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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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I have worked as an educator in academic and non-academic contexts in a variety of (inter)disciplinary settings, employing feminist pedagogy and striving to create inclusive and safe space for all learners. Education to me is a means to liberate, transform, and empower people. Students and teachers *co-create* learning environments, which should also involve communities beyond academia. I am dedicated to creating reciprocal spaces for exchange with the community in my classrooms, be it through service learning, guest speakers, or creative collaborations with community organizations. Teaching was of paramount importance in my graduate student training; I took college teaching classes and earned the Midwest Sociological Society Preparing Future Faculty certificate. I recently focused my teaching philosophy in a paper (Jauk 2016) and a video performance (Jauk et al. 2017). In this work I introduce the idea of “gagafeminist teaching didactics”, inspired by Jack Halberstam’s (2012) book *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the Edge of Normal*, as a variation of feminist pedagogy in higher and adult education learning environments. Here are some of the tenets I distilled and adapted for my own teaching:

1. Try a What If Approach

Gaga feminism recognizes multiple genders and should contribute to the collapse of the binary gender system. That means in a classroom we may ask: What if we gendered people according to their behavior? What if we acknowledged that sexuality may shift over the life course? Asking what if questions makes visible structural inequalities between genders and also challenges hierarchies in the classroom which is a basic tenet of feminist teaching. I like to employ project oriented learning that centers student interest and also try various forms of breaking spatial hierarchies in classrooms, for example with sociometric exercises or campus-oriented assignments to open “what if” spaces of thinking.

2. Apply a How weird is that Lens

Heterosexuality gets little attention in college classrooms. The (heteronormative) assumption is that we all know how heterosexuality works, it is the invisible norm based on which we examine the “freaks” at the fringes. Instead I put the focus on the strangeness of heterosexuality and like to interrogate normative masculinity and femininity with its implications for social inequality. My feminist teaching always has an emancipatory approach. This implies we emancipate from a socially constructed and limiting “normality” and the unhealthy implications of heteronormativity for all genders, and yes, we try to make the world a better place for all sentient beings.

3. Operate from the Life-worlds of Students

For me this means to actively listen to the complex realities of learners and take these as opportunities and starting points for our educational journey together. This also means to let go of basic assumptions of bodies, people, and desire. My teaching embraces a tech-positive approach, instructional technology and multimedia environments. I have also successfully used social media (which are often important part of students’ life worlds) for teaching, and

am interested in the application of new technologies in teaching. A class on New Media involving Social Media as a teaching tool for a “co-learning” environment that I team-taught was recently nominated for an E-Learning Award and selected as a best practice publication (Jauk and Haring 2016). The focus was on using virtual learning environments to the benefit of a variety of learning types in any given classroom and to promote internet safety and critical media literacy.

4. Learn in Unusual Places

As facilitator of learning I strive to offer learning experiences in non-normative places, and to allow students to explore the margins to better understand the social world around them. That means students may actively interact and volunteer in the community. As an interdisciplinary scholar-activist I think it is important to connect to social practice and bring the social world into the classroom through speakers and activists to create spaces for people who are not usually seen in colleges and make our classrooms accessible to them. I also expand learning materials beyond textbooks and classical texts to artifacts, art, multimedia, and grey literature of social movements. In recent classes I have collaborated with a migratory art collective in a team teaching setting and 100 students joyfully created an exhibition of 26 key concepts of gender theory (see photographs in teaching portfolio). I also taught an interdisciplinary urban studies course with an architect-artist. Students addressed gender, inequality and diversity in the city through research-based creative interventions in a new urban landscape in the Vienna region (see related magazine article in teaching portfolio).

5. Evaluate in Creative Ways

Feminist teaching may also mean that we apply different evaluation criteria for the work of our students. Along the lines of hooks (1994, 2010) I emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and an emancipatory focus in addition to academic rigor. This challenges me to develop new evaluation instruments. In a recent larger classroom I employed a “DisQSpace” methodology as part of the grade. This is a Discussion and Question format in interactive parallel “stations” that allow for in depth discussion in smaller groups. I also like to mimic professional conference and peer review formats as final project and/or paper evaluations. As part of participatory student-centered learning I invite students to develop part of the evaluation instruments and/or test questions, if appropriate.

6. Self Reflexivity

I am not a “self made teacher” and as a feminist I strive to continuously employ the sometimes painstaking, feminist staple tool of self-reflexivity (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2007). I am open to feedback offered by students and usually give them several opportunities throughout the semester to offer anonymous comments and influence learning processes in the class. I actively discuss my teaching with peers and I am open to training offered by campus resources and fellow educators. At professional conferences I always seek out the teaching sessions in order to remain a learner. Lastly, I have published and presented on queer-feminist pedagogy in recent years. To quote Sara Ahmed (2017): “To live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable.” That includes my own teaching.

References

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