

Luke, C. and Gore, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Feminisms and critical pedagogy*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 220 pp., \$18.95 (softcover).

This book is an anthology which uses the insights of poststructuralism to give a feminist perspective on an important aim of education, the emancipation of students as this is practiced in critical pedagogy. The contributors are Carmen Luke, Jennifer Gore, Mimi Orner, Elizabeth Ellsworth, Patti Lather, Jane Kenway, Helen Modra, Magda Lewis, and Valerie Walkerdine. These authors are feminists — not ecofeminists but angry feminists. In *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy* they document the problems they have met while trying to carry out their theoretical, academic work, and their teaching.

In critical pedagogy much of the hope for the emancipation of students hinges on their ability to analyze the effects of "power,' voice,' 'democratic notions,' and the 'class, race, gender' triplet" (p. 4). Through their practice of emancipatory education, the feminist educators in this book have become aware that the demand for students to develop and articulate insights into the roles of these concepts in their lives is not by itself a straightforwardly emancipatory experience for marginalized people — although it may well be emancipatory for members of a dominant group such as the white, able-bodied, heterosexual males who have primarily forged and dominated critical theory. This issue is crucial for educators to examine.

This is a very difficult book — difficult in many ways and for many reasons. Some articles, such as Elizabeth Ellsworth's, are difficult because she is challenging the way we usually conceive of the emancipatory value of finding and using your own voice. Ellsworth's analysis contains an important insight. She argues convincingly that it is a very different experience to speak out, in your own voice, if you belong to the dominant group in society than it is to speak out as a member of a marginalized group. Members of marginalized groups are vulnerable to misunderstanding, ridicule, and/or social backlash because their (or our)

experiences and truths are not what is commonly shared and accepted in society. Orner shares the belief that no classroom frees students from the social and intellectual consequences of what they say and emphasizes that students, especially marginalized students, know this (p. 84). Ellsworth, Gore, Orner, and Lather each examine a question which should be important to educators because it is so vital to students, "How do our very efforts to liberate perpetuate the relations of dominance?" (p. 122). They accuse critical pedagogues of ignoring this issue, but they are not sanctimonious about the power of feminist teaching. A strength of this book is the way the authors grapple with the theme that "feminisms may have their own power-knowledge nexus which, in particular contexts or at particular historical moments, will operate in ways which are oppressive and repressive to people within and/or outside of that society" (p. 63).

These authors are voicing their own experiences as female academics and teachers. They are angry and accusatory against most of their male colleagues and many of their (hegemonized) female ones. The usual reaction of both men and women to being accused of unfair practices is to deny it. Many women in the academic world and elsewhere in the late twentieth century prefer to think they are being treated fairly and that the feminists' contributions can stop now because they are no longer needed. Most women prefer to believe they have an even chance with their male cohorts and want to just go ahead being themselves. Therefore we tend to resist the suggestion that if we really cared, we would stop doing what interests us (a male luxury) and begin to fight for the equal treatment of women and other marginalized groups. It is easy and common to react by calling angry feminists "overly sensitive" or "negative and unappreciative of the advantages we finally now have" or to ask "Why don't they stop being so angry and unpleasant to everyone and find something worthwhile to contribute to?" Overcoming such defensive reactions is a second difficulty for readers of this work. However, again it is a difficulty worth enduring because there is truth in what they say. Being female, but not an angry feminist, I reacted defensively at first. But then I began to look around my own university and see many examples of what these authors, particularly Kenway and Modra, Lewis, and Luke and Gore are reporting. I saw men who still resist sharing their power with anyone female or letting women

speak about their own experiences in their own way, men who mock outstanding female colleagues behind their back, many men who neglect their share of caring for their children and their households (and I also saw men not doing these things). It is important to listen to these feminists' accounts of their experiences even though they are hard to hear in 1994. Unless we acknowledge that such things are still going on, we will never remedy them.

Thirdly, this book is difficult for an extremely irritating reason, particularly since it is written by educators for educators. Again and again, terms and issues specific to feminism and poststructuralism are used in the discussion, but without the meanings or significance of these terms and issues being explained to the reader. Some instances of this make the book confusing, even unintelligible, for anyone who is only beginning to read poststructuralism, feminism, or critical pedagogy (see p. 4). The more extreme instances of this practice reduce the message of some of the articles to a simple case of "preaching only to the converted."

Although these authors might claim that they are entitled to use the technical vocabulary (jargon) of their field because they are not writing for beginners, the intent and the relevance of the book belies this. They appear to want their messages about the reactions of marginalized people to the practices of critical pedagogy and about the abuses they endure as female academics to be heard not only by as many educators as possible (p. ix), but heard especially by those whose theory and practice they are critiquing. However, they will not reach this audience when they use, but do not explain, concepts such as "exscribing the voluntarist phenomenological subject" (p. 26), "masculinist theoretical narratives" (p. 29), "theoretical imperialists" (p. 40), "universalized, androcentric subjectivities" (p. 49), or "denaturalize" (p. 74).

These authors are also prone to using a very specific, but nonstandard, interpretation of a widely used term without establishing why we should share their use of it, rather than continue with our own. This, of course, almost guarantees the continuing marginalization of their use of the term. Walkerdine's article is a particularly strong example of this. Her whole

argument hinges upon a very unusual conception of progressive education, one which equates it with the coercive application of judgments about what is "natural to the species" being used by the teacher to turn children into "a self-disciplined work force" (p. 17). She cites Froebel, Pestalozzi, Robert Owen, and Montessori as the people responsible for this version of progressive education. This is not a reading of these educators that I have met before and I will not accept it just because someone asserts it is so. Not being one of the initiated, I need to see specific examples from the writings of these educators which support Walkerdine's interpretation of progressive education before I will take her argument seriously.

It is important that we gain insight into our general inability to hear people who live and speak from the margins of our society. *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy* makes some important contributions to understanding how we should, and should not, approach this goal. However, because it concentrates primarily upon documenting current abuses in power relations between men and women, the book is limited to offering a negative critique. This would be of value if the workings of our societies were basically sound except for the relations between women and men. However, this reviewer believes that our society needs men and women to work together to undertake a positive critique, a total reexamination of all of our current values and for women and men to create completely reimagined, humane, sustainable ways of living that honor all life and work for harmony between all human beings and between us and the Earth we belong to. For this, we need to look not to the work of feminists or critical pedagogues who want to tinker with society, but to the teachings of ecofeminists and others, both male and female, who are creatively constructing a new vision of what our society can become — people like Judith Plant, Fritjof Capra, Charlene Spretnak, Wendell Berry, and Joanne Macy.

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