

## FEMINIST PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

Tracy Penny Light, Jane Nicholas,  
Renee Bondy, Eds.  
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### REVIEWED BY TRINA DE SOUZA

*Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education: Critical Theory and Practice*, edited by Tracy Penny Light, Jane Nicholas, and Renee Bondy, brings together educators working within a range of academic disciplines in higher education to reflect on feminist pedagogy in the classroom. The book consists of a short introduction followed by 15 chapters written by educators in disciplines ranging from Women and Gender Studies, Sexuality Studies, Education, English, History, Philosophy, Psychology, Marriage and Family Studies, and Sociology. The editors note that the collection is rooted in feminist praxis, in contrast to traditional divisions between theory and practice and as a result, all chapters provide critical theorizations and reflections on classroom strategies and offer practical tools for educators. A few themes encompass the collection as it relates to feminist pedagogy including neoliberalism in higher education, reflexivity, and teaching praxis and strategies.

First, the theme of neoliberalism in higher education emerges in Llewellyn and Llewellyn as they discuss restorative approaches to university education that challenge neoliberal models, while Silva Flores examines feminist pedagogy within higher education in the United Kingdom under new neoliberal reforms. Final-

ly, Briskin reflects on the use of activist feminist pedagogies in her classrooms to advocate for social justice within the neoliberal university.

Reflexivity emerges as a theme in the collection through Nicholas and Baroud's chapter as they reflect on and challenge the ways in which educators frequently conceptualize "students these days." In addition, De Santis and Serafini consider their use of dialogue and critical self-reflection as part of their feminist pedagogy in a practicum course, while Dorney reflects on teaching a course on women and anger. Thinking through bodies in the classroom, Gullage explores fatness and feminist pedagogy through a reflection on three interactions with students, while Labinski's closing chapter reflects on the uses of sex in the Women's Studies classroom.

Finally, many of the authors discuss their own teaching praxis and provide feminist pedagogical strategies. The ideas provided are varied, for example Bondy discusses her use of a book club in her Women and Friendship course, while Srigley provides an examination of her practices on indigenizing the first-year Canadian history classroom, offering approaches to the teaching context, curriculum, and modes of evaluation.

The importance of narrative methodologies and strategies is also significant in this collection as Gotlib explores the possibilities of bringing narrative methodologies into the medical ethics classroom, while Iverson engages with imagination-intellect in the classroom using creative tools such as music, art-making, and personal narrative performance.

Some authors also suggest the use of visual methods in their feminist pedagogical approaches. For example, Wilson uses images from prisons in order to open up discussions of gender and feminism in her history classroom, while Penny Light uses

images and film to engage with the multiplicity of student voices in discussions of feminism and the sexualisation of bodies, and finally Browdy de Hernandez employs film and literature on female genital cutting in her classroom.

Working with feminist pedagogy as a teaching assistant for some time, I found this collection immensely useful for my own teaching praxis. A strength of the text is that all chapters centre feminist pedagogical praxis within the classroom. As the individual authors reflected on their experiences, their writing highlighted teaching tools and strategies, as well as successes and possible setbacks. Having read many collections on feminist pedagogy, I have encountered very few that approached the topic grounded within specific classroom settings with examples, tools, and reflections.

Although the authors examine feminist pedagogies in their teaching, a more thorough discussion on the state of feminist pedagogy in higher education today and the ways in which it has transformed since its emergence in the 1980s would have benefitted the collection. While the editors ask questions about the state of feminist pedagogy and the individual authors also grapple with this concern, thematically, a more thorough examination of feminist pedagogy(ies) in the introduction or a possible conclusion would have helped to bring together the individual chapters more clearly.

Overall however, *Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education* provides a much-needed discussion of feminist pedagogies from actual classrooms, merging theory with classroom practice and reflection. This collection can appeal to educators in a variety of disciplines as the authors themselves come together from diverse disciplines. This diversity demonstrates the many possibilities of working

with feminist pedagogies in a range of classrooms and is an important and valuable resource for scholars working within higher education.

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## **GIRL POSITIVE: SUPPORTING GIRLS TO SHAPE A NEW WORLD**

Tatiana Fraser and Caia Hagel  
Toronto: Random House Canada,  
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**REVIEWED BY KISHA  
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There has been a growing interest in girlhood studies as academics, community workers, and educators use their experiences engaging and observing girls to develop programs and strategies for girls' leadership initiatives. Considering the profound diversity in human experience, there also seems to be mounting efforts to incorporate an analysis of intersectional identities within these discourses to account for the identity development of marginalized girls.

In *Girl Positive: Supporting Girls to Shape a New World*, authors Tatiana Fraser and Caia Hagel take us on a journey to explore the contemporary lives of girls living in various parts of Canada and the United States. This book can be described as an informal study of girls and young women conducted through the collection of data from the authors' North American tour. Both Fraser and Hagel lean on their experience as mothers and their many years working with various organizations for the advancement of

girls and women to legitimize their authority on girl culture. Described as "a guidebook for anyone who wants to hear from girls, and understand and support them," *Girl Positive* is a manual that combines the voices of girls with information and strategies to advance gender equity in the face of the many obstacles that impact the experience of girls in Canada and the United States.

The book speaks to a number of topics that continue to be of concern for girls as they mature and become active within their communities, including media representation, sexual violence, depression, bullying, boys and consent, among others. Rejecting the common historical notion that girlhood is a general period of "innocence," *Girl Positive* takes a strengths-based approach to assessing and describing the agency of girls as active participants in responding to the social concerns which they face. According to the authors, girls are often positioned as passive agents in discourses that speculate on their experience. This of course does not allow for the possibility of girls to contextualize their experiences in ways that can contribute to their own positive self discovery and identity formation.

Fraser and Hagel accurately describe gender equity and girls' leadership as a contemporary "hot topic." An increasing number of studies and materials have been produced in girlhood studies in an effort to explore girls' leadership and provide solutions to commonly expressed concerns. *Girl Positive* is similar to other non-academic works such as *Brave Girls: Raising Young Women with Passion and Purpose to Become Powerful Leaders* (Radin), which uses a program based out of an animal rescue shelter as a means to develop leadership skills in girls. In *Black Girlhood Celebration: Towards a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy*, Ruth Nicole

Brown (2009), however, takes a more academic approach as she establishes that girls, specifically black girls, need power, not programs for leadership sustainability.

Although *Girl Positive* makes an effort to highlight diverse voices throughout the text, the narratives and analysis do not fully or effectively communicate the dynamics of intersectionality in North America. Race and class appear to be a subtext that is often tokenized without exploration. There are a number of reflections from girls of colour, as well as girls living in poverty; however, the concerns are not properly unpacked or situated within the broader constructions of racism and classism.

Is it possible to capture and analyze the experience of girls in North America in one text? In reading this book, it becomes increasingly clear that any study on the experience of girls must be specific about the demographic being explored to begin to adequately address intersectional identities. *Girl Positive* emphasizes voices of diverse girls to some degree, yet the issues that they express are not effectively examined to include the nuances of histories which often underpin their experiences—and as a result of this omission, important factors are likely to remain unobserved. The difference between *Girl Positive* and *Black Girlhood Celebration*, for example, is that Brown's analysis of girls is focused on one specific community of girls who, through their intersectional identities, share similar experiences (Brown). This provides more context for understanding the complexities of identity and the process of self discovery, and allows for more effective exploration, which can lead to sustainable change.

On a basic level, this book can be used as a resource for girls' leadership programs. *Girl Positive* is a slightly ambitious and idealistic take on concerns that girls are facing today