

Student resistance and teacher authority: the demands and dynamics of collaborative learning

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Abstract

The intersection among discourses of curriculum, pedagogy, and power are increasingly becoming the focus of research and analysis in southern African classrooms as the effects of apartheid, colonialism, and patriarchy are critiqued for their influences on epistemic and pedagogic policies and practices. This article draws on feminist research on pedagogy to examine the dynamics of teacher and student relations in southern African university classrooms. In particular, it focuses on student resistance to engaging in collaborative work and with radical ideologies in course content. Drawing on case studies it shows that, despite feminist teachers subscribing to egalitarian ideals, when they encounter student resistance to democratic pedagogic strategies and radical course content they resort to normalizing and regulatory postures that reinstate teacher authority in the classroom.

Keywords: Co-operative learning; critical pedagogy; student participation; student-centred curriculum; teacher behaviour

Introduction

MacGregor (1991: 1-4) notes that there have always been social dimensions to the learning process, but only recently have specially designed collaborative learning experiences been regarded as an innovative alternative to the lecture-centred and teacher-as-single-authority approaches typical of most university classrooms. With increasing frequency students are working with each other in paired work, group work, whole-class discussions, etc. During a lecture, students might be asked to turn to a neighbour to formulate responses, draw connections to other material, raise questions, or solve problems. Given that many minds are grappling with the material at once, the mutual enterprise is believed to generate a unique intellectual and social synergy. What is essential to collaborative work, though, is a positive interdependence among students, an outcome to which everyone contributes, and a sense of commitment and responsibility to the group's preparation - for the learning process and product.

While collaborative learning is an effective enterprise for realizing dialogic processes, teaching and learning in this mode come with high expectations about student participation. Given that collaboration requires substantial role shifts for students, it is not unusual to encounter student resistance to group work. Indeed, as they move into collaborative learning settings, students grapple with several shifts. According to MacGregor (1991: 2-3) these include, *inter alia*, the transition:

- from listener, observer, and note-taker to active problem-solver, contributor, and discussant;
- from low or moderate expectations of preparation for class to high expectations;
- from a private presence in the classroom (and few or no risks therein) to a public one, with many risks;
- from attendance dictated by personal choice to meeting community expectations;
- from competition with peers to collaborative work with them;
- from responsibilities and self-definition associated with learning independently to those associated with learning interdependently; and
- from seeing teachers and texts as the sole sources of authority and knowledge, to seeing peers, oneself, and the thinking of the community as additional and important sources of authority and knowledge.

These transitions, that MacGregor identifies as contributing to the success of collaborative work, also impact strongly on individual personality and preferences in relation to the collective good of learning. While the ideologies and philosophies associated with radical pedagogies are vocal on the recognition of difference and diversity, more debate is required in the crucial area of pedagogic normalization and regulation - that invariably results in tendencies that bring students to conformity and consensus.

Thus, Gore (2002) maintains that the power relations of pedagogical interaction will not be overcome by simply adopting different classroom practices, such as the use of dialogic student-centred approaches, journals, portfolios, role-playing, group-work, or other pedagogical strategies. Arranging students in circles, imploring all students to have a voice, engaging in dialogue, etc. may be as repressive as traditional forms of pedagogy. In the classroom it is teachers who influence who is accorded the right to speak and the roles students may take as observing, seeing, listening, or questioning subjects. Laditka (1990: 4) contends that teachers consciously influence students by manipulating the pedagogic field. Thus, a more significant deliberation should focus on *how* pedagogic techniques are employed, and *with what effects*, and not whether or not they are. In addition, this implies that the vast majority of knowledge in educational sites will pertain directly to the formal curriculum, and the techniques of pedagogic power employed will play a role in the kind of knowledge produced.

Thus, there seems to be a pragmatic need to be sensitive to *how* power and authority are addressed in the classroom. This is especially so for feminist pedagogies - given that a principal aim is the creation of conditions within which students are able to develop a critical and analytical consciousness. The pedagogical process of developing critical consciousness involves showing students how to recognize and evaluate structures of power. Even though the specific means of doing so vary among teachers, affording a privileged status to student-centred dialogue is a familiar theme in feminist pedagogical discourses. Student-centred critical and analytical dialogue is cited as essential in facilitating the development of critical feminist consciousness.

While acknowledging the value of critical consciousness-raising and dialogic interaction in student-centred classes, an equal acknowledgement of the unique contingencies of institutional, socio-political, and personal differences, preferences for certain learning styles, and ideological affiliations also need to be considered. This is especially so when dealing with courses and discourses that work to change consciousness, which may not necessarily be experienced immediately as fun, positive, or safe. Distinctive contexts and contingencies possess their own promise and potential for the enactment of specific techniques of pedagogic power. Thus, Finke (1993: 26) reflects on the teacher-student dyad and claims that, 'teaching is a practice which, proceeds not progressively through time, but through resistance, regressions, leaps, breakthroughs, discontinuities, and deferred action'. Foucault (1980: 37) also cautions that radical educators may experience resistance to the techniques and knowledge that they seek to promote.

In the ensuing discussion I also contend that, irrespective of the pedagogic techniques employed (i.e. group-work, paired-work, whole-class teaching, etc.), the centrality of dialogue is pervasive. I argue that, despite the attempts of the feminist teachers I describe herein to foster egalitarian pedagogies based on the recognition of difference and critical dialogue, the fact that they were engaged with conversionist discourses that attempted to effect conceptual shifts in their students in regard to pedagogic strategy and pedagogic content led to student resistance. In responding to this resistance the teachers had to reclaim their authority, and this invariably resulted in the students submitting to the teachers' normative educative and pedagogic authority. Thus, normalization of pedagogic techniques and epistemological content, and student resistance, brought to the fore teacher-student power-dynamics.

Contextualizing the study

The discussion in this paper is based on 24 hours of lecture observations and 14 hours of interviews with six feminist educators located at three southern African universities.¹

Jennifer and Lisa (two white females)² and John (a white male) co-taught the 'Contemporary women's writing' English honours course at a distance education university where students attend short periods of intensive classroom contact. Ten students attended the 1-day seminar that I observed. The class comprised nine women (one Black, eight white) and one (Black) male student. The discussion revolved around why gender needs to be deconstructed, what does it mean to deconstruct gender, and how does one go about doing so?

I also attended the 'Language and power' course Vijay, a 3rd-generation South African of Indian descent, was teaching to 3rd-year baccalaureate students. Posters announcing the death of young students interspersed with HIV/AIDS pamphlets and posters announcing AIDS Awareness Week greeted me as I walked down the corridors. During my observations, the class was involved in discussions around preparing for the HIV/AIDS assignment. Committed to developing the intellectual in a postcolonial society, Vijay had built a component into the course which required students to conduct ethnographic research. Charged with a strong socio-linguistic sensitivity, the AIDS assignment was

intended to instil in students a sense of their need to become actively involved in the positive transformation of their societies. The class comprised 13 Black students (six males and seven females) and four Indian females, ranging between 19-24 years.

I observed a 3-hour lecture session entitled 'Gender issues in African literature' that Thembi and Molly, two Botswana nationals, co-taught to 3rd-year baccalaureate students. Using various critical and literary theories as analytical tools, the students were encouraged to assess the roles that characters assume in African literature with a view to examining the changing perceptions of the writers regarding gender relations in their own societies. This racially homogeneous English-language class enrolled 15 Black students (four females and 11 males).

As teachers of English who work from a feminist perspective, these educators employed their teaching space to conscientize their students to the dehumanizing effects of discriminatory gender and socio-linguistic practices by engaging them in learner-centred, dialogic pedagogies.³ In so doing, they attempted to teach students that language and gender are not neutral, or value-free, phenomena, but powerful conduits for the transmission of cultural values and attitudes. As socio-cultural constructs, discriminatory linguistic and gender practices can be deconstructed and reconstructed to institute new normative ideals that engender a just social order.

In the following discussion, I examine a few episodes of student resistance and teacher normalization techniques which include:

- student resistance to engaging in collaborative work and teacher counter-responses (normalization of pedagogic technique);
- student resistance to engaging in pedagogic content and teacher counter-responses;
- student silence and non-participation as resistance; and
- student resistance to radical ideologies and teacher normalization.

Student resistance to engaging in collaborative work

Vijay had made the pedagogical decision to engage her students in various micro-collaborative activities for an AIDS assignment. In the following extract from her lecture, we note that this is met with resistance from some students, both in relation to pedagogic technique and content:

Buyee (Black female): We have done stuff on AIDS so many times.

Vijay: We're doing too much?

Buyee: Lots! I have done this so many times that I wish I could run away from it.

Vijay: The whole point of this particular choice is that I thought it was a very important thing, and that's the angle we're coming from. In terms of your interviews, and

I'm still keen on the interviews and how you are going to choose your interviewees. How you are going to select the questions? That's what we are going to be involved in today. The question has not been set. The question must be created in class.

In one group I hear students speaking in isiZulu. One student says: 'Everyday it's AIDS, AIDS, AIDS' (Researcher observation).

Vasie (Indian female): ... I told you that I wanted to do the assignment from a different angle - from the point of view of the dissidents.

Vijay: But you also understand that I'm trying to create conditions where students can dialogue with each other. I'm trying to enable you to talk to other people in the class.

Buyee: We are just saying maybe there are different ways of going about this, and if we don't do the same thing, we would be able to cover more things. [Two students sitting in front of me agree that that's a good idea.]

Vijay: That's a nice proposal, but how tenable is it? Remember I talked to you about this a little while back. Let's figure out what it is we are doing because I have already set the exam question.

Buyee: Are we going to write about AIDS in the exam?

Vijay: Not necessarily, but you are going to do an angle on the issue. And you will get choices. I've found that getting the class to work on a particular topic - for example, in the past I've done topics on the African Renaissance - means that you all talk to each other about problems, and I've found that it works very well because everybody is dealing with the same kind of issue. Because you are all doing different interviews, you are all doing different angles on the topic, but you are able to talk to each other and it becomes collective work, which is something I'm not sure you generally get a chance to do. Buyee, have you had a chance to work collectively with a group?

Buyee: Too much.

Vijay: Too much? Everyone is pushing collective work?

Buyee: Especially in the Education Department.

Vijay: Why is collective work so important?

Buyee: They say that it is important because you get to share ideas, learn from each other, you practise different skills - listening skills, and communication skills - and you are able to understand each other.

Vijay: Is it working, or are you being forced to?

Buyee: I think, you already know that you are not living alone, you have to handle different people and all those things, and I've been having problems with this.

Vijay: Let's see how developed your skills are. Maybe let's test it. Prepare to back down on some of the whole communal learning ethic as long as you can prove to me that you have great listening skills. Something I'm not convinced about from the classroom so far. Remember how many times I've said, you are not listening to any of the stuff in class. (Lecture Observation)

In these extracts, student Buyee expresses her dissatisfaction about engaging in group work for the AIDS assignment. We can only surmise that, apart from Buyee feeling that she had had 'too much' of collective work - that collaborative work was going into 'overdrive' - some of her reservations may be related to the issues MacGregor (1991: 1-4) identified regarding students grappling with the demands and dynamics of collaborative work. Drawing from other episodes during the lecture observations, I noted Buyee, in particular, assuming the role of accessory to teacher authority. On two separate occasions she reprimands fellow-students for arriving in class without doing their homework:

Buyee: But Vijay, they knew about the question a long time ago. [Vijay laughs.] I don't think students have an excuse for not bringing in an assignment question, because I was also absent but I have brought a question. (Lecture observation)

Buyee: But Vijay, we knew about it. This was given to us ages ago, and we were supposed to have photocopied the chapter. (Lecture observation)

In the light of these two instances, it may be safe to surmise that Buyee's dissatisfaction with engaging in collaborative work supports the contention that collaborative work requires students to transition: from low or moderate expectations of preparation for class to high ones; from attendance dictated by personal choice to meeting community expectations; and from responsibilities and self-definition associated with learning independently to those associated with learning interdependently. The success of collaborative work thus pivots on all participants assuming responsibility for the process and product of learning. It seems that Buyee's experiences with fellow-students' responses to the expectations of communities of collaborative practice has left her disillusioned with the social or intellectual benefits of this pedagogy. However, teacher decision prevailed over the student's dissatisfaction with group work. Vijay comments that a change in pedagogic technique would be considered on the following proviso:

Prepare to back down on some of the whole communal learning ethic as long as you can prove to me that you have great listening skills. Something I'm not convinced about from the classroom so far. Remember how many times I've said you are not listening to any of the stuff in class?

In elaborating student resistance to collaborative learning, Reynolds and Trehan (2001) argue that differences in students' personal preference for learning modes is an issue that needs to be considered. They contend that student-centred pedagogies bring to the surface affinities, antipathies, preferences for learning methods, as well as the different values and beliefs which underpin them. In addition, recognition must be given to collaborative groups developing perspectives of working with process and task, and patterns of power dynamics as they relate to race, gender, sexualities, and ideological positionalities within group formations. Deconstructing the notion of collaborative learning reveals its more problematic aspects, that is, pressures to conform and the assimilation or denial of divergent beliefs and practices.

Student resistance to engaging in pedagogic content

Apart from student resistance to pedagogic technique (e.g. group work), we also note students resisting engaging pedagogic content. Buyee and Vasio inform Vijay that they have done a lot of work on AIDS. Vasio asks to engage the AIDS assignment from the point of view of the dissidents rather than in relation to AIDS awareness and prevention. However, this request is also absorbed into the need for students to work on a common topic to facilitate group dialogue, and enhance interpersonal social skills (such as listening, speaking, etc.).

The tension emerging from the Buyee-Vijay-Vasio exchange embodies two key features associated with collaborative work.⁴ The students' complaint that they have done a lot of work on the topic probably signals that they perceive that they have exhausted the topic from the angle Vijay is proposing (a kind of intellectual saturation). However, Vijay tries to explain the nuances of difference that would emanate from working on a common topic:

I've found that it works very well because everybody is dealing with the same kind of issue. Because you are all doing different interviews, you are all doing different angles on the topic, but you are able to talk to each other and it becomes collective work.

Not resolving the debate on the intellectual dimension of engaging the AIDS assignment collaboratively, Vijay turns the discussion to the social skills that accrue from engaging collaborative work. She points out:

But you also understand that I'm trying to create conditions where students can dialogue with each other. I'm trying to enable you to talk to other people in the class ...[it] means that you can talk to each other about different problems.

To which a diplomatic Buyee responds:

I think you already know that you are not living alone, you have to handle different people and all those things, and I've been having problems with this.

Notwithstanding Buyee's and Vasie's request for a different pedagogic technique and content, Vijay's concern with the ethic of communal learning, and for interpersonal, communicative skills-development wins over Buyee's reluctance to engage in collaborative learning and Vasie's request to work on the AIDS question from the point of view of the dissidents. The technique of normalization and regulation that Vijay employs in getting the students to work on the same topic relates to the following three educative and pedagogic goals she had outlined for the AIDS research project:

Her educative goal is tied to the development of affective and cognitive skills related to a value system of communal teaching and learning. Thus, she outlines her pedagogic goal as follows: 'I'm still keen on the interviews and how you are going to choose your interviewees. How you are going to select the questions.' She wants to 'teach' research methodology (sample selection, i.e. how students are going to choose their interviewees and instrument development, i.e. how students are going to select the questions for the interviews). Finally, the need for normalization is linked to the balance of power in assessment. Vijay turns to the pre-set examination question as a mechanism to exercise regulation and normalization, and thus reinforces both the institutional and pedagogic power vested in the teacher: 'Let's figure out what it is we are doing because I have already set the exam question'. This comment returns us to the recurring contradiction in early feminist pedagogical discourses in regard to sharing power with students while simultaneously holding onto the reins of assessment and credentialing authority.

Several micro-power dynamics feature in the Vijay-Vasie-Buyee exchange. These include teacher *regulation* and *normalization*, whereby Vijay subjects both Buyee and Vasie to restrictions and requires conformity regarding pedagogic technique and assignment topic. These regulations and normalizations in turn spill into the distribution of students for the group-work activities (e.g. simulated interviews as practice for field work). This organizational device in the learning process generated a totalizing effect, which entailed specifying a collective will to conform to the teacher's pedagogic discretion, direction, and choreography. All these micro-power techniques determined what would be permitted and excluded in the classroom in terms of pedagogic content and technique. Cumulatively, these power techniques trace the limits of what would/would not constitute the domains of validity and normativity, that is, what differences would be included and what differences would be excluded as pedagogically relevant.

Vijay, aware that she has wielded considerable teacherly power in normalizing and defining the parameters of pedagogic technique and content, offers perhaps the most insightful analysis on the Vasie-Buyee-Vijay interchange. In the post-lecture interview, as a critically reflective practitioner, she reflects on and dissects the anatomy of the regulatory and normalizing instructional performances she enacted:

Yesterday I had to tell them you couldn't go there with the assignment because I've already set the exams. I was saying, 'But Vijay, of all the stupid reasons you have to have for constraining students this is the one you have to have?' Of all the right-wing, Fascist things you can do to students, and in a class where we are explicitly saying we are anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-authoritarian! Because we are locked into an exam system - there are deadlines, there are processes and systems - we get bureaucratized. Some of the violence is bureaucratic. I suppose it is my own challenge to figure out how to get around this. That is something that I need to give attention to. (Interview)

Vijay refers specifically to the fact that feminist discourses align themselves with anti-hierarchical value systems. Vijay recognizes the disjuncture between espoused theory and theory-in-use. She had resorted to boundary-marking practices in terms of how and where students could 'go with the assignment', and was aware that this constrained them - especially in the light of her opening statements when she told them: 'The question has not been set. The question must be created in class.' Although Vijay grapples with how to downplay teacher power in the feminist class, Gore (2002) reminds us that the kind of knowledge produced in pedagogy interacts with the site and the constituent power employed there. Schools and universities are knowledge-producing, knowledge-dispensing, and knowledge-credentialing agencies, and these are functions that their teachers need to fulfil. This circumscribes the extent that feminist teachers can divest their classes of power. As Vijay says: 'we are locked into an exam system - there are deadlines, there are processes and systems - we get bureaucratized. Some of the violence is bureaucratic.' Thus, although Vijay identifies getting around the violence of the bureaucracy as a project she needs to attend to, there are evidently limits to what may be achieved in this regard.

Student silence and non-participation as resistance

In the Vijay-Vasie-Buyee exchange we noticed teacher justification of/motivation for the merits of dialogue in student-centred pedagogy. In the following collage of extracts from Vijay's and Thembi's lectures, we notice teachers having to negotiate student silence. Given that student-centred classrooms pivot on student interaction and dialogic participation, silence may be interpreted as a possible display of 'passive resistance', as may be the case in the following excerpt:

Vijay: Do you want to respond to what Buyee has had to say? Surely I don't need to pounce, this is your assignment [long pause]. Should I declare a one-minute prayer silence? [long silence]. No one wants to respond? [long pause]. You can even ask her a question if you want [long pause]. Can't clap with one hand [long pause]. So must I handle it?

Buyee: I'm worried that Sibongele refers to the AIDS issue as a 'problem'. I'm wondering whether it is the right word. According to my understanding it is more than a problem, because my definition of a problem is when you make attempts to solve a problem, it can be solved.

Vijay: Anyone wants to respond directly to what Buyee has said? [long pause]. Shall we just accept what she has said? Come on: I'm trying to get a reaction out of you. Hello, is anyone out there? [still no response; long silence]. Sibongele is actually suggesting giving you a lot of work when you do your assignment. You are not just going to go there and do research, you are going to have to go there and educate them. Are you consenting to that? You want to explain that to us Sibongele?

Sibongele [Black female]: Whatever we find out try and put it in a way that they can understand, make them relate it to their daily lives, even if they are not directly affected.

Vijay: And must we do the education? Can we just do the research and run away?

Sibongele: We can find out what they know, and find out what their fears are ... We are finding out but we are also giving something back. So we can also be empowered. (Lecture observation)

We note attempts by Vijay to coax students into participating in classroom dialogue. We see her encouraging students to take ownership of the discussion - 'This is your assignment'. While she is aware of the power she could exercise by singling individual students to respond in the period of prolonged silence, she chooses to exercise her power of restraint, by not 'pouncing' on them. The word 'pounce' carries with it the image of springing or swooping as ways of capturing one's prey. If Vijay were to pounce on students that would translate into forcing them to participate - hardly consistent with willing student participation. In encouraging the students to participate, Vijay is, in effect, attempting to engage them in what would be regarded as a normative pre-requisite for dialogic student-centred learning - the physical and vocal presence of the dialogic community - hence her question: 'Hello, is anyone out there?'

In highlighting the teachers' dilemma - the contradiction between dialogic student-centred methodologies and the authority vested in their role - this teacher-student 'exchange' illustrates the tension between democratic forms of education and the latent tendency to teacher hierarchy. Even as she restrains her power, Vijay is drawing attention to her potential to exercise power. In not being phased by the awkward silences that marked this exchange, Vijay's deliberate silence lets the students know that she was not going to contribute to the discussion, and it was their task to move the discussion forward. Vijay's 'silence' activated at least two normalizing pre-requisites that MacGregor (1991: 1-4) identified for collaborative work: the students transitioning from listener, observer, and note-taker to active problem-solver, contributor, and discussant; and from being a private presence in the classroom (with a few or no accompanying risks) to a public presence with potential risks. In reflecting on the silences and the long process that marked the negotiation of the topic of the AIDS assignment, Vijay commented as follows:

The process of setting up this question was long but very rewarding ... I was very pleased with them, and I found that it was a function of my shutting up. Once I was not prepared to fill in the silences they opened up and a lot of people participated, and had very germane contributions to make.

The following instance of student non-participation occurred in Thembi's class:

Thembi: Just a minute, that's another stereotype?

Gladys [Black female]: Yes.

Thembi: OK. Were you going to come up with another stereotype, or is it a follow-up?

Petrus [Black male]: What she said.

Thembi: No, she hasn't said anything yet [laughter].

Petrus: But she was about to say that [laughter].

Thembi: I can't believe this. So thank you very much.

Thembi: And can you imagine allowing this many minutes to pass in an exam, because I can tell you I set this for a 4th-year exam. Can you imagine how much time you're losing? ...This is a discussion please, nobody is testing you. Say a word, somebody will add or modify, but say something. Remember that this same week you're going to sit for a test of this kind. Please exercise your minds a little, and be free to do so. (Lecture observation)

Two important points emerge from this extract. The first relates to the nature of student resistance to dialogic participation. Petrus displays a nonchalance and lethargy towards meaningful participation by electing not to expand the discussion or make a contribution. Instead, he defers to a 'comment' supposedly made by another student, even though her response was in relation to something else. As such he contravenes a normalizing prerequisite for collaborative work, that of transitioning from listener, observer, and note-taker to active problem-solver, contributor, and discussant.

In dealing with student silence and non-participation, Thembi resorts to the familiar pedagogic mechanism of reminding students of the need for effective time-utilization, which is important in the course examination. We see again both the tension between democratic forms of education and the latent tendency to hierarchy and the dilemma that teachers face in resolving the contradiction between dialogic student-centred methodologies and the authority vested in their pedagogic role. Students are encouraged to feel free to exercise their minds; but they are reminded that if they do not do so spontaneously and expeditiously, they would be unlikely to successfully negotiate the time and cognitive demands of a test or exam.

Once again, given that one of the limitations of this study is that students do not form a unit of analysis, we can only surmise the underlying reasons for student resistance in such

incidents of non-participation. However, in southern Africa, a potential explanation for student non-participation can be related to the fact that students may not be first-language speakers of English and this may affect their levels of competency and fluency in communicating in English. Furthermore, they may lack practice in participating in student-centred pedagogies.⁵

Student resistance to radical ideologies

In the following discussion, I examine the ideological tensions that emerge when students express insensitive views in the dialogue process, running counter to the radical educative goals of the course. When the course content brings into question students' seemingly comfortable acceptance of culturally sanctioned assumptions that justify inequality and social oppression, they feel that their taken-for-granted identification with the existing social order is being confronted. In such instances, while protests could be interpreted as barriers or resistance, their opposition is not a refusal to engage in the content of the course so much as it is a challenge to that content. For example, in the following extract from Jennifer's lecture, student Joan expresses herself in a less than sensitive way when she advances the 'trauma theory' regarding the 'abnormality' of homosexuality:

Joan [White female]: The way I see it is as though there are two types of gays. The one I would say is a gene that probably one is born with and the other is acquired, for example, the rugby player - something goes wrong - probably at puberty. I would say that there are definitely two types of gays.

Jennifer [teacher]: Listen to what you are saying - 'something goes wrong' ...[John laughs. Jennifer appears unhappy with the way the student has expressed herself].

Joan: I have a friend who was straight and she had a boyfriend who let her down very, very badly. She went out for a while and ended up in a gay relationship, and as far as I know that's where she's been. Before that time she was perfectly normal [class laughs]. It's called the Trauma Theory of the origin of gayness.

Jennifer: The man traumatized her to such an extent that she became gay, whereas in the novel the girl right from the beginning didn't feel as if she was a girl. She was climbing trees and doing all kind of things ...Is it essential to feel like a girl to be heterosexual? For example, if you go into a gay relationship, do you not necessarily feel like a female?

Joan: She was a female in every way. She did everything that an adult female would do - had children - but from a trauma ...

Jennifer: I think that it would be interesting for you to look at why you think that. It is my belief that our society likes people to be straight, and likes two people of the opposite sex to be married for a number of reasons: people like to reproduce. The whole heterosexual system serves the interest of the man at the expense of women. Women are not given the choice when they are incarcerated in marriage. They are not given a choice

as to whether they want to be the cooks, the nurturers, the mothers, etc. Being a mother is not a natural role. It is something that you have to learn, and not all women like it, and not all women want to be the main child caregiver with all the repercussions that has.

Joan: That doesn't make a woman lesbian. I think we are now talking about sexual preference.

John [teacher]: I have a problem with the preference bit. I think sexual preference is a very problematic term. It suggests that you choose, and I think that with gay people it is not a choice. Do you think that someone would choose to be gay when they are persecuted and marginalized? I think that it is part of the pathologization of gay people - they choose to be abhorrent, deviant, weird, freakish. If you think about it logically, you would hardly choose to be part of an oppressed minority. You would much rather have a socially mandated position.

Jennifer: What goes along with that is the pathology of AIDS. AIDS is only something gay men get and it is their fault, never mind the fact that well over 50% of HIV/AIDS positive people in sub-Saharan Africa are women. (Lecture observation)

Jennifer responds to student Joan's remarks with a request for her to *look* at why she thinks that and *listen* to what she is saying, to examine her use of language and how it shapes her ideological perspective. This is especially important in that ways of talking about things reveal attitudes and assumptions that testify to the deep-rootedness of sexism, homophobia, linguisticism, etc.

If students hold 'ignorant', 'bigoted' views and if feminist teachers want those students to learn to become more accepting of the different ways of being in the world, then teachers must encounter their students' resistance. It is in the light of Joan's insensitivity that Laditka's (1990: 3) inquiry becomes pertinent: 'Is it really desirable to vanish one's teaching authority in dialogue that never leads to judgement but only to a continued cycle of questions and comments?' Evidently not so, as both Jennifer and John attempt to make Joan aware of her use of language, while also suggesting that she examine the cultural ideologies that have shaped her thinking.

In the above extract we see teachers challenging the student. In the following extract we see female students confronting the sexist comments made by a fellow student:

Nathi [Black male]: What about returning to cultural practices for girls ...to protect them and keep your virginity? [somebody chuckles]

Vijay [teacher]: And men?

Nathi: [laughs] For men, it's like ...

Vijay: So men can go and kill themselves? [class laughs]

Nathi: No, it's not like that, but if a woman ...

Vijay: Do you care about men ...use a condom?

Nathi: The idea is that if a woman abstains from sex and keeps her virginity, you'll be safe if you marry her.

Devi [Indian female]: Will she be safe if she has sex with you? [class laughs]

Nathi: The thing is you will marry her ...

Vijay: So you yourself will be a virgin?

Nathi: No, no, that I can't guarantee ...[laughter and general protest from class about double standards] I know, but for women it's different. They have to keep their virginity. Men should have a choice ...

Thandi [Black female]: You don't think that men should stay virgins?

Nathi: If I want to stay a virgin then I mean it's my choice.

Thandi: Then why are you just saying women?

Devi: Then it should be her choice as well.

Nathi: Ja, it is her choice, but I was only making a point ...you don't have to bite my head off [class laughs].

Vijay: Sorry, there's no need to, what?

Devi: Bite his head off [class laughs. Vijay moves onto the next student].

Pinky: The same thing they said.

Vijay: Come on, there must be so many other ideas. (Lecture observation)

Nathi's double standards are met with the challenge that they deserve. A defensive Nathi indicates that he was only making a point, but evidently his point of view, like Joan's in the previous extract, run against the educative norms and values of the feminist classroom. Hence, both are subject to regulative and normalizing mechanisms. In commenting on this exchange in the post-lecture interview, Vijay confirms that it is something that she would have addressed, but exercised her teacher discretion by devolving authority to the female students to handle it. Rather than applauding Nathi for participating in classroom dialogue, he comes under attack for his sexist views, and has to request not to have his head bitten off.

The message transmitted via these dialogic regulatory technologies requires that those who speak should be able and willing to articulate clearly and as fully as possible the reasoning behind their statements with evidence drawn from the course materials, make their case from reason, and be willing to carry their remarks through to their logical conclusions. Students should not be accustomed to being rewarded simply for speaking. While feminist educators support students developing their power to construct their own understandings of themselves and the world, given the educative authority they have certainly means that they would want students to come to view the world in a way that includes fighting inequalities, oppression, and prejudices in line with the normative ideal of engendering social justice.

Synthesis

In the preceding discussion I explored various instances of student resistance to the pedagogic technique of collaborative work, dialogic participation, and engaging with course content. I examined how these postures of resistance were met with counter-resistance by the feminist teacher in order to ensure that the pedagogic and educative ideals of the course were not compromised. An exploration of Gore's (2002) proposition that pedagogy proceeds via a limited set of specific techniques confirms that pedagogical power-relations will not be overcome by simply adopting different classroom practices such as dialogic, student-centred approaches. She recommends that it might be more useful to analyse the kind of pedagogical strategies and ideological normalizations teachers enact in their classrooms. In considering the way feminist pedagogical sensibilities impact knowledge systems, I highlighted that teachers privilege certain epistemological and ideological stances, and disprivilege others. It also confirms Shalem's (1999) depiction of the feminist teacher as someone who has a project that embodies a commitment to a set of educational beliefs and goals. The feminist pedagogical project is predicated on a curriculum based on the values of social justice, equity, and development; relevance, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Hence, the feminist teacher educates with the objective of effecting conceptual shifts in her students in accordance with feminist sensibilities. To this end she delineates both a pedagogic and educative path along which her students travel.

In terms of the work feminist teachers do, it is important to stress that subscription to a feminist agenda does not in itself alter the processes of classroom teaching. This cultural dimension of labour - what McLaren (1993) refers to as the 'ethnicization of labour' - shapes individuals in a way characteristic for the particular labour situation. What emerges is that, despite the expectation for feminist teachers to be democratic, students still have to be taught, enthused, and 'disciplined', curricula 'covered', and examinations worked towards. It is against this backdrop that the feminist teacher's educative and pedagogic authority as power becomes apparent. Thus, the bureaucratic imperatives of the educational site at which she is employed, and her contractual obligations, suggest, for the most part, that a feminist agenda may change the goals of classroom teaching rather than the process. Irrespective of the variation in the teaching style the feminist teacher employs (be it as facilitator, delegator, demonstrator, lecturer, etc.), it is

transformation of the underlying pedagogic and educative objective that transforms the teaching activity.

In writing specifically about feminist social vision, there is a need to consider the prospect of 'norms of presence and purpose'. Norms of *presence and purpose* depend upon a theory of community for clarifying what our relations and responsibilities to one another are. When appropriated specifically for the domain of pedagogic content and interpersonal relations, *presence* alludes to both the mental presence (critical consciousness associated with the mind) and the physical presence (associated with the body) of teachers and students. *Purpose*, on the other hand, relates to the narrative intentionality of teaching and learning, that is, the teachers' endeavours to effect conceptual shifts in their students. The realization and materialization of the norms of pedagogic presence and purpose supports understanding the feminist teachers' pedagogic and educative authority, not as a practice that abandon rules, rights or normalizations. It is not ruleless, but is linked to a social vision (*purpose*) that detaches itself from private moorings. Jointly, the norms of presence and purpose resonate with the intellectual and social synergy associated with collaborative learning.

Furthermore, teachers use different kinds of narratives to tell different kinds of stories. They also sanction certain narratives and discount others for ideological and political reasons. In reflecting on the various postures of resistance to issues in the course content, two important points emerge. The first relates to the contradiction that sexist, racist, and homophobic utterances are unwelcome in the feminist class, yet when they are made, they offer a valuable platform to confront and critique prejudicial ideologies. These productive, teachable moments come at the expense of students who are prepared to expose themselves in a public forum, and risk coming under criticism for doing so. The second point relates to the laughter that is generally generated when students like Joan and Nathi air their jaundiced views. Laughter as a dialogic, communicative strategy is an interesting response. While it may be open to various interpretations, it may well be read as shock at the audacity, and/or parochial worldview of the student voicing such undesirable ideologies in a class designed to subvert such thinking by urging a new normativity based on tolerance of diversity, difference, and social justice. It could very well be read as an expression of support of a perspective that certain students also subscribe to, but lack the courage to make public.

In this regard, O'Gorman (1978) ponders whether we, as teachers, have the right to raise the consciousness of students? She extends her question to ask whether teachers, as agents of consciousness-raising, have the right to manipulate others' ideological perspectives? This is a vital question, one especially to be addressed in the debate as to whether classrooms are value-free, or designed to manipulate students with particular ideological ends in mind? Smith (1994: 18), in describing the pedagogical enactments of bell hooks, notes that in spite of hooks' encouraging student-centred classrooms, and regarding every class member's contribution as important, she does not relinquish her teacherly authority, neither does she necessarily think every student has something valuable to say. Some students may be calcified in a kind of mono-vision that is racist, sexist, while also harbouring other prejudicial ideologies. Rather than valuing student

utterances as worthwhile in themselves, hooks values them as entry points for raising students' consciousness, employing them as markers to critique, analyse, and resist prejudicial ideologies. Conceiving her job as an educator as providing a worldview that opposes racism and sexism, hooks describes her teaching style as 'confrontational'. Unlike some feminist pedagogical models that suggest students best come to voice in an atmosphere of safety, hooks encourages students to work at coming to voice in an atmosphere where they may be afraid or see themselves at risk. According to Smith (1994) hooks' classrooms are not devoid of conflict.

hooks' pedagogic stance provokes an interrogation of what we mean when we talk about making feminist classrooms egalitarian. Even though feminist classes may appear homogenous and free from power differences, they are implicated in the structures and prejudices of the outside world. Students are of different genders, sexualities, ethnicities, colour, etc. The various postures of resistance that students enact suggest that if feminist teachers work to create counter-hegemonic teaching, they must also be conscious of their own gendered, classed, and raced subjectivities as they confirm or challenge the lived experiences of their students. This does not mean avoiding or denying conflict, but legitimating this polyphony of voices and making both oppression and power conscious in the discourse of the classroom. Our jobs as teachers should include active resistance to students' active resistance, which, while it does not require the assumption of a traditional teaching position, does draw a purely student-centred pedagogy into question.

There is the need not to distort the nature of differences in an educational setting by oversimplifying them. For example, Joan's 'trauma theory' about gays was expressed in an insensitive way, and Nathi advocated two separate standards of sexual morality - one, which sanctioned male promiscuity, and the other, which expected female sexual purity. However, it is important to note that, for each of us, voice and identity are multiple constructions, and the idea of each person having a (single) voice and identity is a fallacy. This suggests also recognizing the potentially evolutionary and multiple voices of students in general, and those who utter discriminatory viewpoints, in particular. Thus, although some students may voice/express discriminatory views, it is possible that, with changes in time and context, such students may re-evaluate their prejudiced worldviews and align themselves with anti-discriminatory discourses.

In considering a theory of power for pedagogy the overarching impulse is that teachers should recognize that in their search to find better pedagogies, some efforts, such as attempts to rid classrooms of power, will be futile. Rather, teachers should embrace power and use it more knowingly, by being conscious of its effects in terms of interpersonal relations and the discourses produced through pedagogy.

Notes

1. Although students did not form the primary unit of analysis for the study, their permission to draw on their invaluable contributions to classroom discussions has been useful in elucidating teacher-student pedagogic relations.

2. I acknowledge that in the light of discussions on the discourses on identity politics/the politics of difference that the categories of race and gender are simplistic and reductive (see Perumal 2006).
3. Researching participants from South Africa and Botswana highlighted at least one significant historical similarity - both countries had experienced the debilitating impact of British colonialism. South Africa suffered the added insult of racial apartheid. However, the feminist educators from both countries emphasized that national preoccupations of social redress seemed invariably to neglect the equally damaging scourge of patriarchal oppression.
4. This relates to MacGregor's (1991: 2-3) postulation that collaborative work is reputed to generate a unique intellectual and social synergy.
5. Diaz-Rico and Weed (1995: 40-41) suggest that, in attempting to understand and bridge the gap between culture and language, several theories and models have been developed to address the social and individual factors involved in English second-language learning and acquisition, which subsequently affect student confidence to participate in classroom dialogue. It seems that, in order to bridge the gap between language policies, sociolinguistic theories, and educational practice, all of which implicate teacher authority and student agency, what is required is a more holistic conceptualization of English second-language teaching and learning that would take into consideration both individual student variables as well as variables located within the macro socio-historical and political structures of society.

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