

Leadership Education from within a Feminist Ethos

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This paper describes the ways that feminist theories, history and pedagogies can be infused into leadership preparation programs in educational administration. This work is situated with the larger movement of leadership for social justice. The authors describe the theoretical frame for this work and the organization of a feminist leadership course in a graduate program within a large Midwestern university program. Specific data from a planned study of one semester's class is described. Findings are analyzed and recommendations and conclusions are made.

For more than a decade, critical scholars in the field of educational administration have increased awareness of and voiced outrage at the systemic, institutionalized practices of exclusion, racism, sexism, homophobia and classism that pervade public school administration (Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1999; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Shields, Larocque & Oberg, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Skrla, Reyes, Schuerich, 2000; Solomon, 2002). They have joined an outcry for equitable, just education through calls for reform in the preparation programs for school administrators. This movement, 'leadership for social justice' has gained credibility and garnered wide appeal in recent years (Brown, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Murphy, 2003; Shields, 2004; Rusch, 2004).

Leadership for social justice is ground in critical theories and situated within a deep moral commitment to

children and communities, replete with reflective habits of mind that lead to more humane and equity-focused leadership. Shields urges us to teach aspiring leaders to "overcome pathologies of silence" (2004, p. 117), the misguided efforts to display empathy and optimism by failing to acknowledge or attend to the identity differences that negate or ignore the experiences of less powerful, marginalized individuals. Using her own experiences as faculty in an educational administration program, she urges a purposeful acknowledgement of differences across identities and the centrality of relationships as key in the development of transformative leadership. Brown (2004) describes a pedagogical model for transformative leadership that weaves ontological and epistemological assumptions, values, worldviews, context and experiences with critical reflection, alternate discourse, and new

policy and praxis. These aims are sought through a blend of adult learning theories, critical social theories and transformative leadership theory in educational administration education.

A feminist ethos, particularly one that is aligned with critical, postmodern theories is strongly compatible with the aims of this movement. In general, feminism emanates from the knowledge garnered about the inequities and deep injustices suffered by people based on gender and sexuality in society. Initially established within a liberal, mostly white Western movement for 'women's rights', feminism has evolved considerably in recent decades into a broader, more inclusive field that seeks generally to "end sexist oppression" (hooks, 1984, p. 26) for women of all races, locations and social classes and all other forms of oppression that are suffered by people. Today, feminisms are comprised of diverse theoretical perspectives and pedagogical approaches characterized by an evolving body of thought and political intention that strives to describe oppression, elaborate on its causes and consequences, and suggest ways in which all related human suffering can be identified, resisted and overcome through awareness and social reform. Rosemarie Tong (1989) refers to this as "description, explanation, and prescription" (Tong, 1989, p. 1). Feminisms are, then, comprehensive efforts of analysis, education, and activism for social change.

In this paper, I¹ discuss my efforts to create a space within a

traditional educational leadership and adult education program for the development of leadership for social justice within a feminist ethos. Graduate students in these programs aspire to be principals, directors of instruction, school superintendents, social service administrators, higher education administrators, health educators, and teacher leaders in education. While a feminist ethos is integrated in all of my courses, one area of program reform that is noteworthy occurred in a series of graduate courses I designed in feminist leadership in education. In this paper, I describe the philosophical and theoretical framework for this work that developed over a number of years. In particular, I draw as example from one semester's endeavor, a first time online offering of the course and the data that emanated from this experience. With one of the graduate students in the class (the 2nd author of this paper), we designed a process of data collection and analysis with data gleaned from students' online discussions and face-to-face interactions over the course of one semester, in 2006. To this end, I hoped to more fully understand the nature of students learning of feminisms and leadership through the course materials and experiences. The purpose of this endeavor is more evaluative than

conceptualized the course, its theoretical frame and the study described here. "We" represents her collective work with the graduate student/class participant who serves as the second author of this paper. Barbara Peterlin worked with her to collect, organize and analyze the data from the study of the course described here, contributing not only organization and research skills but insightful interpretations as an informed participant and student of feminist theories.

¹ There are two voices articulated in this paper. "I" refers to the first author (Audrey Dentith) who was the instructor of the class. She

prescriptive and we do not advocate for a particular intervention for specific ends. Instead, the intent here is to present the conceptual framework for the course, some of the varied activities and events, and a description of the student learning during the course of one semester that indicates the value and potential of the approach.

While the course we describe here is an elective one for administrator licensure, it is also open to all students across the professions, and attracts Master-level and Doctoral students from nursing, adult education, library science and social work.

Feminist Theories and Leadership Education

Feminist leadership education builds upon feminist knowledge. Feminist theories are varied and diverse but are largely based within three categories: radical, liberal and postmodern feminisms. In this work, we use postmodern feminist perspectives as the foundation for theory and philosophy. Such feminisms are anti-essentialist and view gender and gender relations as fluid and dialectical.

Postmodern feminisms tend not to over-generalize since it is generally accepted that any one theory cannot take into account the multiplicity of all people's experiences. Particular experiences, positions, histories, and identities distinguish people from one another (Brady, Dentith, & Hammett, 2006).

Postmodern feminisms highlight a range of relationships amid fluid, dynamic identities. The experiences of women are not characterized only in terms of gender but also in relation to

race, class, nationality, religion, ethnicity, age, and sexuality. As a result, gender is viewed within the wider context of social relations and the important relations of power are seen as complex and contradictory, productive as well as oppressive (de Lauretis, 1986; Flax, 1990; Nicholson, 1990).

Postmodern feminists understand knowledge as situated within a particular politics of gender that has a specific history, contingent upon time, location and space. Such feminist study provides opportunities for the development of deep understandings of self, culture, social identities, power relations, privilege and oppression. Goals of understanding and seeing oneself as a "constructed being" with multiple social identities, specific beliefs and values that have influenced experiences and informed personal action and reflection are fundamental. A postmodern feminist ethos of leadership education, then, is steeped in context and history, replete with specific gendered content, and reliant on methods that seek goals of awareness, reflection and action.

I organize my teaching into three components including: context, content and methods. I use separate modules that span the semester to help students distinguish among and see relationships between components.

- Module 1: Feminist History and Activism
- Module 2: Feminist Theories and Philosophies
- Module 3: Feminist Leadership/Contemporary Issues

Module 1 satisfies the historical context that is central to feminist understanding. Module 2 works to open up understanding of content or the explanative theories and philosophies that make up the broad field of feminist thought. Module 3 offers a contemporary topic for analysis in an applied manner that rests on knowledge of historical context and the intersection of theories and philosophies previously investigated in the class. This allows for new understanding and appropriate action relative to a contemporary dilemma. Thus, any contemporary topic of study in leadership can serve as the topic for query in Module 3, once the grounding in feminisms and history have been established as an alternate lens for review. Each semester a specific topic is selected for this final module and past topics have included: Muslim activism, Christian feminist leaders, and gay and lesbian administrator activists. Finally, the last component spans the entirety of the course, itself, and is the method, or the instructional strategies and pedagogies that are used throughout the entire course. In the next section, I provide more detailed explanation of these components.

The Context

The context for feminist leadership involves a historical exploration of women activism, (much of it carried out by women teachers) over the past two centuries in the United States. Students read short biographies, view films and listen to historical accounts of the political work of early feminists from the mid-1860s through the 1930s. With purposeful attention to the experiences and activist

work of diverse women - African American, white Anglo and European, Jewish, Asian American, Native American, and Latinas, students regard multiple oppressions suffered by women and, importantly, the myriad ways women fought for change. They also regard examples of diverse women's collective work for emancipation, suffrage, teacher's rights, and unionization efforts, analyzing constructs of race and gender in social oppression amid opportunities for collaboration (Giddings, 1984; Wagner, 1996). Various texts, including first person narratives and life stories, historical films, and oral accounts of local historians illuminate the colonizing ideologies that have historically silenced women and failed to recognize them as full citizens. During the 19th century, women began to struggle for the right to vote, to speak in public, to own property, and to work for wages. During the early 20th century, the right to earn equal compensation, to form unions, hold paid positions after bearing children, became possible (although not equitably offered) for all women. Later, in the 1930s, the fight for Social Security and Welfare rights, worker's compensation, and environmental laws were large on-going campaign fought for by women and their allies. Throughout history, women have maintained the personal as political since personal experience and suffering made public, illuminate the nature of oppression (Naples, 1998; Orleck, 1995).

Beyond a general history of women's work, we also consider in some depth, the specific history of women school teachers and administrators. Starting from Patricia

Carter (2002) history of women in education through Jacqueline Blount (1998) detailed historical account of women in educational administration, (see also Crocco Smith, Munroe, & Weiler, 1999; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002), class members consider the specific history of women in education and the activist leadership that has emerged from their training and work as teachers. These works set the stage for subsequent study of theoretical and conceptual knowledge of feminisms and feminist leadership.

Reading and discussing historical accounts of women are powerful. Most students in this class have never engaged in such study and they are truly amazed at the myriad examples of feminist activism and leadership throughout US history. One requirement of the course includes a short biography of another person. They can select a woman to interview that has a long history in education or in activist work (more than 30 years) or they can create a short biography of key female activist figure in American history. To this end, students struggle over the following questions: How and why did women become teachers? What larger political, social and economic conditions supported their involvement in the teaching profession? What were the experiences of early women teachers? How and for what purposes did women educators organize to secure their rights and challenge the status quo? How has their work been ignored or misaligned? How did women educators participate in the struggle for other human rights? How can history help us to name a contemporary political project? This foundational work grounds a notion of

women educators as activists and education as a vehicle for social change and emancipation. In short, this study becomes the context for learning about the potential for activist leadership through an analysis of women's historical work in education.

Content

From here, feminist theories form the content to further this study. These are sophisticated theories that have evolved over the generations and continue to challenge the taken-for-granted roles of women in society and the suppression of knowledge that has been silenced or ignored while illuminating the nature of power relations in the social world. Feminist theories, although varied and complex, seek ontologically to expose the ways that *gender* operates as a social construct to effectively oppress women by limiting their access to power and certain resources. Gender is something we do, something we think about, a set of social constructs and a set of practices and cultural meanings that organize people into categories that are ideological rather biological. Women have been regarded as the weaker, lesser gender, a phenomenon that has been historically constructed through relations of power that are seldom challenged and nearly always regarded as truth (Davies, 1989; Lorber & Farrell, 1991). Feminist theories, then, expose tacit notions and the ways that particular social constructions of identity operate to limit some through power relations. Through methods that use deconstruction and analyses of power relations, feminist theories illuminate the nature of all social

experiences as gendered, raced, classed, etc. The social constructions of identity are at the core of our lived realities since these are structures that organize people into categories that privilege some and not others (Lorber & Farrell, 1991). Students read feminist theories from within each of three broad areas of feminist thought – radical, liberal and postmodern – and attempt to answer the following questions: What are feminist theories? What differences are evident among diverse feminist theories? How is gender a useful category of analysis? What can be learned about oppression, privilege and resistance related to gender among diverse women? What usefulness do feminist theories hold for us in these times? How can this work inform our own experiences, actions and everyday practices?

Readings, films and discussions that traverse broad feminist theoretical frames (McCann & Kim, 2003) and theories of postmodern feminist leadership (Brady & Hammett, 1999; Blackmore, 1995; Rao & Kelleher, 2000) provide the theoretical work as well as the language and direction for the formation of students' own personal understanding of feminisms and emerging feminist philosophies.

To push their skills forward, I also require them write a short autobiographical piece themselves – highlighting some memory or awareness of their own gendered history and prompting them to rethink their identities as feminist leaders. These personal accounts are often deeply emotional for many. Students recall their own experiences of oppression as victims or complicit actors

and described these in this autobiographical paper. This paper is designed to help students think of themselves as social actors or beings whose identities are socially inscribed as a matter of membership in this society, fostering ways for them to see the that the personal is political and urging them toward a more political identity.

Each year, I alter these readings somewhat to focus in particular on certain groups or contemporary issues. This serves as a foundation for Module 3. So, for example, in the semester of this study, we read works, viewed films, and heard from historical, contemporary and local Muslim women activists who offered their diverse perspectives on the role of feminism in Islam. Students are able to see the variability among Muslim and Middle Eastern feminist thought and to connect their new knowledge of Muslim faith and activism to their professional work in schools, hospitals, government or social agencies. Other years, I have selected readings from Asian American feminists, Native American and Latina feminists, for example. (See the related bibliography for examples of readings).

Method

Finally, all of the teaching and learning in this class is taken up through feminist pedagogies as particular ways of teaching and learning. Activities and discussions that highlight issues of identities, self-reflection, awareness and action are arranged for each class session. Self-disclosure, open sharing and open-ended, unfettered questions are characteristic actions. Considerable time for dialogue about typically uncomfortable issues or topics are modeled and encouraged by the

instructor. Personal experiences and sharing of one's ideas and understandings are commonplace in this class. Feminist pedagogies primarily privilege a praxis that seeks to address the needs, interests and desires of the students as they are situated within their own histories, and honors the experiences that participants bring to their own education and the topic of concern or problem at hand. (Turpin, 2007).

Feminist pedagogies transcend the typical graduate class structure of advanced study in the professions because it does not assume that additional informational knowledge and knowledge-based formats are the best way to build the capacity of people in leadership. Instead, the aim, here is to provide experiences that are deeply personal and transformational rather than simply informational (Collay & Cooper, 2008).

Issues of power are also central to feminist pedagogies. Power relations are examined in order to challenge the tacit notions that have been unchallenged and to expose the ways that power is used to control and oppress others, particularly those who occupy the margins (Brady, 1999; Capper, 1992; Fisher, 2001; Gore, 1993; Gore, Luke, 1996; Nicholson, 1997; Ropers-Huilman, 1998). The interrelationship of power and the exercise of leadership are acknowledged, but are understood in more complex ways than traditional notions of top-down management. Power is conceived not in ways that control, but in ways that might facilitate another's abilities or provide support and response (Dunlap & Goldman, 1991). Power relations conceived in this

way do not simply facilitate the advancement of individuals through empowerment rather than control or manipulation, but also act to dismantle the traditional boundaries of educational organizations themselves.

Investigating power relations can be achieved through opportunities to decode, anticipate and translate episodes of institutionalized racism, sexism, etc in school practices and higher education through persistent questioning and careful facilitation by the instructor. In this way, students are supported in their understanding of the ways that larger systems of power and privilege operate by connecting experiences to new perspectives and feminist theoretical frames. Demonstrating an ethos that actively confronts sexism, racism, homophobia, classism and all forms of oppression while encouraging appreciation for and opportunities for learning and hearing others viewpoints (Turpin, 2007) is central to feminist pedagogies.

Reflection is central and is understood as a process by which one comes to understand things that have been unspoken, hidden from view. Understanding the ways that people are continually marginalized and the experiences of alienation and silencing that emanate from these relations are key areas of feminist talk.

Reflection also encourages thinking about how things might be different. A feminist leader, then, is one who can identify particular practices that thwart social justice and indicate new possibilities for altering or abandoning practices. Identification of the need to change is then followed by the change brought about through

action, and the emancipation of others (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998). Feminist pedagogies provide us with tools for actions, through teaching, reflection and education, that are able to publicly challenge the limitations pressed upon marginalized people and, ultimately, lead to amendment of social injustices. In effect, feminist pedagogies become the basis for leadership practice. To this end, students struggle with the following questions: How have women taken on leadership roles in the educational field? What impediments remain for women leaders in these contemporary times? How do issues of gender, race, social class, language, culture and sexualities complicate women's rights to leadership and the recognition of their work as leaders? How can feminisms support and sustain leadership for social justice?

Course requirements include: leading discussions regarding the readings, summarizing and responding to panel presentations, response papers relative to one of the course topics, autobiographical essays, research projects on related topics, interviews of women activists, and community change projects. Students are given choices in the selection of their course work, although sustained and active engagement with the materials, both on-line and in class, are required of all participants. In addition, speakers are frequently used to open up opportunities for sharing personal stories and engaging with real life activists.

Students have described the course as "powerful", "life-altering" and "unique". For most students, it is their first experience with feminist theories

and pedagogies. They begin to understand stubborn persistence of sexism and oppression through a gendered lens. Their own experiences are reckoned and they grow to experience a kinship with others that often crosses lines of race, economics, religion and orientation. Gender becomes a powerful construct that guides students to an understanding of multiple identities, subjectivities and the role of agency, bridging both personal experiences with larger political realities.

The Study

In 2006, we² designed a study to more specifically and purposefully try to capture the nature of students' learning in this class and to evaluate the teaching methods for the purpose of revising or redesigning the course.³ Twelve students enrolled in this class. All were graduate students who held positions in public school teaching, public school administration or leadership in another public social service institutions or entity and were full-time doctoral or masters' degree-seeking students. There were 2 Asian American students, 2 African

² We refers to both authors. Throughout the paper, "we" suggests plans, activities or analyses that were conducted collaboratively between both authors.

³ The study design including data collection and analysis was supported by a small grant awarded by the Center for Professional Development at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee in 2006-2007. This grant pays faculty for incurred expenses related to study of teaching effectiveness to improve teaching and learning in higher education. Monies were used to pay for a course release for the faculty and a stipend for the graduate student's time spent in data collection and analysis.

Americans, and 8 white students, all female with the exception of one African American male. Three of the women were Muslim; all others class members were Christian or did not identify with any particular religious group.

Nine on-line discussions, through D2L (a campus classroom online system) were set up and intended to help students engage in theory and support their abilities to bridge theory with practice through their reflections of meaning and stories of lived experiences of work, community and family life. On-line work took place in smaller groups of about four or five members. Students were arranged in small on-line groups and each one was given specific on-line roles for each discussion. On-line responsibilities include facilitation of the dialogue, regular on-line contributions and summary construction of each week's work. Facilitators started discussions by posting questions or comments from their own reading of the texts and monitored the progress of the discussion by posing new perspectives and questions. Contributors responded to these prompts while summarizers did the same but also provided a full summary of the week's discussion at the end of each one. These roles rotated among individuals in each assigned group. Group members often do contribute to the conversations in other groups, too, as these can often become quite different in focus and content.

In this particular course offering year, weekend face-to-face meetings (Saturday all day) were held four times during the semester and supplemented by the on-line discussions described above to create a hybrid style course. Each Saturday seminar meeting was

launched by a panel of or individual speaker, relative to the topic. Films, small and large group discussions were integrated into these lengthy class sessions. Speaker panels are comprised of women and men from various races, ethnicities and positions within the community (social service directors, school superintendents, association leaders, grass roots activists, and political activists, etc.) who discussed their work as leaders and activists and the meaning of gender, religion, social class, sexuality and race as they understand them in these roles.

Subsequent online discussions reviewed events from the face-to-face class sessions as well as new or assigned readings. Using technology in this online course format was thought to subvert the typical hierarchy of the university classroom and by virtue of 'free space' facilitate more equalitarian exchanges (Turpin, 2007) and, simultaneously foster richer dialogue by setting up course requirements for mandatory online engagement. The wide-ranging and ample online transcripts from this course were testimony to this assertion.

As in other years, course requirements included an in-depth interview and analysis conducted by students with a community activist or a women leader and an autobiographical paper. Other written assignments included short 'Key Thoughts' papers due for each symposium that highlighted one or more of the readings. Students were encouraged to write about those readings that stirred them in the most significant ways. These were used to spark discussion and encourage more responsibility for oral engagement

among students in face-to-face class meetings.

Evidence of learning was available from several sources: on-line discussion transcripts, final projects and “Key Thoughts” assignments, the instructor and research assistant-graduate student’s observations, and an open-ended survey that was given to each participant at the end of each face-to-face class meeting.⁴ The survey was simply constructed, given to students at the end of each face-to-face class meeting. Essentially, it asked them to reflect on the days’ learning by describing moments of excitement, interest and personal connection.

Students’ posting and responses on D2L provided the richest and largest source of data. Along with our musings and participate observational notes of public events in the class, these transcripts were the only data used in our collaborative analysis. Sharing completed assignments handed in by students and end-of-class meeting survey intended only for the instructor seemed improper and these artifacts were not shared with the graduate student here who was also a class participant. Each of the nine on-line D2L discussions took place over a one week period with all students required to log on and participate a minimum of 3 separate times each week, for nine weeks. These discussions occurred in three week periods that followed a full Saturday, face-to-face meeting. Surprisingly, most students participated

much more than the required amount and during some weeks, we discovered as many as 70+ postings over the course of a few days in some of the discussions. One discussion, in particular, after a panel of Muslim women and men activists spoke to the class depicted an intensely passionate engaged conversation ensued online. It was clear that the topics and discussions generated from the readings combined with face-to-face interactions were highly effective in their ability to engage these students.

The Findings

All of the online discussions were downloaded (300 + pages of online discussions) and read by both authors at regular intervals during the semester. We met formally after each face-to-face class during the semester in which the class was offered to: 1) organize a systematic process of data retrieval and organization; 2) initially review available data and determine methods of reading through the transcripts to identify important ‘codes’; and 3) identify emerging larger themes from identified or agreed upon codes; and 3) to discuss key events or significant discussions that had occurred in the class, to date and the ways these events reflected on students’ emerging knowledge. This was an important formative process since it helped us to solidify the purpose and process of the research and to align our thoughts with each other. It also gave us some opportunity to reflect and share insights at regular intervals (after each class session) and in-between our independent reading of transcripts.

⁴ Students enrolled in the class consented to be included in this study and an IRB process was approved. All names of all students have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Because I view the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and historical grounding as a necessary foundation for change in disposition and practice, I was most interested in evidence student learning of feminist theory, history and feminist practice. This focus was articulated in our initial 'research' meetings and the emerging data provided examples and indicators of desired findings. So, for example, early on, during the first online discussions, comments made online by students served to reveal particular ways that they were able to connect feminist theories to experiences they had in their families, work or other social relationships. This is an indicator of emerging knowledge of feminist theory and became the focus on our research. Thus, we assumed that a student who references the perpetual oppression of women historically indicates that she or he sees the credibility of this major tenet of feminist thought. When she uses this knowledge to bring clarity to personal experiences she has had, she is demonstrating a new 'mindfulness'. These examples, evident in our examination of the written transcripts, reveal instances of connection between the tenets of feminist theories that were discussed in the readings and one's own lived experience. Because the online discussions in the class were available downloaded into paper form, we were able to explicitly view moments of insight with concrete specificity, identifying or extracting key passages and, then, speculating on students' learning evident from this evidence. Knowledge of feminist theory was intensely important in this process since

it illuminated the meanings we could incur from the written text.

To ensure some synchronicity between us, we systematically reviewed all the transcripts, looking for such references and insights and marked these passages with descriptor or codes that depicted the nature of students' learning, in our own words. Each of us read the agreed upon transcripts separately and, then, during our semester meetings, we reviewed and compared our findings.

After the course ended, we meet twice to determine the prevalence of each code we had gathered separately and to group these recurring codes into larger themes. We stuck to those codes that seemed to be most prevalent and were most often noticed or identified by both of us. Several were evident and those that reflected and intersected both our view points are used here in this report (See Table 1).

From this point, we identified themes most related to the central tenets of the course. Using markers or other tabs to distinguish among codes, we situated the most prevalent and agreed upon codes in an organized fashion so they might make sense to others. In this way, we developed a uniform method of reading, interpreting and organizing common codes from the available data.

Eventually, after the class ended, we organized all the codes under two larger themes: *Feminist Connections and Feminist Actions*. These are artificially separated here and overlaps between these two distinctions are evident. We distinguish them only to highlight student processes from inception and insight through commitment to and evidence or articulation of action and

changed behaviors. We do not suggest that these processes are linear or easily delineated and are organized here simply to ease reader interpretation.

Table I
Research Themes and Codes

Theme: Feminist Connections	
Research Codes:	
1.	Connecting historical texts to contemporary examples
2.	Connecting feminist theories to personal experiences
3.	Connecting feminist thought across professions
4.	Seeing selves as potential activists, moving into action
5.	Seeing and expressing awareness and knowledge of white privilege
6.	Broadening of feminist thought and theories beyond gender
7.	Naming oneself as feminist.
Theme: Feminist Pedagogical Processes	
Research Codes:	
1.	Developing sense of need to understand & strive for meaning
2.	Moving analysis deeper through questioning processes
3.	Using language of feminisms to illuminate events or ideas
4.	Forging frank discussions across lines of race, religion, sexuality, etc.

Feminist Connections refers to evidence of the increased abilities of students to connect historical texts to contemporary public and personal examples of injustices, and inequities. Students noted that some things had not changed as much as they thought before reading and discussing these texts. Such understandings indicated an emerging awareness of the ways that particular knowledge and realities remain hidden or marginalized in our contemporary society.

Connecting feminist theories to personal experiences in their professions and/or viewing personal experiences differently as a result of emerging knowledge of feminist theories became more notable as the course progressed

through the semester. Although students could not name it at the beginning of the course, they understood that patriarchy was at work in their lives and society, at large. Kasey was "stunned to have a female perspective," and Judd, the only male in the class, talked about these issues in relationship to the social service organization where he is employed as an educator, stating that "I see more women in power and more women getting promoted to higher positions, but I do agree that more men hold positions of power in this organization and overall in society and there is still a 'boys club'." Susie, who works in the healthcare profession, mentioned that "nursing is a female dominated field

like teaching. Traditionally women were nurses, men were doctors. That trend is finally changing, but slowly. Among nurses, the number of men is increasing, but in hospital and clinic administrative positions, there are high levels of male domination." Leslie, who also noted that she does not work right now in a school, but for a financial organization "which is even worse". Eighty to ninety percent of the employees are female and less than 10-15% are in mid-level positions. Every upper level position within all the departments are men, except for one woman "who never had any kids and dedicates her every waking hour to the job, similar to what a man stereotypically does." Feminist theories explained or clarified some confusion about these experiences for the class participants and helped them to explain particular phenomena that see in their everyday lives. Class participants were also able to connect gender issues of oppression across the professions of nursing, teaching and other leadership in social service work. The connections across professions through various observations and experiences reified the awareness of women's continued oppression in our contemporary society.

Students also began to see themselves as feminist future leaders and to recognize the potential role that feminism can play in their professional roles. While some struggled to move theory into practice for these purposes, a majority of these students' comments reflected a sense of empowerment (through the acquisition of new knowledge) to confront people that have marginalized them in their professional and personal life. Connie

adds that just because "teachers are not in a position of power, change [can happen] through empowerment of teachers." Another student, Tara, shared with the class the difficulties that she had in her daily life with her spouse and in-laws with regards to household duties, the care of her children and her career aspirations. After this course, she was able to confront her husband and father-in-law about some of these issues. Students also appeared to gain skills in confrontation within a wider or more public audience. Feminist theories, it seemed, strengthened their convictions and lent encouragement for a more public voice.

Seeing and expressing awareness and knowledge of white privilege was noteworthy. And, the ability to comprehend the complexity of identities was also evident. Tamara states that "from my perspective, on top of being a woman, I am young and of the Asian race.... (I struggle to fit into) this male dominated manufacturing and corporate business world where I am working now. Sometimes, I, too, question, was it my age, gender, and/or race?" The white women in the class, in particular, expressed more awareness of the multiple layers of oppression including the intersection of race with gender and social class and gender. Amy remarked that "I am learning that feminism encompasses far more than WOMAN. Perhaps any issue of social justice is also a feminist issue because race/sexual orientation/religious creed/economic status can't be separated from one...." Students started to see their own connections to perpetuating social injustice. Anne further stated that,

I feel incensed and stunned. I know that I haven't asked the fundamental questions on issues of power before sometimes because I don't know how to define the issue and I know I'll just come off as rambling and a bit insane, but other times I haven't addressed the issue of power in a relationship because I can't believe what I am a part of.

Another white student, Leslie, revealed that,

I think a lot of times I find myself not standing up against the double standards because I don't recognize it for what it is until the situation has passed. Many times I don't want to bring whatever the situation was back up because I feel like I won't be able to make a difference.

Tara, a white school administrator and doctoral student, stated that, "I am embarrassed to think of the times I have simply not taken a stand because of my position in society and the thoughts of what my possible opposing view may bring." Although it seemed that most didn't know what to do with their new awareness of white privilege, it was clear that this course helped many to take note of and begin to acknowledge their own privilege base.

As the course progressed, a broadening view of feminist thought and theories through (re)definition (i.e. seeing race, class and religion as 'feminist work', for example) certainly

emerged. Initially, students worked within the male vs. female dichotomy. Tamara revealed that, "It is almost as if some of us may perpetuate the whole 'traditional' way of viewing the role of a man and a woman.... I am torn between this very traditional upbringing and a more 'independent' woman." As time progressed and course readings expanded, students broadened their perceptions of the usefulness of feminist theories. They moved their understandings into arenas that also interrogated issues of class, race, religion and sexuality. Tara asked, "Is the education field lacking female leaders due to fear of conflict at home?" Susie questioned, "Do your spouses also ask themselves why they work?" What are we doing, if anything, to end our 'second-class' status?" Amy asked, "When do we, as women, realize that we let society, or even certain people in our lives, stop us, make us question each of our motivations...?"

Naming oneself as 'feminist' was certainly more common at the termination of the class than at the beginning. Many began to call themselves "feminist", although this practice was interpreted in diverse ways. Judd, a Black male, began to refer to himself as feminist while a white female asserted that she had always been a 'feminist', even though there was no evidence or indication that she practiced or so believed so prior to this time. Karen explains,

As a female administrator at the secondary level, I often do feel in the minority. For example, my first encounter [as the new high school associate principal] with

our police liaison officer was met with this comment, 'So, I hear you are going to be the weak link.' I started my role feeling I needed to get my hands on some testosterone pills in order to be effective and seen as valuable. I have since embraced my femininity and feel I have made some impact on the educational experiences of many students and on the professional lives of teachers.

Leslie added this,

I have never really thought much about feminism and I guess that's because of the negativity it represented to me. So, I advocate feminism and through this course have become interested in greater exploration of what feminism is all about and what it means for me.

Amy added that, "As a first semester feminist, I believe that I am more academic instead of activist so far that I don't know how to apply what I have read yet...." Thus, early on in the course, "feminist" was defined as a "role," but later took on a meaning as "activity."

Feminist action refers to the students' increasing abilities to understand and strive for meanings within texts and experiences and to actively connect experiences and knowledge of theories to everyday practice and change. They asked new questions about former experiences or understandings and challenged the authority of texts toward the end of the

class. Tara argued that, "One of the questions that I think needs posing is, 'Why don't we question more'? There is fear in posing questions that are not already to be heard. Are we ready to take the safety net off?" Karen remarked that one of the books,

Really helped me understand how feminism shifted throughout history based on societal and political interests. Realizing and understanding that we as women participate in our own subordination through our acceptance of inequality and our failure to challenge the status quo benefit the dominating forces and limit our ability to move forward.

Madeline started questioning her own experiences when male administrators would call her "dear," and what that really meant to her. She asked, "Do you think this will change with the next generation. Do you believe that younger males are more comfortable with women in different roles?" Overall, we noted that these students moved into deeper levels of analysis as the course progressed, evidenced through their questioning of peers and responses to others' comments.

Using the new language of feminism to illuminate or articulate events, situations and experiences was also evident. The use of this language strengthened as the class progressed, although it was not clear if that usage extended beyond the classroom setting. Tara wrote in one online discussion that "Reading the Carter [book author, Patricia Carter] gave me a base from

which my feminist pride has historical roots." Karen mentioned that, "I am starting to look at the educational system and my own professional practice more critically through a feminist lens....I began making progress and realizing the impact I can make if I stay true to myself." Likewise, the frequency of this language use increased through the course. Students became skilled, at least, at adopting the language they read.

Forging frank discussions across lines of race, religion and culture and learning to bridge personal to political increased through the class, although several students indicated that the wished there had been more face-to-face sessions as opposed to on-line discussions. Also, we often noted a practiced politeness in their exchanged discourse. African-American or Muslim students would correct others if they made some false or overarching assumptions about another's identity and group membership, however, it was always done with a certain tentativeness. Unlike some other similar classes in which the politics of identity can certainly bring on some emotive and angry responses, these students behaved like "professionals" during such discussions, a condition we noted could likely be attributed to the politics of politeness emphasized in pre-service professional training and expected in their professional roles.

One particularly significant exchange occurred on the last night of class. All the students had gathered at the instructor's house for a semester's end celebration and discussion. During the discussion, several of the women were discussing their future goals and

career directions. One of the African American women stated that she wanted to pursue her doctorate and was ready to leave her classroom teacher role in an urban school. A white woman, an administrator in higher education, turned to her and said, "What a pity! We really need people like you in the urban classroom." The African American woman, with good reason, took much offense to the comment. She retorted, "Don't speak to me like that. I'm offended by that statement". The white woman was horrified that she had offended the woman, and didn't seem to be able to completely understand initially why this occurred. It was one of those moments when I consciously fought back the urge to mediate or diffuse an important exchange. Instead, I used this opportunity to affirm the offended woman's reaction by supporting her outrage and pointing out this instance as an example of righteous indignation on the part of all oppressed people and the need for us all to listen respectfully to the messages delivered and work to regard anew our own narrow perspectives, particularly among those of us who occupy privileged status of race, position, and location. In effect, I didn't rescue the offender but did use the opportunity to illustrate the ways that white privilege governs all of us even though we do not think of ourselves as specifically or intentionally racist or sexist. We are all subjected to a local and larger context that harbors institutionalized racism, sexism and all other forms of oppression but through intentionality and openness to the thoughts of others, we can think anew, as agents and active subjects, who lean

inward and but act outwardly in newly imagined ways.

Limitations and Recommendations

Clearly, we both noted a reluctance to acknowledge the nature and full impact of institutionalized sexism and racism in our society. Most students claimed new awareness of pervasive sexism and racism, but they often failed to view their own complicity with these structures. Many times, they continued to believe that 'being racist or sexist' are largely individual acts or attitudes, not subjective responses shaped from within a larger racist, sexist society. Even though students progressed in their understandings of feminist thought, their reliance on these new perspectives and their understanding of subjectivity was often fragmented and attributed to some parts, not all parts, of their lives.

A strong rejection to radical feminist thought was clear and indicated one specific place in which vehement rejection of texts took place. There was a furious denial among nearly all the students to the assertions made in one essay written by a radical feminist from the 1970s. The fierce rejection of feminists who were known or self-described as 'radical' feminists of the 1960s and 1970s became one of the most compelling points of reflection for us. During a presentation of our preliminary findings at a regional conference, a male in the audience expressed some dismay at students' outward rejection of radical feminism. He reminded us of the gains made by these 2nd wave feminists and the ultimate value their work was manifest

in many of the rights gained among women today. He challenged our omission of their important work and our failure to confront students' misperceptions of the events of Civil Rights Movement. This is certainly true and, in retrospect, we should have offered historical information of feminism activity during this period of time. While we had focused very much on the earlier history of women activists, we had glossed over or even ignored some of the contributions made by women and others during the civil rights work of the 1960s in the US. Perhaps, in part, we anticipated the resistance that accompanies mention of feminists from the 'bra burners' era. Upon reflection, we felt that we could have focused more on the accomplishments of these women and the ways their actions were demonized and misinterpreted during this period of controversy and great discord in our more recent history. Many of these gains are misunderstood still today (Feree & Hess, (2000).

In all, we noted some change and growth in every student in relation to the objectives of the course, itself, particularly in their overall regard for activist leadership, an acknowledgement of the persistence of sexism in contemporary society, and a more accurate understanding of and regard for feminisms. The on-line format and resulting written transcripts provided very visible evidence of change and growth in these areas over time. And, many students were able to look at their own actions from a feminist perspective in order to better understand their own experiences. Not only did they better understand their

individual experiences but they began to learn more about the social structures relative to their own experiences. As one student summed it up, "our personal historicity is a reflection of how we were raised, culture, race, gender, etc...all mixed together. We can never separate ourselves from that, but we can grow and learn from it." Therefore, we can see that some gains in abilities to glean understanding of personal experience through feminist theories can lead to better understanding of social and cultural phenomena.

Students also grew to understand the importance of mentors and role models in order to better "negotiate" leadership within a patriarchal society. The help they got from others who use feminist perspectives, the more comfortable and confident they were in their own use of feminist theories to understand and transform their personal and professional lives. Moreover, students' abilities to engaged in active questioning and challenge authority through frank discussions helped them to gain confidence and rally around important social justice issues.

We conclude, however, that the class would be improved with more opportunities for developing skills in debate and discussion. There was not enough time to support these skills. Most exhibited a failure to challenge peers and to rely on an overall politeness that often resulted in avoidance of particular issues. Skills of productive confrontation, sharing of diverse perspectives, and argumentation might help them learn to move their own agendas into action in

other settings. We also speculated that students might benefit from a journey back to the initial discussions of the class so they might ascertain how and in what ways they have grown or changed from the beginning of the course to the end. They likely might be as surprised as we were in the astonishing change in perspective and discourse that delighted us as we reviewed these transcripts, finished assignments, and our observational notes.

Conclusions

Today, as school leaders are called to (re) fashion their own practice as leaders into work as cultural leaders, school leaders must understand and rigorously attend to issues of identity and difference, privilege and oppression in the social relations of everyday life. Forging new ways of leading difficult dialogue that seeks to embrace diverse perspectives and encourages new thinking about the complex issues that confront schools and society is central to social justice leadership (Shields, Larocque & Oberg, 2002; Shields, Solomon, 2002; Starrat, 2001).

As university instructors in educational administration programs, it is important that we develop course content and curricular pedagogies that support this critical work, knowing as well that such work is never simplistic or easily mastered. Our teaching must critique dominant ideologies in order to illuminate the ideologies and practices that marginalize others as it works to recognize the potential of education as a site for the fulfillment of social justice.

Just recently, Karen, one of the class participants who has recently been promoted to Assistant Superintendent

of a very large suburban school district, expressed her appreciation for the class to me, indicating that it was the most powerful experience of her graduate education (she holds several post-graduate administrator licenses and the doctorate in educational

administration). Experiences like the one we describe here should not be the exceptional experience in graduate school, but just one of many that make up a full journey of transformation toward school reform through leadership for social justice.

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