

# Teaching from the Heart

TOWARDS A PRACTICE OF LIBERATORY EDUCATION IN SOCIOLOGY

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Over the past few years I have been reflecting on my identity as a university sociology teacher and a social activist; at the same time, I have been experimenting with teaching practices that promote a liberatory educational process. In May 1993, I was invited to give a presentation on my “Authority in Teaching” to the annual Faculty of Education retreat at my university. This provided me with an excellent opportunity to engage in critical self-reflection about my goals as a teacher and to assess the impact of my teaching practices in the classroom. I have also participated in the “Teaching in Focus” group at my university for the past two years, and this has provided me with further opportunities to reflect on my classroom practices and to explore a number of innovative approaches to teaching.

Most recently, I have explored the literature on critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and antiracist pedagogy in order to reach a deeper understanding of my teaching: how I can teach in a manner which promotes social justice, challenges sexism, racism and other forms of domination, and creates the conditions for personal and social transformation.

In this article I explore what it means to teach from the heart by developing an understanding of liberatory pedagogy- a synthesis of critical, feminist and anti-racist pedagogies. This perspective then provides me with a framework of analysis for my own teaching practices. I focus on four interrelated aspects of my teaching: utilizing a student centered approach by linking knowledge to students’ personal experiences; promoting active learning through collaborative group work- fostering inclusiveness, respect for diversity and antiracist practices in the classroom; and encouraging students to engage in social action. I review my teaching practices in these areas, provide examples from recent courses, and consider student responses to my pedagogy. I conclude by considering the implications of liberatory education for the process of teaching and learning and for my own commitment to teaching from the heart.

## REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING

In order to understand my approaches to teaching, I must first reflect on who I am - as an academic and social activist - and as an integral part of the circle of life which encompasses the world beyond the university. How do my subject identities, my experiences, my feelings and understandings, my visions for peace and justice connect with my role as a teacher? I consider how teaching can contribute to my life goals of peace, empowerment, social justice. And I reflect on my thirty years of activism in progressive social movements: beginning with the American student anti-war movement in the 1960’s; moving to Canada where I became active in the women’s movement, labour movement and anti-racist organizing while I raised two children on my own; later, my involvement with coalition building and grassroots organizing. Since moving to the Prairies in 1990, my close relationships with the Native community, my involvement in Native women’s healing circles, and my growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all life have led to profound personal changes. These new understandings have renewed my social activism and they have had a meaningful affect on my teaching.

Now I must ask myself what it means to teach with my heart and spirit, as well as my intellect. Shor (1993, p.25) notes how Freire's critical pedagogy arises from his passion for justice, his faith in people, his commitment to liberation: "For Freire, teaching and learning are human experiences with profound social consequences." Guy Allen (cited in Ford 1993,p.12) expresses similar sentiments:

*Teaching is a sacred activity. Its power to affect people's lives -positively or negatively - is overwhelming... To be a good teacher, you need love, energy, clarity, idealism and realism - something of the spirit, and something of the earth.*

How do I put this vision of education into practice in my university courses? How can I teach from the heart?

Other educators have raised similar questions about the possibilities for transformative learning and emancipatory education which provides a standpoint for "teaching and learning liberation" and empowers people to act for change (Arnold *et.al.* 1991; Briskin 1990,p.1; Mezirow 1990). There are three strands of pedagogy which address my concerns about instructional practices: critical pedagogy as developed by Freire (1970, 1970) and other practitioners such as Shor (1987,1993; Shor and Freire 1987); feminist pedagogy as developed by practitioners such as Briskin (1990), Lee (1993) and MacDonald (1989); anti-racist pedagogy as developed by practitioners such as Ellsworth (1992) and Roman (1993).

Some authors (e.g., Luke 1992) have emphasized the disjuncture between critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy, and Ellsworth (1992) has counter-posed anti-racist pedagogies to the "myths of critical pedagogy." In contrast to their positions, hooks (1993) argues that she sees a convergence of Freire's critical pedagogy with her own feminist pedagogy, which in turn provides the basis for an ethics of struggle against colonialism, racism and other forms of oppression. In this article, I demonstrate how my own teaching practices are linked to these three strands of critical, feminist and anti-racist pedagogy; in combination they provide the basis for my liberatory pedagogy.

As a sociologist, I have not had much prior exposure to theories of pedagogy to guide my teaching practices; according to Kenway and Modra (1992), this is not an uncommon situation for academics outside the discipline of education. Now I have turned to this rich literature in order to make sense of my pedagogy, to better understand how meanings are made in the educational process (Kenway and Modra 1992,p.162). This has helped to frame my own understanding of how I teach and to locate my teaching with respect to the teaching practices of other educators committed to liberatory pedagogies.

The educational process is central to how the individual and society are constructed (Shor 1993). Therefore education plays a key role in either empowering students to work for social change or domesticating students to accept the status quo. Freire's critical pedagogy promotes a "critical consciousness" which enables students to question society, power and knowledge, and engage in critical action (Shor 1993,p.32). This goal is accomplished through posing problems for research and analysis that are based on everyday student life, current social issues, and the academic subject matter, and which are combined in a student-centered dialogue.

Similarly, feminist pedagogy encourages students to understand the realities of their everyday lives in the context of insitutional power and privilege, and then to use this knowledge as the basis of social and personal change (see Lee 1993). Anti-racist pedagogy (as defined by Ellsworth 1992) explicitly promotes action against racism, sexism and other oppressive structures and practices, recognizes the intersecting and sometimes contradictory social locations of students, and suggests a method of working across differences and inequalities in the classroom.

All three approaches acknowledge the political nature of education, focus on the life experiences of students, and promote action for social justice. These are also critical aspects of my own approach to teaching. However, there is no single blueprint for liberatory education. As noted by Shor (1993, pp.34-35), "we have to reinvent liberating education for our own situations" based on our specific settings and conditions. I now turn to a discussion of my own efforts to develop a liberatory educational process; I examine my own teaching practices and assess student responses.

## TEACHING PRACTICES: STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING

Liberatory educational practices encourage students to develop a critical consciousness: to explore who they are, to discover their relationship to the wider society, to challenge social relations based on domination and inequality, and to learn how they can use their knowledge to transform themselves and their communities. This kind of learning is facilitated by educational practices that are: student centred, linking knowledge to students' personal experiences; promote active learning by students and collaborative learning in groups; respect diversity, challenge inequality and encourage the participation of students from marginalized groups; and emphasize critical thought leading to action for personal and social change.

A basic premise of critical pedagogy is that education should be student-centred, starting from the knowledge of the learner (Shor 1993). I organize many of my courses in such a way that the course content is partially determined by students according to their concerns and interests. I encourage students to select topics for their presentations and research projects which are relevant to them, which are meaningful in terms of their real life experiences and interests, and which will provide them with useful information and analysis.

For example, in "Sociology of Women and Work," I schedule the first half of the course to cover the basic concepts. The second half of the course remains flexible, with the specific content depending on students' choice of topics for research papers and small group presentations. In addition to the assigned texts, I put additional readings on reserve once students have selected their topics of interest.

The majority of the students taking this course are women, many of them mature students, and their backgrounds are quite diverse. I encourage students to begin with their own working experiences and their concerns about women's work; as a result, this course is never the same two years in a row. Depending on the students in the course we might emphasize topics such as: rural women's work, equity issues in the workplace, Aboriginal women's work roles, immigrant women's labour force participation, the double burden faced by working mothers.

Students in my courses have generally responded positively to this student-centred approach. For example, one woman enrolled in "Women and Men in Society" wrote she was "glad that you gave us the freedom to choose a topic of interest as a research project." She went on to explain that writing her paper was helping her to challenge a medical system in which she had personally experienced pain.

Another woman enrolled in "Minority Group Relations" wrote eloquently about her journey of self-knowledge. With my encouragement, she had researched the misconceptions and myths about Black women, and as a result she had developed a sense of her own identity and the power to fight back against racism and sexism. She wrote in her journal:

*Regardless of how this paper is evaluated its value to me is insurmountable. For it has become a stepping stone toward my understanding of life, and thus, has given me a sense of empowerment.*

When students are given the freedom and encouragement to link academic knowledge to their life experiences, they bring greater enthusiasm to their work. Nemiroff (1989, p.5) maintains that students' best motivation occurs when they feel a need for the material they are learning, and students learn best when the work is personally meaningful for them. A student-centred approach provides a way of linking knowledge to students' personal experiences.

Critical sociology provides a means of connecting "our understanding of the systemic, the macro-level processes with what happens with people in their everyday lives" (Hacker 1990, p.25). Similarly, feminist pedagogy incorporates "the affective, emotional and experiential into the learning process" (Briskin 1990, p.27); its goal is the "joining of "affect and intellect where personal experience becomes the site for intellectual investigation and inquiry" (Lee 1993, p.27).

I often use journals to enable students to make these connections, to integrate sociological analysis with their personal understandings. A structured journal-type assignment, which I call the "Diary," enables students to relate course materials to their own experiences and observations. Each entry in the Diary contains a "stimulus" - any incident from their personal life, something observed in the life of others, or an item in the public media - that focuses on family life or social inequality or gender relations (depending on the course). Students are then

required to do an “analysis” which explains the stimulus in a broader perspective, with reference to the assigned readings and course lectures. They also include comments about how the incident makes them feel (the affective dimension) and what they would endeavour to change about this situation (focussing on the possibilities for personal and social action).

Through this assignment, students can demonstrate their knowledge of course material while focussing on issues of personal concern; I come to see how students make sense of course learnings in terms of their own lives. The diaries often demonstrate significant personal growth, insightful sociological analysis, and critical awareness of social issues. The diary assignment is one tool I use to create learning situations built around the themes and conditions of people’s lives. Students are encouraged to make use of academic knowledge and analysis, and to apply it to real life. This kind of student-centred learning, which relates course material to student understandings, is promoted by Shor (1993) and other Freirean educators as an alternative to traditional “banking methods” of top-down education.

### ACTIVE LEARNING THROUGH COLLABORATIVE GROUP WORK

Traditional teaching methods such as lectures, which are based on a uni-directional flow of knowledge from teacher to student, often create passive learners. In contrast to this approach, participatory education is based on active student involvement in the learning process where “students are asked to participate in making their education” (Shor 1993,p.33). My teaching practices are also based on feminist education: to “facilitate active learning where knowledge is relevant and useful, where classroom work is connected to the everyday experiences of students’ lives, and where students are engaged and moving the learning process forward” (Lee 1993,p.27).

In addition to the student selection of topics discussed in the previous section, I have found group work to be one of the most effective methods of encouraging active student involvement. In order to encourage this kind of active learning and collaborative work, I assign group work for student research and presentations in a number of my courses. Students select topics according to areas of interest; they work together in small groups of four to six students in order to develop a specific focus and organize a class presentation (ranging from 30 minutes to one hour). The groups are formed during class time; time is set aside for the groups to touch base every week, but they are also expected to meet outside of class. They give regular progress reports and I work with students to facilitate the group process. Following their presentations, the students in each group are invited to evaluate themselves on two criteria: content (knowledge of subject area, clarity of presentation) and style (organization of material, involvement of class, creativity).

Students are encouraged to make use of a variety of forms of creative communication: role playing and dramatization; art, poetry and music; short films and videos; interviews and guest speakers. Recently, students have even started producing their own videos. In “Women and Men in Society,” one group focussing on the women’s movement produced and videotaped a costumed historical drama - on location at a local fort - which dramatized Nellie McClung’s speech on suffrage to the Manitoba legislature; this was combined with a humorous take on a popular television show. In their self-evaluation, this group commented: “We had fun at our meetings, we enjoyed it. We learned a lot from hearing others’ viewpoints and experiences.”

Through this assignment, students gain experience in group process. They learn to work in a collaborative manner; through discussion and debate with each other, they refine their analysis and understanding. Another group in “Women and Men in Society,” which used a talk show format for their presentation on homosexuality, reported that they had decided to role-play different perspectives (including a lesbian mother, a feminist activist, and a Christian fundamentalist opposed to gay rights) in order to create debate in the class. In their self-evaluation, this group noted: “We shared information and learned a lot... There was input to each other and we heard others’ views... It was teamwork, a creative process.”

I have found that strong friendships and networks may develop through the group work, which helps to break down the anonymity of large university classes. For example, an all-woman group focussing on family violence told me how they had developed an ongoing support network. They had been drawn to this group because of their personal experiences of violence and abuse, and the group work provided the basis for research and analysis, as well as social action and personal change. They also produced one of the most effective presentations

in “Women and Men in Society”: they presented a dramatization of the historical and contemporary dimensions of violence against women and recounted (through videotape) their visit to the opening of a Native women’s shelter. At the end of the presentation, the group provided a practical way for class members to get involved as students were invited to contribute items needed for the women’s shelter.

Writing in their self-evaluation report, the students in this group reported that they had found the process of group work to be “successful and enjoyable ... positive and worthwhile.” They commented:

*We probably learned as much from the interaction as we did in researching our topic. In working as a group you can cover more areas of research, brainstorm for ideas, creativity seems to be more accessible and generally you can just get more done.*

King (1990) also reports positive results with group presentations in sociology classes. She concludes that group presentations are stimulating and fun; they provide a means of linking sociology to the real world outside the classroom; they foster creativity and analytical thinking; they provide a way to learn experientially; and they encourage the development of specific skills (e.g., oral communication, listening, interpersonal relations). Above all, group presentations promote active modes of learning.

In addition to the group presentations, I have been experimenting with other forms of group work which encourage active student learning. For example, in an introductory sociology course, I assigned students to groups of six to eight students for weekly exercises. Each student was asked to formulate a “sociological question” based on the assigned readings for the week; they were encouraged to link the macro and micro levels of analysis, and to select a discussion topic of personal interest. These questions were then shared in the groups, group members selected one question for discussion, the group discussion was written up in a short report, and the discussion was summarized verbally for the class. Facilitators and recorders were selected for each group. Because this was a first year course, I decided to give students credit for participation in the exercises, rather than grading the quality of the questions and reports. Later, in a third year Sociology of Education course, I modified this approach by grading each group’s weekly report.

In April 1994, a panel of students from this course participated in a workshop on group work with the “Teaching in Focus” faculty group at the university. Significantly, the four students who had agreed to speak about their learning experiences were a diverse group, including a Native woman and an immigrant woman of Latin American origin. They identified a number of benefits from the group process:

*... it is easier for students to be seen and heard. ..you can take concepts you’re learning and apply them to your own experiences.*  
*... it validates your experiences ... of racism.*  
*...the brighter students help the weaker students to learn.*  
*...cooperative methods develop more self-confidence.*  
*...group work improves skills... that are valuable for employment.*

The student panel also noted some of their concerns about group work: the importance of training group facilitators, the difficulty of recording group discussion, and the need to clarify how group work is graded. (I have since made some changes to the group work, in response to these comments.)

There is substantial evidence that group work makes a valuable contribution to liberatory education: it contributes to student-centred learning; it provides a way of linking academic knowledge with student experiences; it encourages students to become actively involved in their own learning; and it promotes group interaction and collaboration. Group work also provides experience in “communication and group process, cooperation, and networking,” all aspects of feminist process (Lee 1993, p.23). These “communal, collective and cooperative ways of learning” can be contrasted with the more usual hierarchical and competitive relations in the classroom (Briskin 1990, p.23).

## INCLUSIVENESS, DIVERSITY AND ANTI-RACIST TEACHING PRACTICES

The goals of student-centred learning and active learning cannot be achieved apart from antiracist teaching practices which create an inclusive learning environment for all students, promote respect for diversity in the classroom, validate multicentric perspectives of knowledge, and challenge racism, sexism and other unequal power relations. My primary concern is to create a learning environment of trust and respect for women, Aboriginal students and other students who have been silenced or marginalized ( Dei, 1993) so that they can participate fully in my classes and speak of their own experiences and understandings. Along with this, I want to encourage a critical awareness in students of the “patriarchal power structure that is also white, able bodied, heterosexual and middle class” (Forbes 1993, p.l). Education should expose the “embeddedness of sexism and racism,” and it should disrupt the “normal pedagogical priorities that reproduce sexism and racism” (Ng 1992, p.8). These objectives are grounded in feminist, critical and anti-racist pedagogies.

Feminist pedagogy validates the multiplicity of women’s experiences and identifies intersecting systems of oppression; it is “rooted in a vision that allows for multiple realities and ways of understanding the world” (Thompson and Tyagi 1993,p.194). Freirean pedagogy incorporates similar “multicultural values” in recognition of the various dominant and non-dominant cultures in society; it takes a critical stance towards discrimination and inequality, and promotes a curriculum which is “balanced for gender, class and race” (Shor 1990,p.34). Anti-racist pedagogy incorporates these approaches and also provides explicit strategies for teaching across differences to challenge unequal power relations in the classroom (Cannon 1990; Ellsworth 1992).

Reflecting on my own practices in the classroom, I can identify three teaching strategies that I use to promote inclusiveness, diversity and antiracist practice: first, inclusive course content; second, special support for students from marginalized groups; and third, teaching and learning across differences.

**Inclusive course content.** I ensure that my course content is relevant to all students; this means emphasizing the experiences and perspectives of women, Native people, people of colour, and other groups who have been historically excluded from academic knowledge. In planning my courses I carefully select textbooks and supplementary readings, prepare lectures and discussions, invite guest speakers and community resource people - with the goal of critiquing Eurocentric perspectives and validating other ways of knowing and learning in the course content. While the substantial Native population at the university and in the surrounding community makes it essential for me to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into my courses, the presence of Native peoples provides unique opportunities for doing so.

These efforts have been made easier because of my close association with the Native community and the local Friendship Centre, and I often invite guest speakers to address students directly in Native voices. For example, an expert on Blackfoot language and history made a strong impact as a guest lecturer in my 1993 introductory sociology class; for many of the students, this was their first exposure to an authoritative Native voice.

I have also developed special courses such as a fourth year seminar, “Studies in Gender, Race and Class,” which explicitly addresses how these forms of oppression intersect in women’s lives. Guest speakers, readings, films, and the diverse voices in the classroom all contribute to students’ learning about the multiplicity of women’s experiences. Last semester, I invited the recently organized Women of Colour Collective to join our class for a discussion of racism and sexism. I was told that this was a particularly moving experience for the women in the collective, some of whom had never spoken publicly before; several of the women reported that speaking to our class had helped to validate their experiences of racism. It was also a powerful learning experience for the students in the class judging from their responses to the presentation. For example: an immigrant woman from Latin America was able to name her own experiences of racism for the first time; a Native woman in the class noted the similarity of her experiences of racism to those related by women of colour; and one of the white women in the class remarked that, now that she had heard about racism directly from women of colour, she could no longer deny that racism was a problem.

In this same class, I specified that Aboriginal perspectives (included in the assigned readings) would be accepted as legitimate modes of analysis in addition to Eurocentric theoretical perspectives. This approach not only challenged dominant modes of analysis; it also encouraged students to incorporate Native perspectives into

their research and analysis. For example, in her research proposal on Native women and prison one student explained that her theoretical perspectives would include feminist analysis and Native teachings on the Medicine Wheel.

When I had an opportunity to teach introductory sociology at a local Native college in 1992, I took a number of steps to ensure that the course would be relevant to the students ways of knowing and learning. I arranged with the college to have an elder from the community begin the first class with a Blackfoot ceremony and prayer. The mainstream sociology text (Tepperman and Rosenberg 1991) was complemented by a text on Native life in Canada (York 1990). During the course we explored sociological concepts together and then tested these concepts against students' experiences and understandings in their community. This enabled us to develop a critique of Eurocentric sociological concepts, while making use of sociological analysis to better understand the connections between individual students' experience, Blackfoot culture and Euro-Canadian society.

I developed special short essay assignments which guided students to integrate their own knowledge and traditions with sociological analysis, and we often used small talking circles for class discussions. For one assignment, students were invited to "record one of the traditional stories of your nation... (and) discuss the importance of traditional stories and spirituality in maintaining Aboriginal culture." In another essay, students were asked to "discuss some of the forms of racism that Native people experience in everyday life." In the essay on education, students were asked to "contrast the European system of residential schooling with the current move for Native control of education... (and) to reflect on your own experiences."

Favorable student evaluations confirmed for me that the course had effectively linked sociological analysis with students life experiences. The students praised Native components of the course which had "allowed (them) to focus on their areas of concern within their community." Native issues had made the course "more interesting" with "new knowledge (being) learned on a daily basis." One student concluded: "the application of the sociological concepts should be retained as they relate to our Native way of life."

Inclusive course content is an important aspect of anti-racist pedagogy: as we make visible the cultures and experiences which have been excluded from Euro-Canadian education, students who have been marginalized are encouraged to see themselves as subjects, and "to become active generators of their own knowledge and consequently to be able to identify with the materials being taught in class" (Dei 1993, p.45-6).

**Special support for students.** A second approach I take in my teaching is to provide special encouragement and support for students from less powerful groups so that their voices can be heard in the classroom. This teaching strategy is confirmed by Cannon (1990); she argues that it is necessary to upset the "normative balance of power" in the classroom, which otherwise replicates unequal statuses in society and tends to favour students from more powerful, dominant groups. Cannon reports that she uses her power as the teacher to facilitate participation by students from less privileged groups.

I use a similar approach in my own teaching in order to create a safe space for the active participation of Native students and students from other marginalized groups. In addition to moving Native concerns from the margin to the centre - by validating Native perspectives as part of the course content - I use a number of strategies to encourage students whose voices are usual not heard. As a non-native (white) instructor, I often turn to Native students in the class for elaboration, confirmation or correction of my understanding of Aboriginal perspectives when I introduce these concepts.

I create opportunities for non-standard forms of class participation that may create greater comfort for Native students, and that provide for more holistic expressions of knowledge (which I believe is beneficial for all students). The small group presentations provide a good opportunity for creative expressions based on students experiences and understandings. For example, during her group's presentation on racism, one student read a very moving poem she had composed about her experiences as a Native woman in Canadian society; she informed me later that this was the first time she had spoken publicly about her identity. I have encouraged students to invite Native elders to address the class, community and family members have been videotaped speaking about their lives, and we have had talking circles to discuss issues of family violence. Poetry, dancing, drumming, singing and art displays have been incorporated into the presentations by diverse groups of students. Beyond the presentations which provide an alternative to written assignments, I would like to explore further the use of oral assignments in assessing students' knowledge - this might be especially appropriate for students

who come from oral cultures.

The small group work provides a good environment for encouraging the participation of students from less powerful groups - who might not otherwise speak up in a large class. Both Native students and immigrant students have commented that the small groups make it easier to speak and be heard. For example, one Native woman in "Sociology of Education" explained: "I won't say anything in a big class, but in a group I get to know the group members and I can tell them (what I think)."

I have been told by some of the Native women and men in my classes that they feel comfortable enough in my classes to speak up and share their knowledge with the other students - in contrast to other classes where they often remain silent. My active involvement with the Native community and my personal support for local Native struggles has also been a factor in gaining students' trust. As stated by one Native woman writing in her journal for "Minority Group Relations": "Your classes are very important to me because they address the Native issues and you stick up for Native people and other minorities."

I quite consciously do not treat all students the same. I take concrete steps to validate the experiences and knowledge of Native students, women, and other minorities in order to move students from marginalized groups into the centre. Although students who are used to being in the centre may at times feel uncomfortable with this approach, I agree with Cannon's judgment (1990, p.129) that treating all students fairly does not mean "treat(ing) them exactly the same."

**Teaching and learning across differences.** A third approach I use in anti-racist teaching is to provide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to work together and learn from each other; in this way, they can become more aware of multiple realities and perspectives. This approach worked especially well in "Sociology of Education," where students were encouraged to reflect on their own educational experiences during the group discussions. In my instructions to the groups, I encouraged the Native students and international students (as well as students from other marginalized groups) to discuss how their experiences compared with the analysis presented in the lectures and assigned readings. This led to some very informative discussions about diverse educational experiences, and diversity came to be seen as a positive aspect of our learning.

Cannon (1990) reports that establishing explicit ground rules about working together at the beginning of her classes helps to facilitate positive intergroup relations and encourages students to cooperate across differences. In my own classes, I carefully monitor the group work: at the beginning of the course when I discuss group process with the class, I emphasize the importance of respecting diverse perspectives and the advantages of learning across differences. Once the groups are functioning, I intervene if it appears that students are being silenced or excluded, or if their contributions to discussion are not being respected. Despite my best efforts, however, full and equal participation by all students can be inhibited at times by the reproduction of unequal relations among groups in the classroom, or because of students' perceptions that speaking out is too risky (Cannon 1990; Ellsworth 1992).

When I assign students to groups, I often take into account the gender and ethnicity of group members to ensure that students from marginalized groups are not isolated. For example, I may place several Native students or students of colour together so they can provide mutual support and validation during group work. Alternatively, when students select their own groups for the small group presentations, they usually come together based on common interests. These affinity groups can strengthen the voices of students who have been previously silenced or excluded, and the resulting group presentations often help to raise students' awareness of the diverse realities and perspectives within the class.

These approaches to teaching and learning across differences are similar to some of the antiracist teaching strategies proposed by Ellsworth (1992): promoting social interactions among students, creating safe spaces within the class (e.g., informal affinity groups), naming and discussing inequalities, and acknowledging the multiplicity of knowledges and experiences of diverse groups. This can be a complex process given the sometimes contradictory perspectives and social locations of students.

In addition to these three approaches, I incorporate an emphasis on social action into my antiracist teaching. Through my teaching practices, I encourage students to take an active stance against racism, sexism and other forms of domination; they are urged to challenge relations of inequality as they exist within the classroom and in the wider society.

## EDUCATION AND SOCIAL ACTION

Critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy all emphasize social action as an integral part of education. "Critical consciousness," the goal of Freirean education, combines critical thought and critical action; it promotes an active subject who questions and transforms, one who takes part in and initiates social change (Shor 1993, pp.32-33). Feminist pedagogy, with its connection to feminist practice and the women's movement, views education as "a form of empowerment and a tool in social change"; it highlights the importance of integrating theories with "practical strategies for personal and social change" (Lee 1993, p.27). Citing the "high level of abstraction" in critical pedagogy, Ellsworth (1992, pp.92-93) calls for an anti-racist pedagogy that incorporates an explicit political agenda and constructs "a classroom practice that would act on the side of antiracism."

My own teaching practices incorporate a social action component which encourages students to focus on relevant social problems, apply theory to analysis of these problems, and consider the social policy alternatives in their research projects and group presentations. I also encourage students to become personally involved in personal and social action which can challenge oppressive relations and institutions. These approaches are outlined in my course outlines and assignments.

For example, in the 1993 course outline for "Social Movements and Collective Behaviour," which directed students to study specific social movements for their research projects, I suggested that they "become involved with local social action groups as a means of investigating collective action for social change." I also encouraged them "to engage in social action research - research which contributes to the process of social change."

In her journal for the course, one student, a non-native woman, explained how she had become involved in a research project with the local Native Friendship Centre:

*My interest and curiosity were piqued (by the course). I became involved with a local movement... I learned about native people and their culture. This was an opportunity that allowed my character to grow, as well as my awareness of native issues. This research project, developed in collaboration with the Friendship Centre, provided the centre with useful documentation about its history and role in the community.*

Other student projects have also led to practical results. For example, research on environmental issues led one student to develop a recycling program for the student residence at the university. Several other students made connections with local advocacy groups - such as the women's centre, the AIDS connection, the environmental resource centre, the gay and lesbian support group - and a few students became actively involved with the groups (e.g., attending meetings, organizing community activities).

When I taught this same course in 1991, the focus on social action had encouraged one of the students in the class, an international student from the Far East, to become involved in antiracist organizing on campus. He reflected in his journal about his decision to mobilize international students in response to an incident of racial discrimination on campus; the student noted that course readings and discussions had contributed to his decision, "after much internal debate," to play a leadership role around this issue.

This student's class presentation also contributed in a practical way to anti-racist education. He saw his presentation as "just one step in the right direction in promoting an awareness about the problems foreign students have to confront while studying," and concluded that "more concrete actions must continue to follow in order to increase understanding and interactions of students on campus."

This effort at anti-racist education was quite effective, judging from the responses of other students. Reflecting on the presentation in her journal, one Canadian-born student wrote:

*I've never really viewed foreign students as an oppressed group... I was challenged to look at things from a different point of view... What became quite clear besides the discrimination, was their lack of rights... I believe and hope that this group will organize themselves, their voices need to be heard, there are so many of us that are so totally ignorant about their situation.*

In other courses, students have also incorporated practical strategies for change in their course work. For example, in “Women and Men in Society,” a group of students focussing on violence against women visited women’s shelters, attended workshops and collected donations for a new women’s shelter. Another group focussing on the women’s movement invited the coordinator of the women’s centre to be a guest speaker; her talk encouraged a number of students to take part in local activities. A group concerned about sexism in advertising wrote letters of complaint to the offending companies.

I find that many of the students engaging in social action see this as an opportunity to challenge oppressive or unjust institutions or social relations. But, of course, not all students welcome such an orientation which runs counter to the usual academic practices. Therefore, I use a flexible approach in promoting a social action orientation - which encourages but does not compel students to become involved in the process of social change. In “Social Movements and Collective Behavior,” for example, students have the option of completing a library research project which does not require their direct contact with a community group. While emphasizing a flexible, student-centred approach in my courses, I continue to experiment with teaching practices which might encourage students to engage in critical thought and action.

### STUDENT RESISTANCE TO LIBERATORY PEDAGOGY

By teaching in a manner that promotes active and critical student participation in the learning process, I encourage students to become responsible for their own education rather than seeing themselves as simply passive recipients of education. Laughton (1993) has critiqued the “student as customer” paradigm being promoted by some Canadian universities, arguing instead for a “students as co-workers” paradigm. He concludes that “many students expect to be given an education (as a customer might be) when they should be encouraged more to work with others toward achieving an education (as a co-worker would).” Confusion about these paradigms might help to explain some of the student resistance to liberatory education that I have encountered in my classes.

Student resistance can be traced to several related factors. Students may not feel at ease with critical pedagogy which requires active student participation and upsets traditional authority relations. The hostility of men (and some women) to feminist pedagogy can be traced to continuing male dominance in the face of efforts to decentre those with power. White defensiveness in response to anti-racist pedagogy often reflects students’ fears about loss of power and privilege.

Student unease with liberatory education was evident in the 1993 course evaluation for “Women and Men in Society.” Some students who had expected the transmission of knowledge through a traditional lecture format evidently did not appreciate the participatory learning style of the course; they expressed their concern about the small group presentations, in particular. As a result, student evaluations were contradictory for this class and the highly favourable comments of some students contrasted sharply with the critical comments of other students. Some students praised the group work as “an excellent learning tool” and said they appreciated the “positive learning environment” created by the group presentations; however, other students complained about the absence of “an actual lecture with real notes” and found my approach “unhelpful ... and inappropriate.” Clearly, some students “loved the course” and commended my ability “to teach and facilitate with thorough knowledge and expertise,” while other students condemned the class as “a complete waste of time.”

Shor’s (1993, p.29) analysis of “authority dependence” provides some insight into the negative evaluations reported above. Shor notes that students who internalize the dominant values of passive learning may reject efforts to involve them actively in the learning process; he explains that they may, in fact, “doubt that this is ‘real’ education.” The tendency of students to undervalue women’s authority and expertise in the classroom (Briskin 1990) may have contributed to the unfavorable comments.

Similarly, Heald (199 1,p. 144) reports that students question her professional competence when she encourages them to think critically. She explains:

*I often refuse, against the wishes of some students, to deliver a single right answer in an appropriately brief sentence which can be written down. This from the position of traditional pedagogy, can look like “not knowing what she’s talking about.”*

Basow's (1994) findings also throw some light on contradictory student evaluations. She reports that "student ratings of professors may be biased against women in subtle but significant ways." The tendency of male students to rate some female faculty lower than male faculty may reflect differential expectations for male and female faculty (Basow 1994; Briskin 1990), as well as the devaluing of gender issues (Briskin 1990).

MacDonald (1989) and Lewis (1992) have both reported similar problems of male resistance and hostility in their classrooms when they challenge male privilege and power. According to Lee (1993, p.30), men do not "flock to classes that ask them to learn about and deal with their privilege," and she notes that "male defensiveness" can quickly polarize a class. Student resistance to feminist pedagogy is not limited to males, however. Lewis (1992) has noted that women themselves sometimes become protective of men and supportive of patriarchal relations.

Some academics in the "Progressive Sociologists Network" (1993) report that their teaching may unleash rage in students who are privileged or who believe in the dominant myths. Roman (1993, p.72) has identified the problem of "white defensiveness" which arises in response to antiracist education. She notes that "white misrecognition of the effects of our own racially privileged locations" may result in an unwillingness to challenge relations of inequality.

In courses where I question sexism, racism, and other unequal power relations, I may have to deal with unfavorable student responses ranging from silent alienation to outright hostility. This can lead to student interruptions or disruptions in the classroom, negative student comments on course evaluations, or even student complaints about feminist "bias" or alleged unfair treatment. Unfortunately, these kinds of incidents can have an adverse affect on the careers of progressive academics, particularly academics like myself who are not yet tenured. Negative responses are more likely to be seen by administrators as evidence of poor teaching, rather than as indicators of student resistance to innovative and critical pedagogy. Thompson and Tyagi (1993, p.192) note that "progressive sociologists who practice race-, class, and gender-conscious educational change" face difficulties such as the marginalization of our academic work, devaluing of our pedagogy and the misrepresentation of inclusive scholarship.

Shor (1993,p.35) concludes that "our specific settings and conditions teach us the limits and openings for making change." These limits include the institutional constraints imposed by post-secondary institutions as well as student resistance to shifting power relations in the classroom. On a practical level, we need to find ways of encouraging students to consider the possibilities for sharing power in the classroom. This process can be facilitated through creative teaching strategies (see Lewis 1992; MacDonald 1989), and through group work and other teaching techniques that promote dialogue between unequally located groups (Roman 1993) and foster cooperation across differences (Cannon 1990).

## IMPLICATIONS OF LIBERATORY EDUCATION

Liberatory education has important implications for the teaching and learning of sociology. Critical, feminist and anti-racist pedagogies all point to the political nature of education and the production of knowledge: Freire argues that "the whole activity of education is political in nature... knowledge is not neutral" (Shor 1993, pp.27-28). Claims that sociology could be or should be value-free may, in fact, help to buttress the dominant values which masquerade as neutral, "common sense" knowledge (Apple 1993; Roman 1993). On the contrary, bringing forward our critical values and perspectives may help us avoid problems of hidden bias, and encourage the critical evaluation of existing sociological knowledge by both students and academics. Just as Shor (1993, p.30) argues that liberatory pedagogy does not negate high academic standards, taking a stand against injustice and domination is not contradictory to rigorous sociological analysis.

Will teaching sociology "from the heart" transform the discipline of sociology? I certainly hope so. Liberatory pedagogy promotes the relevance of sociology to real life; this can be a powerful learning experience for many students, as I have already demonstrated. Thompson and Tyagi (1993, p.195) note that many students of colour want sociology programs that "recognize a vital link between sociology as an activist, communitybased discipline and as a site for the production of knowledge." These goals are not contradictory. Academics such as Hall (cited in Apple 1993, p.25) and Bunch (cited in MacDonald 1989, p.150) contend that theoretical analysis should enable us to better understand the real world so that we may transform it. Liberatory pedagogy can assist in accomplishing

these objectives.

Writing this article has confirmed my commitment to a liberatory educational process where I can bring together my concerns as an academic and social activist. There are dangers to this approach, however. On the one hand, I may face continuing student resistance and serious risks to my academic career by practicing liberatory pedagogy. On the other hand, I may “risk being split from transformative politics” (Dehli 1991, p.50) by engaging in formal academic work. However, the gains outweigh the risks. To encourage students to become part of the process of learning, and to value their own experience and knowledge “is to revolutionize... teaching, and directly challenge the status quo” (MacDonald 1989, p.147). I remain committed to “teaching from the heart.”

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