

## **Bringing Feminism into Your Classroom**

*By Michelle Miller, MEd, MA*

**Bringing feminism into your classroom/community centres/learning (un)learning environments/basement bookclubs** is about more than just what you teach. It's also about how you teach it. Here are some suggestions for integrating feminist principles into your teaching, without necessarily changing the curriculum.

- Create a safe space. Make it clear that racist, sexist, classist and homophobic discourse is not welcome in your classroom. Lead by example.
- Form or join a GSA. If your school won't allow one, consider the underground alternative. Let students know that on a certain day of the week, you plan to do marking at the school either after school hours or at lunch and they are welcome to come and chat in your classroom while you do so.
- Hang a triangle on your door.
- Make current events your best friend. Something will happen every day which your class can discuss.
- Encourage creativity and critical thinking. Ask questions you don't know the answer to. Don't ever assume that there's one answer to any question.
- Be self-reflexive. Who do you call on? Who do you discipline? What works do you hold to be important? Whose version of the truth do you subscribe to?
- Make friends with technology! Bring blogs, podcasts, music videos etc into your classroom. Have your students make these things! It's simple, blogger accounts are free and can be created on any computer. Podcasts can be created and distributed with limited technology. Using popular forms can make education come alive for students who may otherwise be disenchanted.
- Trust authority! (just kidding, but) Bring in a Guest Speaker! You aren't the authority on all issues, but someone in your community is. Want to talk about youth poverty? Bring in someone from the community. Same environmentalism, civic participation, etc.
- Encourage volunteerism. But also, help your students know their rights at work, because many young people are exploited at the workplace for their age.
- When you hear racist or homophobic remarks, say something. When students say "I didn't mean it" you say "That's fine, but I'm offended and I'm still going to be offended as long as you're using ignorant language like that" or something. When you don't speak up, you send the message that it's okay, and it isn't okay. Ever.
- Use film, don't abuse film. Watching movies in class shouldn't be an opportunity for students (or you!) to take a nap. Always have critical activities planned around movie-watching.
- Share your resources! I know, you did the legwork, but all students benefit when their teachers wise up and use righteous materials.
- Just because it's by/for women doesn't make it feminist, and just because it's by/for men doesn't mean it isn't.
- Organize a social justice club. Help that club to organize a local social justice conference – invite other area schools to help and/ or attend.

- Any time your students are doing something positive, call the local press and get them to report on it. Newspapers are too full of stories about apathetic teenagers. Disrupt that!
- Watch your mouth! No, I don't mean don't swear, swearing isn't unfeminist, I mean don't call your students "guys". Call them "ladies and gentlemen" or "class" or by their names. Read Audrey Bilger's Fall 2002 article in *Bitch* "On Language".
- Teach your students to vote! During election times, help students to educate themselves as to who they are voting for. Get to know the candidates, their stances on a variety of issues. Hold letter-writing campaigns. Host a candidate debate, bring students to it. Hold a mock election at your school, make charts about where candidates stand on different issues. Voting is confusing, and they're much more likely to do it if they understand how and why.
- Decorate your classroom! Put up political posters. Many organizations (for example, unions and the white ribbon campaign) offer great posters on the cheap for educators who express interest. I learn better when I'm looking at a picture of Rosemary Brown. I do.
- Scavenge. You should always be looking for new materials to teach with. Date them, and after you teach a lesson five years in a row, update or toss it. Feminism requires dynamic change, and that goes for your resource binder too (however, don't throw out this resource guide, it's beauty).