



Feminism and the Classroom Teacher: Research, Praxis and Pedagogy. Amanda Coffey and Sara Delamont. London: Routledge Falmer, 2000. 182 pp.

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How has feminism influenced contemporary educational practices? Is feminism relevant to today's teachers? To answer these questions, sociologists Amanda Coffey and Sara Delamont undertake a feminist analysis of the work and everyday realities of the classroom teacher, providing evidence that feminism is still relevant as a way of thinking about the social world and as a lived reality. The authors assert that the empirical data and analytic discussions presented in the book have a broader relevance, examining to what extent "women teachers specifically—and the feminist project more generally—[have] contributed to theoretical understandings and practical accomplishments of teaching" (p. 2). This ambitious book, with its very broad coverage of what feminism is and could be, I see as appropriate for a graduate-level class in feminist research, but specific chapters could be readings in other graduate and undergraduate classes to add feminist perspective to almost any topic in education.

Coffey and Delamont explain that the research and literature discussed in the book come from a range of countries (British, Canadian, and American research and literature dominate; other—primarily European—work is included) and employ a variety of research modes and theoretical perspectives. Their aim is, rather than an exhaustive review of all available literature, to be "successful in drawing together the polemic and the empirical, the cited and the more diverse and scattered bodies of material" (p. 2).

Material gathered and authors' analyses are arranged into broad themes, which inform the chapter organization. Concluding each chapter is a fictional vignette—set in Ledshire, a fictional British city—designed to be an introduction to the substantive topics of the next chapter. The vignettes offer a way for instructors to raise issues prior to students reading a chapter; in other words, the vignettes can be a prereading activity helping students understand what the instructor hopes they will be thinking about while reading.

Chapter 1 is the theoretical backdrop for the authors' analysis of the everyday world and work of the teacher. It explains the place of a feminist analysis in a postmodern intellectual climate, tracing 19th-century strands of feminism to the current trends and



developments of *feminisms* "as a way of framing feminist educational theory and praxis" (p. 5) by highlighting and illuminating trends and contemporary developments in feminist thought. Chapters 2–5 concentrate on different aspects of the everyday work of a classroom teacher—the classroom's practical contingencies, the intellectual work of a teacher, the teaching career path, and the day-to-day biographies and experiences of teachers. It is these four chapters that I see as most useful for undergraduate or graduate education classes—the sociology of education, history of education, or a student teaching/internship seminar. Chapter 2, "Classroom Life," concentrates on three sets of issues—immediacy and autonomy, talk and the control of talk, and discipline and control—and includes a concise discussion of the disjunction between autonomy and power in the classroom, the school, and the education system. The lens of gender dimension widens from examination of the classroom to extracurricular activities, playground space, and staff rooms; to meetings; and on to the broader school community. Chapter 3 broadens to an exploration of the curriculum and school knowledge. In chapters 4 and 5, issues of discrimination, empowerment, coping, and success are addressed at both individual and structural levels. Chapters 6–8 address the situated, historical, and professional contexts of the teaching career, from the education and training of new teachers through a feminist analysis of policy context, curriculum content, and everyday realities. Chapters 7 and 8 draw on historical and contemporary sociological and feminist perspectives on the teaching profession in order to explore feminist contributions and analytical tensions. Chapter 8's description of the teaching profession from 1948 to the present day, showing how coeducation seriously damaged the careers of individual women as men took a disproportionate share of the top jobs in the new coeducational organizations, could be a very useful reading in a history of education class. Chapter 9, which I would find useful as a research methods class reading, addresses in some detail feminist epistemology, methodologies, and research praxis, including feminist analyses of contemporary research methods. The discussions of gathering/analyzing data on the work lives of teachers, action research and teaching, (re)presenting research, and teachers' occupational cultures and action research could serve as concise introductions to these large and complex topics.

The authors write, "Through their work practices and experiences, teachers are involved in constructing and reconstructing their identities, and those of their students—as gendered, racialized, sexualized, (dis)abled and situated. . . . [W]e should be aware of the individual and collective ways in which the work of the teacher contributes to the (re)construction and (re)production of identities and selves" (p. 27). Those of us in educational anthropology who see this view of teaching as important to communicate to various audiences—undergraduates entering the teaching profession, student teachers/interns beginning to see themselves as part of a larger system,



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experienced teachers involved in graduate courses or classroom research, doctoral students conducting studies of teachers' work—can use particular chapters of this book to provide background, to hold up a mirror, and to help educators in all stages of a teaching career to see "that more vigorous and critical engagement with the autobiographical, experimental, emotional and representational aspects of research should be part of any future agenda for research on feminism and the teacher's work—for the insights such aspects provide are crucial to rethinking the complexity of teachers' lives and work" (p. 142). The feminism Coffey and Delamont see is alive and dynamic and could be used to critically analyze teachers' work.

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