

Feminist Pedagogy in Cyberspace: Learning to Teach (a Little) Differently

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Like other progressive pedagogies, feminist teaching has long espoused the “student-centered classroom” as one of its primary

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Field(s):

English

Course(s):

Southern Literature, Southern
Women Writers

Context:

--upper division (300 and 400 level) courses, typically taken as a required literature elective by part-time (working adult) students, who make up the student body of City College, the evening division of Loyola University New Orleans). The enrollment was 12-15 students.

Intentions:

--one of three courses taught in City College to determine how effectively (and which) computer technologies could be used to teach part-time adult students; --to see how closely I could reproduce the discussion-based pedagogy that I use in my on-campus literature classes.

tenets. Rooted in traditions profoundly resistant to hierarchy, specifically in its patriarchal manifestations, feminism has encouraged a decentering of authority both in theory and in praxis. Translated into the classroom, such purposes typically appear in circled desks, collaborative projects, practical or activist research, and, most critically, lots of discussion. This view of the classroom as primarily a setting for engaged dialogue between a teacher and students was, of course, also the vision of the Brazilian teacher, Pablo Freire, whose discrediting of the “banking model” of education (teacher-depositing-information--into-student) has become a virtual mantra (if one still insufficiently heeded) of contemporary education. Freire’s notion of education

focuses on “acts of cognition” rather than “transfers of information,” and he insists that dialogue in the classroom was a

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critical component of that process:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (67)

The emergence of cyberspace as an arena and as a tool for teaching seems in many ways an ideal context for deploying this model of dialogue formulated by Freire and espoused by many feminist teachers. Certainly, the Internet's democratizing, decentering potential has been one of its most touted virtues: putting every inner city child on the information superhighway, crossing the closed borders of censorship and repression with email, opening the markets of the world on the Web. Feminist educators have certainly shared in this dream of the Web's ability to help equalize the power of information and disburse its benefits more widely. The extensive electronic coverage of the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women was an early and dramatic use of the Web to connect women all over the world (and provided one of my own earliest experiences with its potential.) [Note: The conference proceedings were daily updated on a website and a 'postoffice' allowed participants to communicate with friends and constituencies at home.] An even more specific effort to realize the educational potential of the Web has been Madonna Kolbenschlag's impressive "Women's International Electronic University," an ambitious project "dedicated to educating and empowering women through computer-modem technology."

But if the Internet seems an exemplary space for decentered education, for creating learning communities, feminists have also been quick to recognize the dangers of idealizing technology—even the flashy spaces of the Internet. Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" was an early and eloquent elaboration of the tensions that feminists encounter in adapting ourselves to the conditions of cyberspace. As she reiterates in a later interview, technology is itself a "semiosis. It's a mode, many modes, of making meanings" (Jamison 14), and feminists (and others) need to think carefully about what kinds of meanings we are making when we engage in and with electronic technologies, particularly in the classroom.

Like the circling of desks or the privileging of personal experience, the uses of electronic media in the classroom convey meanings that may or may not be consistent with our ultimate goals: the effective education of our students.

Going On-line: Negotiating the Tensions

Many of these tensions and conflicts (albeit perhaps not so specifically articulated) occupied me as I prepared to teach my first on-line course in Southern literature for adult students in City College a few years ago. A modest grant from the state education fund had allowed two colleagues and me to set up experimental courses in literature, religious studies and computer science for our adult, mostly part-time, students. Our aim was to develop courses for on-line delivery in these different disciplines and to see what we could learn about the practicability and effectiveness of using electronic media across our curriculum. We were confident that the flexibility that on-line courses could provide would be extremely popular with our non-traditional students, whose complex work and family lives often left little time for the college education they sought from us—a point they consistently confirmed in later course evaluations. [Note: For these first courses, an outside evaluator conducted both midterm and final surveys as well as a student focus group. Nearly half of the students (48%) indicated that their schedules, rather than interest or curriculum requirements (33%) moved them to sign up for the online Southern literature class. (Frantz "Midterm")]. We were not so sure about the quality of instruction such courses might allow nor about the demands that these media might place on our own time and abilities. All of us had heard the tales of or imagined ourselves being deluged with student email into the wee hours. More constructively, we wanted to explore as many technical options as we could, adopting a variety of tools and techniques to match our individual disciplines and teaching styles—Webpages, e-mail, chat rooms, newsgroups, bulletin boards, audio-streaming.

My principal concerns in teaching the initial course were two-fold: how to make an on-line course genuinely interactive and how to provide sufficient input without simply producing full-fledged lectures, which I knew would be both impractical to create and counter to my basic teaching praxis. Having been committed for more than two decades to the basic principles of feminist pedagogy and its de-centering precepts, I was hardly willing to relinquish them to a machine. If I were going to be teaching on-

line courses regularly, I had to be sure that I could maintain the pedagogical principles that I had come to view as essential. In the live classroom, that pedagogy typically assumed a pattern of “introductory-comments-and-discussion.” I generally see myself as helping students to learn what they already know from a new point of view: offering them information and perspectives they might not have, but then allowing them to use that material to clarify and articulate their own insights and perceptions about the texts. In the classroom, my job is typically to create the spaces where this learning community can develop, often by deepening the discussion and keeping it relevant. But I wasn’t at all sure what that would look like on a computer screen. How could I keep on-line discussions fluid and relevant, provide students with direction and information, and not become overwhelmed by the technological and intellectual demands of the course, such as mastering new technologies, creating course webpages, filling them with thoughtful and reliable material, creating and evaluating writing assignments, and managing weekly electronic conversations with and among the fifteen students? Just as critically, how would it be not to interact with students in physical space and time? I’m in my element in the classroom, with its little in-jokes and digressions, the body language and unexpected turns in the conversation, the “ah-ha’s” and grimaces that cue my next move and reassure me that learning is (or is not) happening. Would I (or the students) find the abstracted spaces of the internet at all as rich a learning space as a physical classroom? Would the touted benefits of cyberspace as a democratizer and as a dispenser of information in fact be consistent with the goals of feminist pedagogy or collaborative learning? Would the gains in flexibility outweigh the losses of live interaction?

Developing a Course Model

Devising a structure that would facilitate the kind of exchange I sought in the live classroom, then, became the chief objective of my course planning. What I eventually developed (and have refined over three years in three different courses [“Southern Literature,” “Southern Women Writers,” and a special topics course, “The Awakening and Its Contexts”]) reflects (not surprisingly) a modified version of my ‘introductory-comment-and-discussion’ pedagogy. It also offers at least one model of how those essential rhythms of the classroom can be recreated in cyberspace—with instructive differences, of course, not only for learning, but for teaching as well. For as Haraway cautions (following

McLuhan), the media conveys its own messages and implications, not only about student-centered instruction, but also about the meaning of instruction and our role as instructors.

The essential elements of the course model are a Website (which provides a detailed and evolving syllabus, discussion questions and background notes, and miscellaneous materials, such as useful links, electronic handouts, and a student album) and a class mailing list through which the weekly discussions are conducted. It works like this: the class (of fourteen to twenty students) is divided into three or four email discussion groups. Five or six students per group seems to be ideal—just enough to make the postings manageable but the perspectives sufficiently diverse. In a typical week, students read the assigned text (usually a novel or group of short stories) and then respond to one or more of about ten questions that I have posted to the website. The questions, designed to guide reading and analysis, are supplemented by a page or two of informal “Teacher’s Notes,” in which I offer some contextual background or comment on, for example, my reasons for including Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative*, or the notions of white southern ladyhood implied in *The Awakening*. Everyone is required to post an “initial comment” to her/his small discussion group (by Friday); then respond to at least two of those comments (by Sunday).

Strategies for Creating Interaction

So far, so good. But I also wanted to be sure that students were somehow reflecting on all these comments—not just posting-and-responding, more or less mechanically. I was also concerned that not everyone would hear everything everyone said—as theoretically happens in a classroom. This narrowed range of perspectives seemed to me the primary limitation of the small-group structure, one accentuated by the heavy reliance on student interaction as a learning tool. My initial solutions to these problems included setting up a role for small-group moderators and a “final comment” due at the end of the week, sent to me and to the whole class. Neither solution worked very well. The moderating just never happened: with so much else going on, few students really understood what they were supposed to do (I had not been very clear about their role in the first place), and more problematically, the postings weren’t consistently timely enough to allow the moderator to ‘summarize’ the best insights from the small group.

The “final comment” was a better idea, but it turned out to be too labor-intensive when it was due every week: students were being

asked to turn in a “final comment” at the same time as they had to develop an “initial comment” on an entirely new text. The students in my first class, as game and as committed as I was to the experimental nature of the course, hung in there, but we were all being exhausted. Even by midterm, there were significant complaints that there was “much more reading/writing than a regular class, sometimes too much work” (Franz “Midterm Evaluation”). In the next course, I reduced the number of these comments and called them “periodic summaries.” Students were asked, three or four times during the semester, to submit a somewhat more formal comment on the material and discussions of the previous weeks. They might revise an earlier post, incorporating the responses of the group or later readings, or develop a new, overall comment. In either case, the intention was to force a kind of reflectiveness that the more informal exchanges in the email groups did not always occasion. These also broadened the class discussions beyond the small groups—and also gave me the basis for a grade.

How Email Changed My Life—and Grading System

One important aspect of the success of these discussion groups for me—as well as an insight into how electronic media can change the nature of instruction—was the recognition (offered by a colleague at a very timely Epiphany Workshop) that I didn’t have to grade or even read everything the students would write.¹ I had figured that a lot of student writing might be one important way to compensate for the absence of “normal” class participation. But I also knew I’d be overwhelmed if I had to read every word. Certainly, one of the most inhibiting factors in developing online courses is the teacher’s fear of overload: it’s one thing to comment thoughtfully and answer every question helpfully for three hours a week in classes; it’s something else to face five email messages from every student every week—not to mention still having to read and grade four or five or more papers and tests during the semester. Instead, I made it clear to my students that I would monitor their discussions and record the fact of their (timely) participation as evidence of their “attendance” and that I would intervene only when directly asked (or when I thought it necessary—as when I began to notice several students mis-reading Frances Harper’s depiction of white “goodness” because they hadn’t fully appreciated the complexity of her rhetorical position). But I would only commit to read and grade the weekly comment or (in the later classes) the periodic summary.

This substitution of more writing for less time in class (and the concomitant recognition that I could not evaluate student writing in the usual ways) highlights precisely the kind of rethinking that electronic media requires. Just what kinds of work do produce learning? How are we going to measure it or give credit for it? In fact, what usually governs the educational value of a college course--the number of credits awarded—is merely the time spent in class. When that familiar (if highly questionable) measure of “contact hours” disappears, one effect is the shift of instruction toward the student: her willingness to do some other work that will produce at least as much learning as sitting in a lecture. Such a shift certainly buttresses the ideal of student-centered instruction. However, students (like teachers) don’t always embrace this different balance of responsibility. Despite its provision of greater flexibility, my students generally complained that the online format “placed more demand on my time than did any other course I’ve taken” (Class Evaluation, LIT 400, May 1997). In assessing how well they actually learned the material, however, I concluded that the “extra time” and alternative activities did produce something more or less equivalent to contact hours. Judging from their email comments and formal papers, students’ understanding even of challenging texts like *Absalom, Absalom!* and the issues that I thought were critical to the courses, such as the complex interdependence of race and gender roles, were quite on a par with that of students I taught in live classrooms. The students agreed; one wrote, “I learned the most about literature and various genres in this class than in any other class I have taken this semester” (Class Evaluation, LIT 465, May 1998). The survey results confirmed this perception: overall, the online courses “provided a higher level of content and academic expectations than on-campus courses. . . . The students appeared to gain intellectually” (Franz “Summary” i). But if there were no substantial losses in content, there were definitely shifts in how students were learning and in how much that learning depended on their own exertions. In their final evaluations, nearly seventy percent acknowledged that the intellectual challenge and learning were as high if not higher than that in comparable on-campus courses, while eighty-four percent indicated that the amount of effort required by students was greater (Franz “Summary” ii).

Re-evaluating Evaluation, Re-thinking Class Time

One manifestation of this adjustment in how we “count” learn-

ing time lies in the grading. For just as we don't really "evaluate" the specific learning that occurs from students' physical presence in a classroom (despite typically giving them "credit" for just being there), our responsibility for grading—or even reading—the intensive writing or other work that students might do in order to learn something similarly alters in an electronic context. Of course, the notion that student writing doesn't require a teacher's evaluation to insure learning is one that composition instructors have implemented for years in pre-writing exercises and journal requirements. What electronic media do is make explicit the arbitrariness—or at least the variability—of what constitutes the appropriate "work" of the classroom. Obviously, there are more rooms in that educational mansion than we have yet imagined. And especially for adult students, whose learning styles and needs are quite different from those of children and adolescents, these new media encourage a long-needed re-assessment of what universities count as creditable learning.

How Email Changed Students' Lives and Made Them Talk—Even to Each Other

In addition to substituting for class time, intensive writing was also a crucial means of reproducing the pattern of comment and discussion that I practice in my regular classes. The email discussion groups, structured by open-ended questions and a required rhythm of comment, response, and summary, compelled students to engage with the material and with each other—explicit goals of feminist as well as of other student-centered pedagogies. When given even just a little direction, students proved quite capable of articulating the same issues that I would have tried to elicit in a live class. At the same time, the interactions among students that followed from these comments were quite intense and often better informed than the classroom exchanges that are so critical to this kind of pedagogy. Students did get involved with the texts, occasionally seeking out on their own the biography of Richard Wright or background information on the Ya-Ya fan clubs of Rebecca Wells that they shared with their (grateful) colleagues: "The design of the class which focused on student interaction allowed me to benefit from other students' research" (Franz "Summary" 3). Their email conversations were often lively and no less thoughtful than similar discussions in class. And students did form personal relationships with each other (and with me) on-line: our characters and personalities often emerged quite vividly in our interactions. Students

commented that “I loved the contact with peers,” and “that class offered more interaction with other students than any other class I have taken” (Franz “Summary” 3).

At least some of that vigor can be attributed to the medium itself. As one student observed: “Email represents a change in the way students learn to communicate with each other” (Class Evaluation LIT400 May 1997). Required to respond specifically to each other, students can no longer simply talk back to the teacher, despite a roomful of other people. It is, by now, surely redundant to observe (as I did and I do) that students frequently participate in these asynchronous discussions with greater involvement and more equality of access than in the classroom, where the extroverts and quick thinkers have distinct advantages over those who prefer to formulate their ideas more slowly or over those who do not relish the spotlight. A thought can be pursued until the respondents themselves weary of the chase, rather than be cut short by the disinterest of others or by the fifty-minute clock. Students often wrote long and elaborate responses both to the texts and to each other’s comments, such as an involved discussion of the notions of family in Eudora Welty’s *Delta Wedding*. And while many of these were written by the same students who were also lively in “regular” classes, some were contributed by students who participate in discussion only when they are called upon.

But if the medium encourages broader class participation, it also exposes more sharply and more promptly those who perform minimally—the ones who write fifty-word comments about what a long book they have been assigned this week. Silent students often pass unnoticed until the exams are turned in. But on-line, the brevity and vacuousness of what they post is an immediate giveaway. At the same time, their shortcomings have a greater negative impact on the class as a whole. When other students’ learning depends so heavily on the caliber of the exchanges—on thought-provoking comments and genuine responses—weak students, especially in small sections, can seriously detract from the quality of the learning experience. This is one of the places where the teacher’s absence can be most acutely felt.

Re-inventing the Teacher’s Role (at Least a Sense of Timing)

For if the medium does encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, it also requires teachers to develop new ways to help them fulfill that responsibility. In the live classroom, we can promptly intervene when the discussion goes

flat or takes a wrong turn, or when students become frustrated or perplexed by the material. But the time-lapse character of an on-line discussion requires a different cadence of intervention. Problems may take longer to reveal themselves in the asynchronous discussions and may also require more effort to correct. You can't just go in and fix things at the next class meeting. When we read Flannery O'Connor, for example, many students were more disturbed by her quirky perspectives than I had anticipated, and, as one of them complained after posing a string of unanswered questions: "When we read stories like last week's and this week's—it is then that I miss being in class" [Student email, "Lit465swwg2COM-O'Connor" (22 March 1998)]. So did I. For while I tried to respond with more elaborate comments about O'Connor's Catholicism and theological notions of grace, and then invited further discussion that week, the instructional moment just took too long to develop and was lost. Only one student responded further, despite widespread interest just a day or two before. There is definitely an art in knowing when and how to intervene in electronic discussions; at least we can try to anticipate when such cruxes might arise and then learn from experience how to adjust our timing.

Another way in which the media required that I partially re-invent my role as a teacher was in providing the information and alternative perspectives that would generate new insights. As bell hooks argues, even in the student-centered classroom, teachers neither can nor should relinquish their authority to challenge their students' presumed ignorance and typical "mono-vision" (53). No amount of valuing each individual abrogates the need to keep challenging students to see beyond their accustomed—and often very narrow—perspectives. The profound de-centering of the classroom that electronic media encourages indeed often left me worried (especially in the first online course I taught) that students were not getting enough of the information (and presumably the wisdom) that I as a teacher could (and wanted to) provide. Accordingly, the second time I taught an on-line course, I tried to find ways to remedy that gap, particularly my ability to help shape student discussions, which were the mainstay of my campus classes. One effort was my insertion of a "reflections on discussion" component in the weekly schedule. Despite my vow not to read every email message, I was inevitably tracking the conversations. So as part of my informal reviewing, I began selecting comments that I thought were particularly interesting or useful. I tried to make this a simple cut-and-paste operation, only correcting egregious errors to reduce

embarrassment and provide some unobtrusive instruction. Sometimes I simply posted representative comments; other weeks, I was more active, correcting false impressions of the texts, filling in a missing point, or even taking sides one time in a discussion about whether one of Kate Chopin's characters was self-consciously seductive. Students clearly read these postings, commenting on something I said or responding to a question raised in another group. One noted that she "particularly enjoyed" this part of the course, explaining that "It was interesting to read and, of course, easier. . .[moreover] students like to know what the instructors think about student comments as well as the instructor's own feelings on the materials" (Class Evaluations, LIT 465, May 1998). For my own part, I found these summaries a significant way to take a more active role in the discussions without undermining the students' control of the class conversations.

Increasing Interaction: Some Experiments Still Fail

Another way of insuring that students encountered additional perspectives—and not just mine—was simply to require them to post their periodic summaries to the whole class. Reading this broader range of comments was clearly useful, though the substance remained uneven, since students tended to maintain the informal (and often half-baked) style of the weekly comments. Such an assignment needs some shaping to function effectively: specific guidelines about length and topic, for example, and possibly some further "public" feedback from me, in addition to the usual personal comments that I give each student with his or her grade.

My efforts to increase interaction did include some failed experiments. I had hoped, for example, that the chat-room would encourage some of the immediacy and exchange of the classroom. Accordingly, I set up an optional, late-night time for weekly chat sessions. It was a disaster—on several counts. First of all, students had a difficult time getting reliable access to the chat room program; three years ago, the technology wasn't easily available. Secondly, the sessions were a belated feature of the course and not required, so that students' participation was decidedly uneven. We never had more than seven in a session, and once or twice, there were only two of us "chatting." But I really found this particular medium technically unsuited to the kind of sustained discussion that happens in a classroom. Writing one's thoughts instead of speaking them changes the pacing dramatically (especially if one

isn't a good typist), and the lag time between reading a comment, writing a response and sending it awkwardly disrupts any conversational flow. We did, in fact, end up simply "chatting"—either exchanging rather superficial comments on Katherine Anne Porter's plots, or re-instating me as the authority, called upon to answer everyone's questions at once. Chat was only good in situations where my authority was necessary: explaining assignments or occasionally clarifying a difficult reading, such as untangling the chronology of *Absalom, Absalom!* But I haven't tried to integrate chatting again after that first disappointing experience. All tools may not, in fact, be equal.

Other techniques are clearly useful, but simply need more work and more experience. The most obvious means of increasing the instructional input, for example, is just to strengthen the website itself: more extensive "teacher's notes," additional online readings, relevant links, critical backgrounds, clearer and more detailed assignments. Indeed, like any class, the Web-based course benefits from the increments that repetition and experience can provide. Once the basics are in place, one can begin to add greater depth, such as more and better links to Southern texts and authorial sites. Digital libraries online continue to add resources that can profoundly enhance the richness of a course: out-of-print texts, manuscripts, essays, visual resources, hypertext documents. Many of the improvements that I have made in each subsequent course reflect my own increasing mastery of the media. I've learned how to scan text (much more tedious than it ought to be); I've become fairly adept at constructing webpages; and I've located more (and better) sites to which I can refer students. Much of what I haven't done (varied the appearance of the site, integrated more of the available texts and information that the Web provides, developed more technically sophisticated assignments and interactions with students) generally reflects inadequate technical support and the resulting lack of time and skill to develop the resources that could enhance the course.

Back to the Basics: Website and Email

At the same time, as much as I personally enjoy exploiting the media's bells and whistles, a basic Website and a listserv are finally sufficient for teaching effectively in this medium. The Website can shape a rich instructional context; email can be structured to generate exchanges that replicate many of the qualities of classroom discussion: the on-line environment can, in fact, support

many of the goals of a student-centered, feminist pedagogy. There are differences, of course. Both teaching and learning (how one prepares as well as how one is engaged by the material) are altered by the media, no less than circles of chairs or large lecture halls change the character of a class. On-line teaching highlights the structural role of teachers: how we must make information available to students and construct the models and environment that will enable them to understand it. The difference is in the often unfamiliar tools that one employs: hypertext and asynchronous discussion instead of (or at least in addition to) textbooks and lecture notes; changeable Websites instead of paper handouts; virtual rather than physical connections. More significant is the necessary re-consideration of the kinds of activities that inspire learning and ways of evaluating their success. Class time has to be translated into other learning processes: writing, research, exercises, internships, group projects. But that particular shift inevitably transfers the burden of education onto the student—and that might simply require a more mature learner.

The adults in my courses may be in fact be better suited to on-line education than the traditional college-age student. More goal-oriented and self-directed, they are often quite ready to assume the responsibility for their own learning. Indeed, they frequently demand it. Even so, the discipline that is required to do the readings and contribute to the discussions in a timely way challenged many of them. Knowing what to expect seemed an important prerequisite for success: since “on-line courses do require more dedication than the average on-campus course”. . . “the amount of time and work must be understood by students before signing up for class;” and moreover, “all students taking the course must have the same self-motivation. . . and communication skills” (Franz “Summary” 1). The payoff in terms of flexibility was clearly worth it, but it is important for students, as well as teachers, to recognize that the changes in the medium do affect the ways that one learns.

Teaching Ourselves to Use the Tools, or Making the Genie Serve

My experience with on-line teaching has yielded, I think, promising lessons. Electronic media are in the end simply tools that we can use to enhance our teaching. The experience and wisdom of the instructor, not only in providing information but in structuring ways to assimilate it, are still entirely necessary. The administrators’ dreams (and teachers’ fears) that the internet will do away with instructors are as illusory as the notion that printed books would

destroy all authority. For the vast majority of people, learning will always require some kind of structure, some organization of information and some means of testing one's awareness against and within a community of other learners. The new media offer us different ways of shaping that community and of presenting information, but they do not alter our essential roles—although, admittedly, here at the beginning, the differences can make us feel as though we are taking up a whole new profession. Instead, I think we are simply having to reassess what is critical to learning and how—when modes of learning change—we will be able to evaluate it. When we abandon “contact hours” as the measure of credit, what can we count? What kinds of contact matter? With whom? What activities help people learn? How do we measure their equivalence in awarding college credit?

At the same time we are asking these questions, we are having to learn the best uses of these new implements in the classroom—which, as electronic equipment proliferates, is itself becoming a strangely metaphorical space. Faced with a daunting array of teaching tools, we are having to acquire new technical skills as well as develop the experience that is finally indispensable for knowing just what works when and for what purposes. We cannot, of course, especially as feminists, fail to approach these media critically, appreciating the implications for isolation and abstraction that electronic communication also promotes. The usefulness of any tool depends as much on its appropriateness to the task as on the skill of its wielder. Just as circled desks and dialogue don't automatically produce transformative or even engaged education, neither will a Website or a listserv insure that students are learning more effectively. But given the benefits of flexibility for our students (especially the working adults that more and more of them are) and the decentering of learning responsibility these tools can encourage, I think there is more than enough evidence to merit optimism about their use in the classroom, feminist or otherwise. For finally, our role as teachers has always been not simply to understand our material (which is challenge enough), but also to recognize and adapt the technologies that help others to learn it. Whether we use writing slates or laser pens, lectures or listservs, our job has always entailed choosing the right pedagogical resources. Electronic media offer tremendous educational potential; figuring out how to make the genie serve us may take some time, but the learning will be well worth it.

Notes

¹The Epiphany Project was a two-year collaborative research and teaching project designed to help integrate information technology into writing curricula; its workshops were early and powerful models for helping faculty and administrators figure out how to use computer technologies effectively. Virginia Montecino offered me this liberating insight during a three-day workshop at George Mason University in January 1997 (See Batson and Williamson)

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