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The Pedagogy Page is a regular feature of *CLAGSnews* in which we hope to expand dialogue among teachers of LGBTQ material. We invite you to submit 500-word accounts of the new innovations, unsolvable dilemmas, full-out triumphs and unsuspected traps you have found in your classrooms. What issues do you face teaching LGBTQ materials? What debates would you like to launch on this page? Please send your contributions to clags@gc.cuny.edu.

THE PERILS OF QUEERING THE CURRICULUM

BY DAVID WILLIAM FOSTER

A student came into my office the other day who provided a direct challenge to my efforts to queer the curriculum. Let me say first that, although I respect the value of teaching courses on topics that are presented as queer-marked -- indeed, I teach graduate courses in English on Queer Theory and Queer Filmmaking -- my ideological preference in the courses I teach in both Spanish and Portuguese is to engage in queer readings across the canon, toward demonstrating that 1) sexual/gender identity is problematic in all texts, and any facile or obvious attribution is likely to be the result of un/undertheorized reading, and 2) the force of homophobia keeps us from seeing the problematics of sexual/gender identity or intimidates us into ignoring it if we happen to see it. While queer-marked courses are likely mostly to attract those committed to queer interests, courses taught under the aegis of queering the curriculum may take many students by surprise, and some act like they have stumbled into the wrong course: "Wasn't this course supposed to be about Argentine theater? So why are we talking about the constructing of sexual/gender identity?"

But the challenge I experienced went beyond the matter of confusion. Rather, it had to do with privileging the point of view the student took, by definition (herein was one problem to begin with), as refuting, perhaps even disrespecting, her own personal beliefs. In short, she was being forced to attend to a point of view that she found to be morally reprehensible.

I tried to explain to her the importance of listening to all points of view, and the particular importance to us as individuals to understand in particular those we hold to be unacceptable. I also tried to explain to her the matter of "correcting the balance" -- in this case, that the heterosexist presumption (as do classist, ethnocentric, racist, and sexist ones) provided a compelling reason for affording a queer view of things.

But I realized neither of these rather tepidly liberal ploys were exercising any persuasive magic in the face of her sincere indignation. I wanted to insist, with professional olympicness, "But you are here to learn, and *this* is what I have to teach. It is your responsibility to learn it if you want to pass the course, and whatever you do with it after the course is over is your business." But I bit my tongue, as I sensed this would only fuel her indignation.

It is not so much that the Phoenix area has an unusually high number of those on the political or religious right; I personally don't think it does, but many of my colleagues would disagree and insist that dealing with such reactions is just the price of teaching in a massive public institution in this area. Rather, in American society in general, there is still a panic, even in many academic quarters, that attaches to discussing gender and sexuality, and the fact that one is a white male in his sixties only feeds a distracting stereotype about being a dirty old man obsessed with sex and, therefore, unable to focus on the supposedly real issues of culture. Reading cultural production in terms of issues of gender and sexuality is for so many of my students and colleagues (and ones that are not necessarily homophobic) simply not the business of our profession.

Meanwhile, I remain groping for a better way of answering what for me remains my student's stubborn, but no less sincere, indignation. ♦

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