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CLAGS's Queer Pedagogy Workshops, Spring 2000

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LESSON PLANS: CLAGS/ NYU CSGS Pedagogy Workshops, Spring 2000

In our second meeting, we expanded the discussion of “the personal” in the classroom, focusing on the use of personal anecdotes by both students and teachers. We discussed how to encourage students to move beyond anecdotes, how to make meaning out of the personal testimonies that students often resort to in class discussions. But we recognized, too, the feminist principles involved in the use of personal experience as authoritative, and we also acknowledged that Women’s Studies and LGBT Studies have a special relationship to the personal, being constructed around identity categories (unlike Queer Studies in this regard?). Discussion of our specific pedagogical circumstances made it clear that “the personal” remains a powerful category that can both install and deconstruct authority.

Our final spring session allowed us to discuss and critique syllabi brought in by workshop participants. Fall 2000 will bring a new series of workshops held at the Graduate Center: Monday, September 18; Monday, October 16; and Monday November 13. The CLAGS website will have additional information later this summer.

Carolyn Dinshaw
New York University

CLAGS’s Queer Pedagogy Workshops

As a former high school English teacher and now a prospective college professor, I have long grappled with issues of gender and sexuality in the classroom. Is it, for example, incumbent upon me to be both a model and mentor for my lgbtq students? How will the classroom dynamic change if my private experiences become inextricably linked with my professional responsibilities? To what end might I implement issues regarding gender and sexuality while teaching canonical texts or traditional academic subjects? And finally, how would I handle homophobia, students coming out, and questions about my personal life in the context of the classroom?

These are just some of the provocative questions that were addressed in the first two sessions of *Lesson Plans: Pedagogy Workshops on Teaching Gender and Sexuality* which attracted a range of novice to veteran instructors representing a variety of disciplines, political viewpoints, and academic institutions. The stated goal of the series is to create a public arena for discussing teaching as well as sharing experiences and strategies as they relate to

gender and sexuality in the classroom. The indisputable success of this endeavor is evident in the vigorous and productive conversations the workshops have generated.

The fact remains, however, there are no easy answers to the questions posed above. On one hand, we want all of our students to feel comfortable in our classrooms so that they feel secure in taking educational risks that they normally would not take in other learning environments. On the other hand, there are also occasions in which we may want to create discomfort in the classroom. Several of the participants, for instance, voiced the difficulties of getting students to think beyond themselves and their own life experiences. We discovered that anecdote can be both a means of opening a discussion and containing it. But as some of the participants suggested, provoking dissent among the students offers a way to get them to consider alternative perspectives and uses of knowledge.

The most powerful concept I have taken from the workshops so far is imagining my classroom as a place where my students not only feel free to explore issues of gender and sexuality, but also as a place that will prod them on to new forms of social and political action. By bringing together a group of professionally, intellectually, and politically committed individuals, CLAGS’s Pedagogy Workshops have offered a unique and exciting forum for exploring the ways in which this vision may be accomplished.

James Wilson
The Graduate Center, CUNY

GenderSexStudies List

Gendersexstudies-I is an electronic mailing list sponsored by CLAGS designed to enhance communication among teachers and scholars dedicated to the study of gender and sexuality. In addition to being a conduit of information about conferences, calls for papers, job listings, etc., one of its purposes is to facilitate timely responses to attacks on the study of gender and sexuality in the academy. To subscribe, send a message to majordomo@brooklyn.cuny.edu with **subscribe gendersexstudies-I** in the body of the message.