Praxis in the Trenches: A Self-study of Feminist Assessment of Student Learning in Online Education

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Abstract

This dissertation is a self-study of the development and use of a feminist assessment assignment of student learning in online learning in higher education. This paper opens with an overview of current state online education and situates this project’s timing in the surging growth of online post-secondary education (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Feminist pedagogy played an important role both in the development of the research question, as well having overarching influence on the project’s implementation and theoretical framework. Typically, personal teaching practices are informed by broader pedagogic perspectives and the feminist pedagogic values and characteristics which inform my teaching within the online environment are discussed to provide the reader with deeper insight to these critical influences. This project sought to answer the question: how can I embody feminist teaching within the online environment to be a better teacher? To investigate this I focused my attention on one source of tension within the online environment – assessment, and as a result the post-course reflection [PCRv1.0] assignment was created during the fall of 2014. Using LaBoskey’s (2004) self-study methodology framework, this project traces the development of PCRv1.0, its use, and subsequent revisions PCRv2.0 (winter 2016) and PCRv2.1 (fall 2018). The results of the self-study showed that students responded positively to the final assignment which asked them to incorporate their personal experience into self-reflexive evaluation of their learning process within the online course. Revisions, made between the first and last iterations of the PCR studied here, brought significant clarity to the goals of the assignment. Specifically, through aligning the assignments goals more deliberately with the feminist pedagogic principles as identified in the theoretical framework, such as decentralizing teacher as sole authority, valuing student experience, and teaching as midwife. Perhaps most critically, the assignment and this project both serve to challenge traditional pedagogic norms – a central tenet of feminist pedagogy (Schoeman, 2015). While the primary purpose was to improve my teaching practices, in line with self-study methodology this project seeks to engage the reader in conversations regarding feminist teaching practices within the online teaching environment, as well as having implications for the broader online learning and feminist teaching communities.