
An aGENDER for developing professional practice in teaching and learning.

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The Professional Standards Framework within Higher Education has provided academics with a benchmark, one that acknowledges their professionalism by providing 'the best possible learning experience for their students' (HEA 2007). The application process to acquire professional recognition requires academics to reflect upon the domains of their activity through which they evidence core knowledge and professional values. Evidencing practice through reflection is a useful process, for it offers an opportunity to pause, and explore the space for deep engagement in what it means to be professional. This paper addresses itself to the space 'in between us', and asks what of the 'personal' infiltrates the 'professional'. In other words how do academics locate their sense of self within the learning environment in which they work? A question that is explored in this paper is what impact does personal embodied experience have upon the way in which we present ourselves professionally, and how does acknowledgment of personal epistemology inform the ways in which we engage students in their own learning. In order to unravel these questions it is fruitful to acknowledge theory that explores the experience of being embodied as 'ground of our being' and 'our first home' (Halprin, 2003).

The ontological and epistemological debates concerning the body as a lived experience are central to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962). Through his case study research on embodied action, he argues that the body has a dual role of being both a vehicle of perception and an object perceived. The body, therefore, has a paradoxical quality. Merleau-Ponty goes on to develop his

ideas by proposing that the intentionality of experience underlies the possibility of perceiving of all kinds. In other words, it is as if we elect to locate our perceiving selves, one which gives us the vantage point of how we want to be in the world.

The centrality of the body as a source of knowing feeds our ability to perceive. These ideas are developed further by Linda Hartley in her work in somatic psychology and education (2004). She provides insight into the depth and breadth of knowing that the body presents. However, theories and practices that expand embodied consciousness have not been explored in the context of gender. Further, there has been very little written about the socio-cultural and political influences of class, 'race' disability and sexuality in the literature on embodiment and somatics. An absence of literature relating to embodied and gendered awareness within teaching and learning environments is also notable, both from the perspective of the academic member of staff but also from the perspective of students.

Connecting and integrating embodied experience through reflective practice, and recognising the potential influence on academic practices, is highly relevant to learning in institutional education. It could be argued that a prerequisite for professional recognition is to be 'embodily' aware, and that by exemplifying this good practice, educators sanction a more expansive and navigable route for students to develop their own learning.

However to make a convincing argument about these propositions it is useful to explore further the relationship between embodiment, subjectivity, gender and professional practices. To this end this paper revisits the phenomenological accounts of the body that excavate experience, and provide a scaffold for the exploration of how experience is infiltrated by cultural discourses and impacts upon our reflective processes. Iris Young (1990) is particularly insightful here. She draws heavily on the work of Merleau-Ponty in her analysis of how girls and women experience their bodies in the world by addressing the theme of body boundary. Young argues that moving and occupying space is absolutely connected to the gendered experience of being bounded in the female body. Her observations of girls' bodies moving in space illuminate well the perceptual horizons that are defining of the body boundary. Her writing offers educators the opportunity to explore their own occupation of space and reflect upon the gendered experience of embodiment.

Young theorises that the female experience of the body is chastened by three key ideas, what she refers to as; body immanence, inhibited intentionality, and discontinuous unity. Young suggests that, in comportment, girls do not bring their whole bodies into motion, the bodily orientation whether sitting, standing or walking is not with an open body. She draws examples from observations on the length of the stride, less vertical movement in walking, sitting with legs crossed and feet together, and so forth. These body shapes have little to do with the body's strength, but with how one uses the body in approaching tasks. The effort is concentrated on the body parts associated with the tasks, and less on free motion and open reach; hence the source of the pejorative term, 'throwing like a girl'. The whole body is not fluid and directed in motion; not in reach, extension, leaning, stretching and following through in both direction and intention.

There appears to be an imagined space, a kinaesthetic bubble, beyond which a girl does not feel able to move, it is a constricted space. Moving outwards is less common; the girl rarely meets or confronts an object with a counter-motion. There is a much greater tendency to wait and react to the approach, so an overall sense is that girls frequently respond as if something is coming 'at' them. In addition there is an observable tendency for girls to be less self-conscious in direction. They are more likely, for example, to hit a ball 'in general', rather than in a specific direction.

Young suggests that girls' motility is characterised by timidity, uncertainty and hesitancy. They lack trust in their bodies to carry through their aims, and lack confidence in their capacity to enact. They are more tentative, which accompanies their fear of getting hurt. The attentiveness is divided between the aim being realised in motion, something being accomplished and the saving from harm. In a way this is like the attention being directed upon our bodies in order to achieve, rather than paying attention to what we want through our bodies. The above ways of being with our bodies produces greater or lesser feelings of incapacity, frustration and self-consciousness. The typical cyclical outcome is of a self-fulfilling prophecy; one of underestimating one's capability.

The importance of Iris Young's work to this discussion paper is her offering that being in one's body is a gendered experience. It is one that is not limited to the physical boundary of our bodies, but includes a way of being or perceiving that reaches into the so-called kinaesthetic space that surrounds the body. Gender is interwoven with one's experience of self at a bodily level. One can argue that it is important to reflect upon one's gendered physicality in the teaching and learning process and this ought not to be limited solely to those disciplinary areas that are centrally concerned

with the moving body? It may be useful to reflect upon how as university teachers, we occupy space, and do so differentially, based upon our gender. It may also be worthwhile addressing strategies to draw attention to how students of different genders occupy their space and are encouraged to explore the 'kinaesthetic bubble' that surrounds them. Does the occupation of space leave residue at a metaphorical level; the way we all need to claim space, in order to develop.

As the student population continues to increase and the impact of policies on widening participation is felt at the level of teaching and learning, it is useful to revisit those markers that have shaped and informed teachers perceptions of themselves and their students within higher education. Higher education has been influenced during different periods of recent history by reference to the wider debates that inform on gender. Whilst there is a notable lack of political debate on the question of gender, the focus on student experience is gathering momentum. By trawling experience through the filter of gender and embodiment, insights into learning and reflective practice may be revealed.

The Question of Gender

The notion of gender has grown from the sex difference debates of the 1960s and 1970s. Feminists of the liberal tradition (Friedan, 1974) endeavoured to equalise opportunities for women in our social world. The focus on women as a collective was a binding strength. The development of feminist theory gave depth to arguments within sociology that drew connections between the social and political structures and practices that impacted upon the personal experiences of women. The connection between the personal and the political unveiled the structures and processes of patriarchy, and these were defined as being causal in maintaining the power differential between the sexes.

The acknowledgement of the complexity of difference between the broad essentialist category of women and men has continued to be refined. Different groups have claimed their own identity within feminist discourse. Black feminists (Hooks 1981, Amos and Parmer 1984, Carby 1987) claim their gendered voice, arguing that feminism has marginalised issues of racism and therefore presented only a partial account of gender relations. Women of colour (Hill-Collins, 1989) have drawn attention to the assumptions within feminist theory that women are a homogenous group. This has paved the way for women to identify the differences among them and to acknowledge that gender power oppresses women in multifarious ways.

Feminism marked a sea change in the relationship between men and women. Developments since then have evolved into a plethora of frequencies that are composite of women's voice. Some feminists (Segal, 1987) critique the postmodernist theory of fragmentation. Such theory argues that the realities of our lives are so fragmented and that there is no longer sufficient commonality between women to define them as a category, separate and distinct from men. The analysis of power that began between the sexes under the banner of gender relations has evolved into an analysis of power within the sexes. There has been an increased tendency towards the dissolution of association to a collective identity and to the strengthening of individualism and relativism dominating our social reality.

The question that is raised for this paper is in what sense do those currently working within higher education consider gender, how gender impacts upon their embodied sense of self, and concomitantly their professional practice? In what ways do teachers in academia acknowledge and reference their gender within the learning environments in which they work. Indeed do communities of learning currently acknowledge

their awareness of gender and its impact upon on learning processes and outcomes? A key theme for feminists that has prevailed and continues to resonate under different guises today is the significance of discourse in determining embodied subjectivity. Transposed into teaching and learning environments, this translates into the question 'how do we invite students to develop their awareness of how gender and embodiment permeates their lives?'

Discourses of the Female Body, Femininity and Sexuality

Engaging in discourse demands that a long lens is used to make sense of how our experience is framed and circumscribed. Feminists argue that women's knowing and the generation of knowledge from women's subjective experiences have been marginalised for centuries (Llewellyn and Osborne 1990, Gunew 1991). Power has been exercised over women and their relationship with their bodies. The female body has been discredited in its capabilities, controlled and dominated through the structures of patriarchy. The women's movement and feminism anchored itself on reclaiming power by women and for women (Bryson, 1992) with its focus on the rights of women to own their bodies (Millet 1971, Firestone 1979, Brownmiller 1975, Orbach 1979, Eichenbaum and Orbach 1984 & 1985, Ussher 1989, Nicholson 1992).

Susan Bordo (1989 & 1990) writing from a feminist poststructuralist position analyses the body within discourse as a 'text of culture'. The poststructuralist theoretical position is that the body is representative; it is an account of the rules of society on the construction of gender. She suggests also that the body is a locus of social control, one that reflects particular ideas and interests but also is constitutive of social relations. Sandra Bartky (1988) takes these ideas further by exploring particular disciplinary practices on of the body, that then become signifiers of the feminine body.

Bartky's lucid and insightful account of the production of femininity through the appropriation of the female body focuses on identifying three such categories of practices: first, the shape, size and general configuration that is achieved through diet and exercise, which for women concentrates on form, appearance and feminisation; the second group of disciplinary practices addresses the repertoire of gestures, postures and movements that are seen to suggest grace and a degree of restrained eroticism marked by modesty; third, the display of the body that results in feminine embodiment, one that attends to hair care, skin care the proper application of make-up and the selection of clothes. These three categories of disciplinary practices combine to create the ideal body of femininity, which according to Bartky is part of the process of the construction of feminine subjectivity. This discourse continues to have relevance and an enormous impact on everyday 'common sense' assumptions about women and their bodies.

The influence of biologically informed 'common sense' assumptions, in combination with the pervasive discourses of sexuality, have had the effect on how women position themselves and are concomitantly positioned in womanhood. Reproductive capacity, acceptable sexual orientation and sexual practices are the pillars that have supported a patriarchal structure of regulation, domination and oppression. This has contained and constrained women in their choices, expression and experience of their bodies. It is feminist engagement with women's health and in particular women's sexuality that has offered a different angle on women's relationship to their bodies.

A feminist analysis of female sexuality recognises how women have been represented throughout history as archetypes; for example, as of Madonna / whore, angel / devil. The suggestion is that the sexual woman is desirable yet

dangerous, the 'good' women is pure and asexual. These representations and images are littered through the cultural pores of our society and cluster into woman as object, not agent. Key to the social constructionist critique of sexuality is how the institution of heterosexuality as a dominant and coercive force in patriarchal society is theorised. The most critical accounts argue that heterosexuality is as dis-empowering for women as it is empowering for men (Weeks, 1987).

The significance of reviewing the work of these authors is to illuminate the relevance of how the body is shaped and moulded to become a representation of 'some-body'. In drawing attention to the influences that bound and persuade gendered individuals to embrace their social and indeed professional selves, is it possible to develop a reflective engagement that incorporates a more critical awareness of our embodied subjectivity as educators?

There is an array of literature by feminists that addresses the ways in which the female body is idealised in terms of beauty, body parts of size and shape, in presentation of acceptable femininity and so forth (Coward 1984, Chapkis 1986). The emergent literature relating to men and masculinity (Connell, 1987, Hearn 1987, Hearn and Morgan 1991) has benefited from this critical appraisal of idealised bodies. Sue Wendell (1989) argues that this idealisation prevents everyone, disabled people and non disabled people, from identifying with their real body. It may be that able bodied people can postpone the task of identifying with their real body because, unlike disabled people, they can make demands that their body fits the physical ideals of their culture; one that glorifies fitness and physical conformity. Barbara Hillyer Davies says;

'for all of us the difficult work of finding (ones)self includes the body, but people who live with disability.....are forced to understand more fully what bodily integrity means'. (1984, p.3).

Personal testimony has historically been a mechanism for consciousness raising. Sue Wendell (1989), like many feminists, acknowledged that contributions from experiential accounts offer vital insight into the relationship between the nature of embodiment and the experiences of oppression and emancipation. Increasingly teaching and learning accesses reflective practice, a process that generates greater self awareness, as a means to augment learning experience. This is as true for professional development as it is for learners across educational environments. It may be informative if university teachers and students alike have access in the public domain to the narratives of how as gendered individuals we have negotiated and navigated our lives through the prevailing discourses of gender, sexuality and embodiment. The value of bringing the personal into the professional may reignite the dormant political debates that present a transparency to issues of power and how it is experienced.

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