

CHAPTER 17.

**PEDAGOGICAL TOO-MUCHNESS:
A FEMINIST APPROACH
TO COMMUNITY-BASED
LEARNING, MULTI-MODAL
COMPOSITION, SOCIAL JUSTICE
EDUCATION, AND MORE**

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Godbee shares a course titled “Writing for Social Justice,” which partners with the YWCA’s Racial Justice Program. The course simultaneously integrates community-based learning, multi-modal composition, undergraduate research, contract grading, co-authoring, and attention to racial and social justice—with feminist interventions as the underlying and ultimate goal. Based on these connections, Godbee articulates a pedagogy of “too-muchness” and argues for the need to approach feminist interventions as “instead of” rather than “on top of” more traditional approaches. She situates this pedagogical “too-muchness” within and alongside feminist and womanist pedagogies; pedagogy and theatre of the oppressed; and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. In addition to articulating how the YWCA represents an ideal partner for feminist community-based work, Godbee stresses that the “too-muchness” of the course and its emphasis on feminist, critical education better positioned students to become agents and actors outside the course and throughout their everyday lives.

Anyone who has done social justice education knows that it is more than an intellectual activity. Of course, we need to expose people to new perspectives, facts, theories, and analyses. Students need to acquire more accurate and complex information about issues which the mainstream media often ignore, simplify or distort. Yet, even when enlightening

facts and theories are provided, people may still be unmoved and remain uninvolved.

- Diane J. Goodman (2011, p. 33)

I often hear educators (typically ones from privileged groups) express concerns about the difficulty of a feminist, critical, or otherwise justice-oriented approach: the work involved in social justice education¹ is perceived, even criticized, as “too much.” It’s perceived as “too much” on top of other labor-intensive demands of an academic career, “too much” on top of other educational demands of a college course, or “too much” on top of other pedagogical apparatus already in place. This sense of too-muchness may arise from the need for critical emotional literacy (Winans, 2012); likely discomfort (Banks, 2003; Tatum, 1992); and the inherently embodied nature of the work, as “[m]any educators are more comfortable staying at an intellectual level” (Goodman, 2011, p. 34). Whatever the origin, this sense of “too-muchness” allows social justice education to be written off as an addition rather than the core of what we do.

Shifting this language of “too-muchness” involves, I argue, approaching feminist interventions as “instead of” rather than “on top of” more traditional approaches. Typically, education prioritizes the curriculum or content, keeping histories of colonization, inequity, and injustice firmly rooted (e.g., Paulo Freire’s critique of the banking model of education [1970] or bell hooks’s discussion of feminist pedagogy as a “decolonizing political process” [1994, p. 47]). As educators, when we feel responsible to a shared syllabus, program of study, or other external criteria, we may inadvertently prioritize content and imagine feminist interventions as “on top of” these implicit priorities. By naming social justice education as “instead off” rather than “on top of,” I maintain that the curriculum and course structure need to be rethought from the bottom to the top, from the details to the whole. Rather than tweaking an existing syllabus to add components that critique injustice, we need to ask fundamental questions about the values, purposes, and intended outcomes of education. That is, in the words of feminist scholar bell hooks (1994), we need to “imagine ways that teaching and the learning experience could be different” (p. 5) and to “celebrate teaching that enables transgressions” (p. 12). This rethinking can lead us in directions that look and feel very different from our conditioned expectations of schooling. And, yet, the very different—perhaps “too much” different—nature

1 I equate feminism with social justice education, as both seek to counter injustice and enact a more equitable and just world. In *Feminism Is for Everybody* (2000), bell hooks maintains that feminism must engage colonialism, class struggle, race/ism, and other intersectional issues. Valuing intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), feminist education must address sexism in relation to other -isms and as part of justice-oriented movements, which the YWCA articulates in its mission.

of these changes can help us shake up and shake off normalized actions, dominant beliefs, and damaging discourses.

The need to shake up/off typical schooling and to replace it with something truly transformative links social justice education with feminist interventions. Both social justice education and feminist interventions require commitment, ongoing education, and openness to revision. These commitment-driven, reflective, and revisionary values align with the what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch (2012) describe as four “critical terms of engagement” for feminist rhetorical practices: “*critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization*” (p. 19). As an educator committed to equity and justice, I strive to teach—to *critically engage* myself and students—in ways that challenge and change our everyday ways of being, doing, and relating in the world. As I’ve written with colleagues, this pedagogical stance has multiple dimensions, as it is (1) *processual and reiterative*, (2) *reflective and attentive*, and (3) *embodied and engaged* (Diab, Ferrel, Godbee, & Simpkins, 2012). It involves centering the body to interrogate systemic power and to “move-think in ways that disrupt habitual acts and dominant narratives” (Godbee, Ozias, & Tang, 2015, p. 99). And it has the potential for transformation, especially when we come to see ourselves in relation with others across asymmetrical power (Godbee, 2011). This understanding of social justice education draws on and aligns with feminist and womanist pedagogies (e.g., Royster & Kirsch, 2012; hooks, 1994; Lorde, 1984); pedagogy and theatre of the oppressed (e.g., Horton & Freire, 1990; Boal, 1973; Freire, 1970); and culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001), responsive (Gay, 2000), and contested (Li, 2005) pedagogies.

Though differently positioned to intervene into systemic inequities, these scholar-educators teach us that *power* underlies all relations; that systemic (and political) matters are also embodied (and personal); and that work that supports gender justice intersects with and must enact related forms of justice: racial justice, decolonization, Indigenous rights, and others. In Goodman’s (2011) words above, social justice education—and I’d add feminist interventions—must be “more than an intellectual activity” (p. 33). From this scholarship, a few key principles or definitional qualities emerge, indicating that feminist interventions:

1. engage our *full selves*—not only our minds, but also our bodies, emotions, and spirits;
2. prioritize *relations*, or put the time and effort into building and sustaining meaningful (and often cross-status) connections among people and organizations;
3. understand *power* as related to (in)justice so that efforts against sexism

and for gender-and-sexuality-justice are linked with other justice-oriented work, since identities and issues are intersectional and injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere;

4. cultivate *agency* so that students and other actors see themselves as having the responsibility to act, as well as the questions and insights to ask *who* is responsible to act, when, where, why, and how (troubling savior and victim narratives);
5. seek *interconnectedness* among ways of seeing, thinking, doing, and being in the world so that we work toward coherence across spheres of activity and recognize that our work occurs within complex socio-cultural, historical, and rhetorical systems.

Certainly, other principles emerge, and our different positions within systems of power and privilege make some principles more salient than others. I share these five, however, in an attempt to define how I see feminist interventions aligning with social justice education and underlying a feminist pedagogy, one that can be characterized by “too-muchness.”

To be clear, pedagogical too-muchness describes two sides of the same coin. The first refers to educators’ perception of feminist or justice-oriented education as an addition or extra (i.e., “on top of”). The second refers to an intentional layering, texturing, or piecing together of multiple critical pedagogical approaches (i.e., “instead of”). Each of these critical approaches—from community-based learning to multi-modal composing—can be perceived as “too much,” especially when looking from the first side of the coin. Yet, each helps achieve the purposes of disrupting the status quo, overcoming resistance, fostering commitments to justice, and building agency beyond the classroom. Each enacts the five key principles, moving us closer to critical imagination (Royster & Kirsch, 2012; Royster, 2000) and transgression (hooks, 1994). As such, the second side of the coin helps us see the layering of critical approaches not as haphazard or “too much” in the sense of energies going everywhere and nowhere. Rather, this pedagogical too-muchness provides a rich texture to a learning experience, helping us design courses that are complex, critical, and potentially transformative.

In what follows, I demonstrate why pedagogical too-muchness is crucial to social justice education (generally) and to the teaching of one course, “Writing for Social Justice” (specifically). In doing so, I make reference to the syllabus, assignments, and videos that students created, which appear at http://epublications.marquette.edu/english_4210/. I share these documents to illustrate the argument I make in this chapter: that feminist interventions prioritize interconnectedness not only among course content, assignments, and assessment, but also among ways of seeing, thinking, doing, and being in the world. This inter-

connectedness (like the other principles of engaging our full selves, prioritizing relations, understanding power, and cultivating agency) necessitates layering, texturing, or piecing together of critical approaches. That is, the feminist principle of interconnectedness necessitates pedagogical too-muchness.

CO-CONSTRUCTING A SHARED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

This chapter relates one attempt at feminist interventions, as I describe the community-based learning course “Writing for Social Justice” that emerged in partnership with the YWCA Southeast Wisconsin’s Racial Justice Program and with Marquette University’s Digital Media Studio (DMS). Like other courses in this “Praxis” section, students engaged in project-based learning. In other chapters, Ames Hawkins and Joan Giroux (Chapter 18, this collection) describe art activism; Douglas Walls, Jennifer Miller, and Brandy Dieterle (Chapter 20, this collection) explain development of a smartphone app; and Danielle Williams (Chapter 21, this collection) shares a public video project. Here I describe how undergraduates created short educational and promotional videos for Everytown Wisconsin, a week-long camp intended to help teens develop leadership skills, challenge stereotypes, and build self-confidence—all while having fun. The videos highlight participants’ experiences with the camp, showcase what participants have learned, and promote the camp to various stakeholders.

When developing the course, I repeatedly heard concerns about “doing it all at once”—meaning that it seemed too much to integrate video composition and multi-modal projects with community-based learning, explicit attention to race/racism/antiracism, undergraduate research and collaborative authorship, frequent one-with-one conferences, and even grading contracts and portfolios that center student agency—and all within a feminist framework. This sense of “doing too much” stemmed largely, I believe, from ideas about how far the course deviates from what’s typical at my institution (and from many colleges and universities). Yet, as I argue in this chapter and as I found to be true, the course needed all of these pieces because one without the others would not have allowed us to do the type of feminist education I hoped the course could achieve. It would not have allowed us to produce videos that could be of use to our community partner. It would not have positioned students to become agents and actors outside the course and throughout their everyday lives. It would not have given us the critical insights into power relations that are needed for making change. Yet, change is greatly needed—in and out of school—and many students recognize and seek this more-than-intellectual engagement.

“Writing for Social Justice” attracted students who were seeking such engagement. Offered as an upper-division special topics course for writing-intensive

English majors, the course was small with fourteen students. Like my colleagues, students expressed concerns early on that the course was “too much”—too demanding, requiring too many hours/week, asking for too much reflective self-work, etc. When processing at midterms and finals, many students shared stories of being initially “scared” or “overwhelmed by” the course, but so glad they stayed—with the ultimate payoff worth the effort. The high demands kept the class size small, and the small size, in turn, allowed us to build the intimate and challenging community that is needed for social justice education. Happily, I found that students opened to each other and to me (a white woman): I witnessed the eleven white students listen more carefully, learn about whiteness, and articulate commitments to racial justice—with and alongside three students of color who shared their experiences with differential risk, tightrope positioning, and asymmetrical power in ways that helped us all with self-reflexivity. Through ongoing, self-reflexive dialogue, we all learned about and contested the inhospitable conditions in higher education that lead to many marginalized peoples, especially women of color, being “presumed incompetent” (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012). Such reflexivity and contestation constitute a feminist project on their own.

In framing the course, it was important to me that we explicitly link ways of seeing, thinking, being, and doing (seeking interconnectedness). Therefore, I framed our partnership with the YWCA, the role of community-based learning, and the culminating video project as necessary components so that we would not only explore but also practice and engage in the action of “writing for social justice.” I asked us to answer in creative, inquiry-based, and reflective ways the following questions:

- How is writing involved in social justice work? What genres of writing are associated with movements for and thinking about social and racial justice?
- How do we understand central concepts of (in)equity, (in)justice, power, and rights?
- How might we, as communicators, use writing to intervene into injustice and to bring about a more socially just world?

These questions align with learning objectives and competences, which helped to structure the course and named types of conceptual, rhetorical, technical, affective/emotional, and other knowledge. They ranged from broadening our understanding of “writing” to include visual, oral, and multi-modal composition to pairing critique *against* injustice with the critique *for* justice.

Starting the course (and course materials) with articulations of questions, objectives, and competences proved important for thinking about why our semes-

ter's work mattered beyond the course, semester, or site. Because students wrote their own learning objectives, they adopted the language of “goals” and “objectives” in ways I have not observed in other courses. From processing shared learning objectives to setting personalized ones, students assumed agency in the first days of the semester—a time that is too-often spent with teacher-directed instructions. Moreover, collaborative goal-setting communicated the principles of feminist interventions from the start, engaging students in active and personal work as well as explicitly linking what we learn with how we see, what we do, and where we relate in the world.

ENACTING TOO-MUCHNESS THROUGH SEQUENCED AND SCAFFOLDED ASSIGNMENTS

From collaborative goal-setting (articulating *the why* of the course), we moved into the layered, textured, or pieced together too-muchness (achieving *the how* of feminist interventions). A view into the course (and I hope you'll take a look at the syllabus online) reveals scaffolded assignments; in-class workshops; out-of-class conferences; instruction from our DMS partners; consultation with our YWCA partners; and significant attention to the process, revision, and rethinking. Much of this work was collaborative in nature, involving co-authoring, collaborative learning, and undergraduate research. Much of it also involved ongoing reflection through in-class processing, freewriting, movement-based exercises, and contemplative practices. This active hands-on work was guided by scholarly readings—from foundational pieces like Iris Young's “Five Faces of Oppression” (1990) and Beverly Tatum's “Talking about Race, Learning about Racism” (1992) to excerpts of in-field texts like Paula Mathieu's *Tactics of Hope* (2005) and Tiffany Rousculp's *Rhetoric of Respect* (2014). Additional multi-modal materials included music; blogs, comics, and webtexts; short videos; and materials provided to us by the YWCA, such as the grant application for Everytown Wisconsin. We also *all* read excerpts from three books with each person choosing to read and report on one in full: Gloria Anzladúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Myles Horton and Paulo Freire's *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990), and Elaine Richardson's *PHD (Po H# on Dope) to Ph.D.* (2013).

Already the sense of pedagogical too-muchness emerges here in the course overview. To make sense of this range of activities, the course needed to scaffold students through manageable, sequenced assignments—with later projects building on earlier ones:

1. *Introductory Letter Forecasting the Semester*, an informal letter due in week #2 relating anticipations, expectations, and goals for the course.

2. *Statement on Writing for Social Justice*, a large-scale, semester-long effort to articulate a vision of “writing for social justice.” As a culminating statement, this creative piece synthesized course readings, discussions, community-based learning, and insights gained through assignments. The statement included an annotated bibliography kept throughout the semester to document and engage the sources that shape one’s vision.
3. *Critical Importance Video*, a short video (just 1 to 1½ minutes) to teach others about one of our shared books—taking up a line of inquiry, a passage of the text, a story reported, or something else that others will benefit from learning. This was not simply a summary or synopsis of the book, but a presentation to relate what is of “critical importance.”
4. *Community-Based, Collaborative Video Project*, short (2-5 minute) educational and promotional videos to promote Everytown Wisconsin, made in partnership with and for use by our community partner, YWCA Southeast Wisconsin’s Racial Justice Program.

Of these four assignments, the two video projects directly involved the DMS and YWCA. The other two—the introductory letter and statement on writing for social justice—focused on reflection: students set and tracked progress toward learning objectives, personalized knowledge and language of the course, and articulated a vision to carry forward. These reflective writing assignments aimed at *critical imagination and strategic contemplation*, to use Royster and Kirsch’s (2012) terms, as they served as inquiry tools for “seeing the noticed and the unnoticed” (p. 20) and created “space for rigorous contemplation” (p. 21). They helped students understand and transfer the five key principles of feminist interventions that we practiced through community-based learning and video production.

The video assignments, in turn, allowed us to build and rehearse the key principles of feminist interventions, as we worked in relationship and cultivated agency, while also building understandings about power, (in)justice, and other matters. As part of prioritizing relations, I consulted colleagues in the Center for Teaching and Learning, Service Learning Program, and Digital Media Studio (DMS) before and throughout the course. These campus partners provided financial and curricular support. As an example, a grant through the Serving Learning Program allowed the DMS to pilot a course tutoring program—having an undergraduate tutor (in addition to the director) work closely with students during both in-class workshops and out-of-class conferences. The DMS Director, Elizabeth Andrejasich Gibes, co-taught multiple classes to help students build technical, collaborative, and research skills—skills that were not isolated from the critical and feminist approach to the course, but instead made

possible our feminist interventions. We also co-created the critical importance video assignment as a video (investing in collaboration and strengthening our relationship) and used this assignment for students to build conceptual knowledge from readings, while developing technical know-how.

What I'd like to underline is that the complexity, range, and depth of this wide-ranging work allowed us to seek interconnectedness—to recognize connections among systemic inequities and movements for social justice. For instance, along with the readings, in-class activities, and four primary assignments, collaboration with the YWCA allowed us to focus on one type of social justice: that is, racial justice. Throughout the semester, we explored race/ism and racial justice alongside intersectional identities, asymmetrical power, prejudice, and privilege. Seeking interconnectedness meant that we took seriously the YWCA's mission of "eliminating racism, empowering women"—identifying relationships among forms of (in)justice (e.g., linking racism and sexism). Seeking such interconnectedness is necessary for feminism to be more than white women centering whiteness, as hooks (2000) and Lorde (1984) remind us. Also, seeking interconnectedness meant gaining conceptual knowledge (beyond technical skills) that would aid in creating informed and quality videos for the YWCA. Danielle Williams (2018, this collection) identifies the need for such conceptual knowledge when sharing how students reproduced stereotypes: without investigating their own biases, students wrote prejudice into the GED videos they created. Hence, I highlight the value of interconnectedness, as it is essential for enacting other principles of feminist interventions: engaging our full selves, prioritizing relations, understanding power, and cultivating agency.

As further illustration, I'd like to highlight a moment in which the planning and activities of the course created the conditions for feminist interventions, but truly the students had to act, as agents, with openness and courage. When discussing the importance of developing "bias literacy," we noted the need to personalize and internalize (not just intellectually rehearse understanding of) this concept. We asked questions like: When do we recognize privilege in the body? When do guilt, hurt, or other emotions get in the way of authentic relationship? When are biases unintentionally creeping into thoughts and actions? Students evidenced their embodied learning in subsequent interactions. On the day we discussed microaggressions (Sue, 2010), students responded through a "popcorn share": each person shared a response or example from the reading before naming a colleague, who would next respond. As I watched students pass the speaking turn, I noticed that a white student volunteered to begin and that white students were naming other white students. The three students of color were the last to speak and were left naming each other, before naming me (returning the speaking turn to the teacher). We needed to address what happened, and this

could be the moment for folks to embrace racial justice work or to resist.

Gently, I asked: “We’re talking about microaggressions, and we just enacted one. What happened?” A long silence. No one spoke. I interjected, “Does anyone know what I’m talking about?” Several people began nodding, and then one of the students of color described what happened, noting that this happens “all the time” in her classes. Luckily, the white students *got it*: they made connections with the readings; noted how their actions had been unintentional but consequential manifestations of bias; and said they could see why microaggressions are so significant, insidious, and unseen by people with privilege. Rather than resistance, strategic contemplation emerged. Students used the language of the readings, and they made connections to their lives, later tracking microaggressions they witnessed or participated in outside of class. Moments of self-critique like this one were essential. They not only embodied and personalized learning (engaging our full selves), but they also prepared us for working with the YWCA and facing a number of similar, potentially transformative moments throughout the semester.

BUILDING RELATIONS THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

The course’s central project—the collaborative video—involved students in working closely with each other and with the YWCA to promote Everytown Wisconsin. These collaborative videos involved co-authoring and editing in small groups; conducting and filming interviews with camp participants; making use of already-recorded video footage and images; revising based on feedback; and producing a video that met the YWCA’s vision and intended audiences. To accomplish this ambitious project, we worked closely with the DMS staff, who joined weekly in-class workshops and frequent out-of-class conferences. And students took active leadership roles, serving as co-authors, project managers, editors, photographers, designers, outreach coordinators, and record-keepers.

Though we used a timeline to help structure this semester-long project, we also adapted in response to the needs and feedback of our community partner. The YWCA helped us to learn about the work of nonprofit organizations, including their publicity and communication needs. To understand and create videos about Everytown Wisconsin, we learned about the needs of distinct audiences: (1) teens (or potential delegates to the camp); (2) their parents, teachers, or other adults involved in their lives; and (3) the public, including funding organizations and citizen donors. In response, we created three different videos targeting these different audiences. (These videos can also be viewed through the course URL.)

This course was the first time I worked closely with the YWCA and with Martha Barry, Director of the Racial Justice Program. Much of the semester

involved building a relationship that we could sustain and grow beyond this course, which we now are continuing to do. In many ways, though we all wanted the final videos to be of real use to the YWCA, the video project was less important than the relational and processual work of community-based learning. Throughout the semester, the students and I read together work problematizing altruistic “service” or “service-learning” and arguing instead for more robust, reciprocal, and relational models of community engagement (e.g., Rousculp, 2014; Mathieu, 2005; Cushman, 1999; Peck, Flower, & Higgins, 1995). Readings and discussions led students to reflect more critically on previous service-learning experiences and to consider what community engagement would look like beyond this course.

Many “service” experiences not only at my institution (Marquette University, an urban Jesuit university) but also at institutions across the United States invoke troubling notions of altruistic “helping” (e.g., Rousculp, 2014; Cushman, 1999) or reinscribe whiteness (e.g., Seider & Hillman, 2011; Green, 2003). Given the problematic ways that service-learning can be enacted, my hope was that our relational, project-oriented approach would help us to disrupt the status quo, rethink past experiences, and imagine new relations. DiAngelo & Sensoy (2012), for instance, find that white students often “complain they are (or fear being) ‘attacked’” in cross-racial discussions and, therefore, depict race discussions as “unsafe spaces, as arenas of violence” (p. 1). By enlisting white students to work for racial justice (and not just to sit back and talk), community-based learning can help circumvent resistance and communicate the responsibility to act. Taking action, in turn, teaches what Horton & Freire (1990) have expressed: “without practice, there is no knowledge” (p. 97), and to act, one must “start doing it and learn from it” (p. 40). These are arguments for the value not only of community-based learning, but also for writing, research, and multimodal projects that engage students in action, hence why I argue for pedagogical too-muchness and the layering, texturing, or piecing together of multiple, critical practices. Each of these puzzle pieces gets us closer to seeing the picture, but we need them all to complete the puzzle. In other words, we need the many pieces for an intervention that is truly feminist, that is both aligned with and working to enact social justice education.

To explain further, I think of Paula Mathieu’s (2005) argument for why community writing needs a tactical orientation that resists “charity” and is based in both projects and partnerships. Our video project was “tactical” in that it was limited to a specific term and project and, therefore, small-scale in the face of the YWCA’s larger mission. Tactical in nature, the video project (1) addressed a specific issue (Everytown Wisconsin); (2) had a long-term vision (aimed at enacting racial justice and practicing “writing for social justice”); and (3) took a

project, rather than problem, orientation. A problem orientation “operates from a negative space,” has a “transactional quality to it,” and “runs the risk of leaving participants overwhelmed, cynical, and feeling weak” (p. 50). In contrast, a project orientation “privileges creation and design,” particularly within set “length, scope, and parameters” (p. 50). By contrasting problems with projects, Mathieu offers language and a framework for understanding why a tactical orientation is so crucial to community writing.

Similarly, I’d argue, feminist interventions necessitate a tactical orientation that emphasizes projects and partnerships—cultivating agency and prioritizing relations—rather than trying to fix problems. While the relational work of partnerships involves ongoing and sustained investment, the project itself can be immediate and fixed-term (i.e., semester-long). Such projects need not be multi-modal, and, in fact, Mathieu cites other examples of multi-genre research papers (Mack, 2002), oral history projects (Cassell, 2000), and service learning with a Boston-area street paper (Mathieu, 2005). We find still other examples in this collection, such as collaborative art activism for The Cradle Project (Hawkins & Giroux, Chapter 18, this collection), digital storytelling to produce local documentaries (Bower, Chapter 24, this collection), and the collection and retelling of farm histories (Denecker & Sisser, Chapter 9, this collection). Whatever the project’s nature, such work means, in Mathieu’s words, “doing many things at once” (2000, p. 53), as is the nature of public writing and much of our everyday lives. Rather than seeing these “many things” as a problem or as “too much” in the negative sense, it is possible to embrace pedagogical too-muchness. It’s possible to appreciate a project’s and partnership’s ability to influence students’ views of, responsibilities to, and roles within social justice work. It’s possible, too, to see community-based learning, like other critical pedagogical approaches, as central to feminist interventions aimed at more equitable relations.

To see this, I’d like to share another powerful moment—one that emerged from a day of reviewing videos with the YWCA staff. During this workshop day, we noticed and discussed how one co-authoring group started their video with four white speakers back-to-back, putting the voices and experiences of white people first *before* those of people of color. Two YWCA staff members began their feedback by asking about this sequence and the messages it would send. The class took time to identify the problem—engaging in the critique *against*—and then proposed solutions—providing the critique *for* (a framework we used throughout the semester). Building on this familiar framework and earlier moments like our discussion on microaggressions and bias literacy, the co-authoring group received the feedback well; showed a willingness to revise; and recognized their implicit, yet consequential, bias.

During end-of-the-semester processing, a member of this co-authoring group said they continued to think about this feedback and would invest in further developing bias literacy. These moments indicated to me that students were truly personalizing their learning, making it more than intellectual and part of their full selves. I greatly appreciated our community partners' willingness to give this and other *real* feedback—feedback addressing the logic/narratives of the videos and not only its design or genre conventions. In contrast to a vision of community members as “clients,” to pick up on Danielle Williams’s language in her chapter (this collection), our partners at the YWCA truly served as “mentors.” They helped students see, investigate, and revise biased perspectives. The end result not only made the final video products useable, but also made the process deeply learning-full for all involved. Because feedback spoke to conceptual knowledge we worked to build through readings and other course materials, it helped us synthesize ways of knowing with ways of doing (toward interconnectedness). Through pedagogical too-muchness, we learned that “writing for social justice” was not rote practice or technical know-how. It was instead about recognizing and rewriting damaged discourses (like those around race/ism and sex/ism), aiming toward equity and justice.

CULTIVATING AGENCY IN ASSESSMENT

In my mind, as important as “the work” of the course (e.g., the readings, projects, and community-based learning) are the self-reflexive stances students develop and the commitments they tap into, deepen, and hopefully take beyond the semester. To help students cultivate agency and the habits of mind needed for self-reflexivity and self-directed learning, I approached assessment as an ongoing, negotiated, and active process. In other words, assessment came *not* in hindsight or separate from but instead as part of “the work” itself. Because grades matter and are so central to schooling, the means of assessment need also to challenge “business as usual”: we cannot ask students to take significant responsibility without demonstrating how this responsibility manifests in grades. Further, because students typically care about grades, rethinking assessment helps in shaking up/off assumed ways of being and operating in school. All of these goals underlie feminist interventions, which seek to disrupt inequities. Disruption must engage matters of power, agency, rights, and responsibilities.

Pedagogical too-muchness, therefore, involves alternative means of assessment. For me, these alternatives include portfolios and contract grading, both of which present opportunities for students to shape the reception of their work and to see themselves as actors with insights. In “Writing for Social Justice,” students engaged, for instance, in a wide range of self-reflection, relationship-build-

ing, reading, writing, and digital production. To frame and interpret this work, students set their own learning objectives; wrote and revised grading contracts; compiled work into midterm and final portfolios; and composed carefully crafted cover letters, reflecting on their agency and growth throughout the course. Midterms and finals served as reflective moments for looking backward and forward. Explaining this process began in the syllabus and continued in one-with-one conferences, through assignment sheets, and by sharing samples of past students' portfolios and cover letters.

In composition and rhetoric, many of us are accustomed to the use of portfolios and cover letters, even if our timing, construction, or expectations of these documents differ (e.g., Reynolds & Davis, 2014). What is less frequently used is contract grading (e.g., Inoue, 2015, 2012), which can go a far way toward demystifying the grading process, involving students in self-assessment, and fostering students' ownership of learning. Similarly, conferences are important for instructors to listen and mentor—toward cultivating a relational pedagogy, which underlines the deep valuing of relations and agency. Together, conferencing/mentoring with alternative assessment (portfolios and grading contracts) give instructors deep insights into students' experiences and students deep insights into their legacies of schooling.

What I found in this course was that assessment especially helped us think about privilege, power, and inequities. Assessment exposed lower expectations or deficit thinking facing *some* students and higher expectations or excess thinking for *others*. To tell this story, I must explain that this course was *most* students' first experience creating their own learning objectives, and it was *all* students' first experience with grading contracts. During conferences, I found that some students needed to talk through conflicting responsibilities, others needed reassurance that they could succeed, and still others needed direct permission to claim academic success. What struck me was that two of the three women of color planned to contract for lower grades than most white students. In talking with them, I learned that they had come to accept that they should aim for "good" (i.e., not great) grades—likely a sign of the larger legacy of being "presumed incompetent" in schools (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012). After talking through their personal learning objectives (some of the most ambitious in the course), I asked, "why not try for the higher grade?" This question opened reflection on years of schooling, which led to narratives of teachers seeing and grading them differently and worries about being "not enough." When these students chose to abandon the narrative of "not enough" (a choice that realized their agency), they were also able to let go negative expectations, countering internalized oppression.

In contrast, three white students (two of them men) initially contracted for high grades despite their relative inattention to the first assignment and grading

contract. With these students, talking about the contracts allowed me to clarify expectations for successful completion of the course. Throughout the semester, we talked frequently about their contracts, using learning objectives as a guide. At different points (midterms, post-midterms, and finals), these three students re-contracted for lower grades. Their decisions seemed to be made with ease and without anger, along with an increasing recognition that they expected from years of schooling to “get by” with minimal engagement. Guided by ongoing and clear communication, these three students re-contracted without a sense of letting themselves, me, or their colleagues down and with, I hope, questions lingering about how privilege allowed them to be perceived as “doing well” without doing much. Here again, students assumed agency in their assessment and in ways that called them to consider their relative rights and responsibilities. It also opened reflection on past experiences, and one student commented that they had never truly been challenged because they had always been seen as already “doing enough.” These contrasting ideas of *enough* (“not enough” versus “already enough”) lead me to argue that we, as educators, must reconsider the inequitable messages that grades send, stripping students of their agency to succeed and to grow.

As a teacher, I especially appreciated the re-contracting process, as it gave me insights into students’ expectations, while lessening the stress of grading. I put attention toward responding and mentoring instead of sorting and ranking, and students reported feeling secure about their grades and, therefore, open to taking risks. With other causes for stress (e.g., ongoing talk about race/ism, responsibilities to our community partner, and frustration with video editing), it was a relief not to put too much emotional energy into assessment. Further, I believe that, at its best, education gives students the sense that they have responsibility (response + ability) to act in the world. Hopefully, students will transfer the self-determination they practiced in the course outward into their writing, organizing, and other feminist interventions.

EMBRACING PEDAGOGICAL TOO-MUCHNESS

The methodological layering of pedagogical too-muchness is something I’ve come to over years of observation, experimentation, and reading-reflecting-thinking with others. My first classroom teaching experience gave me insight into the need to change not just components of a course or curriculum, but essentially the whole of the educational endeavor. When I began teaching high school social studies, I was not only unprepared to consider the interactional dynamics in a learning environment for 30+ individuals, but I was also trying to do things too differently from what students had come to expect. I realized that students

needed help transitioning into the experience I was attempting to create with them. And I learned that this “help in transitioning” required not just changes to course content or a single assignment. Rather, we needed to question—and largely to change—inherited ways of operating in a classroom. This meant rethinking roles, the use of time, the sequence of assignments, the outcomes of the course—and all starting with guiding questions, learning objectives, and competences. In other words, to embrace hooks’s (1994) call for feminist educators to “teach to transgress,” we must rethink the whole (all components) of education.

Despite having heard grumblings over the years that social justice education is “just too much,” it is only recently that I’ve thought to embrace the language of “too-muchness.” I now believe that pedagogical too-muchness describes the great extent to which we need to change for our teaching to be critical, feminist, and transformative. In Mathieu’s words, community writing involves “doing many things at once” (2005, p. 53). If my lived experience is any indicator, much of living, working, organizing, and acting in the world similarly involves “many things at once.”

Many changes at once can be overwhelming, and to be clear, I am not indicating that we overwhelm ourselves, students, or anyone else. On the contrary, I believe pedagogical too-muchness aligns with the move to connect contemplative pedagogy with anti-oppression education. More mindful, engaged education aligns with the goals of more just, reflexive communities. This too-muchness simply means that we let go of past, often-unspoken priorities to instead piece together the complex puzzle—assembling a new set of critical practices. Such practices, in turn, allow us to enact key principles of feminist interventions, including the five I have addressed throughout this chapter: (1) engaging our full selves, (2) prioritizing relations, (3) understanding power, (4) cultivating agency, and (5) seeking interconnectedness.

As a final story, I will share that “Writing for Social Justice” is my first course in which students have asked at midterms for *more* work. Specifically, they asked for each other (their colleagues) to share popular news stories and examples that would help make sense of the scholarly readings and to take greater leadership roles in class discussions. They also suggested doing more out-of-class freewriting to create space for more in-class processing. Then, post-midterm, students acted on these requests—signing up to lead class sessions, assigning each other freewriting prompts, sharing protest music at the start of class, and emailing webtexts through the course listserv. Something happened by changing the regular classroom script: as I co-created with students, they began investing *more* in their own learning.

Having witnessed and participated in this experience, I will continue to embrace pedagogical too-muchness. In doing so, I hope to create more meaningful,

learning-full experiences. The more we strive for equity in education, the more we can work toward social justice in the world around us. Therefore, I call for us to keep rethinking education, asking: *How might we intervene into and rewrite the scripts of schooling? How might we approach our roles differently? Who might we partner with in this endeavor? What will we need to learn along the way?*

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