

Anarchist Pedagogy in the Gender and Women's Studies Classroom

.....
Stina Soderling is a Lecturer in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She conducts research on anarchist and feminist pedagogy with a focus on grading and student involvement in course design.
.....

Abstract

This article argues for the value of employing anarchist pedagogical methods in introductory Gender and Women's Studies courses. The author draws on her experiences using feminist and anarchist pedagogical literature as well as her own experiences using anarchist pedagogy. Topics addressed include classroom structure, syllabus design, grading, and the question of opinions and neutrality.
.....

Résumé

Cet article défend le mérite d'employer des méthodes pédagogiques anarchistes dans les cours d'introduction aux Études sur le genre et les femmes. L'auteure s'appuie sur ses expériences de l'utilisation de matériel pédagogique féministe et anarchiste ainsi que sur ses propres expériences de l'utilisation de la pédagogie anarchiste. Les sujets abordés comprennent la structure de la salle de classe, la conception du programme d'études, la notation et la question des opinions et de la neutralité.

Introduction

It is the first day of the semester in "Women, Culture and Society," the introductory Gender and Women's Studies course at Rutgers University. I have been teaching this course regularly for a couple of years now and this semester I decided to take a new approach. Rather than presenting the students with a fixed curriculum, I want to provide them with the opportunity to help design the course. I have no idea how this will turn out; I am concerned that what the students want to learn will diverge drastically from what I think an Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies should teach them; I dread the possibility that they will suggest studying topics I know nothing about and that I will have to put hours and hours into learning new aspects of feminist studies. In the back of my mind is the dream that the students will come up with a range of interesting and provocative topics and that we'll go on a rollercoaster of learning together. What happens is none of the above. In fact, what happens is nothing at all. Faced with the question of what they want to learn, all forty-five students in the room stare blankly back at me.

Over the past four years, I have researched, and experimented with, how to implement anarchist pedagogy in the college classroom. Over the several semesters that followed my first attempt at feminist anarchist pedagogy, I have come to expect the blank stares when asking my students what they want to learn. The question is so rare to them as to border on absurdity: "You mean you want us to tell you what we want? You're supposed to tell us what we *have to* learn!" These reactions convince me of the importance of these experiments as a way of opening up spaces for students to think about what they *want* to learn in a Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) course and why.

In some ways, the Gender and Women's Studies college classroom is ideally suited for trying out anarchist pedagogy. Women's Studies was formed during the women's liberation movement (Lawson 2011, 108; Boxer 2002, 43-44) as one of several new

fields of study and research, including Black studies, Chicano/a studies, and Ethnic Studies, that sought to question power structures. One of the key concepts invoked in feminist pedagogy is critical thinking. Yet, arguably, as Women's Studies became entrenched within the institutional structure of academia, the room for experimental pedagogy shrunk. While early programs were often collectively operated, today's departments are run with a hierarchical structure. In order to attract students, courses are shaped to fit university-wide learning goals. Accountability in Gender and Women's Studies has increasingly shifted from student and faculty activists to university administrations. Still, I believe that there is room in Gender and Women's Studies for creative pedagogical solutions and that anarchist pedagogy can have a space here. A great many students and instructors seek out GWS because of the political potentials of the (inter-)discipline and we can use this energy and motivation to try out less restrictive and hierarchical modes of learning.

This article focuses on the introductory Women's and Gender Studies course at Rutgers University, "Women, Culture, and Society," though I also draw on my experience teaching other courses. Since "Women, Culture, and Society" functions both as an introductory course for prospective Women's and Gender Studies majors and minors, and as a general education course for students from across the university for whom this is likely their only exposure to GWS, the course has the immense task of introducing the myriad ways that gender plays a role in culture and society as well as the intersections between gender, race, class, and nationality. In contrast to many other institutions, while "Women, Culture, and Society" is a core course in the department curriculum, the department provides almost no guidelines or requirements for the instructors. Though we have access to past syllabi, most instructors design their courses from scratch, reflecting their own values, convictions, priorities, and areas of expertise. This means that "Women, Culture, and Society" can be taught as an introduction to the three waves of feminism, to South Asian women's activism, to U.S. imperialism, or to prison abolition, depending on who the instructor for any given section is. My focus in the course is on a series of key concepts challenged in feminist theory and practice; by the end of the course, I want students to have a grasp of hierarchy, power, and

normative assumptions. To achieve these aims, I utilize an anarchist-feminist pedagogical framework.

Feminist and anarchist approaches to education both start from a position of critically evaluating power in order to work toward social justice and an end to oppression. In the words of Robbin D. Crabtree, David Alan Sapp, and Adela C. Licona (2009), "Feminist pedagogy is marked by the development of non-hierarchical relationships among teachers and students and reflexivity about power relations, not only in society but also in the classroom" (5). The same could be said for anarchist pedagogy. Anarchist and feminist pedagogies both fit within a broader field of critical pedagogies, inspired by education theorists such as Paulo Freire. Both schools of thought oppose what Freire (2008) called the "banking" method of education in which students are passively fed content by the instructor (72). Yet feminist and anarchist pedagogies are not identical and engaging with anarchist pedagogies can, I argue, deepen and complicate feminist pedagogical practices. Farhang Rouhani (2012), drawing on scholar of education William Armaline, outlines three main principles for creating an anarchist pedagogy: "humility in approach to knowledge, concern for creating spaces free from coercion, and a belief in human capabilities" (1729). In explicating what it means to create such coercion-free zones, Armaline (2009) indicates that such a "pedagogical space should reflect a horizontal democracy where students and educators engage in freely associated cooperative learning and activity rather than individual competition and mutual alienation" (139). Armaline's vision of anarchist pedagogy draws directly on the principles of cooperation, freedom, and mutuality that guide anarchist organizing methods outside of the classroom, including anarchist meetings, study groups and direct action projects. A key aspect of what anarchist pedagogy can offer the Gender and Women's Studies classroom is, I argue, a praxis grounded in liberatory activist methods.

In the following sections, I point to some key issues in teaching where the difficulties of implementing anarchist pedagogy in the GWS classroom have become especially evident to me. Working as an anarchist, or otherwise radical, within hierarchical institutions of learning presents a multitude of challenges. Radical scholars writing about the academy have become adept at chronicling the struggles faced in relation to the

administration such as: How do we get around the need to grade (Canally 2012)? Can we afford to cancel class on May Day? How do we use university resources for subversive ends? Much less discussion goes into our relationship with students and their resistance (if that is the right term) to what we might consider liberatory educational practices. A central question that has come up through my own practice and that guides this article concerns the extent to which we can create a liberatory classroom space within an educational system that is designed to teach people to conform and to create hierarchies and punitive systems for both students and instructors.

To explore this question, I first provide a brief introduction to anarchist pedagogical theory to ground the discussion of classroom practices. Then I look at what I consider crucial components in developing anarchist practices for the GWS classroom: course and classroom structure; rigor and freedom; values and neutrality; and grading. I argue that an anarchist approach to pedagogy can address key questions that feminist educators have long grappled with in regard to power, knowledge production, and non-oppressive educational practices.¹

History and Theory of Anarchist Pedagogy

As might be expected from a praxis that rejects conformity, there are varying opinions about what anarchist education should look like (DeLeon 2012b, 6). While there is a small but extant body of literature on anarchist education for children and in trade schools (Avrich 2006; Suissa 2012), surprisingly close to nothing has been written about anarchist methods in “higher” education (the work of Jamie Heckert is a notable exception).² Much of the work on anarchist pedagogy dates back to the Modern School³ movement of the early twentieth century. While a 2012 issue of *Educational Studies* (DeLeon 2012a) and a relatively new anthology by Robert Haworth (2012) entitled *Anarchist Pedagogies*, are devoted to the topic, there is still a dearth of scholarship about how anarchist theorists and educators approach implementing pedagogical practice. This might be due to the skepticism many anarchists have of institutions, including those of higher learning (Shukaitis 2009, 166). Rouhani (2012) proposes that the lack of attention to anarchism in education also “partly stems from

misconceptions of anarchism itself as violent at worst and as impractically naïve and utopian at best” (1729). A closer look at anarchist educational practices shows that they are neither violent nor impractical, though often unabashedly utopian.

Anarchist pedagogy can teach people to think critically and to put this critical thinking to work in everyday practices. This is exactly what is lacking in much higher education today. As Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa (2011) suggest in a summary of their book *Academically Adrift*, “many students show little if any growth over the first 2 years of college in their ability to perform tasks requiring critical thinking, complex reasoning, and written communication as measured by the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)” (203). They go on to say that, “While higher education is expected to accomplish many tasks, existing organizational cultures and practices too often do not prioritize undergraduate learning. Given these institutional climates, it is perhaps not surprising that large numbers of college students report that they *experience only limited academic demands and invest only limited effort in their academic endeavors*” (203; italics in original). This analysis is in line with the situation I have observed at Rutgers University and it is worrisome.

While I share Arum and Roksa’s worry, there are problems with their approach to learning. Measuring learning and wanting students to learn at a certain rate can be critiqued as a capitalist, market-oriented model. For example, the authors lament that students do too much of their “studying with peers in social settings that are generally not conducive to learning” (204). One must ask what counts as learning here. Do students not learn from each other? The moments when students look up from their individual homework and discuss what they are reading with each other is a rich learning moment because knowledge becomes collective and horizontal. Market ideology aside, the statistics Arum and Joksja present are troubling. How is it that millions of people can spend, on average, four to six years supposedly learning how to think, yet for the most part show no improvement in critical thinking? Whose interests does this serve? The current structure of higher education enables the production of a docile workforce, of people who labour for the pursuit of grades or wages, but not much else. It is an education

that breeds individualism (“How can I get a good grade in this course?”) as well as conformity (“How do I do what the instructor/university/administration wants me to?”). This is a mentality that is in stark opposition to the mutual aid and challenging of power structures that are central components of anarchism. Yet, higher education generally—and, for the purpose of this article, the undergraduate classroom in particular—presents rare, if not unique, opportunities for implementing anarchist modes of being. Though not all students are excited about any given course, enrollment is technically voluntary and classrooms could be considered a temporary association of people with a common objective (as typically outlined in a syllabus), exactly the form of organizing advocated by anarchists. Compared to primary and secondary education, university and college instructors have relative freedom in what they teach, opening up space for experimenting with content and methods.

Anarchist education is more about methods of and approaches to teaching than about teaching certain subject matter. Even though the settings are quite different, one can draw on the philosophy of anarchist elementary school education to inform college teaching practice. As Francisco Ferrer, legendary anarchist educator and founder of *La Escuela Moderna* in Barcelona, has put it, “I will teach them not what to think but how to think” (quoted in Avrich 2006, 19). Teaching students how to think and how to approach knowledge is a keystone of my pedagogical approach. But perhaps “teach” is the wrong word: often asking probing questions and encouraging students to not take what they read for granted is enough to incite a critical consciousness.

Yet, as Judith Suissa (2012) has compellingly argued, Ferrer’s pedagogy paradoxically “involves a normative, substantive and ongoing commitment to a set of values and principles” (81). On this point, anarchists agree with other critical pedagogues; for instance, Donaldo Macedo, in his introduction to the 30th anniversary edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, suggests that Freire’s view of liberatory education is not about getting rid of all values in education, but rather to center the perspectives of the oppressed and marginalized and to illuminate oppressive structures (Freire 2008, 20). This raises an important concern: is it anarchist to impose anarchist values? Can

anarchist educators maintain a commitment to a set of values without imposing them on students? Surely, it is important for educators to be constantly vigilant that we do not try to enforce liberation, as if such a contradictory project was even possible. In practice, this issue is often not as monumental as it can seem in theory. I have found that anarchist values and principles rarely have to be imposed, as students embrace them and often suggest them themselves (albeit not using the label “anarchist”). At the beginning of every semester, I spend time setting up classroom ground rules together with the students. The rules that students suggest are always remarkably similar to the ones I would like: mutual respect, space for disagreement, listening, and speaking from one’s own point of view. The main expression of student resistance to liberatory methods emerges during grading, which I will come back to after a discussion of the problem of structure.

Structure

One of the main interventions of anarchist educators at the primary and secondary education level has been to question and dispense with what they considered excessive structure. For example, many anarchist-influenced schools do not require students to adhere to a prescribed schedule; instead, students attend classes when, and if, they want to.⁴ College courses present an interesting conundrum: ought students be forced to attend class? In theory, college is voluntary and, even once students are enrolled, they are, with the exception of core requirements—which usually do not include GWS courses—not mandated to take specific courses. Yet, when I ask my students at the beginning of the semester why they are taking the course, in most cases, students respond that they need to—it fulfills a distribution requirement, it was the only course they could fit into a certain time slot, or it serves to complete their minor. Thus, while one could argue that students have voluntarily agreed to take a course, and therefore have chosen to abide by a certain syllabus, this “choice” is often made in a constricted situation where students do not at all feel like liberated persons deciding on their own educational path. Further, after twelve or thirteen years of mandatory schooling, students frequently arrive at college with the impression that they need to obey the instructor whose word is not to be questioned, at least not out loud in the classroom. Considering this, any

structure we as instructors create ought to be viewed as an imposition on our students rather than as something willingly agreed to by them.

Following traditional anarchist pedagogy, I have experimented with a less structured classroom environment than is the norm for university courses, namely by involving students in determining the classroom structure. At the beginning of the semester, we set ground rules and these govern classroom interactions. Students usually decide on rules that require respect when listening to others and they generally agree to use computers and cellphones sparingly. Rarely, however, do they set rules for not coming late to class, knowing that the intricate course schedule and extensive campus bus system makes it hard to always be on time. Keeping the priorities that students have identified in mind, I monitor laptop use when I consider it beneficial, but do not penalize latecomers. Most students appreciate these responsive rules, given their role in designing them. They describe the classroom environment as respectful and considerate and, while the students are not always “orderly”—sometimes showing up late and not completing assignments on time—they are universally considerate of one another as well as of me as an instructor.

And yet, for the same reasons that I suggest it is beneficial to minimize structure in the anarchist classroom, doing so nevertheless comes with risks. After all, students have been trained for their whole schooling to learn within rigid structures and they often feel lost when such structures are removed. For example, when a written assignment is optional, many students have expressed having a hard time deciding for themselves whether completing it would be to their benefit or not. One possible path through the structure conundrum is to implement non-hierarchical structures such as rotating facilitators and implementing the progressive stack⁵ technique for discussions. These modes take time to learn, however, and students can either find this learning process exciting or consider it as taking time away from the course content. In a feminist context, form and content are ideally interwoven and students can learn about the history of feminist organizing by practicing non-hierarchical group structures. Still, the amount of time and energy that goes into learning horizontal group structures is significant and would obviously work best if they were used across several

courses so that students could continue to develop such modes of collaborative engagement throughout their time in college.

While every course necessarily has some level of structure, whether explicit (e.g., showing up on a certain day and time every week) or implicit (e.g., sitting down, not yelling while others are speaking), I have come to the conclusion that, when utilizing anarchist pedagogy in the college classroom, less structure is better than more. Not necessarily because less structure is the “right answer,” but because most (or all) of the other courses that students take are overly rigid; my offering a less structured course provides students with a crucial opportunity to critically question which structures are generative and which are detrimental or unnecessarily constrictive. This is no easy practice. As Freire (2008) points out, within a hierarchical society, there is often “fear of freedom” (35). Students are worried about chaos and about not being able to take responsibility for their own learning. Creating a classroom space with minimal formal structure allows students (and instructors!) to face this fear of freedom and to think critically about how they want to learn.

Rigor with Freedom?

Gender and Women’s Studies courses are, at least at Rutgers University, often considered “easy A’s.” The introductory course also fulfills a core university requirement, so many students take it as a way to get their “diversity requirement” out of the way in what they anticipate will be a relatively painless manner. Several of those of us who teach in the department struggle with how to emphasize that GWS is not “fluff,” especially in the context of the introductory course, while at the same time not resorting to punitive and overly harsh teaching methods. The view of GWS courses as easy or somehow not rigorous is, of course, highly problematic and should be countered in our teaching, but how do we do this without resorting to arguably patriarchal modes of dominance?

In applying liberatory educational methods by way of giving students a say in how courses are designed, for example, there is always the possibility that they will opt for less labour-intensive courses than what we, as instructors, might have intended. While my experience is that students usually suggest less work than I would have (though far from always and usually not

dramatically so), I propose that we should look at students' preference for "less work" as far more complex than merely a sign of undesirable laziness. We need to question whether "more work" is necessarily better. If students write more, read more, or take more tests, do they automatically learn "more"? I have found that students are often more likely to grapple with ideas in class if they do not have to worry about writing a paper or pass a test. They usually come up with more provocative—though less polished—ideas and theories in discussions and short ungraded written assignments than in formal essays. The learning process becomes its own goal, its own enjoyment even. This is not to say that there cannot be great value in learning through frequent writing, but rather that learning also benefits from time and spaciousness. In a society obsessed with production, I would argue that creating a space where students do not feel like compulsive producers has its own value.

Flexible syllabi, where students have a say in what work to perform, sometimes means that they do less or give their work so little attention that the result suffers (this dilemma has also been discussed by Rouhani 2012, 1737). But is the issue really that students do not *want* to work? In some cases, I am sure it is. Some people are lazy; others are not interested in intellectual labour. Like elsewhere, at Rutgers, a large state university, many students are juggling multiple commitments outside of class such as jobs, often full time, and family. Because of the rising cost of tuition, many are also trying to finish their degrees in the shortest timespan possible by taking heavy course loads. In such a context, students often have to decide which assignments to prioritize, such that the ones with the most clearly productive results are focused on. This means prioritizing work for courses where there is a clear relation between cramming and grades. While none of these tendencies—laziness, other interests, and prioritizing—are inherently bad, they end up affecting students' work as well as the classroom experience of others, both students and instructor.⁶ And what about the students who really want to learn and have time to devote to the course as well as those who want to engage with the material in a more rigorous fashion? In a discussion-based classroom, everyone is affected by what others bring to the table. If some have not prepared adequately for class, everyone suffers. This is why further research about anarchist pedagogy in the feminist classroom is called for. If students can each

individually decide what to put into the course, how do we make the collective class experience beneficial for everyone?

All this said, the opportunity to have a say in the content of the course, and especially being able to reevaluate it as the semester progresses, leads some students to put in much more work than I would have asked on a standard syllabus. As they learn about new topics, they have questions they want to explore or an argument they want to make. For example, a group of students in a recent class researched toxic waste from a nearby cosmetics plant, writing a report and contacting the owner of the plant (who did not respond). This project was only possible because they were able to redesign their work for the last month of the course, spending more time on this special project instead of other pre-formulated assignments. This leads me to the question of values and neutrality.

Values and Neutrality

As discussed in the introduction, theorists of anarchist education have been firm in their stance that liberatory pedagogy does not equal "anything-goes" when it comes to values and opinions and that an anarchist education is not value-neutral. Indeed, it could be argued that the maintenance of a "neutral" standpoint and absence of position on the course material functions to secure the instructor as "above" students, reinforcing a hierarchy where students are expected to develop a point of view, but the instructor is above this. Presenting one's analysis or position on a matter can make one vulnerable and expecting students to do this without reciprocating puts the instructor in a position of power. It also leaves the students second-guessing their comments, wondering what the instructor is "really" thinking.

At the same time, presenting one's own standpoint comes with risks, especially for instructors from groups who are seen as automatically "biased," given their minoritized positionality in a racist and heterosexist society. Many GWS instructors have written about such accusations of "bias" (read: "incompetence") as being thrown at those who students see as part of a "special-interest group" such as women of colour and queer people. Beyond this, I find that presenting a point of view as an instructor can have a detrimental effect on classroom discussion and hence on students' abilities to

form their own analyses. The U.S. educational system, especially in an age of high-stakes testing, is based on the notion that there are “right” answers and that these are precisely what students can expect to come out of a proper education with. Further, given that their work will be graded—a topic I will address below—students have a fear of saying something the instructor will deem “wrong.”

To complicate matters further, feminist-anarchist pedagogy, based in two movements that have stood up against authority, opens up space to question the concept of truth (Armaline 2009, 139). But questioning the notion of a capital-T Truth should not mean that anything goes. It does not mean that, for example, we can “believe” that racism is over and not need to provide evidence for this claim. I find that students very often equate a discussion-based classroom where the instructor listens to them and does not pretend to hold the whole truth with thinking that all statements are equally valid. We need to teach students to question where their positions come from. Can they back them up? Are their arguments persuasive and logical? In the example mentioned above, the idea that “racism is over”—something that, all too often, students seem to think is merely a matter of personal opinion—it is of course crucial that the instructor respond by describing how structural racism works. As Armaline (2009) points out, anarchist pedagogical praxis sees the instructor as an active member of the learning process (139). We can ask complex questions and bring in persuasive arguments that function to broaden, and challenge, students’ perspectives. The key is that this does not force students to take on a certain point of view, but actively engages them in a learning process where they develop skills to think critically about knowledge production.

As I mentioned briefly in the introduction to this section, students frequently worry about bringing their own values and analyses into the classroom, especially when their positions may not be shared by a majority of class participants. They are worried that they will be judged by the instructor or by other students. The affective dimensions of the learning environment is clearly a critical point for future research on anarchist education. Being able to stand up for an uncomfortable analysis is central to anarchist practice, as it is about challenging the hegemonic worldview of current power

structures. How do we create classrooms where feeling safe and feeling challenged are not in opposition? This fear of judgement brings me to my next and final section: the problem of grading. Worrying about saying the wrong thing is often related to a worry about receiving a bad grade; pleasing the instructor is seen as pivotal to success.

Grading

Grading is one of the key places where feminist and anarchist pedagogical practices diverge. Many feminists have critiqued the current model of grading and presented alternative grading structures (see, for example, Felman 2001, 172-173; Fisher 2001, 107). Some feminist approaches to grading include allowing students to rewrite assignments, so as to encourage an approach to learning as a process rather than a static end goal, and changing criteria to acknowledge subjective perspectives. Anarchists, however, tend to reject grading altogether.

Grading is at its foundation about creating hierarchies and valuing people based on their productivity or potential for productivity and thus is not compatible with anarchist models of learning. However, while anarchist education should ideally not involve grades, in most university settings grading is mandatory. Thus, as instructors, we have to find ways to relate to the grading system, whether we approve of it or not. In the spring of 2014, following the example of Luis Fernandez who teaches in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University, I told my students that they would all receive A’s in the course. It had been several years since I heard Fernandez speak about anarchist teaching and his practice of announcing to his students on the first day of class that everyone will get an A, which is coupled with an invitation to students to come to class if they wanted to learn and participate. Not quite as brave as Fernandez and worried that students would stop showing up altogether, I did not reveal my grading policy until the middle of the semester.

To my surprise, the knowledge that they would get an A did not mean that students stopped doing the work; in fact, there was no change in attendance or submission of written assignments. What did change was the content of students’ participation: they were more open in what they said and wrote, more willing to

try new tacks, knowing that they would not be judged, at least not through grades. In a later, upper-level course, I decided to tell students on the first day of class that they would all receive A's, as long as they attended class and handed in assignments. Again, this had no notable negative result on the quality of their work. This raises the question of whether grades are really as much of a motivating factor as they are often made out to be. This is certainly a topic deserving of more research, including into the consequences of not grading for instructors. While Fernandez and many others, including members of the Delaware-based Open Syllabus Education project, have not faced repercussions for giving all students A's, Denis Rancourt, a tenured professor of Physics at the University of Ottawa, was fired in 2008 after assigning everyone an A+, which shows that the practice is not safe for everyone, even those with the protection of tenure.

What if assigning a collective A is not a possibility? One option suggested by educators with a liberatory perspective is to let students assign their own grades. This addresses the issue of grades being imposed from the outside, sometimes in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. I am not convinced this is a better alternative; in fact, it might even create a worse situation, as it internalizes the grading process. In grading themselves, students have to decide where they fit within a hierarchy and how much their work is worth. Feminists continuously point out the detrimental effects of girls and women internalizing societal standards and constant self-judgment. Asking our students to grade themselves, and thereby adding another self-evaluating burden on our students, does not strike me as particularly feminist.

An option that holds more potential is contract grading. In this system, which has been used by professors of varying pedagogical persuasions, each student writes up a contract together with the instructor, outlining what work will be completed for the course and how it will be graded (Harter 2012). Yet even with contract grading, we are telling students that what they get in exchange for their labour is a grade. This still keeps learning within a system of trade—you produce, I give you a grade—rather than learning for the sake of learning or in order to gain skills that can be applied outside the classroom.

Based on a comment from a student's end-of-semester self-evaluation, I conclude this discussion

of grading with a set of questions for further work. In response to this closing assignment, which asks students to reflect on the semester and their work as individuals and as members of the class collective, the student wrote: "I think the format took away the hierarchy of teacher/student and made it more like colleagues talking about issues in the queer community. It was just a very easy conversation without the feeling like you were judging/grading us on what we said." What does "easy" mean in this context? Does it mean "not difficult or challenging" or does it mean "free of stress"? This same student, in a conversation about grading criteria for the course, said that he appreciated that I had a "lax" attitude toward grading, as it allowed him to focus on learning, not on getting a good grade. We have been taught to see descriptors, such as "lax," as negative, showing that our teaching is not rigorous or challenging enough. I want to pose a challenge in return: what if we saw creating a learning environment that is, in some senses, easy and lax—that is, an environment that is not stressful—as something to strive for? Is it possible that our students' learning process would improve if they were not constantly stressed and worried? Would they learn more if they actually found participating in class enjoyable? Incorporating an anarchist lens when considering feminist pedagogical practices opens up space for not simply creating a feminist work environment in our courses, but for questioning the productivity imperative that underlies so much of education. It opens up space for thinking about whether pleasure and community might not be more important than how much work we manage to get done over the course of the semester.

Conclusion

In any college course, the designated instructor is always in a position of power. While university education is not mandatory, students do not always have a realistic option of not taking a course. Can we ever force anarchist learning on someone or does this undermine the goals of a liberatory education? Within the current structure of academia, any anarchist pedagogical processes will by default be flawed, stuck in a system that is inherently opposed to equality and liberation. Yet there is value to these pedagogical practices that create spaces for liberatory learning. Since its inception, Women's Studies has foregrounded the importance of collective and individual education in liberation from

oppressive structures. Consciousness-raising groups and early Women's Studies courses encouraged a learning process that decentered authority and instead centered participants' own learning processes and experiences. As Women's (and now Gender) Studies has become increasingly institutionalized, I argue that anarchist pedagogies can help feminist classrooms continue to question authority and thus strengthen students' critical thinking and practice.

For anarchist educational practices to be successful, educators as well as students have to give up the idea that we have to be right or do things right. In fact, we have to deeply question the very concept of "success." In this article, I have pointed to some of the issues that I have struggled with in implementing anarchist pedagogy. Perhaps some of these moments would be considered failures, but they are generative failures, moments that open space for students to discover that learning is messy and complicated. Anarchist political and pedagogical praxis consistently emphasizes that we should not strive for perfection, but rather pay attention to moments, however fleeting, in which we can challenge the current structure and build alternatives. Thus, while I have argued throughout this article that feminist-anarchist pedagogy would function better if applied on a larger scale than just a single course, we can also use whatever moments we find to implement liberatory pedagogical practices.

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in scholarship on anarchism, including a growing body of work from feminist and queer perspectives (Daring et al. 2012; Dark Star Collective 2012; Amster et al. 2009). As anarchism gains more traction in academic research, I am hopeful for richer conversations among feminists around how to implement anarchist pedagogies in Gender and Women's Studies, including in the introductory course. As I've suggested, anarchist approaches to pedagogy can lend themselves to the creation of classroom environments that are temporary free zones for experimental learning, even if they are not perfect. And anarchist educators work to embrace imperfection not as failure, but as part of a generative practice.

Endnotes

¹ While anarchism and feminism meet in the ideology and practice of anarchy-feminism, I do not use that term in this article. Anarchy-feminism can be described as the notion that anarchism and feminism are mutually dependent on each other to reach their goal: liberation for people oppressed because of gender cannot be achieved within current state structures and society as a whole will not be liberated as long as gender oppression persists. It is a political movement as well as a philosophy. To acknowledge that the practices discussed in this article do not grow directly out of this movement, I use the term anarchist-feminism rather than anarchy-feminism.

² Jamie Heckert combines anarchist theory and praxis with queer feminism and Buddhist thinking to theorize how educational spaces can be centered on freedom and compassion rather than mandates and punishment.

³ Escuela Moderna ("the Modern School") was a progressive/radical school in Barcelona in operation between 1901 and 1906. It became the model for the anarchist Modern School movement in the United States.

⁴ Two of the most prominent examples of this model is the Albany Free School in Albany, NY, and Summerhill School in Suffolk, UK.

⁵ Rather than everyone speaking in the order they raised their hand, "progressive stack" means paying attention to who has already spoken and giving preference to those who have not yet spoken as well as to participants from underrepresented groups.

⁶ Indeed, I wonder if it really is a problem if our students have moments (or whole semesters) of "being lazy." Why is it so important that they are always "working hard"? What if we encouraged laziness in the classroom, and elsewhere, as an antidote to the culture of incessant productivity? Is it possible to learn and be lazy at the same time? While this is a bigger issue than I can discuss here, it is one that is deserving of further attention.

References

Amster, Randall, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II, and Deric Shannon, eds. 2009. *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Armaline, William T. 2009. "Thoughts on Anarchist Pedagogy and Epistemology." In *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, edited by Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II, and Deric Shannon, 136-146. New York, NY: Routledge.

Arum, Richard, and Josipa Roksa. 2011. "Limited learn-

ing on college campuses.” *Society* 48: 203-207.

Avrich, Paul. 2006. *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

Boxer, Marilyn J. 2002. “Women’s Studies as Women’s History.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 30 (3/4): 42-51.

Canally, Culum. 2012. “Where’s Our Agency?: The Role of Grading in the Neoliberalization of Public Universities.” *Antipode Foundation* website. Accessed July 10, 2015. <http://antipodefoundation.org/2012/03/30/intervention-wheres-our-agency-the-role-of-grading-in-the-neoliberalization-of-public-universities/>.

Crabtree, Robbin D., David Alan Sapp, and Adela C. Licona. 2009. *Feminist Pedagogy: Looking Back to Move Forward*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Daring, C.B., J. Rouge, Deric Shannon, and Abbey Volcano, eds. 2012. *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Desire and Power*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

Dark Star Collective. 2012. *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

DeLeon, Abraham P., ed. 2012a. “Anarchism...is a living force within our life...”: Anarchism, Education, and Alternative Possibilities.” Special Issue. *Educational Studies* 48 (1).

_____. 2012b. “Guest Editor’s Introduction: ‘Anarchism... is a living force within our life...’: Anarchism, Education, and Alternative Possibilities.” *Educational Studies* 48 (1): 5-11.

Felman, Jyl Lynn. 2001. *Never a Dull Moment: Teaching and the Art of Performance*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Fisher, Berenice Malka. 2001. *No Angel in the Classroom: Teaching Through Feminist Discourse*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Freire, Paulo. 2008. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary Edition. New York, NY: Continuum.

Haworth, Robert H. 2012. *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Harter, Odile. 2012. “Making Your Own Grade II: Contract Grading in the 21st Century.” *The Bok Blog*, Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University. Accessed June 29, 2014. <http://blog.bokcenter.harvard.edu/2012/06/18/making-your-own-grade-ii-contract-grading-in-the-21st-century/>.

Jordan, Stuart. 2012. *The Enlightenment Vision: Science, Reason, and the Promise of a Better Future*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Lawson, Erica. 2011. “Feminist Pedagogies: The Textuality of the Racialized Body in the Feminist Classroom.” *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, & Social Justice* 35 (2): 107-117.

Rouhani, Farhang. 2012. “Practice What You Teach: Facilitating Anarchism In and Out of the Classroom.” *Antipode* 44 (5): 1726-1741.

Shukaitis, Stephen. 2009. “Infrapolitics and the Nomadic Educational Machine.” In *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, edited by Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II, and Deric Shannon, 166-174. New York, NY: Routledge.

Suissa, Judith. 2012. *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.