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Sheila Reiter
Doane College

Barbara DiBernard
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, bdibernard2@unl.edu

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Two Women on the Verge of a Contextual Breakthrough:

Using *A Feminist Dictionary* in the Literature Classroom

Barbara DiBernard
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Sheila Reiter
Doane College

Barbara: The following dialogue relates our experiences using *A Feminist Dictionary (AFD)* in literature classes.¹ My perspective is that of a feminist teacher who has found *AFD* to be a useful tool in bringing feminist theory and practice into alignment in the classroom. Like Bauer and Jarratt in “Feminist Sophistics” and Berry and Patraha in “Local Struggles/Partial Explanations” (chapters 6 and 7, this volume), I view the classroom as a political space. As Florence Howe (1983) writes:

Teaching is a political act in the broadest context of that word: some person is choosing, for whatever reasons, to teach a set of values, ideas, assumptions, and pieces of information, and in so doing to omit other values, ideas, assumptions, and pieces of information. If all those choices form a pattern excluding half the human race, that is a political act one can hardly help noticing. To omit women entirely makes one kind of political statement; to include women as a target for humor makes another. To include women with seriousness and vision and with some attention to the perspective of women as a hitherto subordinate group is simply another kind of political act. Education is the kind of political act that controls destinies, gives some persons hope for a particular kind of future, and deprives others even of ordinary expectations for work and achievement. And the study of half the human race—the political act we call women’s studies—cannot be excluded without obvious consequences to the search for truth. (110)

Like the other authors in the present volume, I believe it is crucial to connect the personal and the public and to connect theory and practice. One of my pri-

mary goals as a teacher is to get students to see themselves as agents who are capable of resistance and of personal and social change. In order to facilitate that, we examine hierarchy and power as they operate in the classroom and in the institution (see Bauer and Jarratt, chapter 7, this volume), a process in which *AFD* plays an important part. In addition, I believe that my students and I must practice the “politics of location,” as described by Adrienne Rich (1986). Rich contrasts her earlier self, who spoke and wrote of the “common oppression of women” (210), who wrote sentences beginning “women have always,” with her located self: “If we have learned anything in these years of late twentieth-century feminism, it’s that ‘always’ blots out what we really need to know: When, where, and under what conditions has the statement been true?” (214) She links location with agency: “... I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create” (212).

For Rich, this location must begin “with the geography closest in— the body” (212). She is insistent about starting with the material conditions of our lives and returning to them: “Theory—the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees—theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn’t smell of the earth, it isn’t good for the earth” (213-14).

From Rich, I have learned that helping my students to understand their own locations as well as the “politics of location” should be one of my primary goals as a feminist teacher, one integrally connected with my desire to help them to see themselves as agents. Bauer and Jarratt have, I believe, a similar goal, which they call “the articulation of the self in history” (chapter 7, this volume). *AFD* is one of the most effective resources I have found for moving me and my students toward this goal.

Sheila: I first encountered *A Feminist Dictionary* when it was used as a text in a women’s literature class taught by Professor Barbara DiBernard at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In that class I witnessed the personal revelations of many students who discovered meanings in *AFD* which reflected their own experience; I knew, therefore, that I wanted to incorporate this useful linguistic tool into my own writing and teaching. The process of exploring pedagogical theories that inform its use neatly insinuated itself into an original research project.

The results of that project, and Barbara’s own pedagogical perspective, suggested the following exchange about the use of *AFD*. By the effort’s end,

we found that the distinction between teacher and student had become quite blurred—*AFD* had facilitated both the eradication of classroom hierarchy and the shared experience of teaching and learning.

The same social conditions that necessitate college programs called “Women’s Studies,” bizarrely categorized as nontraditional, inspired its editors, Cheris Kramaræ and Paula Treichler, to compile *A Feminist Dictionary*, originally published in 1985. One could draw the conclusion that the idea of “women” is somehow, suddenly, new. What is new, indeed, is taking seriously women’s experiences and understandings as a form of knowledge. This has become a central tenet of feminism, but its implications have not been obvious or easily acted upon. Bettina Aptheker (1989) writes about how women “needed to learn ... how to cull a way of knowing from the interpretation of experience” (19). *AFD*, in my experience, helps students to do this.

This is probably not the proper venue for discussing whether *AFD* is, indeed, a dictionary. If its undisguised subjectivity is the stumbling block, the designation stands; a closer look at the standard lexicons in the canon will expose them as considerably less than objective. As the editors of *AFD* observe, “There is no doubt that the ‘male’ dictionaries, constructed almost entirely by men, with male readers and users in mind, offer useful information about words and about the world. Yet their exclusion of women, together with their pervasive claims to authority, is profoundly disturbing” (*AFD*, 7).² If format is the concern, consider this: a dictionary defines words—*AFD* does that, too—but we must always ask the question, whose definitions? *AFD* offers us some heretofore unrepresented perspectives. (Many more remain unheard.) I would suggest that if a discussion about *AFD*’s authenticity as a dictionary occupies a class session for a very long time, it may be symptomatic of a reluctance to deal with the real issues that *AFD* raises, issues of the nature of knowledge and reality.

In their introduction, “Words on a Feminist Dictionary,” the editors explain their intention not to “authorize, but to challenge and envision” (*AFD*, 12), that they wish to “elucidate and complicate the terms of feminist discourse” (*AFD*, 4). They dearly see *AFD* as a tool for teaching, expecting that one’s reading of a citation in *AFD* will “also encourage a reading of the original source in its entirety” (*AFD*, 4). (The bibliography is seventy-one pages.)

But the editors assure us that this book is only a beginning. Listening for and hearing women’s words is, itself, an unconventional task, one that has had no model of scholarship in the traditional sense. Women’s words are found in unconventional places, as the editors alert us:

We must look beneath the surface of orthodoxy.... We need to look in such places as gynecological handbooks passed between women for centuries; in women’s art; in folklore and oral histories; in graffiti and gossip; in journals; in letters and diaries; in songs, billboards and posters; in the cant and chant of witchcraft and voodoo; in slogans; in parodies and humor; in poetry; in graphics; in comics and symbols; and in the mass of work by “uncanonized” writers whose richness and diversity we are only just beginning to comprehend. (*AFD*, 17)

Here, then, is a compendium of women’s words which is well suited for use in the feminist classroom, and here, also, is one way of working with them.

My model is a course in “Twentieth-Century Women Novelists” taught by Barbara DiBernard at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a course offered to both upper-division undergraduates and graduate students. A class called “Twentieth-Century Women Novelists” may safely assume students’ interest in literature and, perhaps, even in feminism, although the class members’ degrees of interest in and knowledge of feminism varied widely. There were thirty-two students enrolled in this particular section. We met for two and a half hours one evening per week, for a fifteen-week semester.

The literature we read dealt with women’s most essential experiences, arranged, engagingly, by a life’s chronology. In many cases the theme of the work concerned the woman-as-artist. The authors we studied represented women of many colors and cultures (see appendix A, the condensed syllabus). Also, it is important to note the ingredients of this course that may have contributed, in part, to the successful use of *AFD* as a correlative text: an instructor committed to feminism; a course designed around women’s literature, representing a wide diversity of women’s experiences; and a student-centered classroom.

Several students from this class who were interviewed agreed that the perspectives represented in *AFD* could enhance classes in traditional literature or history.

Barbara: I remember the first time I learned about *A Feminist Dictionary*. A student brought an enlargement of page 433, a promotional poster, to a seminar on “Contemporary Women Writers” that I was teaching. I was astonished by a definition that appeared on the top right-hand side of the reproduction. It read:

STRETCH: The opposite of *SHRINK*. A feminist psychotherapist.

As a feminist, I had been aware, for years, of the patriarchal nature of the English language. I had argued with students and colleagues about the invid-

iousness of the so-called generic “he” and had begun to realize the ways in which English made women invisible or contributed to their oppression. But this was something new. Here was an opening up of the language to female possibilities. The reverberations of a psychotherapist as one who stretches rather than one who shrinks are still with me.

Almost immediately, I knew that I should use *AFD* in class. The book is truly radical in that it “recognize[s] women as linguistically creative speakers—that is, as originators of spoken or written language forms” (*AFD*, 1). It also confronts directly the issue of power hidden by most dictionaries, a fact unrecognized by my students. In *AFD*’s introduction, the editors write that

[a]s feminist lexicographers, we do not claim objectivity nor believe that simply by offering a dictionary of “women’s words” we can reverse the profound structural inequities of history and culture. The dictionary is also therefore a critique of current and past practices; collectively, the entries provide commentary on the institutionalized processes and politics through which some forms of language are privileged over others—how words get into print, why they go out of print, the politics of bibliography and archival storage, the politics of silence, of speech, of what can be said, of who can speak and who listen. (3–4)

I teach in a place where few students identify themselves as feminists and most have read very little women’s literature. Most women undergraduates at the University of Nebraska walk into my courses saying, “I’m not a feminist, but...”—such a familiar phrase by now that it is documented in *AFD*.³ Some female students will say they believe in equal pay and in equal rights, many that they expect to have families *and* careers, but they have little, if any, sense of the history of feminism or what it stands for. Their images of feminists are media-generated stereotypes of man-hating women who want to force us all to use the same bathrooms. Many women undergraduates firmly assert that they have never been discriminated against. Few understand that feminism encompasses Marxist, radical, socialist, lesbian, and other approaches, that it is a political analysis of the entire social structure.

To take advantage of the breadth of information and points of view in *AFD*, I assigned several words to accompany each reading in my “Survey of Women’s Literature” classes—one sophomore level, one senior/graduate level—and a “Twentieth-Century Women Novelists” class—senior/graduate level (see appendices A and B for condensed versions of some syllabi). To be honest, I didn’t know exactly what I would do with these words in class. I did make it clear that the words were part of the required reading, and I

asked students to comment on them in the reading journals they handed in each class period.

Used in this way in class, *AFD* provided both the literal history and the “historical placement of the feminist rhetor and her students” that Bauer and Jarratt call for as part of their “feminist sophistications” (see chapter 7, this volume). For example, I had us look up “author” in the survey class when we read Anne Bradstreet’s “The Prologue” and “The Author to Her Book.” Most of the students, especially in the sophomore-level class, were impatient with and angry at Bradstreet for her seeming disparagement toward her own writing. The *AFD* entry, however, pointed out the long history of the denigration of women writers; suggested the even more difficult situation of women of color; informed us that feminist criticism “has called into question the whole process of authoring and evaluating authors and authored works” (*AFD*, 60); and alerted us to the “politics of visibility” which operate even in *AFD*; “[T]he citations or recurrence of some names more than others should be taken as a sign that *our* research procedures, sources, and resources were limited and not that women authors do not exist everywhere” (61). Thus, we had a historical feminist context in which to struggle with our own responses to Bradstreet.

The *AFD* definition of “wife,” which in the survey of women writers class we read in conjunction with “To Room Nineteen” and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” took us through the word’s etymological and social changes from “female human being” to “female attached to a male,” as well as to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s succinct “a harem of one.” Thus, students whose first reactions to these stories might have been to see the women as outside history, as individually responsible for their own conditions and futures, already had a historicized, politicized context before they came to class.

A journal entry by Tami, one of the students in the course, substantiates the way in which *AFD* enriches the literary texts:

I did something out of routine. I first looked up the assigned words in *A Feminist Dictionary* and then read the novel. I’m sure I would have been impressed with Tillie Olsen’s book *Yonnondio* even if I had done the opposite. But having read the various quotes and definitions first, I had instances where I was able to see the words in a new, elaborated upon, or different light. For me, this illuminated the text substantially.

Yonnondio was about many different things but in particular the family unit (within society). The most powerful story, though, was that of Anna Holbrook and her daughter Mazie.

The Saunders quote [in *AFD*] about motherhood was especially appropriate to Olsen’s work: “It is very hard to disentangle the positive quali-

ties [of motherhood] from the web of associations spun by social and economic facts which elevate and restrict our strength into a static role.”

Using this and other quotes from *AFD*, Tami went on to analyze the social and economic circumstances in which the Holbrooks live and Anna mothers her family, and to come to an understanding of the novel which was rich and complex. The definitions took Tami and the rest of us to the commonly understood meanings of “to mother” and “to father,” to questions of choice, economics, domestic violence, legality, and responsibility. In this way *AFD* served as a resource for an analysis of the politics of location in the literature and led to explorations of our own locations in class discussion and in journal writing.

One’s instinctive response to *AFD* is to look up words that are of personal interest. To encourage and incorporate that personal element into the class, I devised the “Word of the Day” assignment.

In this assignment, each person takes a turn reporting on a word which is not assigned for class. My instructions, in part, read:

Choose any word you want, but preferably one which is related to an interest of yours, or whose definition amused, excited, challenged, or angered you. You will probably want to compare it to one or more “standard” dictionary definitions, if they are available. Tell the class why you picked the word, what you learned from your investigation, and what you want them to take away from your report.

These reports are consistently meaningful, both to the presenter and the rest of the class. Often, the resulting discussion is extremely rich and thoughtful, incorporating students’ personal experience with the definitions and, frequently, the realization of just how sexist “standard” dictionaries really are. It is in this assignment that the students’ “articulation of the self in history” occurs most clearly.

Women students often enter my classes having never identified themselves politically as women. Most deny having experienced any discrimination because they are women; most believe that things are better now, that women have equality under the law; and they want to believe that they have been and will continue to be treated fairly. *AFD* has helped generate the “click” experience for some of these students, and it has provided all of them with an opportunity to “take account of their gendered/raced/classed bodies” (see Bauer and Jarratt, chapter 7, this volume).

A Jewish student used her report to give the female members of her family, as well as herself, a new feminist historical sense of themselves as Jewish women:

Many Friday nights I go to Omaha for dinner. Four generations of women sit around the table. My grandmother, mother, sister (14 years older than me), and myself. When I got *A Feminist Dictionary* I took it home and was thumbing through it at the table. I came across the definition of JAP, or Jewish American Princess, and read it aloud: “Judith who saved the Jewish people; she flirted with the attacking general, drank him under the table; then she and her maid (whose name is not in the story) whacked off his head, stuck it in a picnic basket and escaped back to the Jewish camp. They staked his head high over the gate, so that when his soldiers charged the camp, they were met by their general’s bloody head, looming; and ran away as fast as their goyishe little feet could run. Then Judith set her maid free, and all the women danced in her honor. That’s a Jewish princess.”

Thunderous applause arose from our dinner group. My mother pounded the table and Shabbos wine jumped from the glasses. My sister asked for a copy of the book. For once, a heroic, independent depiction of a Jewish woman.

AFD definitions also shocked white women into a political awareness, for the first time, of what their race means: the definition of “white” states that it is “a political as well as an ethnic category,” and Marilyn Frye’s quote asserts that “membership in it is not... ‘fated’ or ‘natural.’ It can be resisted” (*AFD*, 482). For some students, this represents their first awareness that talking about race includes their talking about being white and what it means in their lives. It also, importantly, suggests that white privilege comes about partly through our own assent, but that we can resist it in some ways.

One student who looked up “liberal”—“because being brought up in a devout liberal Democratic family, I have always gotten a warm, familiar, friendly feeling from the word”—was shocked and angered by Kathie Sarchild’s quote in *AFD*;

The liberal fears and opposes clarity and effectiveness because she fears angering the powerful; she does not want to fight. In order to preserve peace, the liberal resists any idea that requires real change in the status quo, in action or theory. (*AFD*, 231)

This student had never realized that a radical critique of liberalism existed. *AFD* did not change her point of view about what constitutes a liberal, but it shocked her into a recognition of a political continuum on which liberalism was not the farthest left, unquestioned position. She had to take responsibility for her “location” in a way that she never had before.

A female student who tries to avoid conflict in her personal life gained insights into the source of her feelings while doing her “Word of the Day” re-

port. In Webster's ninth edition (1986) she found "conflict" thus defined: "1. A fight, battle or war; 2. An antagonistic state or action—mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wants or external or internal demands." As she pointed out in her report, this definition derives "from a male-oriented military and pugilistic perspective," and it made her want to avoid conflict "because only negative results will be achieved; i.e., deaths in warfare, shattered families and homes, etc." In *AFD* she read that conflict is

[a] needed struggle for growth, inherent in all of life. Conflict is also one of the emotions women—in their work as mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, and general helpmates—are made to feel guilty about experiencing. So we try to disguise it as depression, inadequacy, helplessness and other feelings, and if it seems to threaten the public presentation of sisterhood, we often deny its existence.

This definition helped the student to locate herself as a woman, to understand why, *as a woman*, she avoided conflict and how this fear held her and other women back from standing up for their rights. She concluded:

As Jean Baker Miller brought to our attention in *AFD*, the maintaining of the status quo is what is holding us back from making real gains for equality, and our inability to initiate conflict is what is keeping us from breaking down the male-dominated status quo.

Another student used her report to explore her fears, worries, and complex feelings about going to medical school. The *AFD* definitions helped her recall an incident that happened many years ago. When she was young girl, a friend's mother had responded to her comment about wanting to be a doctor when she grew up, with the statement that only a very cold-hearted person would want to do such a thing. She had been very angry and upset, but had never been able to understand what her emotions were connected to or why she was so upset. However, after reading *The American Heritage Dictionary's* definition of "medicine"—which she found lacking in any human element of compassion or caring—and comparing it with the *AFD's* definition—which included Michelle Harrison's statement that, for her, "doctoring was a form of mothering; the nurturing and healing came from the same energies, from the same center of my self that wanted to mother" (*AFD*, 265)—she acquired a feminist context for her reaction. She concluded her report: "The *AFD's* definition of 'medicine' supported my belief that I can be a doctor and still acknowledge my womanhood. It also stressed the importance of treating one's patients with respect, regardless of their gender." These students' revelations might not seem earth-shaking to longtime feminists, but

many of these women were "locating" themselves for the first time, which I believe is their first step in becoming agents in their own learning and in their own lives.

This assignment sparked revelations throughout the students' investigations of the "standard" dictionaries as well as their use of *AFD*. As *AFD* editor Cheris Kramarae (1987) points out, such questioning of the dictionary is a radical act:

I've checked with hundreds of students; not one has said that dictionary making was even discussed in their classrooms. The dictionary just is. No discussion needed. Final word. Grave effects. The discussions [these] students have had are quite revolutionary [because] they are questioning one of the basic, usually unquestioned, texts of our educational system.

Sheila: In almost every case, students chose words that were deeply personal, often self-revealing, for their "Word of the Day" reports. Some students even went beyond "reports" and constructed events: films, videos, other visuals, even food. A man showed women-made films, explained Hollywood's insidious portrayal of women, and talked about the economic realities of women making films. Another student staged a miniworkshop on liberation theory.

It was in the context of the "Word of the Day" that students shared an amazing array of issues. One woman shared the story of struggling to get her disabled sister into and out of a toilet stall labeled "handicapped accessible." A Chinese woman explained the powerful implications that the word "silence" held for her, a word that embodies the virtues of humility and wisdom in her tradition, but that means invisibility for her on a U.S. college campus. One woman passed out chocolate bars and salted peanuts and talked candidly about life two weeks out of every month as experienced by a PMS sufferer. She explored, dubiously, the movement to rename it PME—Pre-Menstrual Energy—wondering if changing the language can really change the reality. A vivacious woman who, until recently, had vehemently denied male oppression of women investigated Jewish history to discover the roots of Orthodox Judaism's roles for women and Jewish female stereotypes, suddenly seeing how others may have seen her or assumed her to be. It was Passover.

Several times a student was confronted directly by the sexism of the "standard" dictionary. Natalie reported that when she looked up the word "contentious,"

the example my dictionary offered for use in a sentence was from Proverbs 27:15. They went back that far to get this: "Endless dripping on a rainy

day—that’s what a contentious woman is like.” How totally biased and nasty that is.

Barbara: Another exercise I’ve used is one I call “New and Needed Words.” Taking a cue from the editors of *AFD*—who know that there are “Needed Words” and who encourage readers to list quotes and definitions not included *AFD* on the blank pages at the back of the book—I asked students to come up with “New Words” and definitions for them in *AFD* format. With the help of a graduate assistant, I compiled these into a book for the class members, and I also sent a copy to the editors of *AFD* for consideration in future editions. The class response was serious and powerful, showing that these students had incorporated into their own understanding the importance of what *AFD* does and demonstrating, too, that they were language users and makers.

Judith coined “Matrilegacy” as a response to patriarchal oppression of women within marriage. Her entry reads:

A word coined to fill the vacuum left by the term “matrimony.” According to Webster (*New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1976), matrimony is “the union of man and woman as husband and wife: marriage.” Not objectionable, until compared with patrimony: “an estate inherited from one’s heritage” (Webster 1976). Sex-linked words (patri = father and matri = mother) reflect history’s social arrangements. In the English legal system, men could receive property through inheritance, women through marriage. What does language say about the power in that arrangement? Woman’s word is not identified with her; man’s is. Woman’s (implicit) power depends on union with a man and must be remade in each generation; man’s (explicit) power is independent of woman and can be passed on to future generations. Woman shares the power of marriage and owns no other; man shares the power of marriage *and* owns the power of wealth and history. We need a new word for providing and receiving value in a society that recognizes women’s powers. Consider *Matrilegacy*: The heritage provided by women, as in knowledge, values, material goods, influence on events, love, creative work, examples of lives well lived.

Bill defined “Ca(n)on” as “[a] symbol of the sacred domain of literacy excellence which displays phallacies in evaluation; the good old boy’s club which often becomes a form of circle-jerk”; while Chris noted the need for “Prima Don: An egoist; self-centered, temperamental male.”

Although I have found *AFD* extremely useful in my women’s literature courses, I have also found tremendous resistance to it, which at times spills over into an anger and resistance to the entire course, or perhaps, more accurately, focuses the anger and resistance to the course. Students have been ex-

tremely upset over its radical nature, and, unwilling to question the “objectivity” and “truth” of a standard dictionary, they attack *AFD* as being biased. They often hate what they perceive to be its negativity, especially toward men. I remember vividly the angry response to “marriage” the first time I used *AFD* in a sophomore-level class. Although I found several positive definitions of marriage in the long entry, students wrote on and on in their journals about how skewed and negative the definition was, that while marriage might be bad for some people, their parents’ marriage was good, and their own current heterosexual relationships and future marriages were and would be very equal and positive. Susanne Bohmer (1989) has analyzed this phenomenon of students’ resistance to feminist analyses that students take as unfair generalizations. She states that such resistance is “clearly a way of denying differences and inequalities in our society based on group membership” (55). But this is also the kind of attitude that continued exposure to *AFD* should break down. If the student can locate herself in even one definition, I believe, an irreversible process will have begun.

One student who was the most virulent about *AFD* signed up for another class with me two years after the first, a class in which we were also using *AFD*. She constantly wondered—both in her journal and aloud to me before and after class—how *AFD* could have changed so much, not understanding, of course, that *she* had changed in the interim, not the book. Generously, she shared her responses with me as she went back and read her old journals and compared them with her current responses. Whether *AFD* played a major part in this change, we’ll never know, but she had not forgotten it in the interim. Other students reported anxiety about merely carrying *AFD* around with them, while some got into interesting conversations by deliberately leaving it out on their desks at work or on the coffee table at home.

In all of these examples, *AFD* serves as a “counterauthority” in the classroom, to use Bauer and Jarratt’s meaning of the term (see chapter 7, this volume). It serves as both an external counterauthority and an internal one. It overtly questions the power relations in the classroom through its definitions (see, for example, “teaching”; “classroom interaction”; “conversation”; “radicalteacher”; “call and response”), and it helps students develop their own counterauthority within their own discourses. The “Word of the Day” reports called consistently for students’ stories of their own experiences, stories which they were now able to tell and understand in a social and historical framework. It is no accident, either, that so many students incorporated other voices into their reports. A Jewish woman videotaped a conversation with her grandmother

about Yiddish, the mother tongue of her people; the director of a film theater showed one of Barbara Hammer's short films, an exploration of lesbian eroticism; Sheila brought in a local artist to talk about being a woman artist; a student brought in quilts made by her grandmother and her mother; another woman told the story of a friend of hers who had been raped and her anger that we trivialize her experience so easily by the way we use the word "rape" in other contexts. I believe that *AFD*'s use as a counterauthority in the literature classroom moves students toward personal responsibility and action, an awareness of themselves as agents in their own education and in their lives.

Sheila: If I use *AFD* as a teaching tool in future classrooms, I will need to consider, in terms of research and theory in feminist pedagogy, how *AFD*'s quotations work on students' cognitive processes and progress. I do almost no justice, in this discussion, to any of the excellent scholars whose ideas I have appropriated, here. My intention, not unlike *AFD*'s, has been to suggest useful ideas that might inspire a reader to seek out and read these works in their entirety.

My primary sources are a paper by Barrie Thorne (1984), "Rethinking the Way We Teach," and a case study on feminist teaching, undertaken and documented by Frances Maher and Kathleen Dunn (1984), from Wellesley College's Center for Research on Women. To facilitate their study, researchers Maher and Dunn used the model of cognitive functioning devised by Blythe Clinchy and Claire Zimmerman, along with Mary Kay Tetreault's phase theory of curricular integration to analyze their course content.

Maher and Dunn articulated their understanding of the purpose of education in words that provide an excellent starting point for feminist teachers who are considering the use of a text such as *AFD* in their classrooms. Maher and Dunn "assume that the purpose of education is to equip people with the knowledge, both of themselves and of their world, which permits them to make purposeful and active choices" (1). Barrie Thorne addresses the feminist perspective in stating her objective for the student: "To discover that one's experience is not the measure of all things, to come to see white, middle-class, male, and heterosexual assumptions as limited and not the universal, and to explore the experiences of other groups are precious forms of learning" (6). I would add "American" (read "U.S.") to Thorne's series of modifiers and encourage readers to consult Hurlbert and Bodnar's thought-provoking exchange on teaching in time of war, "Collective Pain: Literature, War, and Small Change" (see chapter 11, this volume).

Clinchy and Zimmerman suggest that women college students often enter the learning process in a dualist mode, the belief that a "right answer" to all questions exists somewhere outside themselves and that learning comes from a teacher or a text. Students in this mode often prefer the lecture format "because they are looking for the 'correct' body of information, to learn from the expert" (Maher and Dunn 1984, 6-7). This cognitive mode corresponds to phases one and two of curricular integration, which are the absence of women in the content of courses, and women included, but only as tokens.

In phase three curricula, "women are perceived for the first time *as a group*.... Women's experiences are seen as different from those of males and equally valid" (Maher and Dunn 1984,8). Students who are in the next cognitive stage, multiplism, thrive in phase three curricula. These students begin to hear and use their own personal voices, describing experiences in their own terms, according to their own theories (9). The inherent danger in multiplist thinking is that truths cannot be generalized; everyone has her own, equally valid, point of view.

In phases four and five of curriculum integration, scholarship and curricula become multifocal, allowing the student's experience to be understood in a larger context that embraces class, race, culture, and gender differences (Maher and Dunn 1984,12). The phase of learning associated with them is contextualism; the student's worldview expands dramatically to embrace ambiguity, and she can begin to see herself as "a knower and a meaning maker—knowledge as an evolving construct" (13-14). The important distinction between multiplism and contextualism is this:

The multiplist, although full of a sense of self, has trouble separating out or defining specific attributes or qualities of that self, because self-definition (as opposed to self-discovery) depends upon comparison with other people and other personal histories. The contextualist, on the other hand, can see herself as possessed of certain experiences and qualities which she realizes contribute to her particular perspective. She can, then, allow her perspective to broaden and change. (15)

The feminist teacher can create a setting to encourage contextualism, a setting in which students, both men and women, bring their own experience to the concepts presented in course material, where they can begin to comprehend more complicated issues and themselves within them, a context that "legitimizes individual voices and puts them in a larger explanatory context" (16). In such a classroom, *A Feminist Dictionary* becomes a tool of contextualism. It fits well the requirements for phases four and five of curricular integration,

the phases that correspond to the development of contextualism in students: “Both employ, according to Tetreault, the same methodology for the construction and validation of knowledge, namely the building of conceptual frameworks and generalizations from the specificity and variety of human experiences, in which the perspectives of all participants, not just the elite few, are encompassed” (Maher and Dunn 1984, 13).

A danger of any theory of cognitive stages lies in wanting to make rigid the edges of those stages, slotting students’ progress into categories. Such structures might become more dynamic and truly useful when they are used to encourage critical observations that could generate “the enactment of [feminist] theory in the classroom” (emphasis mine) such as Berry and Patraha seek in their essay “Local Struggles/Partial Explanations: Producing Feminist Theory in the Classroom” (see chapter 6, this volume).

Barbara: Clearly *A Feminist Dictionary* is an extremely useful tool in the literature classroom; undoubtedly, teachers of other subjects have found equally valuable ways of using it. I believe, with Sheila, that it can facilitate students’ shifts in epistemological positions, including their movement toward becoming “constructed knowers” as described by Belenkey and her colleagues (1986) in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*. Constructed knowers “accept the responsibility for evaluating and continually reevaluating their assumptions about knowledge” (139); they also “strive to translate their moral commitments into action” (150). Such knowing thus meets my feminist teaching goals of connecting the personal and the public and seeing ourselves as agents for personal and social change. But like Sheila, I fear the possible danger of using theories to erase differences. What we need to enact as feminists, I believe, is Adrienne Rich’s (1986) “politics of location”: “Begin with the material. Pick up again the long struggle against lofty and privileged abstraction. Perhaps this is the core of revolutionary process...” (213). For me, *AFD* can be a primary tool in this process. To return, men, to where I started: it serves as a “stretch” for all of us.

Notes

1. Kramarae, Cheri, and Paula Treichler, eds. 1985. *A Feminist Dictionary*. Boston: Pandora Press. Although unavailable for a couple of years, *A Feminist Dictionary* was republished in 1992 by Pandora Press in a second edition entitled, *Amazons, Blue-stockings, and Crones*.

2. In this discussion, page references for quoted material from *A Feminist Dictionary* will be preceded by the journal abbreviation.

3. Catharine Stimpson notes that the suspicion underlying it “is rooted in the true perception that the Women’s Movement is radical and in the false perception that it is monolithic” (*AFD*, 207).

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**Appendix A: Readings for Twentieth-Century Women Novelists
(including words assigned from AFD)**

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*. (From AFD: *money; wife; clothing; technology; technosexism; nature of woman; dress*; and two other relevant words of the student's choice.)
- Tillie Olsen, *Yonondio*. (From AFD: *mother; motherhood; mothering; washing; Mother's Day; father; fathering*.)
- Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*. (From AFD: *daughter; daughter-right; friend; friendship*.) Audre Lorde, *Zami*. (From AFD: *lesbian; lesbian continuum; lesbian feminism; lesbianism; race; racism; black; woman-identified woman*.)
- Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*. (From AFD: *guilt; Asian American; silence; International Women's Day*.)
- Doris Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*. (From AFD: *housewife; housework; marriage; appearance; work; working woman*.)
- Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow*. (From AFD: *widow; widowhood*; plus two other relevant words of the student's choice.)
- Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*. (From AFD: *crones; menopause; aging*.) May Sarton, *As We Are Now*. (From AFD: *grey hairs; Crone's Nest; age; ageism; diary; power; ripening*.)
- Anne Cameron, *Daughters of Copper Woman*. (From AFD: *action; medicine woman; Native American literature; menstruation; menstrual strike*.)
- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*; Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. (From AFD: "Words on a Feminist Dictionary; manglish; laadan; needed words; herstory; art; anonymous; man as false generic.")
- Articles on feminist criticism and pedagogy. (From AFD: *radicalteacher; class-room interaction; conversation; feminism; criticism, literary; novel; quilt; quilting; black feminism; black woman; womanist; ableism*.)

**Appendix B: Readings for Survey of Women's Literature
(including words assigned from AFD)**

- Unless otherwise noted, all readings are from the following source: Gilbert, Sandra M, and Susan Gubar, eds. 1985. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English*. New York: Norton.
- Amelia Lanier, from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*; Judith Wright, "Eve to Her Daughters"; Stevie Smith, "How Cruel is the Story of Eve"; Muriel Rukeyser, "Myth"; Julian of Norwich, from *A Book of Showings*; readings from Susan E. Browne, Debra Connors, and Nanci Stern, eds.. *With the Power of Each Breath: A Disabled Women's Anthology* (Cleis, 1985). (From AFD: *Eve; Pandora; Adam; female; woman; laadan*.)
- Anne Bradstreet, "The Prologue," "The Author to Her Book"; Anne Finch, "The Introduction"; Anne Killegrew, "Upon Saying That My Verses Were Made by An-

- other"; Margaret Atwood, "Spelling"; Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women"; Florence Nightingale, from *Cassandra*; Anna Wickham, "Dedication of the Cook"; Erica Jong, "Alcestis on the Poetry Circuit." (From AFD: *l'écriture feminine; writing; author; anonymous; words*.)
- Virginia Woolf, from *A Room of One's Own*; Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken"; Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." (From AFD: *weaving; art; room of one's own; literature; criticism; virginia woolf; quilt; quilting*.)
- Judy Grahn, from *The Common Women*; Maxine Hong Kingston, "No Name Woman"; readings from *With the Power*. (From AFD: *girl; Asian American; name; common woman*.)
- Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen"; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper." (From AFD: *husband; wife; parenthood; should married women work?*)
- Margery Kempe, from *The Book of Margery Kempe*; Anne Bradstreet, "A Letter to Her Husband"; Anne Finch, "A Letter to Daphnis"; Fleur Adcock, "Against Coupling"; Aphra Behn, "The Disappointment"; Adrienne Rich, from "Twenty-One Love Poems"; Amy Lowell, "Venus Transiens," "Madonna of the Evening Flowers," "Opal"; readings from *With the Power*. (From AFD: *marriage; marital rape; violence against women; love*.)
- Zora Neale Hurston, "Sweat"; Susan Glaspell, "Trifles"; Henry Handel Richardson, "Two Hanged Women"; Gertrude Stein, "Ada." (From AFD: *woman-identified woman; lesbian; lesbian continuum; lesbianism; dyke; wife battering*.)
- Mary Wilkins Freeman, "Old Woman Magoun"; Linda Brent, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl"; readings from *With the Power*. (From AFD: *mother; motherhood; mothering*.)
- Anzia Yezierska, "The Fat of the Land"; Alice Walker, "Everyday Use"; Meridel LeSueur, "The Annunciation"; Audre Lorde, "Now That I Am Forever with Child," "From the House of Yemanjá." (From AFD: *child; children*.)
- Charlotte Smith, "Thirty-Eight"; Sarah Orne Jewett, "The Town Poor"; Leslie Marmon Silko, "Lullaby"; readings from *With the Power*. (From AFD: *ageism; aging; death; Native American literature*.)
- Alice James, "Diary"; Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (Spinsters Ink, 1980); readings from *With the Power*. (From AFD: *mastectomy; Amazon; breast; women's health movement*.)
- Mary Astell, from *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*; Margaret Walker, "Lineage"; Maya Angelou, from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Judith Wright, "Request to a Year"; Maxine Kumin, "The Envelope"; Ursula LeGuin, "Sur"; Adrienne Rich, "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev"; Susan Griffin, "I Like to Think of Harriet Tubman"; Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?"; readings from *With the Power*. (From AFD: *grandmother; gray hairs; wicca; friend; girlfriend; strength; bonding; gynergy; patriarchy*.)