

ENACTING CHANGE SURVEY RESPONSE

For information on the Enacting Change Survey Project, facilitated by Joanna Rees, see the NAEA Women's Caucus website at <http://naeawc.net/activism.html>

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Women need to listen to each other's voices in research, community, and practice in art education. I had an epiphany after spending time with aboriginal women in Australia during my last sabbatical. A small community of artists in central Australia clearly let me know that while I was welcome to visit, I was not to steal their ideas for my own purposes. In the past, these women had experienced idea theft by other artists, researchers, and policy makers and wanted to be clear before sharing their space with me. After reading work by Linda Tuhiwai Smith that addresses this issue, I had been unclear how to integrate their knowledge and my own white, western, middle class experiences, so I began to use autoethnography to tell my stories; the aboriginal women became spirit guides for me. Their stories are their own and I have no rights or embodied knowledge of them. Yet, I can tell my story with their influences on my identity, artwork, spirituality, and research. I'm still working on this self-imposed challenge. I've been telling stories ever since I started doing research but I had not understood that my stories have always been an interpretation of an event framed within my relationships with others.

I've been very lucky to have wonderful mentors throughout my career. My Ph.D. advisor at Indiana University, Enid Zimmerman was a wonderful and generous mentor and watching her negotiate academic patriarchy was an eye-opening lesson for me. Stan Madeja hired me at Northern Illinois University in 1994, and has continued to serve as a wonderful mentor. Stan and Jerry Hausman were two very supportive mentors when I started this journey, and (though they may resist the title) were absolute feminists. Jerry encouraged me to co-edit a book with him very early in my career (1994).

When I came to NIU there were about sixty-five faculty members in the School of Art, of which eleven were women. There was only one women faculty member in studio arts and there had not been anyone hired in art education in the last seven years. The art education faculty was very welcoming in spite of the fact that my research was outside their comfort zones -- feminist pedagogy and semiotics. They also respected the fact that I worked very hard. I went up early for tenure and then to full Professor.

Over the past several years, I've often been invited to serve as an outside evaluator for women going up for promotion, which is significant as there are still few women full professors in art education. I'm not quite sure why is this. Perhaps it's because the very presence of women challenge the historic patriarchy of academia. Women tend to research on what some academics may think of as fluffy topics. I have always scribbled outside the lines and am grateful that I never got stopped from doing it. I remember one woman academic who spoke to me after I published an article on the Grateful Dead (1997) and she asked me how I could do that sort of research and work toward tenure, as if it were somehow cheating.

Academic cultural bias creates an atmosphere where women often feel they must do more statistical research. At most universities, men in suits are in administrative control and they can directly or indirectly create a socioecultural bias that directly impacts the professional culture, behavior, and research content of women faculty as they strive for advancement in their career.

Unfortunately there is still biological prejudice in academia. In some cases, (even though it is now illegal) young women may not be hired under the assumption they will become pregnant or spend time focusing on their children, rather than on their academic work. My two daughters spent many hours in college classes when they were small and I had a sleeping area for them in my office. However, as a new professor I would never overtly speak of either the trials or joys of being a mother. It was not an accepted topic of conversation. Maybe the pendulum is changing and academic mothers are now

accommodated more fairly, but the differences between men and women are clear. As Margaret Mead so clearly argued, “women have babies and men don’t.” I think I always envied the many men in the faculty had wives who dealt with their children. I wanted a wife too.

At Northern Illinois University, I have three wonderful female colleagues in art education. One just had a baby and in spite of new institutional practices including (non-paid) maternity leave and the opportunity to stop the tenure clock while on leave, she still struggles with the conflicts of childcare, teaching, and research. Young women need to locate mentors they can trust to have their backs. They need to become aware of their rights while also paying attention to their obligations to their colleagues and their families.

Advice to young women academics: Work hard. Everybody is going to value you when you do more than your fair share. If you don’t volunteer for a job, then someone else will get stuck with it. Another important recommendation is from Enid Zimmerman who told me a long time ago, “write and submit all your presentations!” Find people to help you edit. My biggest challenge in graduate school was that I did not know I could write until my girlfriend, a former English teacher, told me that I didn’t have to get it right the first time, but rather that I just had to get it written down and the edits could come later. The most important advice is to live and work in a positive environment. Work at strengthening support for students and faculty in your local academic setting and building nurturing relationships in the larger art education community.

Bibliography

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