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## Editor's Introduction – Getting the Language, Tools, and Love of bell hooks

Qiana Cutts

Mississippi State University, qmc24@msstate.edu

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## Editor's Introduction – Getting the Language, Tools, and Love of bell hooks

On December 13, 2021, I tweeted about a student's final exam submission for "EDF 3333 Social Foundations of Education," a teacher education course exploring the sociological, historical, philosophical, legal, and political aspects of education in the United States. The student described EDF 3333 as the most unique and motivating of all the courses she had taken at the university and ended the exam with a course reading quote she described as impactful. The quote, "There is a gap between the values they claim to hold and their willingness to do the work of connecting thought and action, theory and practice to realize these values and thus create a more just society" (hooks, 2000, p. 90), was from hooks' *All About Love*, the text from which students read an excerpt at the start of the semester. Not only was I surprised that the student submitted the final exam as it was optional, but I also was overcome with joy by the student's reflection and vulnerability. Most importantly, I was elated that the student's engagement in the course led her to the conclusion that educators must do the work to ensure our action and practice align with the values many of us espouse to hold so dear. She got it.

Two days later on December 15, 2021, saddened at the news of bell hooks' death, I returned to Twitter with a simple message: *bell hooks gave us the language. She gave us the tools. She gave us the love.* A few weeks later, I reached out to *Feminist Pedagogy's* Editors Emily Ryalls and Rachel E. Silverman to inquire about a special issue honoring hooks' work. I received a quick response indicating Kristin Comeforo was developing a call and would be in touch with me. That the editors and editorial board of *Feminist Pedagogy* responded to hooks' death by gathering in thought to consider ways to celebrate her legacy is a testament to the editors' and editorial board's commitment to expanding access to works in feminism through critical commentaries and original teaching activities and a testament to the incomparable influence of hooks. This issue would not be possible without their commitment and tireless work and communication over the last year. Thank you, deeply, Emily, Rachel, and Kristin.

When I reread my December 15<sup>th</sup> tweet in preparation for this special issue, I reflected on my December 13<sup>th</sup> tweet and considered the ways an undergraduate teacher candidate had come to know and be impacted by bell hooks through my teaching and her – hooks' and the student's – commitment to exploring her values and her willingness to do the work. I, too, am committed and willing to exercise my commitment and willingness through my approach to teaching, learning, and living and excitedly approach the contributions to this special issue as opportunities to continue following the example hooks so generously set for all of us.

It is hooks' pedagogy and praxis that contributors to this special issue attribute much of their work as educators. For example, each critical commentary author draws on hooks' (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Furgerson describes her ungrading practices as an imperative for a transformed classroom, supported by hooks' (1994) contention that, "A more flexible grading process must go hand in hand with a transformed classroom" (p. 157). Henderson shares her Black feminist pedagogy was supported by hooks, whose work gave Henderson the "a roadmap and the courage" to stand firm in her identity and scholarship, even when navigating a predominantly white, small liberal arts college in the mid-South in a silo as the only Black woman faculty.

Similarly, Duncan credits *Teaching to Transgress* with fostering her love for teaching with a feminist pedagogy and explains hooks “offered a framework to teach in ways that engage students as collaborators and co-creators of feminist knowledge production, to dismantle multiple interlocking systems of oppression.” Herakova et al. demonstrate how they explored their diverse racial, national, and collegiate identities and experiences to form an “unlikely friendship” and embrace an “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 1994) in their Black Feminist Thought and Expression course.

The original teaching activity authors also center *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), as well as other works by hooks to include *All about Love: New Visions* (2000), *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003), and others. Docka-Filipek explores how hooks’ wisdom and “student-centered, democratic, loving, and critical pedagogy” served as inspiration for her as she and her students challenged ultra conservative depictions of college classrooms as sites of liberal indoctrination. Millhouse walks readers through a Black liberation sense experience while embracing a hooks’ love ethic. Ford outlines how she encouraged her Introduction to Literature students to critically exam “Beasts of the Southern Wild” – and other films and literary works – by drawing from hooks’ (2012) “No Love In The Wild”. Such critical examinations, according to Ford, require students to identify and challenge “underlying projections of sexist and racist tropes” often ignored by critics.

Reflecting various entry points to and applications of hooks’ work, the articles in this issue speak to hooks’ interdisciplinary engagement and to her centering of (the possibilities of) love and engagement and her unrelenting centering of education as a practice of freedom. Hooks begins with and is immersed in love. Enacting such love through teaching requires an acknowledgment that not only did hooks give us the language, tools, and love, but also, *bell hooks gave us the pedagogy and praxis*. I encourage readers to approach this special issue with a commitment to hooks’ pedagogy and praxis and take from the reading a sincere commitment to bridge the gap between values, thought and action, and theory and practice. Further, I sincerely hope that, like my former student, readers “get it.”

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