LUBELSKI ROCZNIK PEDAGOGICZNY
T. XLIV, z. 3 – 2025

DOI: 10.17951/lrp.2025.44.3.7-22

Wojciech Kruszelnicki
University of Silesia in Katowice
ORCID – 0000-0001-7005-1266

FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES, POSTMODERNISM, AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY*

Introduction: The debate concerning feminist standpoint epistemology and the concept of situated knowledge represents a crucial moment in the history of contemporary philosophy of education. Engaging with this issue necessitates reconstructing the tensions between critical pedagogy, postmodernism, and feminist theories of knowledge.
Research Aim: The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of feminist epistemologies, particularly the ideas of standpoint epistemology and situated knowledge, on shaping the discourse of critical pedagogy, as well as on revising many of its foundational assumptions. Ultimately, I aim to assess the extent to which these perspectives have contributed to profound transformations in the epistemology and methodology of contemporary educational research.
Evidence-based Facts: Despite the fact that since the late 1980s many feminist scholars have critically examined the core assumptions of critical pedagogy highlighting the dominant position of men in shaping critical educational theory, their voices have not received significant attention from Henry A. Giroux and other male founders of this educational movement.
Summary: Feminist standpoint epistemology and the concept of situated knowledge represent one of the most significant achievements in contemporary educational theory. Thanks to feminist scholars, traditional models of knowledge have been challenged, leading to the introduction of new research methodologies and alternative educational frameworks which pursue more just forms of knowledge production and a commitment to inclusive educational solutions.

Keywords: feminism, postmodernism, critical pedagogy, epistemology, objectivism, situated knowledge

* Suggested citation: Kruszelnicki, W. (2025). Feminist Epistemologies, Postmodernism, and Critical Pedagogy. *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, *44*(3), 7–22. http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/lrp.2025.44.3.7-22

© 2025 by: Wojciech Kruszelnicki
This is an Open Access Article Under the CC BY 4.0 License
(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

The debate concerning feminist standpoint epistemology and the concept of situated knowledge represents a crucial moment in the history of contemporary philosophy of education. Engaging with this issue necessitates reconstructing the tensions between critical pedagogy, postmodernism, and feminist theories of knowledge – an area that, in itself, constitutes a particularly intriguing chapter in the development of the so-called "critical turn in education" (Gottesman, 2016). This debate highlights the significant role that women's voices in academia have played not only in challenging the classical view of "objectivity" in science – which assumes the possibility of eliminating subjective influences and contextual conditions from the cognitive process – but also in shaping new directions in educational policy, thereby opening avenues for designing more just and inclusive educational practices.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

The purpose of this study is to conduct a detailed analysis of concepts emerging within feminist theory that radicalize post-positivist approaches to science by emphasizing the central position of the researcher in the research process. This includes acknowledging how the researcher's social position and adopted values significantly influence the inquiry. Additionally, I aim to explore the impact of feminist epistemologies on the formation of critical pedagogy discourse, as well as the revisions of its foundational assumptions. Ultimately, I seek to determine the extent to which these epistemologies have contributed to profound transformations in the epistemology and methodology of contemporary educational research.

Another motivation for writing this article stems from the observation that, despite the fact that since the late 1980s many feminist scholars have critically examined the core assumptions of critical pedagogy (Luke & Gore, 1992), highlighting the dominant position of men in shaping critical educational theory, their voices have not received significant attention from Henry A. Giroux and other male founders of this educational movement. Giroux dedicated only one edited book to postmodern feminist theory, including his essay "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Feminism: Redefining the Boundaries of Educational Discourse" (Giroux, 1991), which was later reprinted in his other books and journals. While his articulation of a position that skillfully mediates between the radical skepticism of postmodern theories – challenging grand narratives – and the most progressive aspirations of philosophical modernism – which upholds enduring educational values such as reason, rationality, universalism, community, and democracy – can be regarded as quite compelling, the section of his work that addresses feminism's role in shaping critical pedagogy discourse seems to be merely a preliminary contribution. It does not, however, constitute the more comprehensive engagement –

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

never fully realized by the scholar – of how critical insights from feminist theories could be utilized to further develop postmodern educational practice.

It is also worth mentioning that when, in her influential article "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?" Elisabeth Ellsworth (1989/2013) launched a sharp critique of Giroux's pedagogy, arguing that "the key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices present in the literature on critical pedagogy – namely, »empowerment«, »student voice«, »dialogue«, along with the term »critical« itself – constitute repressive myths that reinforce relations of domination" (2013, p. 188), Giroux responded with a scathing and extensive critique of Ellsworth. His response culminated in the dismissal of her position as mere "careerism, which has become all too characteristic of many leftist academics" (Giroux, 1988, p. 178). As Isaac Gottesman pointed out, these "pompous and dismissive remarks nicely illustrated Ellsworth's argument about the inability and general unwillingness of critical pedagogues to be self-reflective subjects of knowledge" (Gottesman, 2016, p. 105).

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that in his tentative reconstruction of postmodern feminism, Giroux did recognize that "the relationship between feminism and postmodern theory has been both productive and problematic" (Giroux, 1991, p. 34). He noted that "postmodern feminism has both critiqued and expanded several central assumptions of postmodernism. It rejected the elimination of human agency through the decentering of the subject. Similarly, it refused to define language as the sole source of meaning and linked power not only with discourse but also with material practices and struggles" (Giroux, 1991, p. 34). Furthermore, "it insisted on difference as part of a broader struggle for ideological and institutional change, rather than embracing the postmodernist approach to difference as an aesthetic matter (pastiche) or an expression of liberal pluralism" (Giroux, 1991, p. 34). Although these and other observations from the cited essay give the impression of a scholar well-versed in the subject, this does not change the fact that Giroux's presentation of feminist theory after the postmodern turn remains highly general, riddled with oversimplifications and conceptual shortcuts. Rather than providing an advanced reconstruction of individual positions, tracing key differences between them, and considering the extent to which they contribute to critical educational theory, his analysis focuses more on illustrating feminism's profound skepticism and problematization of key postmodern categories such as otherness, difference, historicity, and oppression.

EVIDENCE-BASED REVIEW

Feminist standpoint epistemology emerged as a response to the dominance of objectivist and universalist theories of knowledge, which for centuries ignored the experiences of women and other marginalized groups. Feminist theorists such

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

as Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins, and Donna Haraway sought to transform the epistemology of the social sciences by demonstrating that knowledge is always socially and historically situated.

Standpoint epistemology is based on several key assumptions, which can be summarized as follows:

- Knowledge is situated: There is no neutral, universal cognitive perspective because all forms of knowledge are rooted in a specific social location.
- Marginalized perspectives are epistemically privileged: Those on the peripheries of power structures have a greater ability to perceive mechanisms of domination that remain invisible to privileged groups.
- Objectivity is relational: Unlike classical positivism, standpoint epistemology asserts that knowledge can become more objective when it incorporates the perspectives of historically excluded groups.

Let us consider two examples of arguments that adhere to these directives. Addressing the question of how to modernize the concept of objectivity, Sandra Harding introduced the notion of "strong objectivity" (Harding, 1991, p. 138 ff.), which disconnects the ideal of neutrality from the standards ensuring the objectivity of scientific discourse. She argued that objectivity can only be achieved when researchers consciously integrate marginalized perspectives rather than treating them as subjective deviations from "true" knowledge (Harding, 1995, p. 331). From this standpoint, traditional empiricist approaches are seen as impoverishing their own efforts to maximize objectivity by failing to critically identify the historical and social desires, interests, and values that have shaped research agendas, content, and outcomes just as much as they have structured other human affairs (Harding, 1992).

Continuing the insights of one of the pioneers of academic feminism, Dorothy Smith – who was among the first scholars to observe that "women have largely been excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought, as well as the images and symbols through which thought is expressed and ordered" (Smith, 1987, p. 18) – Patricia Hill Collins analyzed the knowledge produced by Black women in the United States. She argued that the experiences of African American women, both within academia and in everyday life, enable a deeper understanding of the systemic mechanisms of racism, sexism, and classism. Collins emphasized that traditional scientific narratives often overlook these experiences, leading to a distorted representation of social reality. A particularly useful concept in this regard was Smith's notion of "bifurcated consciousness", which Collins applied to Black women as well. This form of consciousness allows them to perceive reality from both the perspective of dominantly privileged subjects and that of those subjected to oppression and marginalization.

In her essay "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), Donna Haraway presented one of the most

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

influential critiques of traditional scientific epistemology. Haraway argued that all knowledge is partial and socially conditioned, and that the idea of a "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986) – a form of entirely objective knowledge – is an illusion. It is so because it was only within the tradition of metaphysical thinking that a view "from no particular point" (Nagel, 1986, p. 141) was imagined to offer a privileged access to the truth; sometimes, however, the truth "will be fully understood only from a particular perspective in the world" (p. 140). The concept of "situated knowledge" was intended to highlight that every individual possesses a unique epistemological perspective shaped by their position within social structures. This notion aligns with Haraway's concept of "partial perspective", which opposes any form of unlocalized knowledge that claims objectivity and neutrality. According to Haraway (1988), such knowledge is ultimately irresponsible because it is inherently incapable of full accountability (p. 583). From this perspective, marginalized viewpoints – precisely because they have historically been excluded – should be taken seriously, as they "seem to promise more adequate, fuller, objective, and transformative accounts of the world" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584).

One of the most significant moments in the debate on feminist standpoint epistemology was the critique feminist scholars directed at critical pedagogy, particularly in relation to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy. Although critical pedagogy aimed at emancipation and the liberation of individuals from ideological and social oppression, its educational practice faced accusations of reproducing patriarchal, overtly masculinist, and Eurocentric patterns of thought.

In her article "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?" (1989/2013), Elizabeth Ellsworth reflected on her experience teaching a university course on *Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies*. She argued that fundamental ideas of critical pedagogy – such as dialogue, valuing the student's voice, and fostering critical consciousness – could, within the classroom environment, function repressively and paradoxically reinforce structures of domination rather than dismantle them. Ellsworth pointed out that critical pedagogy assumes the existence of a fully neutral, homogeneous, and entirely rational educational subject – one capable of independently "awakening" to self-awareness and emancipation. However, as she observed, this universalism actually reflects the perspective of the dominant group: white, heteronormative, middle-class men. Despite its declared commitment to emancipation, critical pedagogy fails to recognize differences based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or social class, thereby reproducing oppressive and authoritarian assumptions. It presumes that individuals who are not European, not white, male, middle-class, Christian, able-bodied, thin, and heterosexual will demonstrate the same level of linguistic competence, openness to dialogue, and adherence to the rules of rational discourse "as any rational person might assume in order to advance a universally valid argument" (Ellsworth, 2013, p. 193).

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

The entire discussion surrounding dialogue, rationality, and reason in critical pedagogy seems to overlook the fact that these categories are historically linked to dominant models of white, male subjectivity. Moreover, they are applied in ways that disregard the experiences of women and ethnic minorities. Ellsworth was particularly critical of the concept of dialogue in education, which is treated as a fundamental imperative of critical pedagogy and a cornerstone of democratic education. In this framework, all members of the learning community supposedly "have an equal opportunity to speak, respect the right of others to voice their opinions, and feel safe enough to express themselves, while all ideas are tolerated and subjected to critical evaluation in opposition to fundamentalist and moral judgments" (Ellsworth, 2013, p. 202).

However, Ellsworth's teaching experience demonstrated that such an idealized form of dialogue is neither possible nor necessarily desirable. First, due to the asymmetrical relationships between teachers and students. Second, because the classroom, as a potentially multicultural environment, does not guarantee safety or a transparent sense of community. Dialogue is not a neutral process – some voices always dominate, while others are forced to listen or remain silent out of fear or shame. In supposedly open discussions, some perspectives may be suppressed, and this is an undeniable reality. As Ellsworth noted, "in our classroom, many remained silent for different reasons, including fear of being misunderstood or of saying too much and making themselves vulnerable; memories of negative experiences in other public speaking situations; resentment over the perception that other forms of oppression (sexism, heterosexism, fatphobia, classism, anti-Semitism) were marginalized in favor of discussions on racism, leading to feelings of guilt" (Ellsworth, 2013, p. 203).

Similar critical concerns were raised by Kathleen Weiler (1991), who highlighted the problem of the universalist assumptions of critical pedagogy, which ignore differences based on gender, race, and social class. Weiler pointed out that Freire and other theorists of critical pedagogy view education as a tool for raising awareness but fail to acknowledge that different social groups have distinct experiences of oppression and liberation.

In the context of critiquing the emancipatory ideals of pedagogy, Patti Lather proposed an alternative approach in her book *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (1991). She advocated integrating feminist critical pedagogy with poststructuralist theories, arguing that such an approach could help avoid the reproduction of hierarchical and dominant relations within critical educational theory. Lather rejected the traditional model of education as a process of discovering *objective* truth and instead proposed an approach that recognizes knowledge as a social construct shaped by discourses and power relations. She emphasized the need for continuous questioning and destabilization of established categories such as truth, rationality, and objectivity. In her view, eman-

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

cipatory pedagogy should involve asking uncomfortable questions, disrupting conventional frameworks, and challenging ingrained patterns of thought. The goal is not to transmit an authoritative truth but to create conditions for its ongoing negotiation and critique.

Feminist revisions of the ideals of critical pedagogy have revealed significant issues regarding the understanding of knowledge, education, and the subjectivity of students within pedagogical processes. Feminist epistemologists have questioned the universalist assumptions of Freire, McLaren, Giroux, and other male founders of this educational movement, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced consideration of power relations and historical mechanisms of exclusion operating within educational practices.

The debate between feminist standpoint epistemology and postmodernism represents one of the most significant controversies in contemporary theories of knowledge and critical pedagogy. While both approaches emerged from the critical tradition, they hold differing perspectives on key concepts such as truth, subjectivity, identity, and power. Feminist epistemologists emphasized the necessity of preserving the categories of subjectivity and the standpoint of the oppressed, whereas postmodern theorists subjected these notions to deconstruction – a process grounded in the belief that "difference undermines the entire logic of identity upon which Western thought is built. The dominant conceptual framework and the knowledge used to make sense of and construct reality in Western culture are organized around binary oppositions between seemingly distinct and independent identities such as woman/man, activity/passivity, culture/nature". Moreover, these binary pairs are hierarchical and patriarchal, which is why feminist scholars employ deconstruction to "de-hierarchize and dismantle them by demonstrating that the primacy and identity of the fundamental term are, in fact, fraudulent" (Ebert, 1991, p. 893).

Postmodernism emerged as a critical intellectual movement against the grand narratives of modernity. Jean-François Lyotard argued that any claims to universal truth are forms of oppression, as they serve to maintain the power of particular groups: "the grand narrative, regardless of how it unifies knowledge – whether it is speculative or emancipatory – has lost credibility" (Lyotard, 1997, p. 111). He further asserted that claims to authoritative knowledge can resemble "terrorist" acts if we understand terror as "an efficiency based on eliminating or threatening to eliminate one's partner in a discursive game. They will remain silent or comply, not because their argument has been refuted, but because they have been threatened with exclusion from the game (and there are many kinds of exclusion)" (Lyotard, 1997, p. 170). The implication of Lyotard's rejection of universalism is that since grand narratives of emancipation and progress are merely forms of legitimizing the power of those who can silence others, it is essential to include hidden narratives – micro-stories and localized experiences that reflect diverse social positions.

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

Lyotard's proposal was initially appealing to feminism; however, feminists quickly recognized that "mainstream postmodernist theory (Derrida, Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault) has been particularly blind and insensitive to questions of gender within its supposedly political re-readings of history, politics, and culture" (Di Stefano, 1990, p. 75). Feminist scholars also pointed to another problem: "Since feminist politics addresses a specific audience or subject – namely, women – the postmodernist ban on subject-centered inquiry undermines the legitimacy of a broader movement aimed at articulating and achieving this audience's goals" (Di Stefano, 1990, p. 75). If subjectivity is merely a linguistic construct and truth is relative, how can we meaningfully discuss the real oppression of women and the necessity of their emancipation?

Sandra Harding argued that rejecting the overly radical notion of the "death of the subject" opens new possibilities for feminist critique. According to Harding, feminist inquiry should be "based on the lives of women as a foundation for critiquing dominant claims to knowledge, which have been constructed primarily from the lives of men representing dominant races, classes, and cultures. This approach could mitigate the distortions and deficiencies in the social reality portrayed by the natural and social sciences" (Harding, 1991, p. 121).

Nancy Hartsock introduced the concept of standpoint knowledge, asserting that women, as a social group, possess a unique epistemic perspective derived from their experiences of oppression. Hartsock argued that women's knowledge is not merely an alternative *version* of reality but a more accurate and comprehensive account of the world because it takes into account structural inequalities that often remain invisible to dominant groups. Within this framework, the standpoint of the oppressed is considered epistemically privileged: "As an engaged vision, the understanding possessed by the oppressed adopts a particular perspective and reveals the true relationships between people as inhumane; it transcends the present and plays a historically liberating role" (Hartsock, 1983, p. 285).

Judith Butler took a fundamentally different stance, profoundly influencing the postmodern turn in feminism through her work on gender and identity. In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler challenged the very concept of "women" as an epistemological category. She argued that gender is a social construct produced through repetitive performativity, particularly heterosexual behaviors that establish "woman" and "man" as such. According to Butler (1999, pp. 19–22), there is no universal *femininity* upon which standpoint epistemology can be based. The assumption of a unified, common identity for women leads to exclusion and homogenization that fail to reflect the actual diversity of women's experiences (Butler, 1999, pp. 19–20). Instead, we must speak of multiple identities and ways of being in the world: "Woman as such is a concept in the making, a becoming, a construction that cannot be honestly said to have a clear beginning or end. As an ongoing dis-

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

cursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification" (Butler, 1999, p. 43). Butler rejected the idea that women share a common epistemic experience.

Further debates emerged between Butler's postmodern approach and feminist orientations that insisted on maintaining the category of a stable subject within their epistemology. Nancy Fraser criticized postmodernist deconstructionists for failing to ask "how a given identity or difference relates to social relations based on inequality" (Fraser, 1997, p. 183). Similarly, Catharine MacKinnon (2000) argued that postmodern feminists ignore the social reality of oppression. These critiques point to a key issue: Butler's analyses are strictly linguistic in their approach to gender construction, often abstracting from the material realities of social institutions and systemic oppression that affect women.

From this perspective, the deconstruction of identity is seen as a politically dangerous move, as it deprives feminism of the tools necessary for advocating for women's rights. If everything is a construct, how can we speak of the real exploitation of women? How can we fight against domestic violence, rape, and wage inequalities if we cannot even assert that women exist as a social category?

Butler responded to these criticisms by arguing that her critique was not meant to weaken feminism but to make it more inclusive by incorporating the experiences of groups that had historically been marginalized – even within feminist discourse. This includes trans women, Black women, and non-heteronormative individuals, whose "non-normative sexual practices call into question gender as an analytical category" (Butler, 2014, p. XI).

Feminist standpoint epistemology has never been a monolithic tradition; rather, it encompasses diverse perspectives shaped by the distinct social and historical experiences of women. One of the most compelling contributions within this theoretical framework is Black feminist epistemology, developed by Patricia Hill Collins.

Like Sandra Harding and Nancy Hartsock, Collins emphasized the necessity of incorporating the experiences of marginalized groups in the production of knowledge. Her analyses focused on the unique position of Black women in American society, highlighting how their knowledge and experiences are systematically excluded from both academia and pedagogy (Collins, 2000, pp. 3–8). Challenging traditional epistemological frameworks that recognize the knowledge produced by white, middle-class men as objective and universal, Collins (2000) proposed four key principles of Black feminist epistemology. These principles serve as an alternative to Western models of knowledge, as they challenge the "Eurocentric, masculinist process of validating knowledge" (Collins, 2000, p. 751):

The Importance of Lived Experience as a Source of Knowledge

Black women acquire knowledge not only through formal education but, more importantly, through their everyday experiences in a society shaped by racism,

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

sexism, and classism. Their knowledge is not based solely on abstract theories but on lived realities, which provide them with a deeper understanding of oppression's mechanisms. Collins cited John Langston Gwaltney's work *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America* (1980) to illustrate the legitimacy of experiential knowledge: "I am the kind of person who doesn't have a lot of education, but both my mother and my father had good common sense. Now, I think that's all you need. I might not know how to use thirty-four words where three would do, but that does not mean I don't know what I'm talking about... I know what I'm talking about because I'm talking about myself. I'm talking about what I have lived" (Gwaltney, 1980, p. 27, 33 in: Collins, 1989, pp. 759–760).

Dialogue as a Method of Knowledge Production

Unlike the Western scientific model, which is based on formal experimentation and objectivist methodology, Black feminist epistemology emphasizes dialogue and collective knowledge creation. The Black community has historically developed ways of knowing through dialogical practices – conversations, storytelling, music, and literature. In this epistemological tradition, knowledge is not something to be *possessed* but rather a process that is co-constructed within a community (Collins, 1989, p. 764).

Ethical and Political Responsibility of Knowledge

Collins argued that knowledge should not be produced in isolation from its social consequences. Science and education must serve as tools for resisting oppression rather than being neutral academic endeavors. She contended that knowledge is never politically neutral – every act of knowing carries social implications, and thus, scholars and educators must take responsibility for the narratives they reproduce: "black people consider it crucial that individuals maintain a personal stance on various issues and accept full responsibility for demonstrating its validity" (Collins, 1989, p. 768).

Collective Validation of Knowledge

In the Western scientific model, objectivity is achieved through methodological control and the reproducibility of experiments. In contrast, Black feminist epistemology proposes a different method of validation – knowledge is considered valuable only if it is recognized as such by the community it concerns (Collins, 1989, p. 769). In other words, it is not white academics who determine the truth about Black women's experiences – it is Black women themselves who define what matters to them and what epistemic value their narratives hold.

The Black feminist tradition and its epistemological framework have had a profound impact on educational research, particularly in the areas of race and gender in education. Bell Hooks emphasized, in alignment with the paradigm of critical

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

pedagogy, that schools can be spaces of emancipation – but only if teachers genuinely allow students to express their lived experiences. However, Hooks (1994) also pointed out a fundamental problem in education: "despite contemporary attention to multiculturalism, there is almost no practical discussion about how classrooms could be transformed to make learning experiences more inclusive. […] Let's be honest: most of us were educated in classrooms where teaching styles reflected a single norm of thinking and experience, and we were encouraged to accept it as universal" (p. 35).

Gloria Ladson-Billings extended this idea through her work on culturally relevant pedagogy, arguing that curricula should be tailored to reflect students' diverse experiences rather than imposing Eurocentric models and knowledge canons. The phenomenon of "acting white", identified in studies on the academic success of African American youth, suggested that educational success often came at the expense of their cultural and psychosocial well-being (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 176). To effectively balance academic achievement with cultural integrity, culturally relevant pedagogy seeks ways to incorporate materials and narratives that resonate with students' identities. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued: "The goal is to include content in the curriculum that allows students to see themselves reflected in what they learn, rather than forcing them to assimilate into an educational system that disregards their lived experiences" (p. 476).

Situated knowledge and feminist standpoint epistemology continue to generate intense debates within critical pedagogy, philosophy of education, and social research. These discussions involve both further developments of these theories and their critiques, particularly concerning the limits of subjectivity in epistemic value, epistemological relativism, and the effectiveness of emancipatory educational strategies.

One of the major challenges facing contemporary critical pedagogy is the neoliberalization of education systems worldwide. Under neoliberal education policies, knowledge is often reduced to a commodity that can be measured, categorized, and evaluated based on standardized tests. In this context, the approach of situated knowledge, which emphasizes the importance of experience and local narratives, stands in opposition to dominant educational trends.

In *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (2014), Giroux warned against reducing education to a process of building "human capital", in which emancipatory values become subordinate to market-driven criteria of efficiency and employability. Neoliberalism transforms education into an economic tool, stripping it of its function as a space for critical thinking and democratic deliberation. Situated knowledge and critical pedagogy become undesirable in this context, as they do not conform to the logic of instrumental rationality. Feminist educational scholars emphasize the need to defend critical pedagogy and standpoint epistemology against such attempts at marginalization.

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

One of the key tasks of contemporary educational research is to demonstrate that valuable forms of knowledge do not need to align with market-based standards of "measurability". Not everything significant in education can be quantified or assessed through standardized testing. Situated knowledge, based on lived experience and reflection, is just as essential for building effective education systems as supposedly "scientific", objective, and empirically measurable directives imposed on education through new managerialism (Lather, 2010).

Standpoint epistemology has been enriched by intersectional approaches, which analyze how different axes of oppression – gender, race, social class, disability, and sexual orientation – interact and influence each other (see DiAngelo, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Historically, it is important to acknowledge that Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality to highlight that various aspects of individual identity – such as race, gender, class, and sexuality – work together to shape particular experiences of privilege or oppression. Crenshaw argued that, for instance, the experiences of Black women cannot be analyzed solely through the lens of either gender or race but require consideration of their mutual interactions (Crenshaw, 1989).

In the context of knowledge production, one of the primary critiques of standpoint epistemology and situated knowledge is their epistemological relativism. Susan Haack questioned whether, if every social group has its own "truth", it becomes impossible to distinguish between true and false claims. If knowledge is always situated and every group – especially women – has its own epistemic perspective, does this not lead to a situation where we cannot speak of any objective truth? How can we resolve knowledge conflicts under such conditions? (Haack, 1998).

Harding anticipated this criticism, arguing that her concept of strong objectivity enables the production of knowledge that is more inclusive and more objective, as it incorporates multiple perspectives shaped by both global and local social transformations resulting from multiculturalism (Harding, 1995). Moreover, she maintained that feminist standpoint theories both generate and advocate for strong objectivity in social research. This requires "the subject of knowledge to be located on the same critical and causal plane as the objects of knowledge. Therefore, strong objectivity demands something that can be thought of as strong reflexivity"(Harding, 1992, p. 458).

Thus, instead of leading to relativism, standpoint epistemology seeks to enhance objectivity by incorporating multiple perspectives and critically reflecting on power structures that shape knowledge production.

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

SUMMARY

In summary, several key conclusions emerge from these analyses.

Knowledge is not neutral – it is always socially situated. One of the foundational premises of standpoint epistemology is that knowledge does not emerge in a vacuum but is shaped by specific social, historical, and political contexts. Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, and Donna Haraway has demonstrated that dominant knowledge systems are not *objective* but reflect the perspectives of groups in power. From this perspective, education cannot be seen as the neutral transmission of facts but as a space where specific ways of thinking and acting are cultivated. Contemporary critical pedagogy must therefore examine not only *what* is taught but also *who* decides what is recognized as legitimate knowledge.

Feminist critical pedagogy challenges and revises traditional models of education. As demonstrated in the works of Elizabeth Ellsworth, Kathleen Weiler, and Patti Lather, even educational models designed for emancipation have often failed to avoid reproducing hidden forms of domination. Freirean critical pedagogy, despite its goal of liberating the oppressed, did not account for differences based on gender, race, or sexual orientation. Feminist scholars have emphasized that there is no single universal model of liberation, and education must incorporate diverse voices and experiences from multicultural environments.

Feminist theory actively responds to contemporary challenges posed by neoliberalism and intersectionality. Feminist standpoint epistemologies and the concept of situated knowledge confront new problems arising from dynamic changes in education and society. The neoliberalization of education has increasingly led to the assessment of knowledge based on its "market utility", marginalizing alternative epistemologies. The emphasis on intersectionality has allowed for an expansion of standpoint epistemology by recognizing that knowledge cannot be analyzed solely through a single axis of oppression but must consider the complex relationships between race, class, gender, and other social categories such as citizenship and nationality.

Standpoint epistemology and critical pedagogy will continue to evolve in response to emerging challenges. Several key directions for future development can already be identified.

Decolonization of knowledge and the growing influence of epistemologies from the Global South. Increasingly, epistemological frameworks developed outside Europe and North America will gain recognition. Scholars such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos advocate for "epistemologies of the South", arguing that people worldwide construct meaningful knowledge about their lives, yet Western dominance has systematically marginalized these perspectives – a phenomenon he describes as "cognitive injustice" or even "epistemicide" (the destruction of indigenous and alternative knowledge traditions) (de Sousa Santos, 2014).

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

Practical implementation of situated knowledge in education. A major challenge is how to integrate standpoint epistemology into educational curricula. Potential directions include the development of participatory methodologies, autoethnography, and pedagogical practices that prioritize the experiences of marginalized students and teachers.

CONCLUSION

Feminist standpoint epistemology and the concept of situated knowledge represent one of the most significant achievements in contemporary educational theory. Thanks to feminist scholars, traditional models of knowledge have been challenged, leading to the introduction of new research methodologies and alternative educational frameworks. While standpoint epistemology has faced criticism for its potential relativism, its greatest strength lies in its continuous interrogation of epistemic hierarchies, pursuit of more just forms of knowledge production, and commitment to inclusive educational solutions.

REFERENCES

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble:Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2014). *Gender Trouble:Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (Tenth Anniversary Edition)*. Routledge.

Collins, P.H. (1989). The social construction of black feminist thought. *Signs*, *4*, 745–773.

Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (Revised Tenth Anniversary Edition)*. Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *140*, 139–167.

di Angelo, R.J. (2018). *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Beacon Press.

de Sousa Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Routledge.

di Stefano, C. (1990). Dilemmas of difference: Feminism, modernity and postmodernism. In L. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (pp. 63–82). Routledge.

Ebert, T. (1991). The "difference" of postmodern feminism. *College English*, *8*, 886–904.

Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, *3*, 297–324.

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

Ellsworth, E. (2013). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In B. Thayer-Bacon, L. Stone, & K.M. Spreecher (Eds.), *Education and Feminism: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (pp. 187–214). State University of New York Press.

Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students school success: Coping with the burden of "acting white". *The Urban Review*, *18*, 176–206.

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. Routledge.

Giroux, H.A. (1988). Border pedagogy in the age of postmodernism. *Journal of Education*, *3*, 162–181.

Giroux, H.A. (1991). Modernism, postmodernism, and feminism: Redefining the boundaries of educational discourse. In H.A. Giroux (Ed.), *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics. Redrawing Educational Boundaries* (pp. 1–59). State University of New York Press.

Giroux, H.A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. Haymarket Books.

Gottesman, I. (2016). *The Critical Turn in Education: From Marxist Critique to Feminism to Critical Theories of Race*. Routledge.

Gwaltney, J.L. (1980). *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*. Random House.

Haack, S. (1998). *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays*. The University of Chicago Press.

Haraway, H. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *3*, 575–599.

Harding, S. (1991).*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*. Cornell University Press.

Harding, S. (1992). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is "strong objectivity?". *The Centennial Review*, *3*, 437–470.

Harding, S. (1995). "Strong objectivity": A response to the new objectivity question. *Synthese*, *3*, 331–349.

Harstock, N. (1983). The feminist standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism. In S. Harding & M.B. Hintikka (Eds.), *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (pp. 283–310). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2012). *The Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Sage Publications.

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *3*, 465–491.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. Routledge.

Lather, P. (2010). Scientific research in education: A critical perspective. *Counterpoints*, *345*, 35–53.

Luke, C., & Gore, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*. Routledge.

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)

Lyotard, J-F. (1997). *Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy*. Aletheia.
MacKinnon, C.A. (2000). Points against postmodernism. *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, *75*, 687–701.
Nagel, T. (1986). *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford University Press.
Smith, D. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic*: *A Feminist Sociology*. Northeastern University Press.
Weiler, K. (1991). Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference. *Harvard Educational Review*, *4*, 449–475.

EPISTEMOLOGIE FEMINISTYCZNE, POSTMODERNIZM I PEDAGOGIKA KRYTYCZNA

Wprowadzenie: Debata dotycząca feministycznej epistemologii stanowiska oraz koncepcji usytuowanej wiedzy stanowi kluczowy moment w historii współczesnej filozofii edukacji. Podjęcie tego zagadnienia wymaga rekonstrukcji napięć między pedagogiką krytyczną, postmodernizmem a feministycznymi teoriami wiedzy – obszarem, który sam w sobie stanowi szczególnie intrygujący rozdział w rozwoju tzw. krytycznego zwrotu w edukacji.
Cel badań: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie wpływu epistemologii feministycznych, w szczególności idei epistemologii stanowiska oraz usytuowanej wiedzy, na kształtowanie dyskursu pedagogiki krytycznej, a także na rewizję wielu jej podstawowych założeń. Ostatecznie dążę do oceny, w jakim stopniu perspektywy te przyczyniły się do głębokich transformacji w epistemologii i metodologii współczesnych badań edukacyjnych.
Stan wiedzy: Pomimo że od końca lat 80. XX wieku wielu badaczy feministycznych krytycznie analizowało podstawowe założenia pedagogiki krytycznej wskazując na dominującą pozycję mężczyzn w kształtowaniu krytycznej teorii edukacji, ich głosy nie spotkały się z istotnym odzewem ze strony Henry'ego A. Giroux i innych męskich twórców tego nurtu.
Podsumowanie: Feministyczna epistemologia stanowiska oraz koncepcja wiedzy usytuowanej stanowią jedno z najważniejszych osiągnięć we współczesnej teorii edukacyjnej. Dzięki badaczkom feministycznym tradycyjne modele wiedzy zostały zakwestionowane, co doprowadziło do wprowadzenia nowych metodologii badawczych oraz alternatywnych ram edukacyjnych poszukujących sprawiedliwszych form produkcji wiedzy oraz bardziej inkluzyjnych rozwiązań edukacyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: feminizm, postmodernizm, pedagogika krytyczna, epistemologia, obiektywizm, wiedza usytuowana

© 2025 BY: WOJCIECH KRUSZELNICKI
THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY 4.0 LICENSE
(HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0/)