

NEW FRONTIERS OF FEMINIST EDUCATION: CHALLENGING THE
PRESUMPTIONS OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND RATIONALIST
PATRIARCHY IN THE CONTEXT OF
EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY

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DECLARATION

*This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library**, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.*

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandmother
Joyce Rachel Buchanan
(1917-2005)

*For you were always the (reluctant) political feminist and you
would have passionately argued with me about all of this.*

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ABSTRACT

This study builds on and contributes to work in the area of educational epistemology and feminist theory. The aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper perception of the potential role which feminist thought can continue to play within the educational context. To advance this critical exploration, I endeavour to provide a tolerably coherent account of the dominant epistemological framework within which many feminist presumptions have emerged. Given that it is popularly believed that the goals of feminism have been met and thus that feminism, especially in the educational context, is no longer such a pressing issue, I seek to demonstrate why such considerations are still applicable in the so-called 'post-feminist' era. One of my central objectives in this thesis will be to urge strongly that this is a temptation to be resisted, and I try to show why we should do so. Although the feminist movement has done a great deal to advance the cause of the emancipation of women, a close examination reveals that the lives of women (and, indeed, men) remain textured by oppressive structures and practices which limit the expression of their full personhood. Within the framework of these structural impediments, I endeavour to establish, by appeal to a variety of philosophical case studies, that women continue to suffer considerable disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. Although various scholars have suggested that the current educational context is presupposed by the epistemic values of power and control (Laura & Cotton, 1999; Laura & Marchant, 2002, Marchant, 2006; Laura, Marchant & Smith, 2008) there has not been an investigation in to the implications of Laura's Epistemology of Power theory for feminist education. I argue that unless knowledge is reconceptualised the goals of feminist education are unlikely to be well served within the current educational paradigm.