

A Methodological Interpretation of Feminist Pragmatism: feminist action research and some of its principles

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“Action research is an approach to professional development in which, typically, teachers spend 1 or 2 years. Practitioners such as e.g. teachers often voice strong criticism of educational research, which they feel is of little relevance to them. This was not a problem for early feminist pragmatists who located precisely women’s *experience*. Two principles were particularly significant for them when doing research and designing research projects:

1. The principle that theory is generated from experience and that theory is accountable to practice (Dewey, 1931), which made it possible for women to trust their own experience as a starting point for reflection; and
2. the principle that “the purpose of inquiry into experience was not to replicate it, but to interrogate problematic situations in order to satisfactorily resolve them.”

(Seigfried, 2002, p. 51).

Early feminists heavily influenced the field of education by providing models for the interaction between thinking and action. Drawing on this tradition, I will attempt in this article to provide an empirical example of and a model for how problematic issues at a specific, women-dominated workplace can be tackled by applying a certain methodology, in this case feminist action research. The main purpose is to give a methodological interpretation of feminist pragmatism based on an empirical action research study conducted in 2005 – 2008. I will illustrate that feminist action research with its built-in multi-levelled validity criteria corresponds well with feminist pragmatism. While my Deweyan understanding of methodology will serve further to emphasise methodology as a key issue for all pragmatists, I discuss why it is essential to feminist pragmatists in the 2000s. Not least in terms of democratic research validity I argue that feminist pragmatists, perhaps more than other feminist schools of thought, are capable of doing research that not only serves academic purposes but contributes to practitioners’ professional knowledge bases in empowering ways.