

**Maternal Pedagogies:
In and Outside the Classroom**

Deborah Byrd and Fiona J. Green, eds.
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Marianne Filion

The difficulty in commenting with any degree of depth or precision on an edited work is considerable, but this is particularly so in the case of *Maternal*

Pedagogies: In and Outside the Classroom. The breadth of this compilation is striking, simultaneously exhilarating and exhausting. From personal narrative to literary analysis, ethnographic research to accounts of activism, this volume covers an impressive, if at times overwhelming, range of content and method.

In their editorial introduction, Deborah Byrd and Fiona J. Green write that “maternal pedagogies are always in flux, always performative ... and employed by individuals and groups whose positionality, values, goals, and strategies are ever-shifting” (2). The reality of this instability is woven throughout each contribution, mirroring its presence in the broader field of education. Each piece makes a unique contribution to theorizing maternal pedagogies, but the overriding strength of this volume lies in its insistent problematization of such theorizing practice. The normative notions of the good mother and teacher, child and learner are repeatedly underlined and undermined to underscore the ever-evolving nature and practice of education.

Maternal Pedagogies is divided into five sections, each comprised of three essays. The first section critically assesses a myriad of problems with culturally embedded assumptions about fertility, gender, and the right to maternity. Section two sheds light on the learner as a recipient of maternal pedagogies. Of particular interest is Walsh and Harrison’s article exploring the use of cultural capital in maternal activism in the face of children’s disability within the educational system. Section three explores the experience of learning from one’s children and students. It is notably, and perhaps unavoidably, touching and informative. Section four deals with pedagogical othermothering. Byrd’s account of service learning pedagogy, as well as Hutner’s description of her experience as an academic mother, ecofeminist teacher, and cancer survivor represents praxis at its finest. The final section of this volume deals with the passing on of maternal pedagogies. Concepts axiomatic to education, namely critical dialogue, creativity, responsibility, and hope, are explored throughout the section.

Felt across the essays is the fundamental, often unspoken discomfort with the fact that education is unavoidably a normative activity. We educate our children, our students, and ourselves according to our conception of what is good and right. We do this critically, consciously, and deliberately, as teachers and mothers, academics and activists. What is more, we educate knowing that we may be wrong, that we could, at least theoretically, do better, and that we will be challenged by our students, our children, our colleagues and peers. The essays in *Maternal Pedagogies*, and the stories they recount, actively resist re-inscribing unjust power relations, argue against dominant patriarchal practices and assumptions, and self-consciously call out the privilege inherent in reading, writing, formalized education, and academic discourse.

Though the relationship between education and mothering in its myriad of forms and contexts is palpable, maternal pedagogies is a remarkably under-explored concept. The expanse of topics, theories, and style in this volume is testament to the need for continued and vast exploration of maternal pedagogies. The vastness of this collection also means that it will be of interest to a wide range of readers who may, at one time or another, have occupied the position of child or parent, student or teacher, historian or literary theorist. Like a child, this volume is full of probing questions, compassion, and wisdom.