

# Favorite bits of “Women’s Ways of Knowing”: midwife-teacher, constructivism summaries, being “in” at the start

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I just finished reading *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, a book I’m quietly adding to my small storehouse of examples for “I want specific aspects of my dissertation to look like this.” Oddly enough, all three of the books on that list are written by women in deliberately feminist voices; that wasn’t a selection criteria, but they’ve all turned out that way. Hm.

- *Women’s Ways of Knowing* — introduction, study methodology description
- *Composing A Life* — interwoven narratives, positionality
- *Troubling the Angels* — multivocal layout

Some of the fascinating bits I noted down for future reference, and thought others might appreciate...

*To most women, the first steps on this journey [towards the sort of procedural knowledge used in STEM fields] do not feel like progress. The voice diminishes in volume; it lacks authority. These women lack even the derived authority of those who, having faith in received knowledge, can assume as they parrot their elders that they speak the truth. Lacking, also, the inner authority of the subjectivist, they cannot cheerfully blurt out the first idea that springs to mind. The inner voice turns critical; it tells them their ideas may be stupid. Women at this position think before they speak; and, because their ideas must measure up to certain objective standards, they speak in measured tones. Often, they do not speak at all. But this is not a passive silence; on the other side of this silence, reason is stirring. (Emphasis mine)*

For those who are thinking about getting women involved in open source, engineering, etc, that quote — and this next one — are illuminating. This next quote comes from a section about how men go through trials and then get confirmed into a community at the end of them (“you passed 4 years of hellish classes; congratulations, you’ve graduated and you are an engineer!”) women need confirmation of community membership at the start, before they undergo the trials of learning to be part of it (“you are an engineer — you’re ready to handle 4 years of hellish classes!”)

*For women, confirmation and community are prerequisites rather than consequences of development. (Emphasis mine, again.)*

Practical implication? Make sure people know they’re “in” when they begin to try — and that the quiet lurking and the unsure stumblings in the beginning are the mark of a fully participating new member.

Then there's this great quote drawn from Mary Daly's 1973 book *Beyond God The Father*.

*The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illumined by ideas that do not fit into preestablished boxes and norms. The worshippers of Method have an effective way of handling data that does not fit into the Respectable Categories of Questions and Answers. They simply classify it as nondata, thereby rendering it invisible.*

And Marge Piercy's poem "[Unlearning to Not Speak](#)" which I will only quote the ending of here...

*She must learn again to speak starting with I starting with We starting as the infant does with her own true hunger and pleasure and rage.*

And the best summaries of constructivist thinking I've ever read:

*All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known.*

*Becoming and staying aware of the workings of their minds are vital to constructivist women's sense of well-being... Constructivists seek to stretch the outer boundaries of their consciousness — by making the unconscious conscious, by consulting and listening to the self, by voicing the unsaid, by listening to others and staying alert to all the currents and undercurrents of life about them, by imagining themselves inside the new poem or person or idea that they want to come to know and understand. Constructivists become passionate knowers, knowers who enter into a union with that which is to be known.*

*[Conversations between constructivists imply] ...a mutually shared agreement that together you are creating the optimum setting so that half-baked or emergent ideas can grow.*

Then there's a quote by Marguerite Duras on how women write from places of darkness and unknown, and translate that darkness as they write. And a section on the idea of the midwife-teacher, helping students draw out of themselves what is already inside and self-created — that's the type of teacher I hope I am, and want to be.