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POINTS FOR DEPARTURE SUBMISSION – *Teaching in Higher Education*

Title:

The (un)invited guest? Feminist pedagogy and guest lecturing

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Abstract:

Teaching a one-off session on a colleague's course is a commonplace occurrence in higher education teaching practice, but it is not an area that has received sufficient attention in pedagogical literature. This article focuses on the scenario where a feminist teacher is invited to give a guest lecture, but is not sure if working with feminist pedagogy will be welcome. Guest lecture pedagogy is outlined: (i) guest lectures are always and yet never a one-off, because they are always embedded in wider teaching practice (ii) guest lecture pedagogy is both a struggle between time and pedagogical principles and an opportunity to break with convention. The challenges and risks of implementing feminist pedagogy in a guest lecture are considered; ultimately the article argues that a feminist teacher cannot simply 'lay aside' feminist pedagogy for a guest lecture, but that some compromises will be necessary in adapting practice for this type of teaching.

Keywords:

Feminist pedagogy; feminist teaching; guest lecturing; guest lecture pedagogy; teaching in higher education

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‘The (un)invited guest? Feminist pedagogy and guest lectures’

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Teaching a one-off session on a colleague’s course is a commonplace occurrence in higher education teaching practice, but it is not an area that has received sufficient attention in pedagogical literature. This article focuses on the scenario where a feminist teacher is invited to give a guest lecture, but is not sure if working with feminist pedagogy will be welcome. Guest lecture pedagogy is outlined: (i) guest lectures are always and yet never a one-off, because they are always embedded in wider teaching practice (ii) guest lecture pedagogy is both a struggle between time and pedagogical principles and an opportunity to break with convention. The challenges and risks of implementing feminist pedagogy in a guest lecture are considered; ultimately the article argues that a feminist teacher cannot simply ‘lay aside’ feminist pedagogy for a guest lecture, but that some compromises will be necessary in adapting practice for this type of teaching.

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Introduction¹

What does it mean to give a guest lecture? And can we think about a pedagogy for guest lecturing? These questions stem from the fact that it is common practice in higher education to include guests in the curriculum, but that this practice is perhaps so normalised that it often escapes notice in pedagogical scholarship. Guest lecturing refers to the practice of inviting someone – often another academic or a professional from the field – to contribute to the curriculum of a course. In courses with a direct vocational link, it is very common to invite professionals into the classroom to provide students with a clear view of the field they are entering, and to strengthen the employability credentials of the course. Across higher education courses it is also commonplace to invite colleagues from other institutions or from within the same institution to provide a guest lecture on their specialist research area. This practice is often framed to students as enhancing their learning experience by providing access to a variety of perspectives and expert knowledge (Campus Explorer, n.d.; CMU, n.d.; PennState, n.d.).

While it is recognised that delivering a guest session is a challenging task, there is relatively little literature available on the pedagogy of guest lecturing. The idea for this piece has been sparked by tensions I have experienced as a teacher in higher education between my commitment to critical and feminist pedagogy and my role as guest lecturer. I have been called on to contribute sessions on different aspects of gender and feminism to a number of modules, and this has raised concerns for me in relation to the possibilities and the risks of working with feminist pedagogy in the one-off manner that results from delivering a guest session. In this piece I set out the intersection between guest lecturing and feminist pedagogy, in order to provide a reference point and material for a more engaged pedagogical discussion of guest lecturing. In the following section, I discuss the practice of guest lecturing. The subsequent section focuses on feminist pedagogy, and in particular the tendency in feminist pedagogy literature to imagine a teacher-student interaction that develops over time (where time is imagined in weeks, months and even years, rather than minutes or hours). The final section then discusses implications and possible avenues for further thinking about feminist pedagogy for guest lecturing.

Guest lecturing: a practical challenge?

There is a relatively substantial corpus of research on inviting professional speakers into courses with a vocational orientation (Kamoun and Selim, 2007; McCleary and Weaver, 2009; Metrejean *et al*, 2002; Riebe *et al*, 2013), a few studies on using guest lecturers in online learning (Hemphill and Hemphill, 2007; Li and Guo, 2015), and some research into inviting guest speakers into school (as opposed to higher education) classrooms (Kim and Vail, 2011). However detailed searches of education research databases² have yielded no results for studies of higher education teachers delivering one-off sessions on each other's modules. There are some sources about this latter type of guest lecturing and the other types mentioned in grey literature and the blogosphere. However this literature tends to frame guest lecturing in practical terms. The advantages and disadvantages of guest lecturing are spelt out, and tips are given for a successful guest lecture – and choice of guest lecturer. These 'tips', which are geared towards inexperienced lecturers, include attending other lectures by the professor, examining the broader course goals, reading supplementary material, planning visual aids, and rehearsing the lecture. It is clear from the results of these searches that there is a noticeable lack of literature available for guest lecturers who wish to engage in critical and reflexive practice about the pedagogical challenges of guest lecturing.

One final source I wish to explore in slightly more detail is an information sheet on guest lecturing located on Massey University's website (Massey University, n.d.), which I found during the internet search process. The Massey University guide conceptualises the guest session as situated within a cycle of guest sessions. This approach means that the guest session is situated within two distinct sequences: the sequence of sessions in the module, for which the guest lecturer provides a one-off session, and the sequence of guest lectures that the lecturer gives (in any number of courses), for which this guest lecture is therefore not a one-off. The document presents a struggle between obligatory facets of 'good' teaching (setting outcomes, using varied teaching strategies, encouraging participation, engaging in meaningful evaluation) and the difficulty of cramming all of these processes into a single session. However guest lecturing also appears as an opportunity to do things differently as well as a struggle: '*[s]ince you are a guest you can probably break with any conventions of providing a lecture that is a didactic delivery of course content to a passive audience*' (emphasis added). The Massey University guide has thus provided the foundation for two strands for the following discussion of guest lecture pedagogy: (i) guest lectures are always and yet never a one-off, (ii) guest lecture pedagogy is both a struggle between time and pedagogical principles and an opportunity to break with convention.

Feminist pedagogy for guest lectures: risks and compromises

Given that feminist pedagogy is 'not a unitary or static discourse' (Kenway and Modra, 1992, p. 159), positioning this piece within the tradition of feminist pedagogy requires some further explanation. Importantly, feminist pedagogy is not just a set of teaching tools – it is 'a particular philosophy of and set of practices for classroom-based teaching' (Crabtree, Sapp and Licon, 2009, p. 1). As such, it is an ethos or teaching philosophy which extends into any classroom, at any time, and beyond the formal learning environment too. Some of the key tenets which are common to most understandings of feminist pedagogy include promoting 'egalitarian teacher-student relationships' (Stromquist, 2001, p. 376), and 'breaking down hierarchical barriers between the teacher and the taught' (Rao, 1991, p. 3). There is a particular connection made between using the experiences and reflections of students as curriculum sources, which is linked with the tradition of Women's Studies as critiquing canonised knowledge that excludes women's voices and experiences (Henderson, 2015), and

empowering women to construct their own knowledge (Lubelska, 1991). In many ways, feminist pedagogy is related to critical pedagogy, but the difference tends to be the focus on gender and feminist knowledge in feminist pedagogical practice (Henderson, 2015). Feminist pedagogy is not without its critiques; Weiner (2006, p. 80) has termed it ‘a productive concept with a ruined history’. In this section, I take into consideration the risks and compromises that are involved in working with feminist pedagogical principles in a guest lecture context.

The pedagogical practice of early Women’s Studies courses is presented as working within a unified group whose members are all part of the same social movement (eg. Rutenberg, 1983). On the contrary, as Macdonald (2002, p. 119) notes, ‘[i]nside our classrooms are the individual members of the very same social groups that exist in the larger world in complex and layered relations of dominance and oppression’ (p. 119, see also Madoc-Jones, 1997). Kenway and Modra (1992, p. 157) present a question to ‘Women’s Studies teachers working with consciousness-raising methods’: “‘How do you know what is happening?’”. For there is of course a danger in making assumptions that views will be shared or that sharing experiences will be beneficial – that teachers can *know* what is happening in their own classrooms. In a famous essay entitled ‘Why doesn’t this feel empowering?’, Ellsworth (1992) expressed grave concerns about the potential for feminist pedagogy to ‘reproduce relations of domination in [the] classroom’ and therefore to ‘exacerbate[] the very conditions we [are] trying to work against’ (p. 91).

The origins of feminist pedagogy have not been lost, despite the obstacles, and it is certainly still highly relevant to feminist pedagogical practice that this practice is experienced as an ethos that extends into every classroom – and beyond the classroom. As such, it is clear that feminist teachers cannot lay feminist pedagogy aside for a guest lecture without a betrayal of principles. In this sense, guest lectures can never be a one-off, since they are part of an ongoing pedagogical approach. However, it is also clear that an uncompromising attitude to feminist pedagogy can be a risky approach in a guest lecture scenario. The pedagogical approach mentioned above, which is transferred from the women’s movement to the higher education classroom, involves a long-term process of development. There is a sense of the students and the teacher getting to know each other as a group, over the course of weeks at the least (McCusker, 2017; Ropers-Huilman, 2009). In a guest lecture scenario, however, the lecturer only has one opportunity – there is no possibility of observing students over the course of time to see if they behave the same way regularly or if they are having a good or bad day. This places a certain amount of responsibility on the guest lecturer to get it right on the day. And if it somehow does not go well, and if it is the students’ only exposure to feminist pedagogy on the course, it is more than a bad session. Getting it wrong, potentially convincing a group of students that this approach to learning (and perhaps the feminist/gender content that accompanies it) is not ‘proper knowledge’ (Pereira, 2012), is a blow not just to the lecturer’s self-esteem, but to the ‘cause’ to which they subscribe.

While in the previous section I alluded to the opportunity for a guest lecturer to break with convention, this is not without its risks. However, for a teacher who works with the ethos of feminist pedagogy, ‘[f]eminist teaching is a reexamination and reimagining of what happens in *any* classroom’ (Crabtree, Sapp and Licon, 2009, p. 4, emphasis in original): it is not an option to set feminist pedagogy aside as if it were a box of teaching tools.

Conclusion

In this piece, I have constructed a counter-discourse to complement the prevalence of practical advice on the topic of guest lecturing. It is not my intention to dismiss the practical advice, and nor is it my intention to provide an alternative set of ‘top tips’. It is of course necessary to check the available technology and the expected course content in advance of a guest lecture – and following this advice can also have a comforting effect. What I have tried to do is provide a more analytical approach to thinking about guest lecturing, and the foundations of a discussion for other guest lecturers to take up and extend. When a lecturer enters a classroom as an invited guest, there are other elements that they may bring with them that are *uninvited*. In the case of feminist pedagogy, at times lecturers are invited into a classroom in order to provide some feminist/gender content that the module teacher views as beneficial to the students but out of their expertise. While the content and the lecturer may be invited, the teaching ethos may be uninvited, and this is a risk that feminist teachers run entering any guest lecture.

The Massey University (n.d.) guide to guest lecturing helped to formulate some key tenets of guest lecture pedagogy: (i) guest lectures are always and yet never a one-off, (ii) guest lecture pedagogy is both a struggle between time and pedagogical principles and an opportunity to break with convention. In view of this, and the lack of time available for a guest lecturer to implement the relationship development that is inimical to feminist pedagogy, it may be necessary to compromise on some (but never all) of the pedagogical principles that underpin this teaching ethos. Some self-forgiveness may be needed in balancing the risks and challenges of bringing feminist pedagogy into a guest session.

Conflict of Interest Statement:

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² ERIC and BEI, using several search terms such as 'guest lectur*', 'guest session', 'guest speaker*'.