

REVIEW: MAEBH HARDING AND AOIFE O'DONOGHUE (EDS), *DOING FEMINIST LEGAL WORK BEST PRACTICE GUIDE: FEMINIST LEGAL PEDAGOGIES AND HOW TO DO THEM*

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This is the second guide produced by the Doing Feminist Legal Work (DFLW) Network led by Dr Maebh Harding and Professor Aoife O'Donoghue. The DFLW Network has hosted a number of cross border workshops and has produced two guides, the first focuses on *Rapid Legal Policy Reactions and How to Do Them*, while this guide, *Feminist Legal Pedagogies and How to Do Them*, serves as a practical tool to assist those who are thinking about incorporating feminist legal pedagogies into their own teaching. While Harding and O'Donoghue act as both editors and contributors, there is an interesting and diverse range of reflections from contributors. A guide such as this is particularly useful as some academics, particularly those starting out may feel overwhelmed when thinking about various pedagogies and how to bring them into their day to day teaching. This guide serves as a practical tool in which contributors share their own experiences of engaging with feminist pedagogies. The guide is very accessible and comes with a useful list of additional resources to assist those who want to learn more about the area. While the guide is rigorous in its production and presentation, and includes reference to scholarship on legal education, the six pieces in the guide provide both an introduction to the area and a tool for reflection for those who have been relying on feminist legal pedagogies for some time.

The guide starts with a short explanation on 'what is feminist legal work' and 'what do we mean by feminist legal pedagogies'. Feminist legal pedagogies foster students' critical thinking and reflective practices about 'the very nature of the law, the power dynamics of the classroom and the way in which legal knowledge is constructed'. The first contribution in the guide is from Professor Máiréad Enright on the topic of 'Can you do the feminist lectures? From silo to mainstream thinking'. Enright discusses a practice that can sometimes happen where one academic is asked to deliver a token class or handful of classes in a module where feminist approaches may not have been previously mentioned or included. This siloed approach could give students the impression that this material is separate to the core content of the module and therefore possibly of less value or less rigorous. Enright invites academics to think about the other content that was taught on the module and then engage students in a conversation about, for example, the various theorists they have previously discussed on the module and the way in which topics and arguments could be addressed and examined through the feminist perspective. Enright advises that instead of trying to deliver a siloed lecture that attempts to cover a large chunk of feminist legal theory, it would be more effective to ask students a range of questions related to what they have previously learned through the lens of a feminist perspective: this approach would also allow for opportunities to arise to model reparative critique.

The second piece from Dr Maebh Harding looks at 'Decentering and Decolonising patriarchal legal structures (when they are still central to your subject discipline)'. Harding

¹ Available at <<https://dfw.ie/publications/best-practice-guides>> accessed 26 March 2024, research funded by the Irish Research Council under the New Foundations Shared Island Scheme.

states ‘Today, I really try to consider whose experiences I am centering and whose experiences are missing in terms of what I teach and how I teach it’.² She relies on a research-led ‘law in context’ pedagogy ‘which situates law in its social, political and historical context’³ and stresses the importance of students being able to relate the law they learn about in class to the impact that the law has on different social groups and how that impact can be disproportionate. This piece is useful for those who might be starting out in academia and want to think about the way in which students can share their own experiences in the classroom, but also noting the different power dynamics which may be in place within the classroom environment. Harding highlights the importance of establishing ground rules for discussion of emotive subjects in the classroom to ensure that students feel they can contribute in a safe environment.

Dr Yassin Brunger discusses the topic of ‘Doing Travel with Ideas’. Brunger advocates for the use of audio-visual aids in the classroom, which in addition to readings can make ‘preparation multi-layered and engaging’.⁴ By advocating this approach students may develop ‘the kind of ‘oppositional gaze’ that bell hooks encourages within feminist praxis’.⁵ The advantage of including audio visual resources ensures that we, as educators, can think about the way we discuss people’s stories in the classroom and also reflect on whose stories we are telling—and what voices are heard in the classroom. The piece also recommends including points for reflection to accompany the audio-visual materials, which would allow for deeper consideration of the content of the materials. Reflection points rather than a question-and-answer focused session and helps to avoid a situation where students may not answer a question due to a fear of being wrong: this ‘fosters a classroom community that centres on dialogue and reflexivity’.⁶

Dr Sarah Craig examines ‘The Feminist Practice of a Supportive Teaching Team’. This piece highlights an important dynamic which may not be considered as much as the lecturer-student perspective. Craig argues that the same supportive environment we may want for our students should also exist with our co-teachers. The piece highlights how early career researchers may join an established teaching team and how important it is that more established colleagues reach out to offer guidance and support. The penultimate piece in the guide is from Dr Sahar Ahmed on the topic of ‘Doing Intersectional Teaching and Dealing with Resistance’. Ahmed’s piece focuses on advocating for ‘an intersectional approach that includes anti-racism’.⁷ The author reflects on how she developed her anti-racist pedagogical perspective in both secondary school and university classrooms. The piece reflects on the issue that what worked at the secondary school level, did not necessary work in the university classroom, and the resistance the author faced when adopting an anti-racist pedagogical approach.

The final piece on ‘Feminism Across the School’ is written by Professor Aoife O’Donoghue. The piece examines the idea of having feminist and/or critical approaches embedded across the curriculum and challenging the idea that while many Schools may have issues of gender

² Mae bh Harding, ‘Decentering and Decolonising Patriarchal Legal Structures (when they are still central to your subject discipline)’ in Mae bh Harding and Aoife O’Donoghue (eds), *Feminist Legal Pedagogies and How to do Them* <<https://dflw.ie/publications/best-practice-guides>> 3.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Yassin Brunger, ‘Doing Travel with Ideas’, in Mae bh Harding and Aoife O’Donoghue (eds), *Feminist Legal Pedagogies and How to do Them* <<https://dflw.ie/publications/best-practice-guides>> 4

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Sahar Ahmed, ‘Doing Intersectional Teaching and Dealing with Resistance’ in Mae bh Harding and Aoife O’Donoghue (eds), *Feminist Legal Pedagogies and How to do Them* <<https://dflw.ie/publications/best-practice-guides>> 4.

being discussed in gender and the law and feminist legal studies modules, issues of gender are possibly not being discussed across the curriculum. O'Donoghue provides practical steps that could be taken when looking at reading lists for a module and considering who is represented or not. She questions 'what voices we deem to be expert and why?'.⁸ This questioning also relates to the issue of rigour within the selection and creation of the reading lists which academics put together to accompany their teaching.

O'Donoghue's piece bookends a guide which moves through a process of asking an academic to think about their own practice; how they engage with students; how they engage with colleagues; how they engage with learning materials; and how they navigate situations where pedagogical approaches may face resistance. The editors have brought together a great mix of authors, who reflect from different angles and career stages and share honestly their experience with using feminist pedagogies. The honesty in their reflections shares challenges that others may also face when engaging with these pedagogies and it enriches the sharing of practice in the guide. This is a thorough practice guide which will be as useful to the early career researcher as it will be to the seasoned teacher. This guide can serve as both a reflective tool and a practical aid to academics at any career stage.

⁸ Aoife O'Donoghue, 'Feminism Across the School' in Maebh Harding and Aoife O'Donoghue (eds), *Feminist Legal Pedagogies and How to do Them* <<https://dflw.ie/publications/best-practice-guides>> 6.