



The Rules above the Bed: ALL as Hospitality

Abstract

In times of 'Widening Participation', the University trades on notions of 'diversity', framing itself as a place of access and inclusion, welcoming students from different backgrounds. In this space, ALL addresses diversity through practices tailored to particular student cohorts, which are identified by one or more diversity 'feature' (e.g. Indigenous, low SES, refugee, or CALD). Practices include conducting pre-entry language assessment; identifying students-at-risk; monitoring student progress; and delivering targeted programs. These practices are seen as addressing students' needs and redressing the perceived 'imbalance in student access and educational readiness'. ALL is thus positioned as a site extending the welcome of the University, with its practitioners acting as benevolent hosts. Applying Derrida's notion of Hospitality (2000), however, we question whether such practices are indeed welcoming and hospitable. Derrida distinguishes two paradoxical but irreducible modalities of Hospitality, conditional and unconditional hospitality. These two modalities reflect the ambiguous relationship between host and guest/foreigner. For Hospitality to occur, the guest/foreigner needs to be welcomed by a host but this guest/foreigner can pose a potential threat as an enemy or parasite. Similarly, as a sovereign or master of the house, the host opens the space of hospitality but averts the potential threat by identifying, labelling, and policing the guest/foreigner. In dictating 'the rules above the bed', the host thus engages in conditional hospitality. Yet, Hospitality also demands an unconditional welcome. 'This is the double law of hospitality: to calculate the risks, yes, but without closing the door on the incalculable, that is, on the future and the foreigner' (Derrida, 2005, p.6). In this paper, we explore the ambiguous role of ALL practitioners, as hosts who not only provide a welcome to the guest/foreigner student but also exercise their status as masters/sovereigns. We question current ALL practices which privilege conditional hospitality and close the door on the 'incalculable' or 'unforeseeable' that students may bring. While unconditional hospitality is impossible to achieve, Derrida reminds us that Hospitality is an "openness that answers an ethical demand ... to welcome and make room for anyone who might stand on the threshold of our home" (Langmann, 2010, p.343). We believe Derrida's notion of Hospitality offers a radical responsiveness to student difference. Each time we welcome a student, we are presented with a 'crisis of choice' in opening to the possibility of the arrival of the new (ibid). Hospitality thus demands of us an ethical response 'in doing everything to address the other... while keeping this question from becoming a "condition", a police inquisition, a blacklist or a simple border control' (Derrida, 2005, p.7).

References

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