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Toward Decolonizing and Feminist Pedagogies in Transforming Economics Classrooms

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Abstract

Organizing around changing economics curricula has been gaining momentum. Where there has been less emphasis is on the pedagogical front, which focuses on *how* we change the way we teach economics. We enter this conversation by asking how decolonizing and feminist pedagogies can be used toward transforming economics classrooms. We analyze this question through the lens of three prominent problems in economics: the lack of engagement with power, the insularity of economics, and the overreliance of formalistic economic modeling. We argue that by flattening power hierarchies, letting students co-create and co-lecture, and centering the importance of different knowledges, we open new possibilities for radical pedagogy in the economics discipline.

JEL Classification: A20, B54, A14

Keywords

economics teaching and pedagogy, decolonizing economics, feminist pedagogy, feminist economics, decolonizing pedagogy

1. Introduction

Globally, there has been collective organizing to change economics education with calls for "teaching and practicing economics so that it truly helps to deal with the real-world challenges" (Rethinking Economics 2024). At the time of writing, the *Rethinking Economics International* website listed 110 different student groups across six continents, showing how widespread this organizing has become. In South Africa, *Rethinking Economics for Africa* (REFA) successfully hosted its sixth annual festival in 2023. The festival was framed around context-specific ways to challenge how economics is taught in universities (Rethinking Economics for Africa 2024). The

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multifaceted nature of the more current trends in economics education shows promise, despite still facing a plethora of challenges. Bäuerle and Groenewald (2025) set out a more recent and detailed account of these trends.

There are promising signs in prioritizing pluralism in economics education with the *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* (IJPEE) founded in 2009. It is encouraging to see the *Review of Political Economy's* (*ROPE*) 2023 symposium focusing on "how to embed gender, feminist methodologies, and inclusive practices" (Long 2023: 588) into economics curricula. This special issue of the *Review of Radical Political Economics* (RRPE) on Anti-capitalist Pedagogies and Teaching Radical Economics. It is also a timely and necessary call to reinvigorate previous research on economics pedagogy, building on the history of scholarship on radical pedagogy in RRPE (Clement 1975).

At the core of this article, we ask how decolonizing and feminist approaches can be used toward transforming economics classrooms. This discussion required intricate navigation since the literature on decolonization may not necessarily be feminist and vice versa. And both decolonizing and feminist approaches may not base their analysis within the discipline of economics, especially on the pedagogical front. Finally, definitions of "decolonizing" and "feminist" vary significantly and there are, rightly so, fervent debates on terminology. For instance, some scholars use the term decolonial, some others may refer to postcolonial or anticolonial, and yet others use the term decolonization. Debates also exist on what is meant by feminism, feminisms, feminist pedagogies, feminist political economy, feminist radical political economy, and feminist international political economy. Without inserting ourselves into this debate, which is not possible given the limitations on word count, we use the phrase "decolonizing and feminist pedagogies" to reflect our approach. We clearly attribute where we have drawn from specific authors' ideas throughout the rest of the sections in this paper in discussing our approach to pedagogies that are feminist as well as decolonizing

After providing an overview of the feminist and decolonizing literature, we move toward the question of how decolonizing and feminist pedagogies can be used to transform the economics classroom, by drawing on our experiences of having practiced these pedagogies in our teaching over the past six years. We discuss the options for letting students take a more active role in co-creating their economics curricula when power hierarchies are flattened, offering opportunities for co-teaching, and allowing students to choose one of their own assessment methods. Through these strategies, we engage with interdisciplinarity in a move toward trans-/anti-/counter-/de-disciplining and a fundamental rethinking of how economics tackles its overreliance on formalistic economic modeling.

When we analyze our pedagogical approaches to economics below, we have not drawn only from those works that explicitly exist at the intersection of decolonizing literature, feminist literature, and economics literature. Rather, we aim in this article to present how we have tried to bring all three these aspects—decolonizing, feminisms, and economics—more closely into conversation with one another when applying this to our pedagogical practice. We have framed the article around three problems we have found to be particularly dominant in the economics discipline. These problems are (a) economics' lack of engagement with power, (b) the insularity of economics, and (c) the overreliance of formalistic economic modeling. This is not to suggest that these are the only problems in economics. However, these are the ones that we have grappled with most prominently as academic economists in South Africa.

We base our understanding of pedagogy on the work of Mayberry, as being:

> concerned with the content of what we teach—feminist thought—and the ways in which we teach—feminist pedagogy. The form and content of educational practices are inextricably linked in the feminist classroom. Feminist pedagogy therefore embodies a concern for *both what we teach and how we teach.* (Mayberry 2010: 6, emphasis added)

In sections 4, 5, and 6, we place the majority of our focus on the *how* component of decolonizing and feminist pedagogies, but in some instances, there is more explicit reference to *what* we are teaching in order to better illustrate the *how* components. There is, of course, a vast body of work to draw from when centering decolonizing and feminist approaches in economics. Our intention in this discussion is not to be overly prescriptive. Rather, we think that the *how* components better present some opportunities for guiding ideas that can more readily be applied and adapted depending on context-specific realities. Throughout this article, we do not position these pedagogical approaches as an option to only be incorporated into a specific economics course; for an example on how to specifically teach development economics from a gender perspective, see Berik and van der Meulen Rodgers (2023). Rather, we think that each economics lecturer would be best placed to grapple with their specific institutional challenges and relational opportunities, to decide how to incorporate these pedagogical approaches in a way that is helpful in their context.

We have drawn inspiration from the work by de Jong et al. (2019) where they "present two fields with powerful traditions of critical pedagogy—decolonial and feminist thought—which have been in productive exchange as well as tension with each other" (Icaza and de Jong 2019: xv). The authors reflect here on bell hooks's internal critical dialogue—which is further clarified by Icaza and de Jong (2019: xvii)—where she is "trying to find a language to acknowledge her indebtedness to Freire's work and honor their friendship while engaging critically with 'not only the sexism of the language but the way he. . . constructs a phallocentric paradigm of liberation'" (hooks 1994: 49). The decolonial contribution to feminist pedagogies has been both important to our pedagogical approaches and continues to challenge us in our own complicity in the reproduction of systems of oppression. Grande (2003: 346) clearly writes on the whitestreaming of feminist pedagogies that "merely assert the equality of female power and desire [as] accomplices to the projects of colonialism and global capitalism." We expand in further detail in our sections on pedagogical approaches, on the important contributions that have shaped our approach to decolonizing and feminist pedagogies in the economics classroom.

In each section where we discuss the pedagogical approaches we have employed in the classroom, we provide evidence in three forms. Firstly, we use both reflexivity and critical reflection as evidence for the largely positive response to our approach, while also engaging with the instances where the responses have been more negative. We work with the definition by Ng et al. (2019: 1123) of reflexivity as "a process of recognizing one's own position in the world in order both to better understand the limitations of one's own knowing and to better appreciate the social realities of others" and critical reflection as "a process of examining assumptions (i.e., individual and social beliefs and values) and power relations, and how these assumptions and relations shape practice" Ng et al. (2019: 1123).

Secondly, we provide qualitative data in the form of direct quotes/statistics from our own lecturer evaluations. We include some of the positive student responses and some of the negative responses to more accurately present the complexity of the experience we have had. Thirdly, we offer summary statistics from the past six years (2019–2024) from between 91 and 120 lecturer evaluations, which we argue highlights some of the more generalizable positive experiences reported by students we have taught. We also reflect on the area that has received the lowest score in the lecturer evaluations over the past six years.

We certainly make no claims to have succeeded in this approach. We have used our reflexivity and critical reflection to point toward areas where we can show positive experiences, and to also discuss the fewer—albeit no less important—negative experiences. We offer these contributions as one thread in a much larger tapestry. We also emphasize that the pedagogical approaches we offer are much narrower and more limited in scope than decolonization as conceptualized by Ireland:

> decolonization is not merely an approach, method, or self-contained exercise in Puerto Rican feminist thought, but an ongoing way of living, existing, persisting and theorizing anti-colonial not-yet-futures. . . decolonization is a process that begins as a personal questioning of one's conditioning—what we value, how we learn—and ends with the autonomy of our lands. (Ireland 2023: 21)

For more related to this, please see Mohanty (1984), Lugones (2010), Tuck and Yang (2012), and Garba and Sorentino (2020).

We are keenly aware of the limitations of lecturer evaluations and are not presenting the quotes or summary statistics as any form of causal inference. As such we do not offer this evidence as some sort of incontrovertible proof of the success of decolonizing and feminist pedagogical approaches in economics classrooms. We point out that we have employed these approaches across a variety of courses—macroeconomics, development economics, research methods, and history of economic thought—at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. The class sizes have varied from approximately 20 to 130 students each year. Lecturer evaluations are not compulsory and have low response rates at our institution. In addition, since they are not compulsory, we may expect higher response rates from students with some extreme perspectives on the pedagogical approaches and their course experience to take the time to fill out the evaluation surveys. Table 1 presents average statistics from answers that have been given by 91–120 students across the six years we have been lecturing with these approaches. The lecturer evaluations at our institutions have standardized questions which do not always provide us with the level of specificity we would have liked to present, but we contextualize this with the direct quotes from lecturer feedback and our own critical reflections. What we think this together offers is a picture that, broadly speaking, students across the different modules we have taught, over the past six years, seem to self-report positive experiences with our pedagogical practices. Altogether, they can be seen as vignettes of possibilities for radical change in economics classrooms through decolonizing and feminist pedagogies.

2. Literature Review

The edited volume by Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela (2004) has served as an important intervention that calls on greater engagement between the postcolonial and the economic, both as disciplines and as discourses. They are clear in that this is "not aimed at producing yet another 'subfield' of economic heterodoxy, but at providing a cross-cutting 'frame' in which we may rethink a variety of heterodox traditions within economics" (Charusheela and Zein-Elabdin 2004: xv). While literature in the area of economics and postcolonial theory has sometimes been presented as having a particularly strong focus on culture (Zein-Elabdin 2009), Kayatekin (2009) places focus on political economy and postcolonial theory, and Smith and Lester (2023) aim to provide clarity on the distinction between decoloniality and decolonization as a broader project. Excitingly, there is emerging scholarship that is now focusing on decolonizing economics (Alves et al. 2025) which "instead of seeing Eurocentric aspects of the social sciences as blind spots to be corrected within dominant paradigms, seeks to unpack how dominant approaches may preclude the study of systemic processes associated with decolonization, such as structural racism and imperialism" (Kvangraven and Kesar 2023: 1724). In an interview, Grieve Chelwa explains that for him the entire economics discipline originated to justify imperialism (Shringarpure 2021). This sort of scholarship helps us to better understand that knowledge production and reproduction in the economics discipline is not a neutral process.

On the feminist front for the economics discipline, we now have entire edited volumes on feminist economics (Berik and Kongar 2021), work on feminist political economy specifically with advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students in mind (Cantillon et al. 2023), and robust debates within Feminist Radical Political Economy (Cohen 2018; Ramnarain 2024).

Table 1. Lecturer Evaluation Scores from 2019–2024 with the Average Percentage Reported Across Six Years of Evaluations.

Question	Average %	Respondents
The lecturer(s) explained concepts in an understandable way.	96.10	120
The lecturer(s) provided a platform where students could ask questions and communicate with other students and the lecturer.	96.21	120
I feel comfortable approaching the lecturer(s) with questions.	94.83	120
The lecturer(s) used a variety of teaching strategies (e.g., lectures, group work, discussions, project-based learning be it online or face-to-face) to support my learning.	96.59	93
The lecturer(s) used a variety of resources (e.g., narrated PowerPoint presentations, textbooks, videos, podcasts) to support my learning.	95.91	93
The lecturer(s) used a variety of assessment strategies (e.g., online quizzes, tests, assignments, portfolios, case studies, videos) to assess my learning.	95.82	120
The assessments of this module challenged me to reflect critically on the material that was presented.	95.14	91
I feel that I have gained skills in this module that are valuable for my future career.	93.21	91
I am confident that I can apply what I have learned in this module.	89.82	120

Inspiringly, in some instances there are contributions that exist at the crossroads of decolonizing, feminisms, and economics, such as the work of Gisela Carrasco-Miró (2025) and of Dengler and Seebacher (2019) on moving toward a feminist decolonial degrowth approach.

We highlight some of this literature, because while we largely focus on the *how* component of decolonizing and feminist pedagogies in economics classrooms, this sort of work serves as valuable avenues of investigation when economics lecturers engage more strongly with the "what" component of their pedagogy. While we are hesitant to veer into the territory of this becoming a list of reading recommendations, we emphasize that these resources once more prioritize knowledges in the written form with a very academic audience in mind. On the decolonizing front, we draw from the importance of epistemic justice conceptualized by Ndlovu-Gatsheni "democratizing 'knowledge' from its current rendition in the singular into its plural known as 'knowledges'" (2018: 4). Therefore, part of the practices of decolonizing and feminist pedagogies can encourage us to seek out *knowledges* in forms outside of this, for ourselves and for students. We reflect on some of this in section four of this article when discussing verbal contributions from fiction authors in some of our economics modules.

In terms of decolonizing and economics teaching, we are heartened by more recent contributions that engage this topic. Choat et al. (2023) provides a comparative analysis of decolonizing economics and politics curricula in UK universities. Muller (2017) examines more closely what decolonization might mean for a South African economics curriculum. Importantly, Kvangraven and Kesar (2023) grapple with the broader decolonization agenda and economics teaching. This study is based on survey results relating to how various economists understand the relevance of decolonization for curriculum reform. This sort of work explores critically important dimensions of economics meeting with decolonization in terms of what economists might choose to teach. Where our research enters into this conversation is to focus explicitly on the pedagogical practices one might use in an economics classroom by employing a decolonizing and feminist approach.

In contrast to what is frequently published in the American Economic Review today, Shackelford (1992) advocates for the importance of feminist pedagogy as a means to bring critical thinking and creativity to the economics classroom. Aerni and McGoldrick (2002: xiv) explore the many positive side effects of feminist pedagogy for economics because it suggests its ability to "transfer authority from the instructor to the student, allows for considerations of process over output, and allows for topics not considered by the mainstream." This perspective presents useful insights but does not engage with questions of decolonizing and feminist pedagogy and has a large focus on teaching in the United States. More recently, research from Corsi and Zacchia (2023) argues that the use of a feminist pedagogical tool in the form of economics students' written diaries can achieve a range of goals in improving economics teaching. While such engagement is certainly valuable, our research seeks to highlight the importance of decolonizing and feminist pedagogies in economics classrooms as a broader approach that can be applied in an array of contexts.

As we had presented in the introduction of this article, we have found the various contributions in the edited volume by de Jong et al. (2019) to be instrumental in guiding our thinking around decolonizing and feminist pedagogies. These contributions center a way of teaching that at its center does not seek to reproduce the norm, but rather to enable the recognition of difference as a ground for knowledge (Icaza and Vázquez, 2018).

3. Problems in Economics Teaching

As mentioned in the introduction, we have organized this article around three key problems that we have found especially prominent in economics. These are (a) economics' lack of engagement with power, (b) the insularity of economics, and (c) the overreliance of formalistic economic modeling. Each of these—in the order mentioned—are clarified in this section.

3.1. Some problems with power in economics

We root our understanding of pedagogy both in terms of *how* we teach and in terms of *what* we teach. While these elements are not interchangeable with one another, we emphasize that trying to change how we teach without also explicitly teaching content about power in its multifaceted dimensions would make it more difficult to grapple with the classroom power hierarchies. The concept of power is often addressed in mainstream economics within the narrow confines of market relations. Mearman et al. (2023) provides the following list of examples in which mainstream economics addresses power: consumer and producer sovereignty, market power in industrial organization, bargaining power, government power, principal agent, and contract theory. However, academic economists—more specifically those outside of the mainstream—can likely attest that such mentions of power in economics textbooks are often reductionist. Heterodox economics does view power within its broader social context (Mearman et al. 2022), which offers encouraging directions for curriculum reform. However, contrast this with the way in which Carrasco-Miró lays out ideas of power in decolonizing feminist economics:

> While there is not a unifying/totalizing "decolonial feminisms" located in a particular place or options (this will contradict the core ideas of it). . . decolonizing feminist movements and struggles around the world—have in common a plurality of ideas and approaches concerned with multiple and interconnected power structures such a heteropatriarchy, capitalism, whiteness, colonialism, and ecological degradation—and the resistance to them. (Carrasco-Miró 2025: 22)

How this conceptualization would frame specifically what would be taught in economics curricula presents an exciting, challenging, and potentially infinite process for future research and praxis. For the purposes of how we teach, we engage with power in the economics classroom itself, try to flatten power hierarchies in the economics classrooms, and emphasize the importance of centering knowledges. While it is not unique for these power hierarchies to exist

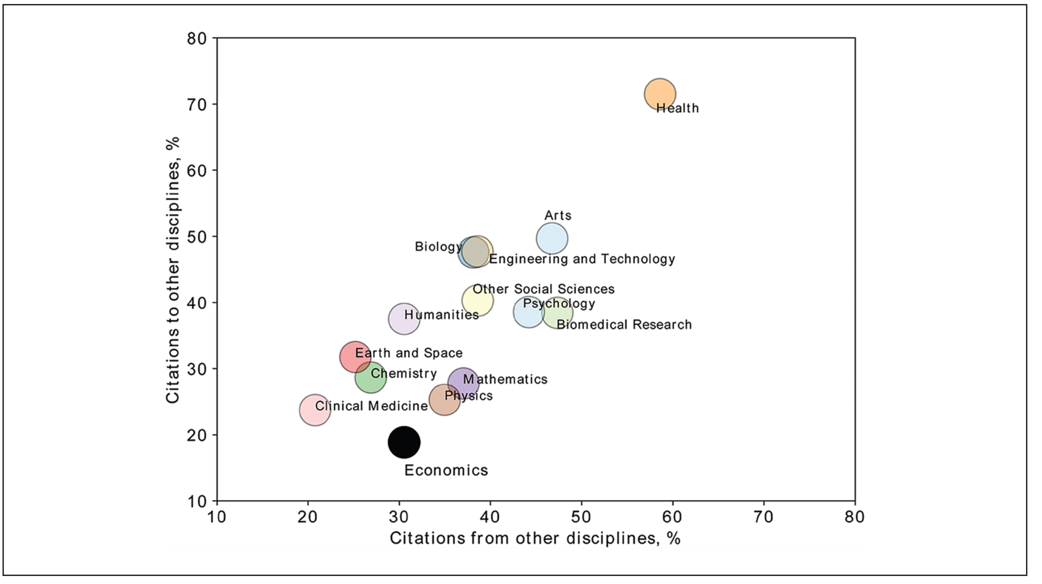

Figure 1. Citations in and out of disciplines.
Source: Van Noorden (2015).

in many contexts between lecturer and student, we think that these are particularly perverse in economics, given the culture of economists seeing themselves at or near the top of the disciplinary hierarchy (Fourcade et al. 2015), and a mainstream that is so dominant that the economics discipline is seen as anomalous in having such a clearly identifiable top five of economics journals (Truc et al. 2023). As such the impetus for grappling with radical pedagogies is essential in the economics discipline.

3.2. The problem of insularity in economics

Insularity is particularly problematic for the economics discipline. Haldane and Turrell (2018) illustrate both citations to other disciplines and citations from other disciplines in a single figure. They draw from data originally published by Van Noorden (2015), to show that economics has historically been insular in comparison to other disciplines.

As can be seen in figure 1,[1] "over the period 1950–2010 economics papers in academic journals have cited papers in other disciplines less frequently than the average. In turn, those other disciplines have consistently failed to cite economics research" (Haldane and Turrell 2018: 220).

Fourcade et al. (2015: 95) also show that only 42.1 percent of US university professors in economics either strongly agree/agree with the proposition that "in general, interdisciplinary knowledge is better than knowledge obtained from a single discipline." This is in comparison to 59.8 percent of professors in political science and 72.9 percent of professors in sociology. This is a statistic worth reflecting on when we think through what might be some of the challenges to how we teach economics in a more interdisciplinary manner.

Truc et al. (2023) gives a particularly nuanced analysis on the insularity of economics. To have a more accurate representation of the insularity of economics—which allows for more

[1]We have kindly been granted written permission by Haldane, Turrel, and Van Noorden to make use of figure 1 in this article.

precise approaches to reforming economics pedagogy—the results of Truc et al. (2023) are better appreciated when understood in the broader contestation around the insularity of the economics discipline.

Fourcade et al. (2015: 91) "documents the relative insularity of economics. . . this trait peculiarly characterizes economics." They also investigate the extra disciplinary citations in five top economics journals[2] to seven other disciplines. Their results consistently show political science and sociology having citations below those of finance and statistics. The relatively low percentage of citations from economics to other disciplines as a whole should also be noted, with the maximum value at approximately 8 percent.

Truc et al. explain that their:

> analysis indicates that Fourcade et al. (2015) are correct—contra Angrist et al. (2020)—in their assessment that economics has been uniquely insular among the social sciences, but Angrist et al. (2020) are right to point out—contra Fourcade et al. (2015)—that the degree of interdisciplinarity of economics has changed rather dramatically in the last two decades, although the most influential journals in the discipline do not participate in this transformation. (Truc et al. 2023: 1058)

Having a more precise understanding of the nature of the insularity of the economics discipline—specifically in contrast to the economics discipline more broadly compared to the most influential journals—can assist us to more clearly deal with some of the challenges in transforming economics pedagogy. This bears strongly on how we teach economics in a more interdisciplinary manner, which we discuss in detail in section 5 of this article, based on our experiences of using a decolonizing and feminist approach in our pedagogy. With most economists not having been trained in an interdisciplinary manner, this insularity can easily (re)produce knowledge that continues to marginalize essential insights from other disciplines.

If one is committed to a decolonizing and feminist approach, we offer our attempts at *how* we teach economics in a more interdisciplinary manner. Interdisciplinarity is one step in the direction of transforming economics. This would be a move toward what Carrasco-Miró (2025: 20) is arguing for in terms of anti-/trans-/counter-disciplinarity, which are "essential tools to seek solutions outside—and against—the current framework of the economic thinking and resisting colonial 'techniques of specialist knowledge as they work with strategies of power'" (Spivak 1996: 215). This is an area of much larger debate outside of the focus of this article. However, a potentially useful way of thinking through the idea of transdisciplinarity is that it "transcends conceptual and generic boundaries that both delimit and limit what is recognized as legitimate and valuable knowledge; and, ideally, it transforms the disciplines involved" (Rostek 2021: 4). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 3) also introduces dedisciplining as "liberating knowledge from disciplinary empires and academic tribes." We take inspiration from both these conceptualizations as a move toward epistemic freedom, while being keenly aware that our approach to interdisciplinarity falls short of comprehensive trans-/dedisciplining.

3.3. The problem of overreliance on formalistic economic modeling

The final problem we highlight in this article is the methodological monism in mainstream economics resulting in restrictions to the questions approached and research conducted. For the most part economics research is structured around formalistic economic modeling in order to deduce forward causal inference (see Heckman 2008 and Gelman and Imbens 2013).

[2]They define these top five journals as the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Journal of Political Economy*, *American Economic Review*, *Econometrica*, and *Review of Economic Studies*.

This dominance is made clear when noting that "almost any modern economics textbook we quickly find references to procedures of formalistic economic modelling, central to which is the reliance upon functional relations" (Lawson 2004: 22). Strict adherence to mathematical methods limits the tools available to economists (Lawson 2001) and therefore limits the scope of questions that can be addressed by them. Very particular questions can be answered with much more precision using formalistic economic modeling, such as a more nuanced and precise gender wage gaps (see Posel et al. 2024 and Alonso-Villar and del Río 2024). But to use such estimations as a sign of forward inference would not be possible without construing a fictitious counterfactual to compare it with (see DeMartino 2022).

Importantly, while formalistic economic modeling lends itself well to certain quantitative methods, grappling with the complexity of the nature of an economic phenomenon might very well also require qualitative methods that economics students are seldom trained in. This is one essential reason that economists should be educated in a way that allows them to cross the current, socially constructed methodological boundaries.

As can be seen in Rodrik (2021), mainstream economics has become obsessed with attempting to ascertain and quantify "forward causal inference" as conceptualized by Gelman and Imbens (2013: 3). Rodrik calls the search for forward causal inference, the economists' method, which would not be inaccurate in the case of most mainstream economics. To use mathematics in the way it is often being applied in economics requires event regularities (Lawson 2010). Event regularities are however quite scarce in nature, resulting in scientists developing experiments that allow them to establish such an environment and enabling causal inference securely. This is not an option available in the social sciences. To get around this, economic theory assumes ceteris paribus. But this ceteris paribus would result in clean models that significantly deviate from reality. This is exemplified in the words of George DeMartino (2022: 8): "The strategy generates impressive blackboard demonstrations of causality. The problem, though, is that in the actual economy other things are changing constantly and unpredictably."

We elaborate in section 5 how a decolonizing and feminist approach to pedagogy might bring about a different understanding of what questions can be asked by economics students in the first place, when their method has not already been predetermined.

4. Decolonizing and Feminist Pedagogies and Power

Feminist pedagogy "is an evolving and contested paradigm, not a prescripted program or method" (Lefebvre and Giddings 2023: 615). That being said, Shrewsbury (1997) does identify power as a central concept in feminist pedagogy. Vitally for us "feminist pedagogy embodies a concept of power as energy, capacity, and potential rather than as domination" (Shrewsbury 1997: 168). This reconceptualization of power in feminist pedagogies plays out by fundamentally questioning the hierarchical structure of teacher and student (Weiler 1991). On the decolonizing front, we draw from the importance of epistemic justice, conceptualized by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) as *knowledges* in the plural, forms an important part of the process of democratizing knowledge.

One way to embody power as a concept of capacity and potential, rather than domination, is to use a teaching practice where we give students the opportunity to choose what content is included in their curriculum and to co-teach that theme. This practice attempts to at least start to flatten the power hierarchies in our pedagogy, as we aim to center the students' choice regarding the content of their curriculum. Importantly, we would partner with them to co-teach this topic. When presenting this approach to students, we first explicitly discuss the work of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), which emphasizes the importance of knowledges, rather than knowledge. We do this by pointing out that in the modules we lecture, there is no single textbook—a practice in many South African undergraduate and even postgraduate classes—from which we draw knowledges. The resources that we lecture come from a variety of books, journals, reports, and blogs. To flatten the hierarchy of written text above verbal contributions, we also offer video essays and spoken word poetry as teaching resources.

In the first week of each of the courses we lecture, we start by laying out a curriculum for students and asking them if there are any themes that they think are not relevant or useful to them. In our macroeconomics module where we teach Marx's concept of the industrial reserve army, we have had a student openly tell us that they did not think that the concept was relevant for them. We provide this example to engage in critical reflexivity and reflection around this practice of flattening hierarchies in the economics classroom, specifically around which knowledges make up the curriculum. It is well and good to espouse the importance of these ideas from the work on decolonizing and feminist pedagogies, but when this is embodied in the classroom it requires unpacking various important implications. If students reject certain topics in the curriculum that are arguably important—but are not deemed important by students who have not been exposed to these knowledges—does the attempt to create more equal power relations present an important critique of this approach? It certainly does.

We think that the way to grapple with this critique is through a dialogue with ourselves and with students, using critical reflexivity and reflection, which contrasts this approach with the status quo. It is also vital for this critical reflexivity and reflection to occur iteratively over time. As a starting point, in the first class of the semester we propose—not dictate—the outline of the curriculum by justifying why we think these themes are relevant. This means we do not just present a syllabus but rather try to address the issue of students having a lack of exposure to certain topics. This is accomplished by introducing these topics and justifying why we think they are important. Our approach contrasts to the way in which most economics courses function where the syllabus is simply given, which reinforces highly skewed hierarchical power relations between lecturer and student. Rather, what this process does is to reduce just how skewed power relations are, with no opportunity for students to engage with their economics curricula at all. This justification of topics by lecturers is to engage in critical reflection referred to in the introduction of this article. As such, following Ng et al. (2019), this is a practice that requires lecturers themselves to question their own assumptions about why they think certain topics are valuable and for this reflection to shape their practice of needing to actually justify this to students, rather than continuing to (re)produce knowledge uncritically.

At the other extreme, if we were to simply arrive in class with no syllabus and tell the students that they will decide all topics that will be covered, this too creates a problematic hierarchy because it would be a shirking of our responsibility as lecturers and placing the burden on students to create an entire course. The process of changing curricula, assessment formats, and lecturing practices is something any academic knows is time consuming. But it is one in which we emphasize that though decolonizing feminist pedagogy is seen as "core to their praxis, rather than as unrewarding housework or as an unwelcome distraction from the 'real work' of research" (Icaza and de Jong 2019: xvi).

After having applied Gatsheni's work on epistemic justice and knowledges, as a discussion point to get students' inputs, we then ask them to tell us if there is a theme that they feel is irrelevant. As we indicated in our example above, there are times when students feel comfortable enough to state this openly. However, if this is not forthcoming, we ask students to anonymously write down a topic they feel is not at all relevant, or if they feel that all are relevant, which one is the least relevant.

In almost any classroom, the lecturer is positioned as someone who is more educated and in positions of authority, especially since they are the ones who will often be deciding on final grades. Being positioned as such, we have seen that it can sometimes be difficult for students to initially communicate with us openly. This highlights our point about the response to the critique of this approach needing to be iterative over time. Initially, we only engaged students in a verbal discussion that resulted in most students simply agreeing with the curriculum outline. When asking students informally for feedback at the end of our courses in these earlier years, students have told us that they feel we have more formal education in the discipline through graduate degrees than they do, so we are better educated and therefore the final decision should rest with us. Others have told us that they are concerned that we would take offence by being told that the curriculum we have created has irrelevant components to it. In such cases, critical reflexivity has helped us to explicitly discuss the power relations the students have validly just pointed out in the classroom. So, in addition to soliciting student input verbally, we also encourage students to also spend a few minutes giving written feedback on the syllabus anonymously. This is then collected and read out by a fellow student, to take the workshop forward. In some instances, we have been lucky enough to teach the same group of students at undergraduate level, and then at postgraduate level the next year. In this case, we find that the relationships we have built with the students from one year to the next helps to create greater openness for more fruitful discussions at the postgraduate level. We find that students feeling comfortable with us is a key part of decolonizing feminist pedagogies in the economics classroom. The evidence of this is at least partly reinforced by the lecturer evaluation scores reported in more detail in table 1. This shows that over six years of lecturer evaluations, 94.83 percent of students answered yes to the question, “I feel comfortable approaching the lecturer(s) with questions.” While this is not a perfect representation of what we are practicing in our classrooms, it serves as a good proxy given the standardized lecturer evaluations given out by the university.

Such reflexivity has enabled us to better understand the limitations of our own knowledge and to better appreciate the social realities of others. By employing this practice of decolonizing and feminist pedagogies in economics, students provide a unique perspective in having not immersed themselves in academic materials for a living. This type of immersion can sometimes blinker academics into highly specialized debates, which can run the risk of becoming ivory tower pursuits.

We have sometimes been refreshingly challenged by some students, to ask whether we are training economists who will be able to engage with real world issues, or whether we are overwhelmingly providing knowledges and skills that are most suited to students who would also become academic economists. This sort of critical reflexivity is not to disparage or belittle academia, but a vital part of situating our own pursuits in relation to the social realities of students who may very well decide on careers outside of academia. When students are encouraged in this workshop to practice critical reflexivity, they have shared with us the advantage of grappling with the significance of knowledges they were not previously aware of. They also acknowledged the importance of engaging with academic research to better inform their understanding of topics regardless of the industries they may end up working in.

So, how do we bring this practice full circle in terms of trying to balance student input on the relevance of the concept of the industrial reserve army versus introducing them to knowledge they may not have known existed or think was relevant? We ultimately engage the entire class in a decision that we think honors the conceptualizations of power as knowledges that have capacity and potential. In the example above, we did not exclude the industrial reserve army of labor topic from the curriculum. We did, however, spend less time on it in class that year and then provided a host of additional resources that students could make use of outside of scheduled class time.

Part of the discussions we had with students was to emphasize that we too have been unsatisfied with how mainstream unemployment ideas were presented to us in our formal education. When recognizing this, we actively sought out alternative knowledges on unemployment. We think that these may equip each of them with ways to better understand contemporary realities of South Africa. As of 2024, South Africa’s unemployment rate by the narrow definition is 33.5 percent (Stats SA 2024). We contextualize this unemployment rate over time as persistently high and structural. We then layer the ideas of the industrial reserve army with Alenda-Demoutiez and Mügge’s (2019) article that uses qualitative interviews to show that South Africa has adopted the narrow definition of unemployment as its official definition—rather than the expanded definition that includes discouraged work seekers—despite how this may not fit local conditions, especially where labor markets do not adhere to Western-industrial norms. We then ask students whether they think it is necessary to question the status quo in learning about unemployment in the way it is presented by mainstream economics in contrast to how it is presented as an industrial reserve army.

Having ourselves been educated in mostly hierarchical educational structures, it was initially jarring for us to have students question the relevance of curricula we had devoted a lot of time and energy to creating and reforming from the much more mainstream education we ourselves had been presented with.

Over time, we have become more comfortable with our discomfort when students challenge the relevance of curricula that we have tried to reform from much of our own formal education. We now thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with students on this. What is interesting to note is that in the final assessment opportunity where students have a choice to write an essay on any of the themes we have covered throughout the semester, the same student referred to previously chose to write their final essay on the relevance of the industrial reserve army to better understand unemployment in South Africa. In this essay they reflected explicitly on how their thinking around this topic has changed over the semester.

We also encourage students to add a topic to their curriculum, by letting them make suggestions for topics on our e-learning platforms. We then collate those topics, giving students time in class to lobby other students to vote for a topic by explaining why theirs is important to add to the course and then letting them vote on it. Once the topic with the most votes has been determined, an online document is created for students to make suggestions for resources on that topic, which is used in our lecture. We put the names of the specific students who had suggested the resource on each slide that draws from their suggestion to emphasize their contribution to co-creating the classroom. We also invite them to explain to the class during this time why they thought this was a useful resource. This pedagogical approach gives life to the decolonizing and feminist pedagogical component of power as the capacity for students to shape their curriculum and their learning resources. In the process we seek to provide some way of balancing our domination as lecturers and therefore solely deciding what gets taught. Rethinking and rebalancing power relations also needs to occur in conjunction with the practical constraints involved. We ensure that the students are not overburdened with the responsibility of crafting an entire curriculum. Our pedagogical approach is built on encouraging and enabling students to critique and make alternative suggestions to the curriculum.

Topics that students have chosen are unlikely to be found as a core part of an average economics curriculum—despite its perceived relevance—which reinforces the importance of democratizing at least aspects of the final decision around a course curriculum. The topics that students have chosen include decolonizing economics, the potential of a single African currency, lobola,[3] Black tax,[4] corruption, as well as dictatorships and democracies in Africa. As a point of reflection on the iterative nature of this pedagogical approach, it was a 2021 cohort of students that had chosen corruption as a topic to add to the curriculum. The years prior to this, one of us had been struggling to understand why in our development economics module, students were so dismissive of the role that the state could play in economic development. When students chose the topic of corruption, it came to light that most students think that it was irrelevant to learn any theories

[3]Lobola refers to the practice of paying a bride price in Southern Africa (see Chisango et al. 2022).
[4]Black tax is a contested term but is defined by Magubane (2016: i) as "the social and economic support, such as money, shelter, food and clothing, indicating what the middle class provides to their extended family (kinship network)."

or case-study applications of the role of the state for the purposes of development, because of their perceived prevalence of corruption in South Africa. Since then, the two-week theme on economic development theories is condensed into one week, which opens up room to discuss anti-corruption strategies for development, a theme that is now taught every year. This is an insight we would not have had without the pedagogical approach of encouraging students to add a topic to the curriculum.

Importantly, we encourage students to co-teach their chosen themes with us. This centers decolonial pedagogies of democratizing, knowledge as the singular into knowledges as the plural, where students themselves are experiencing their knowledges being prioritized in the classroom.

Overall, students have responded with a lot of enthusiasm to being able to choose their own topic, to suggest resources, and to co-teach. The process of lobbying students to vote for their topic and for them to co-teach does favor students that are more comfortable speaking in public. But those that are not comfortable doing this do seem to be quite enthusiastic about suggesting resources and have written opportunities for reflection at the end of each class. When we initially start this discussion at the beginning of a semester, there are some students who respond by telling us that they feel uncomfortable with this process and that they do not know enough to be able to meaningfully contribute. To try and address this, we purposefully schedule the co-teaching toward the end of the semester, once students have had ample opportunity to experience a pedagogical approach in which we actively deconstruct the hierarchy and constantly emphasize numerous knowledges in economics with no single correct answer, but rather a series of intertwining debates where we can all engage critically to decide where we stand on various issues. In terms of areas where at least one student has felt less positive about this broader approach was a student in the 2019 cohort who suggested that "more textbooks could be used because some of us are structured to study well using textbooks." In order to address this over the years, we have put renewed effort into trying to let students who are enthusiastic about the approach we have taken to become tutors for the year below them to better guide students from their vantage point.

In classes where students co-teach, it was wonderful to witness the level of engagement of the other students. Generally, we have experienced our lectures as having a fair amount of engagement, but when students are co-teaching there is a remarkable level of enthusiasm, with students asking so many questions that the classes run over time. We have witnessed students pushing back on points raised by fellow students in respectful debate and yet others who had not raised their hands the entire semester while we have lectured now making extended verbal contributions.

In a feedback session after the co-teaching, we ask students why they felt more comfortable engaging in this way. Various students openly admitted that even with an approachable lecturer, they still feel that they did not want to take on someone in a position of authority. However, they felt on an even footing with their peers and so did not experience these same concerns. One student in our most recent iteration of this co-teaching responded that they had been taught from a young age to respect their elders and that as such they feel that even to ask a lecturer a question shows disrespect toward them, and to actively disagree with a lecturer in public is seen as undermining them.

Being approachable—at least on some level—as a lecturer does seem to be confirmed in the lecturer evaluations. An average score over six years of 94.43 percent of students who completed lecturer evaluations responded *yes* to the question "Did you feel comfortable approaching the lecturer with questions?" More insightful perhaps than these statistics on standardized lecturer evaluations at our universities are the anonymous written feedback from students. A student in the 2024 cohort responded that what they liked most about the module was that "it empowered me to change the way I think, I learned how I came about knowing ideas and knowledge I've acquired so far." A student in the 2021 cohort responded to this same question with, "creating an actual classroom environment full of economic debating and being able to be heard of my own informed opinions and then learning and adapting my own views to my classmates and the content." When responding to the question about what they liked about the teaching and learning experiences of this module, a 2020 student answered, "The fact that we didn't base our knowledge on one specific textbook, but a variety of sources."

Reflecting on trying to rebalance some of the power hierarchies in an economic classroom, we want to emphasize that while this is only a small step in the direction of doing so, that we are optimistic that this serves as a foundation to build on. Despite our best efforts, we are unable to change the fact that some students continue to see us in a position of authority by virtue of having the title of lecturer, reinforcing the very power hierarchies we seek to flatten. We are also keenly aware that we are white South Africans and the overwhelming majority of our students are black South Africans, which raises a host of historical, political, and social factors that present challenges as to how we engage with this pedagogical approach. For instance, as two white South African academics, we have been told by some of our students that discussing ideas around decolonizing economics is a privilege we are afforded because we are white and therefore won't be assumed to be an "angry black student." We have also been told by the students that we have the luxury of being able to engage these ideas because we are academics and that if students were to discuss these ideas at job interviews, they would be less likely to be hired. We have tried to navigate these discourses by providing opportunities during class for students to discuss these points and offer critiques to our approach. These continue to be points of tension we grapple with, and we try to let students lead in these areas of discussion.

5. Decolonizing and Feminist Pedagogies and Disciplinarity

For our pedagogical approach to interdisciplinarity we have found it useful to question ideas of authority that feminist pedagogies have engaged with. To add greater complexity to the component of an "expert in a position of authority"—that lecturers must often perform in the classroom—we argue that it is important to ground ourselves in the postcolonial insights of Minh-ha (1991). They argue that what interdisciplinarity actually entails "is to create in sharing a field that belongs to no one, not even those who create it" (Minh-ha 1991: 108). As such our pedagogical approach to interdisciplinarity is not one where we simply introduce students to disciplines outside of economics. When we teach such scholarship, we engage in a frank and open dialogue with students, to point out to them our uncertainties and, indeed, our fears of presenting work that is outside of the discipline we have been formally trained in. We in turn ask them to share with us their challenges, reservations, and/or opportunities when learning from other disciplines.

We try to create an opportunity to be vulnerable in sharing that we are concerned that we ourselves engage in a type of "economics imperialism" (Fine and Milonakis 2009: 1), where we appropriate the insights from other social sciences, without the nuance that should accompany such teaching and research. Ultimately, we contextualize to students that while we hope to engage with other disciplines without the hubris that can all too often accompany economists' interaction with other disciplines, we do not shy away from the practice of teaching other disciplines. In the process, we circle back to Minh-ha's (1991) contribution of a discipline belonging to no one, not even those who have created it.

We now offer another critical reflection on this pedagogical approach toward interdisciplinarity where students co-create an assessment opportunity where they choose how they want to be assessed. We engage students in the dialogue we have discussed in the paragraphs above and then let them decide among one another how they would like to be assessed. The only requirement we make of the assessment is that it should be interdisciplinary in nature.

The forms that students have chosen to shape their assessment method has varied. In one cohort, students decided that they wanted to return to their high schools—which in the majority of cases are students from a very underprivileged background—and present to high school learners on the importance of educational opportunities for intergenerational mobility. A different cohort had decided that they wanted to create podcasts where they invited friends from other disciplines onto their podcast to discuss any of the themes we cover in the course. They focused on entering into a conversation with these students about the convergences and divergences that the respective disciplines have on topics such as development, unemployment, democratic institutions, and education. The most recent cohort created video essays on the economic implications of lobola. These assignments included pictures and edited videos of their own families' celebrations of the custom, while still engaging critically with aspects of the custom that some students felt had harmful implications for them.

We have used this pedagogical approach for the past five years and can attest that we receive the highest quality work from the students when they are able to co-create their assessment. In comparison to other assessment deadlines, where students often submit late, these assessments have always been submitted early. Students frequently ask if they can submit assignments that are longer than the maximum number of minutes we allocate in the instance of podcasts or videos. This stands in stark contrast to the assessments we set up ourselves, where we frequently experience students submitting the minimum number of minutes/words. In the 2023 cohort, when students were asked in the lecturer evaluation what suggestions they have for maximizing student collaboration, a response was: "None. I liked the co-creators assignment we were given." Again, as a broad proxy of general satisfaction of this pedagogical approach, over the past six years, 95.82 percent of students who completed lecturer evaluations responded *yes* to the question "Did the lecturer use a variety of assessment strategies to assess my learning?" In response to the question "Do you feel that you have gained skills in this module that are valuable for your future career?" 93.21 percent of students who completed lecturer evaluations responded *yes*.

The co-creators' assessment does present a slight tension in terms of our previous point about trying to flatten power hierarchies. This is because we are still the ones who have to allocate grades to these assessments. While we are sometimes limited by institutional rules, for future areas of investigation, we could potentially make use of assessment methods such as ungrading (Ramnarain and Santucci, 2024) to better balance power relations between student and lecturer. The lowest score for the lecturer evaluations across the six years is for the question "Are you confident that you can apply what you have learned in this module?" Only 89.82 percent of students responded yes to this question. This might indicate that we have not succeeded in explicitly drawing out the applicability of our pedagogical approach. Whether these responses might be in relation to how we are teaching or what we are teaching (or a combination of these) is unclear. Overarchingly, areas for further research would entail getting ethical clearance to be able to conduct semistructured interviews with students before and after a course, to get richer data on questions that are not standardized across the institution we work at.

6. Decolonizing and Feminist Pedagogies and Formalistic Modeling

Our pedagogical approach to try to address the overreliance on formalistic economic modeling is built on Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018: 3) work on epistemic freedom being "fundamentally about the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies, and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism." We also find feminist pedagogy important when outlining specifically for economics students the necessity of "a variety of methods that engage students in learning. . . and allow for topics not considered by mainstream economic models" (Aerni et al. 2002: xiv).

Being emboldened by decolonizing and feminist pedagogies, we have drawn from this approach in how we teach research methods courses and in the students we have supervised. We start off the research methods course with an exercise asking students to go round in a circle and talk through questions that they are really curious about. Often students start off by bringing up questions that seem to reflect their lived realities very strongly. Questions we have heard students raise include how township economies are functioning—in the South African context these are similar to informal settlements—or whether there is a gendered element to stokvels, which is a South African term for what in the mainstream economics literature is sometimes called a Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA). In the South African context, this is often an informal credit and/or saving group where a community of people pool funds together by contributing a predetermined amount usually monthly (Matuku and Kaseke 2014). At this point, the students we teach have only been exposed to quantitative methods. In these first few weeks, we try to provide opportunities for methodological pluralism by exposing students to training on qualitative methods as well and to explain that the nature of a qualitative research question is fundamentally different from a quantitative one and we try to expose students to the importance of identifying which method would best answer their research question, rather than having a predetermined method and trying to see which question can be answered by that.

What is quite clear from the questions some students are initially asking is that they do not lend themselves well to formalistic economic modeling. Despite students displaying initial enthusiasm for the topics we mentioned above, by the time we arrive at the point where students present their research proposals—having worked with their supervisors for a few weeks—many of them would default to a question that hinges on being able to download an existing quantitative data set. They then typically run ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions to determine the relationship between different variables. In the case of quantitative methods, Harding's (1995: 7) point on how feminist thought actually allows economics to adhere to strong objectivity in that "feminist research does not introduce political assumptions, values, and interests into research fields that are otherwise value neutral; it identifies the ones that are already there." When we supervise honors and masters' students our pedagogical approach is—in the case of those who have chosen quantitative methods—to point out the political assumptions and values that underpin the quantitative data that shapes their interpretation of those results. This is not to glorify qualitative methods, as this would be to replace one hegemony with another.

We think we have made the least inroads with this pedagogical approach.[5] We do always have a steady influx of dedicated and hard-working students, who are willing to put in the extra work to also learn qualitative methods and/or to engage critically with quantitative methods. The students we supervise tell us that they feel there is more freedom in being able to pursue research questions that genuinely interest them. On the other hand, students have informally let us know that they have been told by other students and staff, that if they do not take on a quantitative method in their dissertations, that they are not real economists and they would be limiting their job opportunities. We respond to this by emphasizing that they do not need to choose either quantitative methods or qualitative methods but could build skills in both of these avenues. We ourselves have often faced this same sentiment about our own research when it veers even remotely away from the mainstream and so this narrative continues to reproduce severe limitations as to how methods are taught in economics. There are some promising avenues on how ethnographic and qualitative research methods in heterodox economics can broaden the scope of economic inquiry (Basole and Ramnarain 2016) to potentially ameliorate the reproduction of these limitations in teaching methods to economics students. What has become quite clear to us as we try to build on a decolonizing and feminist approach to pedagogy in the economics classroom is that it is incredibly difficult for students and academics to enact the epistemic freedom of being able to think, theorize, interpret the world, critically determine appropriate methodologies, write from where one is located, and be unencumbered by Eurocentrism.

[5]As we do not lecture research methods courses individually, we do not have lecturer evaluations to offer.

7. Conclusion

Although there are myriad challenges to reforming economics curricula, there has been encouraging and sustained progress around this issue. Where there has been less emphasis is on the pedagogical front, which focuses on how we change the way we teach economics. We enter into this conversation by asking how decolonizing and feminist pedagogies can be used toward transforming economics classrooms. We provide positive evidence throughout this article of the experience of our pedagogical approach and practices over the past six years through lecturer evaluations, critical reflexivity and reflections on the success and challenges and direct quotes from student feedback.

As economics lecturers in South Africa, we have experienced three particularly dominant problems in economics: the lack of engagement with power, the insularity of economics, and the overreliance of formalistic economic modeling.

We drew from feminist pedagogies to situate the importance of considering how we teach by trying to flatten power hierarchies. On the decolonizing front, we drew from the importance of epistemic justice conceptualized by Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018: 4) as "democratizing 'knowledge' from its current rendition in the singular into its plural known as 'knowledges.'" We offered our pedagogical practices over the past six years of giving students the opportunity to co-create their curricula, and co-lecture on topics that draw from their lived experiences.

For our pedagogical approach to disciplinarity, we drew from the importance of questioning authority that feminist pedagogies have engaged with. To add greater complexity to the component of an "expert in a position of authority"—that lecturers must often perform in the classroom—we argued that it is important to ground ourselves in the postcolonial insights of what interdisciplinarity actually entails, which "is to create in sharing a field that belongs to no one, not even those who create it" (Minh-ha 1991: 108). We suggested interdisciplinarity as an eventual move toward potential trans-/anti-/counter-/de-disciplining.

We have explicated how our pedagogical approach tries to address the overreliance on formalistic economic modeling. We find feminist pedagogy important when outlining specifically for economics students the necessity of "a variety of methods that engage students in learning. . . and allow for topics not considered by mainstream economic models" (Aerni and McGoldrick 2002: xiv). We outlined here the approach to encourage students to be able to ask research questions in their economics dissertations that are not predetermined by a specific method. We provided a discussion of how this has been the area where we have faced the most significant challenges.

Ultimately, we have advocated for decolonizing and feminist pedagogies as potential avenues to move toward for economics lecturers who are committed to not just reforming but transforming the economics classroom. Critical discussions of our experience and students' experience with these approaches and practices are intended not to be prescriptive but to engage more deeply in a dialogue around radical pedagogy for economics.

We hope that for those who are committed to a different type of pedagogy, this work offers up potential avenues for further discussion and debate. It is a pedagogy that encourages us to ask difficult, radical questions of ourselves, lecturers, and students alike. It is a pedagogy that asks when we have intentionally or unintentionally r(e)produced oppressive structures; which asks when we have silenced or sidelined certain knowledges; and ultimately asks us to always keep moving toward constructing a more emancipatory space.

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