

Guest Speakers: A Great Way to Commit to Education

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Abstract: Having guest speakers in a classroom might seem like a bad idea for some, but very beneficial for others, in any event it is a very useful tool that is sometimes neglected and is often times left aside. This article presents an overview of its highs and lows, and what can be done in order to improve a student's learning in a more interactive, one-on-one, topic specific basis. Some examples and tips are mentioned in order to understand how this technique works and how it can be properly applied. This tool can be very helpful not only to the students, but it can also contribute to the teacher's knowledge and practices. This article analyzes the best ways this technique can be used in order to make classes more approachable and appealing for students.

Keywords: *Guest Speaker, Class Improvement, Teaching Approach, Student Involvement*

Introduction

A Guest Speaker can be a great tool for the improvement of a class, because it offers a new perspective and variety in the way it is taught, while it provides important specific subjects that are often omitted from a regular class. That in turn brings a better learning experience to the students, the teacher and even the guest speaker. Because of the way this technique is used, a better one-on-one approach is achieved, as well as a better understanding of a topic that otherwise would be very dull or unclear. Students have a chance to learn about said specific topic in a way that helps them get fully involved in the class and actively engage in a more approachable way of teaching.

A student tends to be more interested in participating in class when there is a topic he or she would like to know more about. In the case there is a determined subject a teacher is not so proficient in, a guest speaker is then brought in to talk about their said field of expertise. Guest speakers also impact staff as well as students, in the most beneficial way possible, they improve their knowledge.

As mentioned in "An update of marketing student perceptions of learning activities:

Structure, preferences, and effectiveness" (Karns, 2005). A study made on college students shows that every student is different and that they have different ways of learning, there are many categories on what a student can be divided into. For instance, there are some students that are considered "sensate" who prefer real-world learning and respond well to lectures, but do poorly when it comes to activities that involve vagueness. "Visual" students are also included on this list, they prefer pictures, videos, diagrams, among others and work well in group projects, but do not respond well to guest speakers. Moving on with the list, there are also "sequential learners" that prefer logic but do not do very well with lecturers either. And lastly, there are "active learners" who prefer discussion. Each one of these categories help in the understanding of how a student's mind set works and what are the best ways to approach those mind sets in order to assist their learning, without jeopardizing their motivation, their skills or their confidence.

According to these categories, it can be seen that there is a split right in the middle between students that respond well to guest speakers and students who do not. The way this learning activity is used has a huge impact on the students' interest for the class. There is never going to be a right answer or a right way on how to apply this rarely used technique, but certain measures can be taken in order for a guest speaker event to have the expected results for a determined classroom.

Results

One of the questions that may arise is, "why is this method barely used in classrooms, if it is as successful as the studies have shown?"

First off, there is an issue that every teacher faces, time constraint, this limitation often times impedes a class from covering the materials stipulated for the course, in most occasions teachers tend to leave out the possibility to have someone come and help with lectures, because they need to follow a "set schedule" that tells them what to cover within the few months of duration of the class. Secondly, it might be difficult to find

guest speakers that can travel to where the class is taking place or finding a time that matches their schedule and the time needed. Thirdly, it can also be expensive. If it so happens that the guest speaker does not live anywhere nearby the school district where he or she is needed, travel expenses and accommodations must be taken care of. And last but not least, there might be a shortage in technology in a given classroom, making it more difficult to invite a speaker, in the case they need to use specific equipment for their presentations. These are some reasons why this learning technique is rarely used. However, it does not mean that they are the main or most accurate causes, but they are often times the most common impediments for this activity to happen.

The outcome of this practice not only depends on the ability of the speaker to make it successful, it also depend on the willingness, motivation and interest that the student presents when it comes to this matter. The reason for this is that sometimes a teaching practice is not successful and modifications to it need to be done in order to make it work, but none of this would work if there isn't a shared interest in learning/teaching from both parties. One of the disadvantages is that due to different student profiles it is very hard to be successful at it, but when successful, it can create a "bond" between the speaker and the student, because then the interest for the subject is awakened. As talked about in "Pitching the profession: Faculty guest speakers in the classroom" (Mooney, 1998). A well done guest speaker lecture can bring the student into the further liking of the field talked about, and can lead to a full enrollment into it, as well as secondary "consequences" such as field-related connections, a different point of view on ideas previously taught in a different way, and above all, better learning.

One of the disadvantages of this activity is that it is not always successful and it can certainly influence the way a student performs in class. Also, another drawback might be that it takes time out of the class to include these practices in it, and some other important topics might be set aside. The best way to prevent this is to plan ahead and have a determined schedule for the class and if

necessary cut out the subjects that have little to no relevance, to talk about specific material. In addition to that, guest speakers might not be always available or near the place where they are needed, and this might cause the class to not even use this resource at all. But if possible, a video conference or an online addition to the class might be required to solve this problem.

An online option and a great way to have a guest speaker involved in the class is mentioned in "Evaluating the impact of guest speaker postings in online discussions" (Hemphill, L. S., & Hemphill, H. H., 2007). In this article, a guest speaker for an online class turns out to be a rather successful event, in which students get 100% involved into the class, and as described, the peak in activity from them comes when the guest speaker is implicated in the class. They tend to show a greater rate of "productivity" by participating in all kinds of discussions, postings, etc. It is more successful than in an actual classroom by certain factors, one of them might be perhaps psychological. In which the student in a classroom seems to be more introverted at the time of asking/answering questions, whereas in an online course there is nothing to be afraid of, and if the topic that is being spoken of interests the student, participation is more likely to happen when using this method.

Another example of positive results from guest speakers in classrooms is stated in "Guest speakers: reflections on the role of accountants in the classroom" (Metrejean, C., Pittman, J., & Zarezki, M.T., 2002). In this article it is explained how making guest speakers mandatory is a very successful option, because it shows that the results are even better than expected; it also provided connections within the accounting major undergraduates and the speakers, who were subjects in this study.

If applied into elementary education, it will create an even more successful result, because the students will soon develop a desire to learn about specific topics, a better bond with the faculty staff, among other benefits. The school will also be seen as one that cares a lot about its students' education and that reputation will pay off with time, as students graduate in a more prepared manner.

Conclusion

In a less positive description, as mentioned before, using this modality might be contra productive, since it can be more expensive to use, or the school may not have the technology needed for it, but on the greater scheme of things, this idea seems very feasible in a today's classroom, where technology is key. The only drawback to this idea is that there really is no genuine interaction between the speaker and the student. Unless a video conference is opted, then the way this idea is presented seems more close to the real-world teaching, rather than just reading postings online from an unknown person.

In the articles reviewed, there were mixed results on whether having a guest speaker is a good idea or not, but they all mentioned that it depends on the kind of students that are being taught and how willing they are to engage into their own learning. A guest speaker in a classroom in my point of view, is a great tool that needs to be used more often, because it provides specific knowledge, personal-level comprehension, and it motivates students to actively participate in the classroom with a different person who can answer

their specific questions. In my personal experience I have been a guest speaker in several classes and it has been as helpful to me as it has helped the students and even the professor in understanding topics on which I was the only one with first-hand experience on the subject. Therefore, I highly recommend and support this activity in classrooms and conferences.

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