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Introduction: Learning in Parallel, Learning in Partnership

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INTRODUCTION: LEARNING IN PARALLEL, LEARNING IN PARTNERSHIP

This fourth issue of Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education is co-edited by **Alison Cook-Sather** (Coordinator of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr College) and **Lena Bahou** (Guest Student Editor and graduate student at the University of Cambridge, England).

Themes of mutual engagement, relationship, and reciprocity have been the focus of previous issues of Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education. The essays included in those issues explored the ways in which the dynamic interaction of people and roles in teaching and learning give shape to pedagogical partnerships and to the lessons learned from them. In this issue, we focus on the ways that mutual engagement fosters parallel processes of individual and shared learning.

Rather than pit mutual benefit and individual gain against one another, these essays throw into relief how collaborative work between faculty and students not only builds more productive and satisfying pedagogical relationships but also contributes to the clarification of the partners' respective commitments and goals. The learning that unfolds in relationship at once sharpens individual insight and contributes to perspective in the sense of depth perception or wide-angle view — perception informed by more than one angle of vision.

Gaining such perspective disposes and prepares participants to continue learning; it prompts them to see their current engagement as part of a longer-term evolution rather than an isolated experience. It thus inclines participants toward further educative experiences — Dewey's (1916) definition of meaningful learning. This capacity to be and learn interactively, to work both individually and in partnership, animates and enriches learning as it unfolds within and beyond college classrooms and is essential in world that increasingly values and requires such collaboration.

The format of these essays reflects this issue's themes. The three co-authored articles narrate in different ways how the faculty/student collaborators learned in parallel and in partnership. In the first, the co-authors provide "alternating narratives structured in chronological order"; they alternate between their two voices, each sharing from his perspective key components of the story of their shared experience. In the second essay, the narratives run side by side, offering us parallel stories that juxtapose the similarities and differences in the learning of this faculty/student pair. In the third essay, the three co-authors alternate between co-authored and individually authored sections and include as well voices of others who participated in the project they describe, offering a multifaceted set of reflections. Like the different kinds of perspective highlighted in this issue, these different narrative structures afford us different insights.

In "Fostering a Pedagogy of Mutual Engagement Through a Shared Practice of Aikido," Greg Selover, BA, Middlebury College, 2010, and Jonathan Miller-Lane, Assistant Professor of Education Studies at Middlebury College, trace the development of their teaching/learning relationship within both the college classroom and the martial arts dojo (training hall). In their exploration of the unique connection they developed and sustained through their academic work

in the classroom and their simultaneous practice of Aikido, they emphasize the give and take — in Aikido, the offering (nage) and receiving (uke) — that can also constitute a dynamic exchange between faculty and students. Formality is broken down through this exchange, and in its place a shared striving, a sharing of power, a sharing of process can emerge. Learning to listen (receive) and learning to speak (offer) take different forms for faculty and students, but they can be fostered in parallel and in partnership. A key point Selover and Miller-Lane make is that the shifting roles that are such a basic part of Aikido practice helped them to overcome the hierarchy that typifies professor-student relationships in higher education and to teach and learn together.

In "Learning While Doing," Zachary Oberfield, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Haverford College, and Sally Wu, who worked as Professor Oberfield's student consultant during her senior year at Haverford, offer parallel narratives of the key insights they developed through working, respectively and in partnership, through the TLI. Oberfield presents five principles that he discerned and that he hopes to take forward to guide his practice, and Wu presents five steps she discerned herself taking and that she anticipates repeating as she moves forward. These are guiding principles and steps on an ongoing path, respectively, that this faculty/student pair hope will inform their ongoing journeys as teachers and learners. Sometimes they offer similar — or even the same — insights achieved from their respective angles of vision; other times they emphasize different learnings, particularly relevant to where is each in his or her journey. The parallel narratives throw into relief the similarities and the differences between Oberfield's and Wu's experiences and insights.

In "Embracing Productive Disruptions: Excerpts from an Ongoing Story of Developing More Culturally Responsive Classrooms," Jody Cohen, Senior Lecturer in Education at Bryn Mawr College, Alison Cook-Sather, Professor of Education and Coordinator of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute, and Tiffany Shumate, Bryn Mawr College, 2008, offer several takes on work the three did together as part of a project called Toward Culturally Responsive Classrooms. They write both collectively and individually, and they include as well the perspectives of other students who participated in the project. The defining and redefining of culturally responsive pedagogical practice in which all participants engaged emphasizes the importance of keeping such defining efforts flexible, evolving, and never ending. As the title of the essay suggests, the learning — about themselves, about others, about complex phenomena such as 'culture' — must be ongoing. Throughout the essay each author highlights how collaborating with the others both challenged and supported her as, together and separately, they undertook this challenging work.

This issue's "From the Student Perspective" features the reflections of Ivana Evans, Haverford College, 2012, on the lessons she has learned in partnership with several faculty members through her participation in the TLI. She divides these lessons into three related gains she has experienced: in perspective, in empathy, and in confidence. Addressing each of these, she also reflects on how, together, they have helped her understand responsibility, courage, and power differently and prepared her to move forward as a learner and future educator.

Finally, this issue's section on "Teaching and Learning Insights" features faculty members' and student consultants' advice for other faculty members and students who might undertake collaborative partnerships such as those supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and

Learning Institute. Their advice is organized into five categories: (1) have an open mind, (2) structure your partnerships, (3) engage in real dialogue, (4) acknowledge the challenges of collaboration, and (5) rethink your models for faculty/student roles and relationships.

The balance between learning in parallel and learning in partnership highlighted by the contributions to this issue of Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education calls into question what some experience as a dichotomy or tension between individual growth and shared development. The both/and quality of these discussions affirms the generative potential of partnerships that break down traditional hierarchies and bring faculty and students into cooperative and collaborative relationships.

FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: GUEST STUDENT EDITOR, LENA BAHOU

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Finding a New Voice…and New Voices: A Student Ethnographer's Perspective

While carrying out a student voice project through a Students as Researchers initiative in a Lebanese school for my masters degree, I was asked by the participating middle school students to describe my experiences as a university student with particular reference to how we learn. After I answered several of their questions, student-Karim replied with a smirk, "Miss, it sounds like your university could use some student voice, too." The other students nodded in agreement. Caught off guard by their perceptiveness and honesty, I politely smiled and reverted back to the purpose of my engaging with them: to support 'amplifying' their voices at school through their research projects. As far as I was concerned at that time, student voice was about school students rather than about how we engage at the university level with learning and teaching.

When I started my doctorate the following year, however, I became more aware of and disheartened by the fact that higher education students are rarely invited to participate actively in shaping the learning environment in which our education takes place. I noticed that, similar to the middle school students in my previous project, students at university level in my experience are confined or relegated to having a 'voice of complaint' rather than a "voice of initiative" and suggestion. This led me to think about the disconnect between the focus of research projects carried out by university students and the educational context in which those students are working. The message I have absorbed as a higher education student is that making a difference in education is something one does 'out there,' usually for others.

This disconnect was intensified as I learned more about plans for a seminar that would take place at the University of Cambridge in June 2011, which Alison Cook-Sather was going to facilitate. The seminar, called "Student Voice: Past Efforts, Current Trends, and Future Possibilities," was to bring together policy makers, theorists, and practitioners whose focus is student voice. As the date of the seminar approached, I realized that I was one of the few students who was planning to attend. An exchange with Alison led to sending out another announcement – a general invitation to all PhD students at the Faculty of Education at Cambridge. To my surprise, few responded. It appeared that few students understood what student voice implied and how it might be connected

to their work on schools. Discussions I had with my colleagues in an effort to encourage them to participate led to their seeing how their participation related to them personally as students as well as researchers. Around ten students signed on for the seminar out of the 60 participants.

When Alison arrived in Cambridge, we met to share thoughts about the upcoming seminar. In recounting the challenges of my doctorate work with Alison, I also mentioned that there was irony in the fact that a major student voice conference was taking place in Cambridge, the institution from which pioneering student voice work had emerged in the United Kingdom, and yet where students' voices are seldom invited, listened to, engaged with and acted on except marginally through for example surveys and on few issues. Missing has been invitations to students to participate in a 'mutual engagement' with faculty about pedagogic and curricular experiences.

In the following days, Alison informed me that she decided to create positions for three student ethnographers who would participate, observe and document the seminar from their own student perspectives. I gladly accepted her invitation to take on this role and suggested other students who might be interested. The three of us students who agreed to participate met with Alison to discuss what our role would be and share our thoughts on the organization of the three-day seminar, which would consist largely of small-group discussions. The idea of a seminar in which everyone speaks and listens to one another was daunting for me. I had gotten used to being a spectator on the sidelines at the usual academic conferences at which experienced researchers talk at you about their research with a few minutes to ask questions if you are lucky. In contrast, for this seminar we were being invited to bring together past and present, and to pause fully in the present — not the projected future like we tend to do — to share our voices of experience and reflection.

On the first day, all participants talked in small groups about what had initially brought us to student voice work and why we thought it was significant. Seminar participants consisted of a rare gathering of university students, school teachers, school leaders, faculty members, academic researchers, and policy makers sitting together as equals. On the second, main day of the seminar, three exceptional presentations were given at different points of the day while we rotated four times in small groups for 30 to 60 minutes each and shared our thoughts and practices on given themes starting with our own principles/goals of student voice and ending with issues and challenges of student voice work.

The organizational structure of having the large group for presentations and small groups guided by reflective questions enabled me to bring to bear my diverse experiences and multiple roles as former student, former teacher, aunt to seven children, novice researcher and postgraduate student. The structure of the small groups, the important role facilitators played and the quiet moments for individual written reflections that we had integrated into the design of the day positioned everyone as learners.

On the last day of the seminar, approximately 30 participants took part in a post-seminar discussion of key issues and next steps. The question of whether 'student voice' was still the term to accurately describe what we are doing emerged as a main point of discussion. Many participants engaged in a lively debate about making the shift to 'intergenerational learning' or

'partnerships between youth and adults.' Observing the silence of all the students in the room throughout the discussion, Alison encouraged students to share their thoughts. It appeared that the discussion itself — that is, the voices heard and issues raised — was in part indicative of the need to still focus on student voice in order to create and sustain authentic partnerships. Most students agreed on the need to retain the term 'student voice.'

After the seminar's closure, my fellow ethnographers and I met to think together about the issues that emerged for us and in our notes. Subsequently, we met with Alison twice before she left Cambridge to discuss how our discussion might manifest as a joint article between the four of us and, later on, contribute to a book that may emerge from the seminar proceedings in which our voices would be interwoven throughout rather than have a separate 'student perspective section.' I consider the process I engaged in as a student ethnographer with my colleagues and Alison to embody the spirit and practice of cultivating voices (and capacities) that create intergenerational partnerships as a springboard for collective agency in relation to issues that matter to us.

This entire experience was significant in regenerating in me a spirit of excitement, renewal and connection with others. It left me thinking about what my responsibilities as a postgraduate student are regarding how to shift from this student 'voice of complaint' to a 'voice of initiative' in my own educational context and in others. Where do the possibilities lie within and beyond my immediate academic surroundings? I have come to realize that sometimes we can search for the cracks in between where possibilities lie to be discovered, other times we have to be patient observers, listeners, students of our own environment and create precious links with others across borders that tend — and intend — to divide us.