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Introduction: Respect, Reciprocity, and Responsibility in Developing Participatory Cultures and Practices

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INTRODUCTION: RESPECT, RECIPROCITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY IN DEVELOPING PARTICIPATORY CULTURES AND PRACTICES

This tenth issue of Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education is edited by Alison Cook-Sather (Mary Katharine Woodworth Professor of Education and Coordinator of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr College).

For the last couple of years, I have been working closely with my colleagues, Catherine Bovill and Peter Felten, to analyze student-faculty partnerships not only within our own work but also across contexts and countries. We've studied over 60 partnership programs and projects in the United States and the United Kingdom, and we've talked with many colleagues around the world about how to develop such opportunities for collaborative work. Striving to identify what lies at the heart of the most successful partnerships, we settled on respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. As we discuss in our forthcoming book, *Engaging Students as Partners in Teaching and Learning: A Guide for Faculty*, we see this triad as foundational to the work of collaborating across the traditionally separate roles of 'teacher' and 'learner.'

It's worth unpacking these three terms a bit, since everyone has somewhat different understandings of them, and they manifest themselves in particular ways in student-faculty partnerships. We see respect as an attitude according to which one takes seriously and values what someone else or multiple others bring to an encounter; it demands openness and receptivity, it calls for willingness to consider experiences or perspectives that are different from our own, and it often requires a withholding of judgment. Whereas respect is an attitude, a way of thinking and being, reciprocity as we understand it is a way of interacting: a process of exchange wherein there is equity in what is exchanged and how it is exchanged. Both respect and reciprocity inform the kind of shared responsibility that characterize genuine partnerships between students and faculty: When students take some responsibility for pedagogy and faculty share some responsibility for learning, teaching and learning become "community property" (Shulman, 2004), with students recognized as active members of that community and collaborative partners equally invested in the common effort to engage in, and support, learning. *In short*, respect is a precondition for developing a reciprocal way of interacting, and both lead to a sense of responsibility for the actions and outcomes that the partners are working together to achieve.

Respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are essential qualities of the partnerships featured in the essays included in this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*. In both formal and informal partnerships that cross traditional lines of role and accountability, these three interdependent qualities of partnership inform the development of participatory cultures and practices. The terms that several authors of these essays use — "*communities of practice*" and "*participatory cultures*" — have both general and more context-specific meanings. In general, they evoke shared spaces in which people actively engage with one another in particular kinds of practice — teaching, learning, problem solving, co-creating. They are at once inclusive and exclusive; they create opportunities for participants to actively engage, and yet often particular kinds of expertise are required for participation. Whether the authors use these terms or present the work of developing *participatory cultures and practices using other language*, the essays in this issue illuminate and analyze these complexities.

Across these discussions, though, we see students repositioned in ways that sometimes surprise and inspire them as well as throw into relief the ways in which they are not invited into partnership in other arenas. In both cases they also show us how the space we are opening up in the world of teaching and learning can create desire for further change. The repositioning of students is complemented by a repositioning of teachers, who also are prompted to rethink the ways they interact with students and others in higher education and other realms. Working together within and across overlapping spheres and areas of expertise, responsibilities for teaching and learning become more complicated. Technology in particular has the potential to open up new spaces for learning, but as Koltun-Fromm and Pallant point out in their essay in this issue, just introducing technology does not automatically create a new kind of dynamic or learning.

So what kinds of spaces and what kinds of approaches are most conducive to collaborative engagement — to participatory cultures and practices? The five contributions to this issue offer diverse explorations of how teachers and students in different positions and across different contexts can come together to collaborate and explore, both redefining participation and offering glimpses into the experiences of those involved in that redefinition. The first three essays focus on how technology can catalyze a different kind of participation in and responsibility for learning through creating more active, collaborative, and engaging processes of exploration both within and beyond the classroom. The fourth and fifth essays focus on mixed-role partnerships and the challenges of legitimizing participants' expertise. All of the essays illustrate the power of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.

In “Practice, Practice, Practice: Building Online Tools to Help Students Master Skills,” Selby Cull, Assistant Professor of Geology at Bryn Mawr College, presents several on-line forums she has developed to support active, student-directed learning in her courses. These include Instant Feedback Practices (IFPs), whereby students have a forum within which to repeatedly practice skills and get instant feedback on whether or not they are mastering them; scaffolded instant feedback practices that build up increasingly difficult skills to master; monitoring student progress using the IFPs; and IFPs completed in class. Cull discusses not only these practices but also the ways in which she developed them in collaboration with student consultants and faculty colleagues.

In “Teaching and Learning in Digital Contexts: Undergraduates' Perceptions of Themselves and their Professors Collaborating in a “Participatory Culture,” Sandra Lawrence, Professor of Psychology and Education at Mount Holyoke College, explores what happens when faculty and students come together in collaborations involving technology and learning outside of formal mentoring programs. She studied the outcomes of a program through which technology-proficient undergraduates became “ad-hoc,” informal co-collaborators on curriculum matters with their faculty supervisors. Lawrence suggests that “students' digital proficiencies enabled them to interact with faculty in non-hierarchical, supportive climates — similar to a participatory culture — which then permitted them to take on new roles in the teaching and learning process.”

In “Collaborating on Integrating Technology into Teaching,” Ken Koltun-Fromm, Professor of Religion, and Miriam Pallant, Student Consultant, Haverford College, '14, present a dialogue through which they discuss their experience of collaborating to integrate iPads into one of

Koltun-Fromm's courses. Koltun-Fromm emphasizes his interest in how this integration of iPads into his teaching could enable students to become active producers of knowledge in the classroom but also prompt reflection on how that technology informs engagement with images and the Internet at large. Pallant provides both suggestions regarding and reflections on this effort, illustrating how she and Koltun-Fromm both created and supported a form of participatory culture.

In "Partners As Newcomers: Mixed-Role Partnerships As Communities of Practice," Mark Meacham, teacher at Williams High School, Maggie Castor, Elon University '12, and Peter Felten, Assistant Provost, Director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, and Associate Professor of History at Elon University, offer two case studies of mixed-role partnerships. In the first case study, Meacham, a veteran teacher who participated fully in a specific high school community of practice, along with other master teachers, experienced newcomer status in a university research cohort. In the second case, Castor explores how she moved from being a newcomer to a more full participant in several overlapping mixed-role communities of practice during her time as an undergraduate at Elon University. In both cases, Meacham and Castor focus on the experience of being a newcomer who attempts to enter more fully into participation within a mixed-role community of practice in higher education. They also raise questions about how best to welcome and support newcomers into communities of practice and mixed-role partnerships.

In "Legitimizing Student Expertise in Student-Faculty Partnerships," Hayley Burke, Bryn Mawr College '15, analyzes the importance of recognizing and treating students as among those with expertise on learning and critical insights on teaching. Drawing on her own and other student consultants' experiences and perspectives, she complicates the notion of a trajectory from novice or outsider toward expert or insider, arguing instead for retaining some of the qualities of her and others' position as student as a form of expertise in and of itself.

What I find particularly inspiring about all of these essays is the examples they offer of the kind of learning that can happen in partnership within and beyond courses when students and faculty respect one another's expertise, when they exchange equally valid but not necessarily the same kinds of contributions to a shared project, and when both students and teachers are afforded opportunities to take a different kind of responsibility for their own and others' learning. They also point to further questions that lie at the heart of education: As the space of partnership develops, the desire for pushing for further collaboration, cooperation, and reciprocal exchange grows and challenges us all to make the kind of meaningful change that will expand the ways in which we can learn from one another.

References

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