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RECIPROCAL SUPPORT AND SHARED EMPOWERMENT

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My partnership with a new faculty member through Bryn Mawr's Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) was one of mutual respect and admiration, one where we supported each other and cheered each other on, and most importantly, one where we considered each other peers. I learned a lot from this partnership, gained confidence as a student, and grew to appreciate the liberal arts education on a whole new level.

From the very beginning of our partnership, we established a great rhythm of reflecting on and discussing my faculty partner's teaching style and habits. One thing we focused on for most of the semester was an effective way to work on writing in a class. My faculty partner's assignments were usually around 3-5 pages, and due every week or two. She was very passionate about students improving in their writing, which is simple as a goal but complex in execution.

What is the best way to teach someone how to formulate an argument? How do you explain how to use what we discuss in class in a paper? Is peer review useful? How can we get students to use the Writing Center? These were questions we discussed at length. Her perspective was that no one is ever perfect when it comes to writing. She wanted students to work hard, but to not worry too much if they weren't perfect. It wasn't about the grade so much for her, as it was about student growth. This was where we talked more about the purpose of the liberal arts education.

We talked at length about what it means to be a writer, a thinker, and what the meaning of art and original thought is to us both personally and as members of our communities. For me, as a student at Bryn Mawr, it is easy to get caught up in the thought process of, "I have to be achieving at this really high level and grades are all that matter ever at all times." With my faculty partner, I was able to discuss the benefits of learning for the sake of learning, learning about something because it will make you a better person and show you beauty in the world, and learning how to explore and make mistakes and grow. These are ideals that I have always had, but discussing them with my faculty partner really validated me and let me heave a huge sigh of relief.

Having this kind of open discourse about education gave me a whole new appreciation for the institution that I'm a part of, as well as a new confidence in myself as a student. It was also very powerful to form a relationship between me — a student — and my faculty partner — a professor. This was a huge contrast to how I've been taught to view my relationships to professors, as well as my relationship to my education, and resulted in my becoming more empowered as a student, young person, and woman.

Growing up in our American public education system, I got the message that teachers had all the answers, that my mind was not as valuable as theirs because I was younger and less experienced than them, and that there was only one way to learn and if I couldn't achieve in that way (getting high grades that were often based on certain types of tests), then I was not smart. Luckily, I was able to succeed in the "acceptable" way in school. However, as I have gotten older, I have come to believe that a person's intelligence should not be measured by how well they do on a test. I

believe that students' minds should be celebrated and valued in all the different ways that they work and function. Being involved in the TLI program with my faculty partner, I became much more empowered as a student and young person, and was able to grow in confidence in my own mind and intelligence.

I believe that it is a really special thing for a student and a professor to be learning from and teaching each other. In our discussions, we were both able to come up with some new ideas and strategies for how to realize a more inclusive and hospitable classroom. My faculty partner valued my opinions and my thinking, and let me know it often. I thought she was an incredible thinker and passionate teacher, and also let her know often. We were able to encourage and guide each other in a wonderfully reciprocal way, picking each other up when we were doubting ourselves or feeling challenged, and congratulating each other when we did well.