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Amplifying Student Voices in Higher Education: Democratizing Teaching and Learning through Changing the Acoustic on a College Campus

Alison Cook-Sather
Bryn Mawr College, acooksat@brynmawr.edu

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Ampliar la voz de los estudiantes en la educación superior: democratizar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje a través del cambio de la acústica en un centro universitario.

Alison Cook-Sather

Abstract

This article describes three programs that work to democratize teaching and learning in higher education through amplifying student voices. The first program partners undergraduate students with college faculty to explore, affirm, and revise the pedagogical approaches the faculty members employ in their classrooms. The second program pairs undergraduate students and college staff members from the service/craft sector in reciprocal teaching and learning partnerships through which they explore topics and areas of mutual interest. The third program brings undergraduate students, faculty, and staff together to explore social justice issues and to build capacity for communicating across differences. Based at a selective liberal arts college in the northeastern United States, all three programs create new spaces within which undergraduate students lead, teach, and learn from other members of the higher education community. In these structured and supported spaces outside of the formal classroom arena and typical relationships among members of the academic community, students learn to speak with and learn from one another as well as from differently positioned members of the community. As students test and tune their own voices — a process that moves them from silence or uncertainty into a place of greater confidence, capacity, and resonance — they develop a commitment to ensuring that others, both those with less power and those with more, listen and are listened to in new ways. Thus, through these programs, the voices of faculty and staff are brought into dialogue with, and modulated in relation to, student voices. This article describes the programs and analyzes how they support students in developing the confidence, courage, and capacity to amplify their own voices and to ensure that other voices are heard and honored.

Resumen

Este artículo describe tres programas destinados a democratizar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje ampliando la voz de los estudiantes. En el primer programa colaboran alumnos universitarios con profesores de la Universidad para explorar, afirmar y revisar las propuestas pedagógicas que los profesores emplean en sus clases. El segundo programa empareja a alumnos universitarios con los docentes de taller en un sistema de enseñanza y aprendizaje recíprocos a través del cual investigan asuntos de interés mutuo. El tercer programa conduce a los alumnos, profesores y docentes de taller agrupados a explorar asuntos relativos a la justicia social y a construir la capacidad de comunicarse a través de las diferencias. En un "College de Liberal Arts" en el noreste de Estados Unidos, los tres programas han creado nuevos espacios en los cuales los alumnos universitarios de grado lideran, enseñan y aprenden de los demás miembros de la comunidad educativa. En estos espacios estructurados y apoyados fuera de las clases ordinarias y

de las relaciones típicas entre los miembros de la comunidad académica, los alumnos aprenden a hablar con y a aprender de los demás así como de otros con una posición diferente en la comunidad. Mientras los alumnos prueban y sintonizan sus propias voces –un proceso que les lleva desde el silencio o la incertidumbre a un lugar de mayor confianza, capacidad y resonancia- desarrollan un compromiso que asegura que los demás, aquellos con menos y con más poder, escuchan y son escuchados de formas nuevas. A través de estos programas las voces de los profesores dialogan con y son moduladas en relación a la voz de los alumnos. Este artículo describe estos programas y analiza cómo apoyan a los estudiantes en el desarrollo de la confianza, el ánimo y la capacidad de amplificar sus propias voces y cómo asegurar que otras voces son escuchadas y apreciadas.

Key Words: student voice, open space, partnership, dialogue, democracy, power, learning, higher education

Palabras clave: Voz del alumnado, espacio abierto, colaboración, diálogo, democracia, poder, aprendizaje, enseñanza superior.

Those who constitute the greatest number in U.S. institutions of higher learning do not have the most powerful voice. This acoustic imbalance echoes a paradox in the democracy of the country at large, which claims that all citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives when, in fact, the voices of the powerful often silence those of the less powerful. The concept of 'voice,' as it is used in the student voice movement,[i] asks us to understand sound, specifically speaking, as representative of presence, participation, and power of individual students and/or of students as a group in relation to other people, institutions, and practices in education (Cook-Sather, 2006). As a participant in this movement, I have argued for integrating the voices of secondary students into discussions of educational practice and reform, methods of research, and processes of teacher preparation (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2009a). I have not suggested that students' voices should drown out other voices but rather that they should be an equal part of the mix that constitutes both the processes and the products of this work. In recent years I have turned my attention to designing and supporting programs at the college level that, through amplifying student voices, have the potential to make higher education a more democratic context for teaching and learning.

"Amplifying Student Voices in Higher Education: Democratizing Teaching and Learning through Changing the Acoustic on a College Campus" ("Ampliar la voz de los estudiantes en la educación superior: democratizar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje a través del cambio de la acústica en un centro universitario"). *Revista de Educación*. Ministerio de Educación. Madrid, Spain, 2012.

To amplify means both to make louder and to make more powerful. The programs I discuss aim to do both as part of a larger effort to modulate the voices of all those who labor in higher education. Three interrelated concepts inform this discussion. Bernstein's (2000) notion of "the acoustic of the school" underpins the metaphor of amplifying student voices. He used the phrase to draw attention to what is audible — what sound is produced and perceived — in the space of a school. In his words: "Whose voice is heard? Who is speaking? Who is hailed by this voice? For whom is it familiar?" (p. xxi). An acoustic is created both by the structures of a space and by the sound that fills it; therefore, processes both of constructing and of participating in a space contribute to its acoustic. To capture the qualities of the space of higher education that I argue for, I draw upon Williams' (2004) analysis of "the open space of democracy," in which she highlights the relationship between physical spaces and democratic practices. And to define the forms of engagement that contribute to the creation of a democratic space for teaching and learning in particular, I evoke the terms of Fielding's (2011) argument for "democratic fellowship." His notions of "radical collegiality" and "inter-generational learning" characterize the programs I discuss; a "deep and demanding mutuality," the "joint work" that "take[s] participatory models of democracy seriously," are essential to creating the new acoustic that can be achieved through amplifying student voices in higher education.

At Bryn Mawr College, a selective liberal arts college for women in the northeastern United States, three programs were established in 2007 in response to different catalyzing events but with similar rationales underpinning their creation. Through their participation in these programs, students develop the confidence, courage, and capacity to amplify their own voices and to ensure that other voices are heard and honored. These programs therefore not only increase the volume and the power of student voices, they change the acoustic in the space of higher education. With and through that changing acoustic, we can remix conversations between and among faculty, students, and staff such that everyone can learn from everyone else, making real democracy in education possible.

Three Programs that Amplify Student Voices

The first two programs fall under the umbrella of Bryn Mawr College's Teaching and Learning Initiative (TLI, http://www.brynmawr.edu/tli), which was conceived in 2006 with

support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Challenging the belief that expertise is hierarchical and that some people's work solely supports others' education, TLI programs for faculty development and staff education create structures within which *all* members of the campus community — faculty, staff, and students — interact as teachers, learners, and colleagues. While the dominant cultural model in higher education is stratified and status-driven rather than democratic and reciprocal, the TLI seeks to foster a culture that operates on principles of equality and functions as an integrated, interactive, and evolving whole (Lesnick & Cook-Sather, 2010).

One branch of the TLI, Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT), creates partnerships between undergraduate students who attend Bryn Mawr or nearby Haverford College and faculty who teach at one of these two institutions. The goal of each partnership is to explore, affirm, and constructively critique the teaching and learning that unfolds within the faculty member's classroom. Sophomore through senior undergraduate students from a wide variety of backgrounds who are not enrolled in the courses for which they serve as consultants have the following responsibilities: meet with their faculty partners to establish hopes for the collaboration; visit one class session each week; take detailed observation notes on the pedagogical issue(s) or challenge(s) the faculty member has identified and that the students discern; survey or interview students in the class (if the faculty member wishes), either for mid-course feedback or at another point in the semester; meet weekly with the faculty member to discuss observation notes and other feedback and implications; participate in weekly meetings with one another and with me in my role as the coordinator of SaLT; and visit one or more faculty seminars five times over the course of the semester. Student consultants are paid by the hour for their participation; faculty earn a course release in their first semester (new faculty) or stipends (continuing faculty) for participation in the seminar. This program is funded in part by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and in part by the Provost's Offices of Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. It was piloted in 2006, further supported in 2007, and fully established as part of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute in 2009. Between 2007 and 2010, SaLT supported 125 faculty members and 58 student consultants in a total of 138 partnerships. (For other discussions of this project, see Cook-Sather 2008, 2009b, 2010, 2011; Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011; and Cook-Sather, Cohen, & Alter, 2010.)

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A second branch of the TLI focuses on staff/student partnerships through a program called the Empowering Learners Partnership (ELP). Piloted in 2007 in a course, "Empowering Learners," that was developed to support extra-classroom learning, the ELP program has expanded to become an integral component of staff education at Bryn Mawr College. Students who serve in the role of learning partner through the ELP program come from a wide range of majors and backgrounds, and they are paid by the hour for their participation; staff members who choose to participate are given 1-2 hours per week of paid release time by the College. Students and staff members are paired in reciprocal learning partnerships focused on shared educational interests, and the pairs divide their weekly meeting times between teaching and learning, each taking on the roles of both teacher and learner. Focal areas have included Greek cooking, Italian language, Microsoft Excel, principles of Islam, crafts, baking, jazz appreciation, self-defense, home maintenance, and PowerPoint. So far staff members have come from the departments of Housekeeping, Dining Services, Facilities, Public Safety and Transportation, the Alumni House, and the Copy Center. Between 2007 and 2010, approximately 60 staff members and 50 students participated. (For another discussion of this program, see Lesnick & Cook-Sather, 2010).

The third program, the Social Justice Partnership Program (SJPP, http://www.brynmawr.edu/socialjustice/index.shtml), also piloted in 2007, was created in response to a racially complicated incident on Bryn Mawr College's campus. After individual meetings of involved parties, sit-ins and protests, a Teach-In, and a full-campus Town Hall meeting, a group of students, with the collaboration of faculty and staff, created this program to support community members in developing the capacity to talk across tensions and differences in preparation for future conflicts and crises. Since its advent, the SJPP has been run primarily by students, with faculty, administrative, and staff collaboration and support. In the context of small, cross-constituency (student, faculty, staff) cohorts and wider community events (such as movies and discussions), the program aims to create safe spaces, resources, and programming within and through which students, faculty, and staff members coming from different backgrounds and life experiences can explore what issues of diversity mean to them and how those issues affect their lives. The goal of the program is not to prescribe or proscribe any particular set of beliefs and practices but rather to encourage participants to embrace diversity and work toward justice with clarity and courage on their own terms and also as a community. Between 2007 and 2010, 15

5

staff members, 10 faculty, and approximately 275 students participated. (For other discussions of this program, see Cook-Sather, Cohen, & Lesnick, forthcoming, and Cook-Sather, Cohen, & Alter, 2010.)

Amplifying Student Voices in Various Partnerships

Each of these programs creates a space apart — outside of the formal classroom space and the typical relationships among members of the academic community — within which student voices are amplified by design and practice. In turn, the voices of faculty and staff are brought into dialogue with, and modulated in relation to, those student voices. In these structured and supported spaces, students learn to speak with and learn from one another as well as from differently positioned members of the community.

Amplifying Student Voices in Partnerships with College Faculty

With few exceptions (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Cox & Sorenson, 2000; Werder & Otis, 2010), students are not among the interlocutors or collaborators in exploring and analyzing classroom practice at the college level. The goals of the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program are to affirm and improve teaching and learning in higher education and also, more broadly, to deepen the kinds of conversations faculty and students have with one another. There are four formal arenas through the SaLT program within which student voices are amplified and both student and faculty voices modulated: (1) written, classroom observation notes that students take each week when they visit their faculty partners' classrooms; (2) students' weekly face-to-face meetings with their faculty partners; (3) students' bi-weekly visits to faculty pedagogy seminars; and (4) weekly meetings of all student consultants and me, in my role as coordinator of the program. Each of these arenas involves different participants; together, they create a constellation of new spaces within which students and faculty speak, listen, learn, and teach in new, more democratic, ways.

The written observation notes student consultants take each week afford them a chance to 'speak' to faculty from the student perspective but not from within the position of a student enrolled in the course. These notes have a column for time, a column for observations, and a column for reflections, responses, and suggestions. Because the student is not responsible for

engaging in or taking notes on the content of the class, she is able to focus on the dynamics of the classroom from the perspective of a student. These written expressions of student voice serve as the basis for face-to-face discussions between student consultants and their faculty partners in their weekly meetings.

One student consultant's description of her note taking and preparation for her meeting with her faculty partner illustrates the amplification of her voice that, in turn, amplifies his in a new way. Describing how she responded to his request that she focus on student engagement in his class, she wrote: "On my observation sheet I have written down what has led me to believe that students are not engaged, and I have written a note that we should talk more in depth and a note for me to bring up an idea I had." Explaining why she took this approach, the student consultant said:

> This gave the professor time to think about the problem and think on his own before I gave my advice/perspective. That way he'd have his ideas when we spoke but also he was more interested in hearing what I had to say.

This strategy, using her voice to name an issue in her notes and to create space for her voice in their upcoming conversation, enabled both the immediate and the future amplification of this student's voice. At the same time, she acknowledges the importance of the professor's voice in this dialogue.

The acoustic of such meetings is unlike that of most classroom conversations between faculty members and the students enrolled in their classes. Faculty and students can talk frankly about their different perspectives, each voice contributing equally to the sense they make together. As one consultant explained: "Our different perspectives mean that we are seeing different things, and we have different biases, so we sometimes have some conflict when we meet about what's going on in the classroom." The student voice, amplified in this discussion, offers insights and analyses that students would likely not offer under typical circumstances. It also affords faculty an equally unusual opportunity to analyze their practice and to articulate the rationale behind it. This exchange allows for conflict that carries relatively little threat, since, as one faculty member put it, they are "outside of the normal relationship." As this faculty member continued, that means that the student consultant is "not responsible for the content" and "free of the grading," and the faculty member can discuss "what I am struggling with in ways that I

would NEVER talk to a student." The acoustic of these meetings is produced both by the equalizing structures of the SaLT program and by the modulation of student and faculty voices within those structures.

Two kinds of group meetings through the SaLT program provide additional spaces within which students' voices are amplified and all voices modulated. In the meetings of faculty participants and student consultants, students' voices are attended to with respect, as faculty pose questions such as: "How could a professor take what might, from your perspective, look like discrete moments, discrete papers, and help you see them as in fact cumulative in some way?" and, "Do you have any suggestions for us about how we can better receive criticism?" These are questions about assignments and assessment about which faculty genuinely seek student insight, valuing both the reflection necessary to respond and the responses themselves. Such valuing characterizes the weekly meetings of student consultants and me, as well. One student consultant explained:

> [We have] an incredible support system in our weekly [TLI] meetings [where] I feel I can raise an issue I'm having and have it addressed, I feel that my opinion matters and is respected…[and we can] find ways to frame ideas and concepts so we can think about them in new and deeper ways.

The effect of participating in these multiple forums is cumulative — an amplification through layering, a modulation through repeatedly remixing. Even as students gain confidence and conviction in their own voices, they develop a heightened awareness of the importance of listening for and to others' voices. One student consultant explained how, through developing her own deeper awareness of the power of student voice, she learned to modulate her own contributions to class discussion to make space for others to speak:

> I didn't expect this to affect me in other classes as much as it did. Especially midway through when we were having these discussions in our student consultant meetings about how we as students help or do not help students to learn, [such as by] blurting out answers in class or not leaving enough time for other people to process things… I definitely think now more before I ask or answer questions.

Freedom from the accustomed economy of power also facilitates students learning to listen to and advocate for faculty in new ways. As one student consultant explained:

> I feel like I am more of a professor advocate. Sometimes when I hear things about professors, it just makes me so angry. I think a lot of students don't reflect on

> themselves, they don't look at what they are doing that limits or takes away from their learning experience, and I just want to be like, "What are YOU doing? Think about what you are doing in that class — Are you not paying attention? Are you not participating?"

Through their participation in SaLT, students develop a commitment to creating spaces for dialogue and reflection both within and outside of classes that are characterized by "different kinds of relationships and different configurations of power" (Fielding, 2011).

The result of amplifying their own voices and learning to make space for and listen more carefully to the voices of others is an increased confidence and capacity to take action in their educational lives — to initiate conversation and take up forms of engagement that they would otherwise not have pursued. Simply put, in one student's words, "It has helped me become more outgoing and realize that I have a perspective, which I can voice." They are affirmed by the experience of having their voices heard: "I am honored that things I say have any value. It was so good that people wanted to hear and took into consideration the perspective that I was bringing." And, as one student put it: "There is a sense of empowerment that leads to confidence and agency." Students speak up, speak to, and speak with faculty in new ways, including about issues as charged as race:

> I definitely feel as if being a part of the project I have been able to talk to my own profs a little more about what I'd like to see in the classroom and what I feel isn't noticed in the classroom. For example, there was a class, my psych class, and we were talking about ethnic identity development, and all of the students of color were speaking and the white students were not. I mentioned that to the prof that evening, and she divided us into groups the next day and changed the reading — she included an article that was about white ethnic development. That article got the class talking. So being aware that I am an student and there are things my prof might not see, that I have the right to say, "Hey did you notice this?"

The opportunity to observe and the insight that comes of careful observation, as well as the listening spaces created by the various participants in the program, are all crucial to changing the acoustic of the College.

The amplification of student voices within SaLT thus leads to more attentive, engaged, mutually informed and informing speaking and listening on campus. The students, and the faculty with whom they work, come to see teaching and learning as a shared responsibility — a

process informed by multiple voices — and students articulate and carry forward the desire to open more democratic and nurturing spaces:

> I think I'm learning, or really just beginning to think about, how much our education system is really stuck in a certain worldview. I used to think that education just is the way it is — teacher at the front because that's where he/she belongs. Even when I experienced more inclusive or empowering learning environments, I sort of thought of them as outliers and that it would be unreasonable to expect all educators to create a classroom that was more like a community. Now I've begun to think about how this actually reflects a more general worldview — and how some version of [this program], which I feel like at base is just meant to encourage more direct communication and caring between people who are supposedly separated by various levels of power and authority, could be really beneficial in other environments outside of classrooms. It would be wonderful if all working, living, learning environments could become more communicative and balanced.

Amplifying Student Voices in Partnerships with College Staff Members

The amplification of student voices within faculty/student partnerships constitutes one form of revision to the acoustic of the academy. Since these two constituencies are already in regular dialogue, albeit typically within the classroom and on the professor's terms, these partnerships require what Oldfather (1995) described as "major shifts…in relationships and in ways of thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power, and self" (p. 87). Student/staff partnerships require just as major a shift, but of a different kind. Here the shift includes students developing a sense that they have something to teach but also, as importantly, that they have something — sometimes a lot — to learn from staff members.

Embracing the notion that everyone has something to teach and something to learn requires new awareness and revised ways of engaging with community members, and the ELP program provides the space and support structures for such changes. In an analysis of both faculty/student and staff/student partnerships, Lesnick and Cook-Sather (2010) suggested that participants move through four recursive and mutually informing stages when they participate in these programs: (1) recognizing their capacity as teachers and learners beyond their accustomed campus roles; (2) risking vulnerability in working beyond the roles and tasks within which hierarchies hold and sometimes appear to protect them; (3) forming more complex relationships through which they recognize one another as teachers and learners going beyond role-defined

stereotypes; and (4) coming to hold in common the hybrid roles of teacher and learner in addition to their prior and continuing campus roles. They thus move toward a more democratic way of "learning, working and living together" (Fielding, 2011).

An early phase of this work is students speaking with staff in ways that they might not have before — as people and fellow members of the community. One student described how, as a result of her participation in the ELP program, she came to consciousness — and voice — in the simplest sense of acknowledging and speaking with those who keep the campus running:

> The biggest change in myself is appreciating what everyone does on campus. During my freshman year I think I just kind of went through, I didn't really make connections. I mean, I made connections with Bryn Mawr students, but not staff members. And that's really the biggest change in myself, saying that extra "thank you," really appreciating what everyone does — housekeepers and every staff member. It's really a huge change in myself.

Coming to an awareness of and finding a voice to acknowledge a staff member's contribution to the College prompts students to learn to listen to staff voices and find ways to amplify those. Describing an assignment she had for the "Empowering Learners" course within which she grounded her work with a staff member, one student explained:

> To complete this final assignment, I had to approach a lot of people I didn't know, introduce myself, and ask personal questions. Learning to discount a fear of embarrassment and walk up to those staff members I had seen but not met before was a struggle every time. I know a lot of people's names now, in some cases even their favorite Beatles albums. It will be my challenge to continue talking, to continue growing these connections.

"Growing the connections" includes developing the capacity to listen and observe as well as to take action. One student explained:

> I have learned how to be a good listener, better teacher and a better friend. I have experienced working with older family members in my household who have some of the same life experiences and difficulties as the staff who work at Bryn Mawr College. Participating in this program has helped me develop into a patient, confident individual who believes that I can really make a difference in many people's lives.

These forms of modulation have powerful implications for the kind of teaching and learning that happen on campus beyond the classroom. The balance between speaking and listening comes to represent — and supports students in enacting — a reciprocal model of

teaching and learning. Rather than reify traditional notions of teacher as all knowing and students as receiving, students in the ELP program develop a sense of themselves as a liberating hybrid of teacher and learner:

> Now that I have practical experience that exemplifies how not knowing exactly what to do can make me a more effective mentor, I hope to feel less limited in what I attempt to teach. I do not have to be an expert in an area—I have to be willing to learn alongside my students and admit when I do not understand. As a teacher, I am a learner as well. Like my students, I will need to know what resources are available for when I am unsure. There is nothing more empowering to me as a lifelong learner than knowing I can work around my own uncertainties. http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/education/handbook/teachingandlearning

This student comment echoes in intriguing ways some of the most powerful qualities of democratic practice: "Democracy invites us to take risks. It asks that we vacate the comfortable seat of certitude, remain pliable, and act, ultimately, on behalf of the common good" (Williams, 2004, p. 22). The uncertainty the student quoted above describes, and the empowerment she derives from embracing it, are the hallmarks of teaching and learning through the ELP program. Students and their staff partners co-create their curriculum, coming to voice together, and then reinforcing one another's voices through their ongoing dialogue. These are organic processes of co-creation and assessment (Dalke & Lesnick, in press). Integrating the written reflections of a fellow student into her analysis (thus further amplifying student voice), one student participant in the ELP program explained:

> This flexible, dialogue-based approach to teaching and learning also allows for a greater sense of collaboration and cooperation from the parties involved. Students (like [my classmate]), are "more often than not encouraged to learn as consumers and not always as producers or inquisitors of knowledge" but within the TLI it is "acceptable to rely on your partner's own knowledge and expertise to help you create lessons."

Each semester there is a final celebration at which all staff/student partners share what they learned from and taught one another. The moving testimonies and presentations/performances participants offer speak to the power of these partnerships to create a more democratic model of teaching and learning — one that includes those traditionally positioned to support rather than participate in the educational process. There is promise here for

the amplification of student voices — and, in turn, the amplification of those who generally have no voice in higher education — to transform the acoustic of the campus. In one student's words:

> As we participate in these programs, we need to work to find commonalities rather than just focusing on the differences between us, but we also need to be aware of those differences and be willing to acknowledge the ways that they traditionally divide us. It is important that we find ways in which our different roles and understandings intersect, and to use those intersections as starting places for voicing and understanding the systems that shape our lives and interactions with one another. In this way, we can look at the TLI as a new context for us to allow these considerations a place in our conversation and consciousness as we work together to gain practical knowledge and build relationships. On a greater level, our shared work may even begin to alter the assumptions that people come in with in the first place, and allow us to start reshaping the systems that have had such a role in shaping us.
> http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/education/handbook/teachingandlearning

Amplifying Student Voices in Partnerships across Faculty, Staff, and Students

"In the open space of democracy there is room for differences" (Williams, 2004, p. 8). This assertion captures the spirit of the third program I focus on, which brings students, faculty, and staff into conversations that serve to amplify student voices in yet another way and that quite explicitly pursue "the essential synergy between justice and care" that Fielding (2011) suggests is a key feature of democratic fellowship. This form of radical collegiality and radical attention amplifies student voices within multiple forums of the Social Justice Partnership Program (SJPP). The primary forum, within which most students participate, is the cohort each student joins as an initial form of engagement in the program. Once a student has participated as a member of a cohort, she might become a co-facilitator of a cohort, with a staff or faculty partner. Finally, she might move to being a member of the steering committee, a group of students, faculty, and staff who oversee the program. In each of these forums, the student voice is amplified and the conversations around social justice are remixed to balance the voices of multiple constituencies on campus.

Within the SJPP cohorts, students meet once per week with their faculty or staff co-facilitator and student co-facilitator, as well as with 5-8 other students, to talk about their experiences and perspectives on issues of diversity and social justice within and beyond the campus walls. About this forum, one student wrote:

> My [SJPP] cohort has really provided me a space to articulate what's going on in my head and a space where other individuals can bring in what they are thinking about and if something happens, going in with them and just being able to say, "I don't know what to do with this. What do you guys think?" That kind of opportunity to have a space with five relative strangers and talk, it's just really helpful for me to articulate my thoughts, which is preparing me to go out in the real world. I am confident, I am going to be able to articulate my thoughts and stand up for myself and other people in a way that I don't think I was able to do before.

This student narrates the process of developing a voice both to express herself in the present, in the context of the safe space of the cohort, and to do so "in the real world." The confidence comes both through developing her own capacity to speak and through listening to others speak to her.

Having the space to speak and to listen is particularly important for marginalized students, for those whose voices are routinely silenced:

> Especially for a community that is majority white and small groups of students of color to redefine the idea of being marginalized, to redefine the idea of all this bad stuff or wrong doing is happening to you. But seeing other people's perspectives and realizing that within this group that is marginalized together you have a lot of differences of experience. And what offends me is not going to offend you. It was important for me to start sharing my perspective to let people know that everything is not roses all the time but it's worth a fight. This is my college. This is where I felt comfortable. This is where I know that I have a space here. This is my space and I have my voice here, this was powerful.

This student articulates both the pain of being marginalized and the power of recognizing diversity within that marginalization as a source of new insight and possibility. Reclaiming the College as her own through participating in a forum that supported "dialogue with others whom we care for and respect" (Fielding, 2011) amplified this student's voice and empowered her to share her experience and insight with others.

When students move from being participants to being co-facilitators of SJPP cohorts, they develop a deeper awareness of why such amplification is essential and what supports it:

> Sometimes when you are alone and everyone is nodding their head agreeing and you're the person that's like, Huh? For a number of reasons you don't always feel comfortable stepping out and saying, "I don't believe this and I don't think this." So what I have done is seek out these spaces here. I could do that all the time because if not I would go crazy. That's how the SJPP was for me. A space where

14

> I could do that and also be in a space where people are willing to listen. Not only allowing yourself to speak but also having people listen to you. 'Cause I could speak all the time, I could shout at the top of my lungs in the middle of campus, but if nobody listens to me, it doesn't do anything. Yes, I am shouting, but no one is hearing me. So it's also about bringing people into spaces where they are willing to listen to you….I know it's sometimes the same people coming to these spaces all the time, but there is value in that for me.

The emphasis here on the twin processes of speaking and listening echoes Ayers' (2004) notion of democratic education:

> Democratic education is characterized fundamentally by dialogue — the principal vehicle for discussion, deliberation, reconsideration, and transformation… Dialogue is a collaborative enterprise, a community endeavor, a participatory event. In dialogue we speak with the possibility of being heard, of touching hearts and changing minds, and we listen with the possibility of altering the angle of our own regard. (p. 96, 97)

When students recognize one another's experiences, perceive both the diversity of what people live and the necessity of bringing differences into dialogue, both speaking and listening become a responsibility:

> The reason I committed to SJPP was that there needed to be a different story, not the story of this is how we are going to package this for everybody. I remember my experience at that time [when the program was first started], I could walk from pocket to pocket of people on campus and everyone would have a different feeling about it, and that's what scared me: that one narrative from those groups was going to become the dominant narrative. And so each group would just continue to think their way, and what I wanted SJPP to do was to bring people together to create a new narrative, together, that is not one story but is at least encompassing of multiple perspectives.

The polyvocal narrative for which this student argues captures the modulation of voice that is what transforms the acoustic of a space; it is when many voices speak to one another, capturing multiple stories from various angles, that a space and the meaning made within it are transformed. Williams (2004) recognizes this in her inclusion of a quotation from Thich Nhat Nanh at the beginning of her book: "It is possible that the next Buddha will not take the form of an individual. The next Buddha may take the form of a community — a community practicing understanding and loving kindness, a community practicing mindful living." This sense of

15

"Amplifying Student Voices in Higher Education: Democratizing Teaching and Learning through Changing the Acoustic on a College Campus" ("Ampliar la voz de los estudiantes en la educación superior: democratizar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje a través del cambio de la acústica en un centro universitario"). *Revista de Educación*. Ministerio de Educación. Madrid, Spain, 2012.

collective responsibility born of valuing both individual and all voices is the embodiment of democracy.

The notion of a community as the awakened or enlightened one is consistent with the notion of leadership student participants in the SJPP develop. When students assume leadership roles on the steering committee of the SJPP, they learn to speak with both their own individual voices and as a collective; they learn to listen and speak together:

> I never truly felt like the leader but a leader; I felt like that was our mission. The whole program came about to address a community, and we built our own community in order to do that. We leaned on each other to figure out how to craft a message and how to do it in a way that would be heard — How can we state it in a way that is inclusive of all of us? How do we speak for one another to someone who sees us as an other? How do I feel sure that you feel empowered, and how do you support me? And that's what's making us leaders. We could model that for the community at large; that was something we aspired to. We tried to mimic interconnectedness and everyone was a leader.

Through every forum of the SJPP, students amplify their voices, learn to listen for and to other voices, and move toward acting on what they learn. As one student put it: "I look at things in a new way and have gained the courage and conviction to start conversations and take action." This action is informed by a deep understanding of the democratic process of engagement and struggle, of connection and caring: "The open space of democracy is not interested in hierarchies but in networks and systems where power is circular, not linear; a power reserved not for an entitled few, but shared and maintained by many" (Williams, 2004, p. 59).

Conclusion

The processes of amplifying, modulating, and tuning student voices as I have discussed them here make student voices louder and more powerful in conversations about (1) formal education in college classrooms, (2) teaching and learning beyond the classroom, and (3) social justice within and beyond the College walls. They contribute to the democratization of teaching and learning on our campus as they embrace "the human necessity of dignity and respect and its transformative effect on the lived experiences of those who both give it and receive it" (Fielding, 2011).

16

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The acoustic of classrooms at Bryn Mawr is changed as faculty members "work with students in a more productive way, with a two-way dialogue which helps us explore different avenues in a train of thought." The acoustic on the wider campus is changed as the TLI staff education programs "bring people from different parts of the campus together who otherwise might not see each other" and staff members experience an increased sense of connection and belonging to a community that is otherwise just a workplace. And the acoustic students, faculty, and staff create and seek both on and beyond the campus is changed as they "mimic interconnectedness and everyone [becomes] a leader." These changes are accomplished through the intentional construction of 'open spaces' within which variously positioned members of the College community are brought into dialogue and their voices remixed. As students test and tune their own voices — a process that moves them from silence or uncertainty into a place of greater confidence, capacity, and resonance — they develop commitment to ensuring that others, both those with less power and those with more, listen and are listened to in new ways.

There are, of course, challenges to this work: it is complicated and destabilizing because it threatens traditional hierarchical structures and requires time for and attention to the educational experience of everyone in the higher education community. For these reasons, some members of the community find it threatening, disruptive, and simply not desirable. Therefore not only does it require commitment and work above and beyond the standard requirements of different members of the higher education community, it also requires persistence in the face of resistance and adversity.

But efforts such as these create a different set of possibilities for higher education — different sounds and dynamics, different insights and understandings, different relationships and forms of engagement. Changing the properties or qualities of a space and what sound fills it — changing the acoustic — changes the sense made in that space, the tone and the significance of what is said and what is heard both within that space and beyond it. These amplifications, resonances, and transformations resound in the wider open spaces across the campus, changing the acoustic of the entire college, one encounter and opened space at a time. Such revisions hold promise for a more democratic way of being and becoming.

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[i] The student voice movement had its origins in the 1960s and 1970s but did not catalyze at that time. It saw a resurgence in the early 1990s in what Fielding (2004) called the "new wave" student voice movement, and it has been growing ever since (see Rudduck, 2007).