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# Listening to equity-seeking perspectives: how students' experiences of pedagogical partnership can inform wider discussions of student success

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# **Listening to Equity-Seeking Perspectives: How Students' Experiences of Pedagogical Partnership Can Inform Wider Discussions of Student Success**

Alison Cook-Sather

## **Abstract**

Discussions in higher education have proliferated in recent years regarding not only how to recruit a greater diversity of students but also how to support their success. The voices of students themselves, particularly those students traditionally underrepresented in and underserved by higher education, have important contributions to make to these discussions. This article draws on a larger study of the perspectives of undergraduate students who identify as members of equity-seeking groups (e.g., students who are racialized, LGBTQ+, first generation) and who have collaborated with faculty in a bi-college, classroom-focused, pedagogical partnership program in the United States. Using constant comparison/grounded theory, I analyzed these students' responses to a question about how participating in this program affected their sense of themselves as students. The themes that emerged across students' responses included how participation in pedagogical partnership (1) fosters important affective experiences in relation to all faculty and to fellow students, (2) informs students' academic engagement in their own classes, and (3) contributes to students' sense of their evolution as active agents in their own and others' development. Both affirming and expanding established understandings of what contributes to student success presented in the literature on belonging, engagement, and persistence, these themes have implications for how we might support the success of a diversity of students both within and beyond formal pedagogical partnership.

Key words: success; student engagement; belonging; student perspectives; pedagogical partnership

## **Introduction**

Discussions in higher education have proliferated in recent years regarding not only how to recruit a greater diversity of students but also how to support their success (Devlin, 2013; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gibson et al., 2017; Hockings, 2010; US Department of Education, 2016). The voices of students themselves, particularly those students traditionally underrepresented in and underserved by higher education, have important contributions to make to these discussions. In this article I draw on a larger study of the perspectives of undergraduate students who identify as members of equity-seeking groups (e.g., students who are racialized, LGBTQ+, first generation) and who have collaborated with faculty in a bi-college, classroom-focused, pedagogical partnership program in the United States. I used constant comparison/grounded theory to analyze these students' responses to a question about how participating in this program affected their sense of themselves as students. This analysis surfaced three themes that cut across students' analyses of their experiences of participating in pedagogical partnership. These themes included how participation in pedagogical partnership (1) fosters important affective experiences in relation to all faculty and to fellow students, (2) informs students' academic engagement in their own classes, and (3) contributes to students' sense of their evolution as active agents in their own and others' development.

These themes add to existing arguments that partnership is one approach to supporting the success of students (Healey, Flint, and Harrington, 2014), and they have more general implications regarding how we understand and support success for a diversity of students. To provide a sense of the context in which these themes emerged, I describe the partnership program in which the students participated. I then offer a brief explanation of my research methods, which do not focus on evaluating the partnership program itself but rather on what the perspectives of equity-seeking students who have participated in partnership can teach us about how to support student success. In the next section, I present a range of student perspectives that substantiate each of the three themes. In the discussion, I address how these themes both affirm and extend our current understanding of student success as that understanding is reflected in scholarship on belonging, engagement, and persistence. I conclude by situating the potential of pedagogical partnership to support the success of a diversity of students within wider calls for greater inclusion and equity in higher education.

### **Context of the Study: The Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) Program**

All the students whose perspectives inform this discussion participated in Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT), the signature program of the Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. These are two selective liberal arts institutions located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Bryn Mawr is a women's college, and Haverford is co-educational, and both enroll approximately 1,200 undergraduate students from diverse socio-economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Supported originally by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and currently by the Provosts' Offices at the colleges, the SaLT program invites undergraduate students to take up the paid position of pedagogical consultant to college faculty. Faculty and student pairs work in semester-long partnerships to analyze, affirm, and, where appropriate, revise faculty members' pedagogical approaches in courses as those are taught. Since the advent of the SaLT program in 2006, 230 faculty members and 145 student consultants have participated in a total of over 280 partnerships.

All incoming faculty members are invited to work in such pedagogical partnerships as part of a first-year pedagogy seminar in which they have the option to enroll in exchange for a reduced teaching load (Cook-Sather, 2016). Partnerships not linked to a seminar are available to all faculty with no compensation attached. In both cases, student partners conduct weekly observations of their faculty partners' classrooms focused on pedagogical issues the faculty members identify. Student partners then expand upon and deliver their observation notes to their partners and meet weekly with them to discuss what is working well and what might be revised in relation to classroom practice, assignments, assessment, and more. They might also conduct mid-semester feedback or gather other forms of feedback and work with their faculty partners to further develop or revise courses for future semesters.

Student consultants are second- through fourth-year students enrolled as undergraduates at Bryn Mawr or Haverford College. They major in different fields and bring varying degrees of formal preparation in educational studies (from those with no coursework in education to those pursuing certification to teach at the secondary level). Students apply for this position (they submit an explanation of how they are qualified for the role, procure letters of recommendation from a faculty or staff member and a student, and sign a confidentiality agreement), and they may not be enrolled in a course to which they are assigned as a consultant. They attend an orientation and receive a set of guidelines for developing partnerships with faculty members, but

beyond these supports, students do not receive any additional pre-partnership training. Instead, weekly meetings with other consultants and me as director of the program support students on the job as they hone the skills and capacities necessary to partner with faculty in the work of developing productively challenging, inclusive, and engaging classrooms and courses (Cook-Sather & Abbot, 2016; Cook-Sather & Motz-Storey, 2016).

The position of pedagogical partner that they occupy affords students a unique perspective on classroom engagement and educational outcomes. Previous publications document the benefits of taking up this position and also the challenges and frustrations of this work (Bovill et al., 2016; Cook-Sather 2015, 2014, 2011; Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011). Since its advent, the SaLT program has focused on developing classrooms that are inclusive and responsive and thereby strive to support the success of a diversity of students (Takayama, Kaplan, & Cook-Sather, 2017). In this work the program positions student partners from equity-seeking groups in particular as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 106) and strives to support the experience one student partner described: “[participating in SaLT] made me feel like who I am is more than enough—that my identity, my thoughts, my ideas are significant and valuable” (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, p. 277).

Because of the potential of participating in pedagogical partnership to increase students’ sense of belonging, deepen their academic engagement, and encourage their persistence, all of which are linked to success, student partners offer perspectives that are particularly important to defining and supporting success for those traditionally underrepresented in and underserved by higher education. As one student partner put it, the presence and participation of students from equity-seeking groups helps “disrupt the exclusive nature of higher education and helps level the playing field to allow for students to achieve more than they thought possible before their voices were included” [Student 4].

## **Methods**

Since 2007 I have engaged in an ongoing action research project investigating the experiences of student and faculty participants in the SaLT program. Approved by Bryn Mawr College’s Institutional Review Board, the studies I have conducted employ constant comparison/grounded theory (Creswell 2006; Glaser & Strauss 1967) in order to determine themes and trends in the experiences and perspectives of respondents. Themes have been generated through the first step

in the constant comparison method: identifying a phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), followed by open coding: “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 61).

A total of 31 students who self-identified as belonging to equity-seeking groups participated in the study, claiming membership in one or more of the following groups: African-American; Asian-American; female; first-generation college student; Latina; low socio-economic status; disabled; and queer. Among a larger set of questions posed through an online survey or in a face-to-face interview, I asked student partners: “In what ways, if any, did participating in this program affect your sense of yourself as a student?”

Using the constant comparison method to analyze student responses, I identified the themes of how participating in partnership (1) fosters important affective experiences in relation to all faculty and to fellow students, (2) informs students’ academic engagement in their own classes, and (3) contributes to students’ sense of their evolution as active agents in their own and others’ development. These themes were confirmed by those student participants who were able to read and respond to drafts of this article.

### **Students’ Descriptions of Affective Experiences, Academic Engagement, and Agency**

The affective experiences, academic engagement, and sense of agency students describe are inextricably intertwined, but for purposes of discussion I address them one at a time.

#### **(1) How Partnership Fosters Important Affective Experiences**

The affective experiences students describe are signaled by student partners’ uses of terms such as “understanding,” “sympathetic,” “appreciation,” and “empathy.” While these experiences are fostered in and through pedagogical partnership, students describe how they extend to relationships with faculty outside their partnerships and with other students.

Many student partners describe developing understanding, sympathy, and empathy in relation to their own professors. As one explained: “I became a lot more understanding in my own classes. A lot more understanding of teachers and where they struggled” [Student 23], and another said: “I was more sympathetic toward faculty members” [Student 3]. A third student partner stated: “It made me a lot more compassionate towards my professors, more empathetic.

Because I saw how hard my faculty partners were working, it made me a lot less likely to disparage my own teachers and less willing to tolerate that from other people” [Student 18].

The deeper affective appreciation student partners develop for faculty has a complement in their greater understanding of and empathy for other students. Describing how she became “a more forgiving student,” one student partner explained regarding “little things that I thought before were cutting into discussion time or lecture time, I started to feel if it wasn’t for me it was for my friend next to me” [Student 13]. Importantly, student partners suggest that feeling with (rather than experiencing frustration at) others in educational contexts need not come at the expense of recognition of the emotional labor so many students from equity-seeking groups invest. On the contrary, working in partnership “makes that work visible, and then discussing it in the weekly meetings [with other student partners] and feeling like we are all doing this work, we’re being affirmed in doing this work for this institution and for each other” [Student 10].

## **(2) How Partnership Informs Students’ Academic Engagement**

One of the most consistent ways in which participating in partnership informs students’ academic engagement is through developing or deepening their capacity to be reflective regarding the learning process. Like the affective experiences student partners described in the previous section, this academic engagement extends to inform students’ own classroom experiences and their interactions with faculty beyond the classroom.

Working in partnership, one student explained, “helped me learn how to reflect on my other classes” [Student 7]. As another said: “Over time I was able to self-process what was happening outside of what we were supposed to be studying and analyze how the teaching and learning were going. I would not have had that skill set outside of SaLT” [Student 15]. Yet another elaborated:

Being a student consultant has allowed me to understand the rationale behind an activity or behind an assignment a lot better. So now when I am a student and receiving information, I can not only receive the content, but I can also see why it is being delivered in this way. Why I am being asked to engage with this particular text in this particular way. So seeing the content as it is as a student but also going to the next level to see the pedagogical reasoning behind it has totally deepened my learning. [Student 14]

Students suggest that the greater awareness they develop regarding the learning process and how to be intentional in engaging in that process informs both their own learning and their role in others' learning. About the former, one student said: "It has helped me think much more deeply about what I need as a learner and recognize which strategies and teaching styles work for me and recognize when they aren't working for me" [Student 19]. Addressing the latter, another student explained: "I was more aware of my own identity and my own experiences and what I can contribute" [Student 3]. Considering both her own and others' learning, another student mused: "How can I be better person in the space for myself and for everybody else who is also here?" [Student 18].

These reflections focus on what happens within classrooms; students also describe developing the ability to approach professors and ask for help or give feedback outside of class. One student stated: "I have a lot more comfort talking to professors....It's not a big scary thing to be in a conversation with a professor. It's just a conversation" [Student 14]. Another student contrasted her before-partnership self and her after-partnership self in regards to having such conversations:

I think I feel more confident speaking to professors and with professors about my concerns about classes, if something wasn't going well or I wasn't understanding the way the professor was presenting the information, before I wouldn't have said anything. Before I would have just been this is how everyone teaches. But now I feel like I understand both how to approach a teacher about that and feel like I have something to say that's worth hearing. [Student 11]

The capacity and confidence to pursue one's own academic success do not necessarily come easily to any student, but they most certainly do not come easily to students from equity-seeking groups who have consistently been underserved and undervalued. As one student explained, the confidence and capacity to offer feedback on her learning experience "grew because of this program" [Student 4]. Another student partner described her increased capacity for engagement in these terms: "I had more tools afterwards to engage beyond the way I had been trained to engage. More creativity around how to get...engaged even if I didn't feel a pull" [Student 16].

### **(3) How Partnership Contributes to Students' Sense of Their Evolution as Active Agents**

The affective experiences they have, the reflective capacity they develop, the awareness of themselves and others as learners, and the confidence they develop as pedagogical partners all contribute to students' sense of themselves as active agents beyond their partnerships, in their classes, and in other areas of their life during and after college.

Virtually all student partners assert a version of this statement regarding their experience of pedagogical partnership: "I think it has given me confidence in my classes in new ways" [Student 10]. Confidence is often linked with strength: as another student partner explained: "I felt stronger and more empowered to give my voice" [Student 3]. A third asserted: "It made me feel a sense of ownership of my experience both inside the classroom and outside the classroom" [Student 12]. A fourth summed up this confidence and strength as "just more empowerment as a learner" [Student 16]. The confidence, strength, ownership, and empowerment students develop change the sense of agency they have in classes:

It helped me be kind of a better citizen in the classroom...[and]... got me started thinking about how students can be better advocates in those spaces and include one another and create more of a sense of community and shared endeavor in the classroom rather than just score points with the professors. [Student 18]

With empowerment and a sense of agency comes the realization that many of the challenges students face are a result of educational systems not being "set up well for students" [Student 8]. Such a realization is particularly important for students from equity-seeking groups, and in the role of pedagogical partner, they can begin to address these systematic problems. As one student partner explained:

I had always had interest in learning about how people learn, especially since I have come from a really underserved educational background myself. I learned very quickly at Bryn Mawr that I didn't necessarily have resources that I absolutely needed to be able to thrive automatically. [Student 26]

This realization prompted this student to begin to think about ways that she "could help professors become more wakeful to the needs of that structural disadvantage" [Student 26].

Likewise, another partner explained regarding the classroom in which she worked as a pedagogical partner:

The class was not very diverse...I am looking at the hierarchy between the professor and the students, and his identity and their identity, and then there was

me, I was the only black person there. So that was really complicated...I remember that being very hard but something we talked a lot about. I remember him getting a lot from it. Having to change the way he was positioned to listen to students like me and other people. I remember feeling really empowered that I was an expert in this. [Student 4]

The sense of agency students develop contributes to the active role they take in countering structural disadvantages within classrooms. As one student partner put it: “I started to think of myself more as an advocate within classroom spaces for my peers. I began to feel I had a lot more agency and could be an agent of change within my classroom spaces” [Student 6]. Another student partner explained that she began “to encourage other people to have a similar power that I had. ‘Oh, something is going wrong, you should tell the professor’” [Student 12]. About claiming this sense of agency, another student contended: “My classmates wouldn’t have considered that as a possibility” [Student 9]. This same student recalled: “We transformed a [name of discipline] class into something we wanted to see. This transformed what I thought was possible as student, what change I thought I could enact” [Student 9].

Partnership work also inspires students to become active agents beyond their partnerships and beyond their classrooms. One student explained how she takes “more leadership roles as a result [of participating] in the program” [Student 3]. This can mean striving to improve conditions and communication on campus more broadly. As another student explained: “It gave me more power to think that I could change things and pursue other kinds of projects on campus...So, after these partnerships, I made a map of where people feel safe on campus as a community forum thing” [Student 12].

I conclude this section with an extended analysis offered by one student of how partnership gave her the sense of agency that empowered her choices as a professional, after graduation:

There is kind of an idea that when you go out for a job you should always be aiming for something that is higher than where you feel like you are, something that you are probably underqualified for, and I feel like participating in SaLT set me up to be more aware of what that would look like for me. It’s really tough for women, for women of color, for LGBTQ folks; we usually apply for positions that we are overqualified for. As an example, white men go for things they are

underqualified for. Like our president [of the United States]. They do that. They feel really comfortable with it. After SaLT, “consultant,” “fellow,” these are words not typically afforded access to people like me. So, having the experience, being able to say I do know these things, I can prove them, set me up to be more willing to go out for things that I wouldn’t have gone out for before. It improved my confidence, my job seeking confidence. And it’s true, I haven’t had trouble getting jobs. My mom talks to me about that all the time. She says, “Of all my kids, you’re the one I don’t worry about when it comes to finding a job.” And the reason for that is programs like [SaLT]...I would not be in that same position if it wasn’t for that same training and understanding. [Student 4]

## **Discussion**

Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) argue that “students as partners” interweaves through many debates, one of which is the conversation around student “retention and success” (p. 12). Both enacting and illuminating what success can look like for students, the experiences of pedagogical partnership that students from equity-seeking groups describe in this discussion offer a response to Hockings’ (2010) assertion that “we need to be mindful of the individual rights and needs of the ‘diversity’ of students in higher education today” (p. 2). Below I expand upon how the affective experiences, deepening of academic engagement, and increased sense of agency that students describe here both affirm key insights from the literature on belonging, engagement, and persistence and expand our understanding of success as a holistic phenomenon that encompasses intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, physical, and spiritual development (Cuseo, 2007).

The importance of the affective experiences students describe is confirmed by the literature on belonging. Feelings of belongingness have two key components: “(i) a sense of valued involvement (the feeling of being valued, needed, and accepted in the system or environment); and (ii) a sense of fit (the person’s perception that his or her characteristics are shared with or complementary to those present in the system or environment” (Hagerty et al. [1992, 1993] cited in Asher & Weeks, 2014, p. 287). Student partners consistently argue that it is “necessary to feel connected in order to feel empowered enough to engage” [Student 28] and

describe how “becoming empathetic stopped me from disengaging from my classes, and that empathy translated to all members on campus” [Student 6].

While involvement and belonging are necessary for student engagement and success (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005), research suggests that students from “at-risk and nondominant groups” often feel “a profound sense of both social and academic nonbelonging when they arrive on campus” (Barnett & Felten, 2016, p. 9-10). *Belonging uncertainty*, “doubt as to whether one will be accepted or rejected by key figures in the social environment,” can “prove acute if rejection could be based on one’s negatively stereotyped social identity” (Cohen & Garcia 2008, p. 365; see also Walton & Cohen, 2007). Because a sense of nonbelonging/belonging uncertainty is inextricably linked with the feeling of “instantaneous *disconnection*” that students from equity-seeking groups feel, “it is especially important that institutions provide opportunities for students from equity-seeking groups to develop the sense of agency that inspires them to make the effort to seek and make connections, places, and meaning for themselves” [Student 28].

Drawing on Thomas (2012), Healey et al. (2014) argue that “there is evidence that seems to support the notion that encouraging a sense of community and belonging increases student retention and success” (p. 35). Students’ perspectives offer us insight into the lived experience of connectedness and of being respected and valued (Strayhorn, 2012). They illuminate as well how those experiences actively counteract feelings of nonbelonging and belonging uncertainty. And they suggest that such experiences support students in becoming “affective, embodied selves” (Beard et al., 2005, p. 235) who are confident, intentional, and inclusive in their support of their own, faculty, and other students’ learning and teaching experiences in higher education. The emphasis students place on empathy and deeper understanding—feeling *with* and compassionate toward faculty and fellow students—expands our understanding of success as fostered by working in deeper *partnership with* all faculty and students, not only in their SaLT partnerships.

The importance of the second theme, how partnership informs students’ academic engagement in their own classes, is confirmed by the scholarship on engagement. Kuh (2001) has defined engagement as “students’ involvement in activities and conditions that are linked with high-quality learning,” and he has suggested that “while students are seen to be responsible for constructing their own knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate student involvement” (p. 12). Drawing on Fromm’s (1978)

argument that higher education is about “becoming,” not “having,” Solomonides et al. (2012a) emphasize students’ whole sense of being in relation to engagement (see Bryson, 2014). Similarly, Neary (2016) has argued that “engagement activities give students a sense of being, belonging and becoming as well as feeling part of their institutions,” and Bryson and Hand (2007) found that one of the key influences on student engagement was trust relationships between students and faculty members and between students and peers.

Without strong engagement, students do not optimize their potential during and after their experience in higher education (Bryson, 2014; Felten et al., 2016; Hardy & Bryson, 2016; Nygaard, Bartholomew, Brand, & Millard, 2013). The insights student partners offer about the ways that partnership foster academic engagement address the argument Quaye and Harper (2015) present for making engagement equitable for students in U.S. higher education. Through partnership, students experience and deepen the capacity to reflect on their learning, to think critically about their class participation, to create space and provide support for others’ participation, and to approach professors and ask for help or give feedback, all of which contributes directly to academic engagement. Developing the mindset and the tools to engage also positions students to maximize their own and contribute to others’ success.

The forms of academic engagement students describe expand our understanding of success by making it more relational and more of a shared responsibility. Students’ lived experiences and analyses of partnership within and beyond the classroom illuminate how academic engagement can be informed not only by reflection on the nature of learning and a heightened self-awareness within and beyond the classroom but also by a sense of *working with* that complements the sense of *feeling with* highlighted in the theme of affective experiences.

The third theme, how partnership contributes to students’ sense of their evolution as active agents in their own and others’ development, is usefully illuminated by the literature on persistence. Students’ perspectives suggest that participating in pedagogical partnership can push them beyond persistence to agency in their own and others’ development—yet a third form of shared responsibility for success.

Tinto (1994) argued that some degree of “social and intellectual integration and therefore membership in academic and social communities must exist as a condition for continued persistence” (p. 120; see also Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Hardy & Bryson, 2016). Building on this work, Strayhorn (2008) asserted that the extent and magnitude of a student’s academic and

social integration experiences were significant predictors of their satisfaction with college, which, in turn, influenced their decision to persist in college. Therefore, he argued, students who actively engage in college environments and report frequent supportive interactions with others are more likely to succeed in college.

Belonging and engagement as they inform persistence are particularly important for students from equity-seeking groups. Relationships with faculty are key here. As Cole (2008) has argued, “the kinds of contact that students have with faculty may be more useful than other academic interventions, because they can also be used to attract, retain and graduate minority students (Antonio, 2001; Freeman, 1997)” (p. 588). Developing themselves as active agents through partnership positions students to succeed both on campus and after graduation. Whether empowering students to transform a class, change the campus culture by making structural inequities visible, or increase job-seeking confidence, partnership contributes both to student persistence and to student success.

As with the first two themes, student partners affirm these links for the students who experience them and also consider how they might inform others’ experiences. In emphasizing this commitment both to their own and to others’ persistence and thriving, student partners illustrate what shared responsibility for their own and others’ success can look like. Perez-Putnam (2016), a recent graduate of Haverford College who was a student partner through the SaLT program while she was there, captures this phenomenon:

I often tell people that I would have left Haverford were it not for the SaLT program. Although this is probably an exaggeration I am now unable to test, I do feel like I owe SaLT a debt of gratitude for making me feel like an integral part of the school and its processes. As a freshman at Haverford I felt out of the loop, uninvolved, small, superfluous. Starting my sophomore year with a pedagogical partnership through the SaLT program, I felt like I was not only working with this specific professor in the moment but also towards a far-away future Haverford in which all professors have had the same opportunity to think about their pedagogy within the space of the SaLT program. This made me feel like my work was important and would have a lasting impact, which contributed to my deepening connection to the school. It also taught me that my happiness is closely tied to

how much I can imagine my work to have wider effect and guided me to participate in other activities that were fulfilling in similar ways.

## **Conclusion**

There is increasing evidence that pedagogical partnerships “nurture belonging for both students and faculty” (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017) and can be “a primary path towards engagement” (Bovill & Felten, 2016; see also Matthews, 2016). Because pedagogical partnerships foster dialogue across differences of position, perspective, and identity (Cook-Sather, 2015), they have unique potential to give students from equity-seeking groups ““a seat at the proverbial table”” and affirm that their ““commitment to make spaces safer for underrepresented groups”” can ““drive important transformation in classrooms and in the student-teacher relationship”” (student partners quoted in Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013). Colón Garcia (2017) captured the potential of partnership this way: “[If] we all engaged in partnerships through which we reflect and discuss how teaching and learning experiences can include and value everyone, our campuses would become places of belonging.”

Student success “is heavily dependent on aspects of social integration which involve the affective dimensions of their engagement with higher education (Tinto, 1994; Moore, 1995; Johnston, 1997; Parmar, 2004)” (Beard et al., 2005, p. 236). As the perspectives of the students quoted in this article suggest, experiences of pedagogical partnership foster important affective experiences with all faculty and with fellow students, inform students’ academic engagement in their own classes, and contribute to students’ sense of their evolution as active agents in their own and others’ development. These affirmations that are so essential to students’ lived experiences and to the development of academic and professional capacities both contribute to student success and argue for the particular promise of pedagogical partnership in addressing the ways in which higher education is currently failing “as the great equalizer” (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). As Healey et al. (2014) suggest, “The wider adoption of research findings on engagement through partnership can lead to significant improvements in student learning and success” (p. 11).

While well-resourced programs such as SaLT might be particularly well positioned to, in turn, position and pay students from equity-seeking groups as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 106), other colleges and universities around the world

have developed partnership approaches modeled on or inspired by this one as well as developed such approaches out of their own contextual needs and commitments (see Cook-Sather et al., 2014, and Healey et al., 2014, for numerous examples). Therefore, the model is replicable across contexts in which resources vary considerably.

Including the perspectives of students from equity-seeking groups in discussions of student success positions us to better support the “becoming” (Gale & Parker, 2014) of a diversity of students in higher education and to make progress toward “realising equality of outcome for all” (Layer, 2017, p. 3). Through their descriptions and analyses of their affective experiences, academic engagement, and sense of their evolution as active agents that were fostered by their experiences of partnership, students affirmed existing understandings of success as those are illuminated in the literature on belonging, engagement, and persistence. They also expanded those understandings by illustrating and arguing for ways of feeling and working with faculty and other students that extend beyond partnership, thereby suggesting that experiencing and supporting success can be a shared endeavor. A challenge for all of us in higher education, then, is how we might develop additional opportunities for students and faculty to take shared responsibility for student success.

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