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Article

While We Are Here: Resisting Hegemony and Fostering Inclusion through Rhizomatic Growth via Student–Faculty Pedagogical Partnership

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Abstract: Postsecondary educational institutions often struggle to enact their espoused commitments to inclusion. Faculty on temporary appointments and students traditionally underrepresented in and underserved by colleges and universities, in particular, can feel excluded. In this article, we argue that student–faculty pedagogical partnership can help postsecondary institutions better enact their espoused commitments to inclusion by nurturing rhizomatic development for human sustainability. We describe how a student–faculty pedagogical partnership program provides a brave space within which rhizomatic growth can unfold by offering an autoethnographic case study of one faculty–student pair who worked in a semester-long pedagogical partnership through this program. Their work aimed to affirm and extend inclusive practices in the faculty member’s STEM course, and the unexpected intertwining of their paths also served to foster a sense of inclusion for both partners. After an introductory discussion of the partnership program, definition of rhizomatic growth as we use it, and an explanation of our method, the faculty and student partners present their autoethnographic case study by alternating their voices. We focus our discussion and recommendations on how partnership supports rhizomatic growth, inclusion, resistance to hegemony, and human sustainability. Finally, we propose possible directions for future research in each of these areas.

Keywords: pedagogical partnership; students as partners; sustainability; rhizomatic growth; inclusion; temporary faculty; underserved students; autoethnography

1. Introduction

Many postsecondary education institutions articulate a commitment to inclusion but struggle with how to enact it for all their community members. Doing so would mean resisting the hegemony that weaves the university into what Andrew Seal calls “the fabric of capitalism” [1]—a fabric that might be made of, but is not made for, all its members. While some institutions, including ours, endeavor to foster inclusion, they do not escape the neoliberal university’s underlying reality that may well consume more than it produces, at least in human terms. In particular, Seal argues, “contingent academics” and “students loaded down with debt” are “utterly typical of an economic order devouring itself from within” [1].

The first part of our title, “While We Are Here”, aims to capture the simultaneous sense of disconnected transience and deep human engagement that interim faculty and students from underserved backgrounds can experience. Members of both groups can feel transient not only because of the duration of their stay but also because they do not feel that they belong or are part of the community. However, while they are at these institutions, they can strive to make the most of their

experiences and often contribute a great deal to human sustainability for themselves and others. Such efforts are facilitated through nourishing that counters the “devouring” [1]. The second part of our title, then, “Resisting Hegemony and Fostering Inclusion through Rhizomatic Growth via Student–Faculty Pedagogical Partnership”, captures our argument that student–Faculty pedagogical partnership can nourish visiting faculty and students from underserved backgrounds by providing structures and spaces that foster a sense of inclusion, resist hegemonic institutional tendencies, and contribute to human sustainability.

A number of institutions with pedagogical partnership programs have fostered inclusivity as the premise of their work. For instance, Smith College, a selective college for women in the northeastern region of the United States, launched their student–faculty partnership program with the goal of “developing a more inclusive learning environment” [2], and Berea College, a work college located in the east south-central region of the United States, launched their student–faculty pedagogical partnership program as a component of a multi-part, institutional effort called “Belonging, Inclusive Excellence, and Student Learning” [3]. Similarly, Florida Gulf Coast’s Student–Faculty Partnership Program was developed explicitly to foster a sense of belonging for both faculty and students [3,4], and Victoria University of Wellington links its partnership program with both a university-wide commitment to a new Learning and Teaching Strategy that was co-written with students and Aotearoa New Zealand’s country-wide commitment to bi-culturalism [5].

As the director of the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, a pedagogical partnership program that has embraced a commitment to fostering inclusion since its advent in 2007 [6,7], I have been particularly concerned about the experiences of visiting faculty and students who belong to groups underrepresented in and underserved by postsecondary education and who need meaningful employment to be and to stay there [8]. I have endeavored every year to devote some of the SaLT program’s resources to supporting community members of these two groups, and this is the story of one such effort. We offer the story in the form of an autoethnographic case study of Jamie Becker, a faculty member in a STEM field who was on a visiting appointment at Haverford College during the 2019–2020 academic year, and Alexis Giron, an undergraduate student at Bryn Mawr College on the pre-medicine track who completed a major in psychology and a minor in neuroscience in May 2020 and who identifies as a first-generation, low-income, Afro-Latina.

Several theories inform our analysis of Alexis’s and Jamie’s experience of pedagogical partnership during their time at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. First is Jan Meyer and Ray Land’s [9] notion of troublesome knowledge as a characteristic of threshold concepts—ideas that are fundamental to understanding but uncomfortable and challenging to grasp. Pedagogical partnership is a threshold concept [10,11], and in the case study we present here, experiencing a sense of inclusion is as well. Second, Alexis’s and Jamie’s experiences illustrate Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s [12] argument for rhizomatic as opposed to linear development—growth that is nonlinear, non-hierarchical, multiple, and unknowable in advance. Neither Alexis nor Jamie expected or could have predicted the ways their partnership would affirm Jamie’s inclusive practices or foster both partners’ sense of inclusion. Finally, Alexis’s and Jamie’s experiences substantiate Karen Gravett’s [13] reconceptualization of transitions as perpetual processes of becoming, a reconceptualization that draws on both Meyer and Land’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s theories. The relationship-focused, inclusion-oriented partnership Alexis and Jamie created through and as a perpetual process of becoming, worked very intentionally against multiple manifestations of the neoliberal university and for human sustainability.

Alexis’s and Jamie’s partnership began when they both chose to participate in the SaLT program during the Fall-2019 semester. As director of that program, I paired them in a semester-long, classroom-focused, pedagogical partnership. We contextualize this case study by describing the SaLT program and defining what we mean by rhizomatic growth in this context, and we then offer an overview of our autoethnographic method. The autoethnographic case study alternates between Alexis’s and Jamie’s voices and maps how they developed their partnership. Both our discussion and

our recommendations focus on how partnership supports rhizomatic growth, inclusion, resistance to hegemony, and human sustainability, and we note possible directions for future research concerning all of these.

2. Context: The SaLT Program as Providing Brave Space for Inclusion, Rhizomatic Growth, and Sustainability

To provide context for the case study, we describe in this section the SaLT partnership program and its rhizomatic growth out of another partnership project, review rhizomatic growth for and as sustainability as we define those for this case study, and offer an example from the literature of pedagogical partnership providing a brave space for rhizomatic growth.

2.1. SaLT Program: Programmatic Roots and Shoots Finding Their Ways

Any faculty member at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, whether continuing or interim, can participate through the SaLT program in a semester-long, one-on-one, student–faculty, pedagogical partnership—one of several options the program offers [14]. Any second-, third-, or fourth-year undergraduate student may apply for the paid position of student partner. There are no grade requirements or other (typically exclusive) selection criteria, and all students’ applications are accepted if their schedules match those of participating faculty members and if they can commit to the time and responsibilities of the position. Matches between student and faculty partners are made almost entirely based on schedules. Students participate in an orientation, are given guidelines, and are supported in weekly meetings with me in my role as director of the program, but there is no additional training [15]. The program was initially created in response to faculty requests for support in making their classrooms more inclusive and responsive and has retained that commitment [6].

Through this program, student partners visit their faculty partners’ classrooms each week, take detailed observation notes, deliver those notes to their faculty partners, meet weekly with their faculty partners, and meet weekly with other student partners and me to discuss how best to support faculty in fostering inclusive educational experiences. Interim faculty often take advantage of this opportunity to participate in pedagogical partnership, since it is one of the only sources of pedagogical support available to them as visitors to these institutions. The undergraduate students who work as consultants through these pedagogical partnerships are not enrolled in their faculty partners’ courses. They are paid by the hour at the top of the student pay scale for all the work described above. Such compensation is essential to acknowledge the expertise all students bring to this work. It is especially important for students who need employment and who would particularly benefit from jobs that “foster skill acquisition, contact with faculty and administrators, and opportunities for enrichment” [8] (p. 177). Each semester, between 50% and 75% of SaLT program student consultants identify as belonging to one or more equity-seeking groups (e.g., racialized, first generation, LGBTQ), including historically low-income.

2.2. Rhizomatic Program Growth for Human Sustainability

The SaLT program for university undergraduates and faculty grew rhizomatically out of a project that pairs secondary students and prospective secondary teachers in semester-long partnerships prior to the prospective teachers’ semester of practice teaching and carries the same commitments. Called Teaching and Learning Together, that project, which was developed in 1995 in the context of a teaching methods course and is still running, conceptualizes education *as* teaching sustainability, which Stephen Sterling defines as “nurturing critical, systemic and reflective thinking; creativity; self organization; and adaptive management” [16] (pp. 56–57). The project is part of a broader commitment to conceptualizing and supporting learning to teach as “developing resilience within teaching-learning relationships in a way that acknowledges and aims to deal with uncertainty ([17])” [18]. Such a “new ecology” apprehends, according to Steve Mentz, that “stable structures like equilibrium or homeostasis do not accurately reflect natural systems ... [and acknowledges

that] wherever we seek to find constancy we discover change” [19] (pp. 156–157). The approach to teacher education through the Teaching and Learning Together program “sees sustainability as the preservation and development of life and further capacity for life in and through change” [18]. SaLT strives to nurture sustainability in these same ways. In particular, it does so with its longstanding commitment to inclusivity [7]—to connecting people as humans, not as capital. It therefore rejects neoliberalism, which David Harvey [20] has argued is “the doctrine that market exchange is an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action” [21] (p. 177). Such an ethic threatens to replace social responsibilities with private satisfactions [22] and reify the sage/disciple hierarchy that characterizes traditional teacher–student relationships. Within the neoliberal frame, David Hansen suggests, education becomes “a mere means for training human capital, rather than a formative experience of cultivating expanded moral sympathies, deepened democratic dispositions, and a serious sense of responsibility for the world” [23] (p. 4).

In my role as director of the SaLT program, I strive to work against the dominant, neoliberal values and embrace instead “an ethic of reciprocity and the practice of partnership in learning and teaching” in order to move toward “what Jon Nixon [24] (p. 134) has called ‘an ethics of connectivity’” [21] (p. 175). Such an ethic is nurtured in brave spaces, a concept drawn from social justice work [25] to replace the notion of “safe spaces” since “to remove risk” from challenging encounters around controversial issues is “simply impossible” (p. 136). In contrast, brave space implies that there is indeed likely to be danger or harm that requires courage to face. However, painful or difficult experiences will be acknowledged and supported, not avoided or eliminated. Such a concept “focuses our attention on the active engagement and agency required of participants in spaces intended to support learning”; using “brave” rather “safe” not only sets a tone for engagement but also proposes a mode of engagement [26] (p. 1).

Education for and as sustainability embraces the new ecology and rejects the neoliberal frame described above. It also recognizes that both students and academics are on paths representing “parallel states of becoming” [27]. Students and faculty can connect regarding similar experiences at different points along those paths and use those connections as inspirations to work toward greater equity, or they can recognize that they are on entirely different paths and learn from and draw on those differences as sources of strength and connection [28]. Pedagogical partnership can create the “brave space” that invites both kinds of recognition, connection, and action [26], which have equal potential for fostering inclusion and nurturing rhizomatic growth for human sustainability.

2.3. An Example from the Literature of Pedagogical Partnership Providing Brave Space for Rhizomatic Growth

Particularly relevant to the case study we offer here of a STEM faculty member and a pre-med student traditionally underrepresented in STEM is the experience Kerstin Perez [29] captures—a moment on her path from being an underrepresented student in STEM to being a new faculty member in a position to affect the present and future experiences of other underrepresented students in STEM:

In the Fall-2015 semester, as I assumed the role of instructor and led my first undergraduate lecture class in physics, I was concerned with how my own actions would expand or constrain the pool of students who continue in STEM. When I, a mixed-race White and Hispanic woman from a low-income urban area, was a student in similar classrooms, I had a nagging knowledge that silent factors were keeping others like me away from physics and that any level of success I achieved would be an exception to the norm. I wanted to openly address similar concerns among these students, not only to relieve the anxiety of those who felt they did not belong, but also to encourage everyone to consider how their actions shape the academic community they are joining. (p. 1)

Perez [29] links her place on her path with her student consultant’s place on her path and shows how, together, they retraced their experiences, affirmed those, and imagined mapping new possible pathways for students—pathways of inclusion. She explains:

Meron, herself an underrepresented student who had been dissuaded from a STEM field by her experience in undergraduate classes, validated my own experiences with classroom environments that,

while not explicitly unwelcoming, left us feeling isolated. With her, I could share the vulnerability of being a student who didn't feel that her background and approach to study were shared by her peers, as well as announce the things we wish professors had spoken to us about. (p. 1)

After narrating a set of steps she and her student consultant took to try to make Perez's classroom a more equitable and inclusive space for the students enrolled in her courses, Perez [29] succinctly captures her ongoing commitment to equity and inclusion and invites other academics to make and take up the brave spaces of partnership—a form of embracing a “philosophy of becoming” [30] that resists hegemony and supports both faculty and student processes of becoming:

... my purpose in writing this essay is to encourage other STEM instructors and instructor-student partnerships to create the space necessary to address with students how issues of equity and inclusion affect their classrooms and fields, and to make the goal of an inclusive classroom an important consideration for course design. These are delicate conversations, which should be handled with care and respect, but my experience over the past year have shown me that students are eager to listen and engage. My partnership with Meron was essential for developing the brave space necessary to have these conversations, validating how my personal experiences influence my teaching, and supporting the changes I attempt to make. (pp. 4–5)

We can understand these processes of finding and building connections across positions and over time as rhizomatic processes of development [31]. They spring from an experience of exclusion and, through crossing the threshold of pedagogical partnership and embracing a perpetual process of becoming that is committed to fostering inclusion, stories such as Perez's offer us models of human sustainability that resist the hegemony of STEM fields in particular and postsecondary education more generally.

3. Method

The case study we present here was generated through a form of collaborative autoethnography, and it embraces not only first-person pronouns but also personal style. In the latter commitment, it works against the expectation Elizabeth Dauphinee describes that we “deny all traces of self in scholarly writing” [32] (p. 804) and instead makes the presence of our selves known through the style. We embrace the definition of case study Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus [33] offer—a reframing of this traditional method to focus on the processes through which events unfold, reconceptualize culture and context, emphasize a critical approach to power relations, and demonstrate a greater appreciation of the value of comparison. Autoethnography draws on researchers' lived experiences to “describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences” [34] (p. 1), and “collaborative autoethnography” is an approach through which “a group of researchers [pools] their stories to find some commonalities and differences” to discover “the meanings of the stories in relation to their sociocultural contexts” (p. 17). Such a research method is at once collaborative, autobiographical, and ethnographic [35,36].

As they detail in the collaborative autoethnographic case study below, Alexis and Jamie worked during the Fall-2019 semester in a partnership that focused on ensuring that Jamie's course was welcoming to a diversity of students. Throughout and after their partnership, Alexis and Jamie documented, both in spoken exchanges and in written reflections, the ways in which this work affirmed and extended the inclusive pedagogical strategies Jamie had already developed and how the partnership work made them both feel more included in the Bryn Mawr and Haverford College communities. In composing their case study, Alexis and Jamie drew on the notes they kept throughout their collaboration and engaged in retrospective analysis to trace the development of their partnership within the terms that rhizomatic development offers.

In their first-person narrative, they reject the need to “deny all traces of self in scholarly writing” [32] (p. 804), they focus on the processes through which events unfold, reconceptualize culture and context, and emphasize a critical approach to power relations [33], and they “pool their stories” to

find “commonalities and differences” to discover “the meanings of the stories in relation to their sociocultural contexts” [34] (p. 17).

4. Building Pedagogical Partnership for Inclusivity

In their autoethnographic case study, Alexis’s and Jamie’s voices alternate as they use the language of rhizomatic growth to narrate how they took up the brave space of partnership to foster inclusivity for Jamie’s students and one another. The sections of their dialogic narrative—“Roots and shoots finding their ways”, “Strengthening root clusters and creating new nodes for shoot development”, and “Pursuing paths representing ‘parallel states of becoming’”—retrospectively map the initially challenging—or “troublesome,” in the language Meyer and Land [9] and Gravett [13] use—and ultimately empowering transitions each experienced through their pedagogical partnership. This is one story of a pedagogical partnership; there are general guidelines available for developing this kind of work [15], but each partnership is unique, so Alexis and Jamie focus on their individual experiences rather than on generalized structures and approaches to be replicated.

4.1. *Roots and Shoots Finding Their Ways*

Jamie: When faced with my first semester of full-time teaching, I was desperate for any support I could find that might improve my pedagogy and assist me in developing a more inclusive and relaxed classroom environment. I was also looking for someone to tell me, as quickly as possible, if I was doing a terrible job. Doing anything for the first time can be scary due to high levels of uncertainty and, for me, providing a robust learning experience for my students while fostering an environment in which they felt comfortable engaging with the course material and each other without receiving any formal training in how to do either of those things was keeping me up at night.

Following a recommendation from a fellow visiting professor, I requested a student partner through the SaLT program and was initially quite excited to have this additional resource in the classroom. Going into the partnership I imagined myself and Alexis as existing on very different points in our paths. While I had little knowledge of what constituted a successful Bryn Mawr or Haverford College course, I reasoned that Alexis—a senior who took many courses at both institutions—would guide me toward emulating her best course experiences. In hindsight, I realize now that I entered into our partnership with the traditional academic hierarchy flipped on its head—with Alexis as the sage and me as the disciple—however, this did not occur to me at the time. While this could be viewed positively, I believe now that it highlights how ignorant I was regarding the history of hegemony in higher education. I was correct that there were many things I did not know that Alexis could help me understand; however the most important things were not my known unknowns, but rather my unknown unknowns.

When Alexis and I met for the first time before the start of the semester, she was quite blunt with me about her concerns regarding inclusivity in higher education and her goals of ensuring that my course would provide equitable learning. She warned me that her feedback each week would be direct and void of any sugar-coating. While I appreciated everything she said and reminded myself that I wanted honest feedback, I left more anxious than ever. In addition to dozens of students and the occasional faculty colleague, there would be one more person in the classroom evaluating my performance, waiting to point out my mistakes.

As the semester began, this anxiety faded and was quickly replaced with admiration and a deep appreciation. Alexis rapidly became a source of positive reinforcement, encouraging me to continue with my natural teaching style while also taking risks and striving to grow as an instructor. As the semester progressed, my interpretation of Alexis’ role evolved from a critic to a partner. While at different points of our respective paths in many ways, we were both dealing with uncertain futures—this current situation is temporary, what comes after graduation and interim employment?—with the great unknown looming for both of us in less than a year. We also shared a common goal of providing equal learning opportunities for my students. Alexis patiently entertained my incessant questions regarding

various aspects of the course—such as how to generate lively class discussions while simultaneously encouraging participation from a diversity of voices and ways to transform the classroom into a brave space that provides opportunities for students to explore alternative ways of approaching questions and course material—and provided me with tangible teaching strategies to test and adopt in the classroom. I believe that my partnership with Alexis improved the students' experiences in the course on which we collaborated, but also had a sustained positive effect on my development as a professor and human.

Alexis: Prior to meeting Professor Becker, I was prepared to work with a white, cis-male who was not concerned about diversity in any type of way. That was not at all the case, and this gave me so much more room to feel confident in the position of student consultant that I was recommended for. After several semesters in college I had realized that many parts of my identity contributed to my sense of non-belonging in academia and insecurities in the classroom. As a low-income, first-generation, Afro-Latina from a single-parent household, I was thrown into a predominantly white institution, taking pre-med classes with predominantly white students and predominantly white professors. I had been afraid of reaching out to professors. I was afraid of speaking up in class. I couldn't ask my classmates to tutor me; they'd think I was dumb. I'd just be one of the "brown girls" that didn't understand. I went through the first three years of my undergraduate career with this mindset. That was until I started to work with Professor Becker, and I felt I could bring my whole self to the partnership—my identity, my experiences, my perspectives—and that Professor Becker would listen to those and respect them.

To create a map for ourselves coming from such different places, we began by laying out each of our personal goals with the program to acknowledge what we were each looking for in the classroom and to see which of our own goals aligned with the other's. It's difficult to find safety in spaces where I feel that I do not belong, so when all I knew that I wanted to accomplish was for my first time in the position revolved around educational diversity, Professor Becker was on board. Even though we came from different places, our goals converged in this way, unexpectedly.

Professor Becker and I continued to see each other under a lot of pressure, and one of the main things that we had to remind ourselves about is that we are all human. It was so much more relieving to see Professor Becker as a person than as a professor. Professors have always been a huge intimidating fear of mine. Even as a senior, it has been hard for me to talk to professors outside of solely academic spaces. This position gave me another perspective on that fear. I personally believe this helped strengthen our partnership.

4.2. Strengthening Root Clusters and Creating New Nodes for Shoot Development

Jamie: Alexis and I collaborated on a course for non-majors focused on the climate crisis. I have a colleague at another institution who has documented some of the disproportionate effects of climate change on disadvantaged groups, and I knew that I wanted this to be a recurring theme of the course in addition to the more traditional scientific content. However, I was concerned with how information related to these topics might be received from the mouth of a cisgender straight white male. My partnership with Alexis was instrumental in helping me navigate the presentation of this material, which was outside my traditional biology wheelhouse and something that I might have otherwise lacked the confidence to bring into the classroom on a meaningful scale. We discussed strategies to develop and foster an inclusive learning environment early in the semester, as well as ways to encourage students in the room to respectfully engage with the course material and each other. Alexis took an active role in these efforts, developing surveys for the students to take that she then analyzed and presented in class to foster these discussions. Her advice and presence were instrumental in creating a classroom environment conducive to equal learning opportunities.

Reflecting now, I realize that the central themes of the climate crisis are inherently at odds with the notion of education for the purpose of "training human capital" and my primary goal for the course became a desire to develop a "serious sense of responsibility for the world" in my students—concepts

in direct opposition to a traditional neoliberal educational framework [23] (p. 4). My partnership with Alexis created the brave space that allowed me to embark on this path. Part of the rhizomatic process of development involves the construction of nodes from which new roots and shoots can grow. I believe that creativity is an essential component of node creation and that partnerships in which individuals share and meld ideas enriches creativity. With input from Alexis, I was able to develop my pedagogical language to include phrases that encouraged student engagement (e.g., “Is there anyone who has not spoken yet that would like to?”), understanding (e.g., “What doesn’t make sense about that? How did you arrive at that conclusion?”), and creativity (e.g., “Did anyone approach this question in a different way?”). Alexis encouraged me to remind my students that I wanted to hear everyone’s voice during class discussions and develop alternative outlets for sharing their voices (e.g., smaller groups & online forums), which I believe enhanced the educational experience of several students in the course.

Indeed, end-of-term student feedback suggests that the course, affirmed and supported by my partnership with Alexis, created possibilities for student paths that may not have been perceived previously. One student noted that the course “definitely caused me to think more deeply about the issues we covered, which I will take with me into other aspects of my life”. Another pointed to the “positive learning environment”—“not because the assignments were too easy or the material was simple, but because of the flexibility and relaxed nature of the work”—that allowed the student “to learn new information that will stick with me beyond the end of the semester”. The students’ emphasis on the inclusive environment they experienced and the enduring understanding they anticipate suggests that, like me, they moved further along paths they had not necessarily anticipated, but felt brave enough to pursue.

Alexis: One of the most impactful experiences for me was when we were able to create a survey that asked students for their ethnic and educational background. There’s a term that I came across in my experience working as a student partner: science identity. I have been a student in many STEM courses, but with my lack of ability to approach the professor for help, I often did not feel confident in science being a part of my identity. When I was given the opportunity to put out a survey, as small as this one, it allowed me to feel, even in the slightest sense, that connection to the science identity I’ve always wanted to claim. Being that this was a position for education and I was a STEM student, I would not have imagined that the space that gave me more hold of my scientific identity would be a position that does not require a scientific setting. I was able to become more of a science student through being in partnership with a scientist who valued my questions as well as my experiences and knowledge.

With the anonymous information provided through the survey, I was able to put together a small presentation that displayed the answers to the class in pie charts. This presentation was not to out any students, but to allow students to acknowledge who was in the classroom and how much space they take up. I believe, in a way, this helped to create a brave space that encouraged current and future non-traditional students to use their voices. My hope was to help students who have experienced academic spaces as I have to find growth and healings of their own. I came up with this idea because there are some obvious demographics in a person’s appearance (i.e., biological sex and race), but there are so many factors to their upbringing that may not be as obvious, like educational background. Many students I’ve come across have attended private school or boarding school, or a public school with private school resources. Students who have been surrounded by education and STEM most likely feel more confident in the space and the work that they are doing. Oftentimes, these same students end up dominating the space that is supposed to include everyone, although it may not have been created with this intention.

Working from our different places of origin and our shared commitment to inclusion, it was in our best interest to reinforce that space by giving all students a sense of responsibility and accountability to the privileges that others may not have been able to take advantage of the way that they have.

4.3. Pursuing Paths Representing ‘Parallel States of Becoming’

Jamie: While the stated goal of my partnership with Alexis was to enhance student inclusivity in a specific course, our interactions had an unforeseen impact on my professional self-worth over time. While the title of ‘visiting professor’ suggests a home institution to return to, the reality for many contingent faculty is temporary employment with low job security and an unknown future. An interim position, by definition, is deemed unsustainable by the institution. Rhizomes don’t have beginnings and endings, but interim appointments most certainly do. This reality, coupled with discrepancies in compensation and faculty support opportunities, can preclude visiting faculty from fully integrating with their institution. I believe that pedagogical partnerships between visiting faculty and students offer a unique and promising opportunity to support the professional development of faculty on interim appointments while simultaneously fostering individual connections that can increase a sense of belonging to the campus community at large.

One of the largest barriers to my rhizomatic development [31] during my first year of full-time teaching was periodic feelings of disconnect from my institution due to the temporary nature of my employment. These feelings persisted despite numerous genuine efforts by many of my colleagues (whom I greatly appreciate) to provide me with support and positive reinforcement. The imposter syndrome experienced by many in academia, particularly among junior scholars [37], is often exacerbated for individuals serving in interim roles in which the message from the institution, although never stated directly, is that while they are doing a great job, they are not great enough to keep that job. As my partnership with Alexis developed, we found a shared concern for the unknown futures facing us both at the end of the academic year. I hope that being open and honest with Alexis about my own uncertainties allowed her to see a relatable and human side of faculty members that educational hierarchies have traditionally sought to hide from students. I feel that honesty and openness are necessary harbingers of rhizomatic growth. Through my conversations with Alexis, I was able to largely circumvent this barrier and find affirmation and value in the work I was doing in the classroom.

I want to stress the importance of the SaLT program and its availability to contingent faculty. Resources provided by the program, including monetary compensation for the student consultants, are the nutrients and water that fuel the rhizomatic developments I describe here. My involvement with the program improved my experience as an interim faculty member and helped transform my view of higher education pedagogy. I am now more aware of the historical hegemonies that erode inclusivity and equitable learning in higher education. While I still have much to learn, through my partnership with Alexis, I feel that I am more prepared to address these issues in my future classrooms.

Due to its ubiquity around my home, when I think of rhizomes, I think of bamboo. As anyone who has attempted to control the spread of bamboo knows, its rhizomes are numerous, they grow rapidly, and they are incredibly difficult to eradicate. I like to think that pedagogical partnerships between faculty and students, when developed rhizomatically, are akin to bamboo—a sustainable source of materials for constructing inclusivity in higher education.

Alexis: Reflecting on my experiences in this program, I have been able to heal a part of myself that was unable to speak up and advocate for my belonging in the STEM classrooms that I, very deservedly, was allowed to take up space in. My position and my partnership have provided me with validation that I was unaware I needed in order to grow as a student and as a scientist. I was given independent projects and I was able to work *with* and not *for* my faculty partner. We grew together: we moved along our separate paths, and we also moved together through the regular meetings and exchanges we had.

In every meeting, before we turned our attention to Professor Becker’s class, we had a human, person-to-person conversation. We talked about our lives, what we were working on, what we were struggling with. I had this conversation with someone who obtained an entire PhD. I never would have thought that was possible.

I have experienced a multitude of pains and harms in classes that were not designed to see students like myself succeed, but working with a professor like Professor Becker has allowed me to feel more confident in the classroom. I have been able to find a sense of empowerment. This is not

only to validate myself for my earlier academic career, but to raise my voice for those who are in the exact position that I was once in.

5. Resisting Hegemony and Fostering Inclusion through Rhizomatic Growth via Student–Faculty Pedagogical Partnership

While crossing the threshold [9–11] of pedagogical partnership was initially troublesome for Alexis and Jamie, albeit for different reasons, their experience and embrace of rhizomatic growth [12] positioned them to reconceptualize what could have been disconnected transience as perpetual processes of becoming [13]. In this section, I offer my interpretation as someone outside the case study narrative but committed to upholding the structure that supported it, of how Alexis's and Jamie's partnership supported rhizomatic growth as a perpetual process of becoming, inclusion, resistance to hegemony, and human sustainability.

5.1. Partnership Supporting Rhizomatic Growth as a Perpetual Process of Becoming

While there are many differences between faculty members visiting colleges on interim appointments and undergraduates from underrepresented and underserved groups attending their chosen college for four years, both can take up pedagogical partnership as a brave space within which to make their rhizomatic ways, thriving in the cracks [38] that the brave spaces of pedagogical partnership create.

Self-doubt, uncertainty about how they might be perceived and received by the other, and vulnerability were challenges Alexis and Jamie shared at the outset of their work together. By allowing themselves to grow toward one another, even after initial suspicion and uncertainty, Alexis and Jamie were able to cross the threshold of pedagogical partnership, develop in what Deleuze and Guattari [12] characterize as nonlinear, non-hierarchical ways that are unknowable in advance, and experience transitions redefined along the lines Gravett [13] argues for—as perpetual processes of becoming. As they grew through their partnership work, Alexis and Jamie traced paths that represented “parallel states of becoming” [27].

Alexis describes how she and Jamie mapped a way forward from their different starting points and that their “goals converged in this way, unexpectedly.” Both committed to inclusivity; they grew from their different starting points in ways that allowed them to feel and to facilitate greater inclusivity. Alexis describes one particularly powerful form of rhizomatic growth she experienced: from the position of student partner outside of a STEM role, which fostered her sense of STEM identity. As she explains: “I was able to become more of a science student through being in partnership with a scientist who valued my questions as well as my experiences and knowledge”. By allowing herself to grow rhizomatically and unexpectedly into partnership, Alexis experienced affirmation not only within partnership but also beyond it, illustrating that she is engaged in a perpetual process of becoming.

Jamie notes that “part of the rhizomatic process of development involves the construction of nodes from which new roots and shoots can grow”. He asserts in his narrative that “creativity is an essential component of node creation and that partnerships in which individuals are sharing and melding ideas enrich creativity”. The unexpected ways he developed through his partnership with Alexis illustrate the power and potential of rhizomatic growth: “While the stated goal of my partnership with Alexis was to enhance student inclusivity in a specific course, over time our interactions had an unforeseen impact on my professional self-worth”. Like Alexis, Jamie experienced affirmation beyond as well as within the partnership, illustrating that he, too, is engaged in a perpetual process of becoming.

5.2. Partnership Supporting Inclusion

When Alexis and Jamie began their partnership, both were feeling a sense of exclusion. Alexis describes realizing, after several semesters of trying to find her place at Bryn Mawr College, “that many parts of my identity contributed to my sense of non-belonging in academia and insecurities in the classroom”. This experience is consistent with that of other students from underrepresented and

underserved backgrounds who feel excluded due to dimensions of their identity [39–41]. The space of the partnership and the respect of Jamie, both of which explicitly valued Alexis’s experience and perspective, gave her “so much more room to feel confident in the position of student consultant”. Her sense of inclusion came from feeling she could bring her whole self to the partnership—“my identity, my experiences, my perspectives—and that Professor Becker would listen to those and respect them”. This opportunity and invitation to bring her whole self inspired a sense of inclusion in the moment and capacity in the future. In her own words again: “My position and my partnership have provided me with validation that I was unaware I needed in order to grow as a student and as a scientist”. Through partnership, Alexis has found what she described as “a sense of empowerment”.

The sense of exclusion Jamie describes took the form “periodic feelings of disconnect from my institution due to the temporary nature of my employment”—feelings that persisted, he explains, “despite numerous genuine efforts by many of my colleagues (whom I greatly appreciate) to provide me with support and positive reinforcement.” The feelings of exclusion created by these institutional structures were countered by the experience Jamie had in the SaLT program. Directly addressing this point, Jamie asserts: “I believe that pedagogical partnerships between visiting faculty and students offer a unique and promising opportunity to support the professional development of faculty on interim appointments while simultaneously fostering individual connections that can increase a sense of belonging to the campus community at large”. The confidence he built, the specific strategies he developed, and the commitment to continually becoming all fostered a sense of inclusion for Jamie.

Jamie also notes ways in which his partnership work fostered inclusion among students enrolled in his course. Approaches suggested by Alexis—such as saying, “Is there anyone who has not spoken yet that would like to?”, “What doesn’t make sense about that?; How did you arrive at that conclusion?”, and “Did anyone approach this question in a different way?”—helped ensure that Jamie’s students felt included in his course and were able to engage in their own current and future growth.

5.3. Partnership Supporting Resistance to Hegemony

Visiting faculty teach a large number of students and the same students taught by permanent faculty. They should be supported while in an unfamiliar and temporary environment, and they should be assisted in making the experience a useful step in their professional development. Similarly, students from underrepresented and underserved groups should be affirmed and supported at their universities, their experiences and knowledge recognized and valued [42]. Resisting the hegemony that weaves the university into “the fabric of capitalism” through which “contingent academics” and “students loaded down with debt” remain “typical of an economic order devouring itself from within” [1], brave spaces such as those afforded by pedagogical partnership support, affirm, and productively challenge interim faculty and students from underrepresented and underserved groups as they forge human connections and follow their respective planned and unplanned paths through postsecondary education.

Alexis used her position and her voice to speak against the structures and practices that have harmed her and other students from underrepresented and underserved groups. She worked with Jamie to make his classroom as inclusive and empowering to a diversity of students as possible, sustaining their humanity while they were in the class and supporting it as they moved beyond it. Her own empowerment and her articulation of her work against hegemonic practices, both in her narrative in this case study and her foreword to a book about redressing the epistemic, affective, and ontological harms of postsecondary education [43], contribute to enacting and naming pedagogical partnership’s capacity to support resistance to hegemony.

Jamie notes that he began his partnership with Alexis “with the traditional academic hierarchy flipped on its head—with Alexis as the sage and me as the disciple”. Although he did not recognize this at the time, the partnership work helped illuminate “the history of hegemony in higher education”. It raised his awareness of the particular “historical hegemonies that erode inclusivity and equitable learning in higher education”. The partnership work prepared him, he explains, to “address these issues in my future classrooms”, and his commitment to develop a partnership program where he

currently works holds promise for creating brave spaces in that new context within which others can do the work of resisting hegemony.

5.4. Partnership Supporting Human Sustainability

Feeling disconnected and transient is not conducive to human sustainability. Instead, feelings of inclusion and belonging while nurturing others' growth and experiencing one's own growth are what constitute (in the present) and contribute to (future) human sustainability. Alexis and Jamie both reflected upon how their work constituted and inspired such sustainability.

Alexis noted that in every meeting with Jamie, "before we turned our attention to Professor Becker's class, we had a human, person-to-person conversation." This human connection gave her confidence and courage, and made her feel as though she belonged in her role and mattered to another human being. Her eloquent analysis of how participating in pedagogical partnership shaped her experience in college captures how she was able, from this foundation of human connection, to engage in "critical, systemic and reflective thinking; creativity; self organization; and adaptive management" [16] (pp. 56–57)—all forms of human sustainability. In the Foreword, she wrote to a book about how pedagogical partnership has the potential to heal some of the epistemic, affective, and ontological harms postsecondary education causes minoritized groups, Alexis explains: "I am able to put myself, a student with multiple underrepresented identities, into an academic space where I am not only being heard as a student, but as a partner, as well". She argues that this position afforded her a unique opportunity: "This was my chance to make up for all of the struggles left unsaid, my chance to make it up to myself for not being the advocate I told myself I would be." While she also struggled with how she had experienced discouragement and discrimination, she had to use her voice "in this position to speak up for the next generation of students with underrepresented identities in postsecondary education" [43]—a commitment to future human sustainability.

Jamie also reflects in one of the sections of the case study on how the partnership work "had a sustained positive effect on my development as a professor and human." His own current experience was complemented by a commitment to sustain the human going forward. As he explains: "My involvement with the program improved my experience as an interim faculty member and has helped to transform my view of higher education pedagogy". Not only is he "now more aware of the historical hegemonies that erode inclusivity and equitable learning in higher education", looking to the future, but he also asserts that, "while I still have much to learn, through my partnership with Alexis I feel that I am more prepared to address these issues in my future classrooms." Letting the rhizomatic growth continue not only to foster inclusion but also, and as noted in the previous section, to provide brave spaces for partnership that can counter hegemony, Jamie's plans to explore possibilities for starting a partnership program at the university where he now has a tenure-track position promise to promote human sustainability in a new context.

As Jamie also notes in the case study, end-of-term student feedback suggested that the revisions to his teaching and course supported enrolled students in their own human sustainability experiences. Students noted how the course prompted them to "think more deeply" and take that new understanding "into other aspects of my life". The students' emphasis on the inclusive environment they experienced and the enduring understanding they anticipate suggests that, like Jamie himself, "they moved further along paths they had not necessarily anticipated, but felt brave enough to pursue".

Sustainability involves developing resilience and capacity to manage uncertainty [17,18]. It does not mean keeping things as they are but rather moving with and sometimes making the changes that characterize life—Gravett's [13] perpetual process of becoming.

6. Recommendations and Future Directions for Developing Brave Spaces of Pedagogical Partnership for Inclusion and Rhizomatic Growth

Based on the experiences Alexis and Jamie had of their partnership, we recommend:

- **Finding and creating opportunities for interim faculty and students from underrepresented and underserved groups to share their experiences and insights.** They will need to cross the threshold of pedagogical partnership—move through and past the troublesome knowledge that each has something to learn from and teach the other—but providing brave space makes that more achievable.
- **Making the perspectives of interim faculty and students from underrepresented and underserved groups on inclusion a focus of educational development.** As this autoethnographic case study demonstrates, faculty and students who have experienced exclusion can see what those who have not experienced it cannot, just as those with less privilege in any context have knowledge not available to those in more privileged positions [44].
- **Placing human sustainability at the center of education and educational development.** Linked to the experiences of inclusion fostered by the pedagogical partnership work Alexis and Jamie present in their autoethnographic case study, we recommend what a group of student partners from across nine different institutions with pedagogical partnership programs emphasized under the description of “starting with and sustaining the human.”

These opportunities might be supported by teaching and learning centers [45]. They can be department or division based, or they might be taken up by individuals who reconceptualize existing roles such as teaching assistant or repurpose funds for research to support pedagogical partnerships. For detailed guidelines regarding developing and launching a partnership program, see *Pedagogical Partnerships: A How-to Guide for Faculty, Students, and Academic Developers in Higher Education* [15]. For an argument regarding how pedagogical partnership, whether individual or institutional, can explicitly redress epistemic, affective, and ontological harms caused by postsecondary institutions’ hegemonic structures and practices, see *Promoting Equity and Justice through Pedagogical Partnership* [46].

While scholarship in these areas is growing [47], future research into the potential of pedagogical partnership to support rhizomatic growth, inclusion, resistance to hegemony, and human sustainability might look across contexts at the different ways institutions of postsecondary education do—and do not—support interim faculty and students from underrepresented and underserved groups. It might also dig more deeply into the specific approaches faculty develop through partnership to make their classrooms more inclusive and how enrolled students experience those efforts. Finally, it might link directly, like some scholarship [48], to the newly amplified arguments against anti-Black racism and other forms of violence and oppression and challenge the white supremacy that underlies hegemony.

As we have illustrated with our case study and as we have argued in our recommendations, creating brave spaces such as those provided by pedagogical partnership, particularly for faculty on temporary appointments and students traditionally underrepresented in and underserved by colleges and universities, can help postsecondary institutions better enact their espoused commitments to inclusion through supporting rhizomatic development for human sustainability.

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