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Alison Cook-Sather
Bryn Mawr College

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THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP: A SAMPLING OF STUDENT PARTNERS' STORIES

Alison Cook-Sather, Mary Katharine Woodworth Professor of Education, Bryn Mawr College, Director, Teaching and Learning Institute, Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges

In the ten years that I have been facilitating student-faculty pedagogical partnerships through the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, I have heard student partners in the program reiterate how participation has transformed their experiences of education as well as their sense of capacity, confidence, and agency. Most of these assertions emerge in the context of weekly meetings I facilitate among student partners or on end-of-semester feedback forms, although some have taken more formal shape. For instance, one student partner published a reflective essay in which she wrote: “By my senior year, I truly felt as if I was building meaningful relationships with my professors and contributing to the classroom in ways that I could not have imagined during my first year.” She reflected on how “participating as a student partner in SaLT gave me the opportunity to learn about myself and grow within my community and as a person with the privilege of having a space to process that growth as it was happening” (Colón García, 2017). Student partners in other parts of the world have also described forms of transformation. For example, one student partner in Australia described a colloquium at which students presented their experiences of cultural competence in a powerful, personal way. In a co-authored reflective essay, this student wrote about how the event “transformed our negative experiences about cultural competence at the university into something practical” (Bell et al., 2017).

This issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* brings such stories of transformation to a wider audience. It was inspired by some of the powerful reflections student partners shared that evoked their experiences of pedagogical partnership in ways that more distanced descriptions cannot capture. The authors of these essays have all worked in one or more semester-long, one-on-one partnerships with faculty members at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, but each partnership was different and each student partner experienced his or her own form(s) of transformation. A former student partner and I have argued that when student (and faculty) partners fully embrace the opportunity to participate in SaLT, they “engage in processes of translation that lead to transformed perceptions of classroom engagement, transformed terms for naming pedagogical practices, and, more metaphorically, transformed selves” (Cook-Sather & Abbot, 2016). The essays in this issue offer glimpses into one set of examples of these forms of transformation.

In “[THE FORMATION AND POWER OF TRUST: HOW IT WAS CREATED AND ENACTED THROUGH COLLABORATION](#),” Mary Brunson, Bryn Mawr College Class of 2018, narrates the trajectory of her partnership with a faculty member who had been teaching at the college for many years and chose to undertake a partnership in order to address pedagogical challenges in relation to tensions that have emerged in his classroom around identity. Mary describes how she and her faculty partner built trust between them, which allowed them to experiment, take risks, and develop greater clarity about processes of teaching and learning, including the particular power of discomfort and “unknowability.” This essay highlights how processes of transformation can be uncomfortable, unpredictable, and unfinished.

In “[THE POWER OF TRUST IN EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM MY COURSES AND PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIPS](#),” Fatoumata Sylla, Bryn Mawr College Class of 2018, also writes about trust. She reflects on how she came to realize that, in her own courses and in pedagogical partnerships, trust is what allows for “more enriched, holistic, and socially conscious educational engagement.” She offers examples from her own courses that illustrate how trust was and was not built, and she describes how trust between her and her faculty partner, who was new to the college, developed through dialogue, certain forms of risk taking, and efforts to make both of those processes explicit.

In “[TRANSFORMING MYSELF AS A PARTNER AND A LEARNER](#),” Paul Wyncoop, Haverford College Class of 2020, discusses the pedagogical issues he and his faculty partner explored and how those explorations transformed his own learning. His analysis most clearly illustrates transformed perceptions of classroom engagement, but in his focus on particular benefits he experienced as a learner, he illustrates as well his experience of a transformed self. He concludes with reflections on the friendship he formed with his faculty partner as an inspiration for other student-faculty relationships—a way in which he might carry the lessons from and ways of being developed within formal pedagogical partnership in to other teaching-and-learning realms and relationships.

In “[MOVING FROM 'US VS. THEM' TO 'US' THROUGH WORKING IN PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP](#),” Manroocha Singh, Bryn Mawr College Class of 2018, describes how she and her faculty partner, through their open and ever-deepening exchange of ideas and experiences, came to identify and then work to combat the “us vs. them” phenomenon some students and faculty feel. As part of her work with her faculty partner to create more of a sense of “us” in the classroom, Manroocha also describes how she came to recognize patterns of attitudes and behavior in herself and other students, such as avoiding office hours, that were manifestations of the “us vs. them” phenomenon. Her rethinking of these through dialogue with her faculty partner both informed her and her faculty partner’s thinking about classroom practices and transformed her as a student.

In “[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, NAVIGATING DISCOMFORT AND UNCERTAINTY, AND TRANSLATING MY VOICE IN NEW CONTEXTS](#),” Sasha Mathrani, Haverford College Class of 2018, explores the ways in which participating in pedagogical partnerships contributed to her overall growth through developing her confidence and skills in building relationships, navigating discomfort and uncertainty, and translating her voice in new contexts. Moving from various kinds of doubt and discomfort to states of greater certainty and confidence, she describes how “partnerships led me to value myself, my perspective, and my contributions”—another example of a transformed self.

Matthews (2017) argues that “universities should be spaces that strive for the type of learning that transforms our identities and beliefs in ways we cannot predict.” Partnership provides spaces and structures within institutions of higher education to support such transformation. The essays in this issue offer glimpses of what that transformation looks and feels like to five of the student partners who have experienced them.

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