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HOW PARTICIPATING IN PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP HELPED ME GROW AS A PERSON AND AS A STUDENT

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In the fall-2018 semester, I worked as a Student Consultant through the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. I worked in a semester-long partnership with a faculty member to explore her approaches to classroom practice. As a result of my participation in that program, I have grown as a person and as a student. This growth is both in awareness and in the ways I interact with others.

My Growth as a Person

As a person, I feel that this partnership experience has made me a more thoughtful and considerate friend because this work has required me to think more about how I talk to people. When speaking to my faculty partner, I had to think about how to frame comments, ideas, and questions in a way that was constructive, but not overly critical. While my positionality as a student allowed me to be aware of things that my faculty partner might not have seen, I had to remember that she also has equally valid knowledge and classroom experiences. So I had to make sure that I respected and validated her experience when I asked questions or offered suggestions. As a result, I began to think carefully about the words I use, and how I can frame my ideas to ensure I get my point across, while still being considerate of others.

This careful thought, developed in a professional context, has affected all my personal relationships. In becoming more aware of the words I use and how I speak to others, I have become more thoughtful in conversations with friends and loved ones because I try to pause before reacting, so that I can respond in a more constructive and supportive way. Through this partnership I have come to realize that the way in which we frame our responses and reactions significantly impacts how people interact with us.

In coming to people with more constructive feedback and constructive comments, I have found that people are more open to listening to what I am coming to them with and the ideas that I have. Before I would come in with my own options and not think about how it would feel to them, so it would be confusing to me the way they shut down. Now that I come to people in this new way, the interactions and conversations are more open and honest, and that allows us both to understand one another's perspectives.

My Growth as a Student

To make my work with my faculty partner as beneficial to her as it could be, I also had to ensure that I was building and maintaining trust with her throughout the entirety of our partnership. As part of building that trust, I had to be sure to highlight the positives, namely, what was working well in the classroom. As someone who majors in a field that encourages a critical perspective, I

had to make a conscious effort to focus on the positive aspects of my partner's work. However, once I was able to make this shift, I became far more appreciative of my partner's work and really valued her time, effort, and the classroom environment that was the result of both of those. Because I developed this appreciation of my faculty partner's teaching practice, I even started paying more attention to the work my own professors put into their classes, which made me feel more positive towards them.

As a student, this partnership has made me feel more confident in myself and in my experiences. Because so much of my partnership relied on my perspective, observations, and past experiences, I felt very validated. It was empowering to know that my lived realities complemented my work as a student consultant. Not only that, but later on in the partnership, my faculty partner began to ask for my solutions to the challenges she encountered in the classroom. This action in particular made me feel like even though I was a student, I held knowledge that was valuable in the classroom environment. In that sense, this partnership helped me to realize that my experience in the classroom is an important part of the overall learning environment, so I can, and should, play an active role in the classroom.

Conclusion: Widening My Perspective

My partnership with a faculty member also required me to engage with the perspectives of both students and professors, leading me to have a better understanding of both positions. I now find myself thinking about the roles that students and teachers have to take on in the classroom in order for the learning environment to be engaging, challenging, and safe. While teachers have to be conscious of the way they structure their courses, how they behave in the classroom, and how students are responding (or not responding), students also have a role to play by doing readings and engaging in the class.

However, because of the power dynamic that exists between students and teachers, professors have more of a responsibility to think about how they can be inclusive in their classrooms. Because it is often difficult for professors to remember or understand what it is like to be a student, part of my job involved "interpreting" the student perspective for my faculty partner. As a result, I had to engage with the various realities of being a student—trying to understand how various aspects of identities (race, gender, socioeconomic status, ability, educational background, sexuality, etc.) affected student engagement in the classroom.

As a result of having to think through classroom experiences from multiple perspectives, I became more aware of the many ways that students navigate institutions of higher education, and how difficult this process can be for students who hold particular sets of identity markers. In that sense, this partnership made me think about educational institutions from new perspectives; allowing both me and my faculty partner to better understand the attitudes and behaviors of students.

The growth I have experienced through this pedagogical partnership, as a person and as a student and in awareness as well as in how I interact, has prepared me for the new pedagogical partnership I am undertaking this semester and is influencing how I am thinking about life and

work after I graduate this spring. Working in partnership helped me strengthen listening skills and my overall communication skills, and those are really important in environments that don't have the same structure we have in this environment. The partnerships have allowed me to think about how better to communicate with people so we can both get to where we want to be, rather than me feeling ignored and them feeling frustrated. It's helped me find a better balance, and it's made me think more about communication and what effective communication means. It isn't solely based on me and what I am saying; it involves that other person. It doesn't just matter how I frame my words; it matters how other people interpret them.