

Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

Volume 1
Issue 28 Fall 2019

Article 1

October 2019

Gaining Perspective on Inclusion: What Faculty See in What Students See

Alison Cook-Sather
Bryn Mawr College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe>



Part of the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Cook-Sather, Alison "Gaining Perspective on Inclusion: What Faculty See in What Students See," *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*: Iss. 28 (2019), <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss28/1>

GAINING PERSPECTIVE ON INCLUSION: WHAT FACULTY SEE IN WHAT STUDENTS SEE

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

“My consultant and I have thought a lot about how to shape classroom dynamics carefully, and how to invite feedback from even those students who feel that their voices might not be welcome (or that their concerns might not be valid).” – Faculty partner

“My faculty partner and I really worked on incorporating the students’ own voices into their learning experience.” – Student partner

Above are two excerpts from the final feedback survey that was part of an IRB-approved study of the experiences of participants in “Toward Greater Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Within and Beyond Our Classrooms.” This project, funded by a grant awarded to Haverford College from the Lumina Foundation, supported weekly meetings I facilitated in the Spring-2019 semester for ten faculty members who claimed different identities, crossed different disciplines, and were at different stages of their careers. Each faculty participant also worked in one-on-one partnership with a student consultant through the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges to analyze what was already happening in classrooms, departments, and centers on campus to foster inclusion and to gather a wide range of student perspectives to inform further efforts toward inclusion. Approximately half of these faculty members continued to work together, along with some other faculty colleagues, in a second seminar during the Fall-2019 semester focused on how to support students in both navigating and transforming curricular structures to make them more inclusive. Each of these faculty members is again working with a student consultant through the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program to build on the first semester’s work.

The five essays in this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* recount different stories of what these faculty have chosen to work on with their student partners. The essays share inspiring approaches to identifying sources of exclusion and working toward greater inclusion, and they also highlight the perspective faculty can gain when they engage in dialogue and reflection with student partners focused on equity and inclusion: what faculty see in what students see. The essays also include student partners’ reflections on the importance of such gaining of perspective. But beyond—or maybe beneath—perspective, which is so essential to this work, is human connection. These essays reveal how student and faculty partners connected as people, cared for one another, provided the space and support to do the hard emotional as well as intellectual and structural work of striving toward greater equity and inclusion.

The first two essays focus on work faculty did in individual classrooms, one to change the dynamics around class discussion in a psychology course and the other to change the structure of homework in a linguistics course, to make both more inclusive. The next two essays focus at the departmental level, describing two approaches to learning from students about how to make those two departments, one in French and one in religion, more welcoming to a diversity of students. The fifth essay describes work a faculty member and student partner did to look across student’ experiences in the natural sciences division and focuses on the supportive space and human connection these pedagogical partners forged.

In “[HOW I LEARNED TO EMBRACE THE AWKWARD SILENCES TO PROMOTE CLASS PARTICIPATION](#),” Benjamin Le, Professor of Psychology, Haverford College, describes a destabilizing and transformative moment in which his perception of student participation in his classroom did not match what his student consultant perceived as she observed. The differences in their perceptions led to a profound revision of classroom facilitation on Le’s part—revision supported through his and his student partner “talking about strategies to create a classroom space where all students are empowered to participate.” Key to this revision was what Le’s student partner, Maya Gorstein, calls the capacity to “sit comfortably with awkwardness” as some students speak less and others move toward speaking more. Both Le and Gorstein’s reflections reveal the confidence they built through the sharing of perspectives in which they engaged.

In “[SEEING HOMEWORK THROUGH STUDENTS’ EYES: FROM PRESSURED PERFORMANCE TO INTENTIONAL LEARNING](#),” Brook Danielle Lillehaugen, Associate Professor in the Tri-College Department of Linguistics, Haverford College, discusses how her re-imagining of homework within her introductory linguistics class offered her surprising insight into how students perceive options for re-doing homework assignments. Lillehaugen wanted to ensure that homework provided an opportunity for learning, not just testing, and, in particular, afforded all students to engage, not just those who know how to “do college,” such meaningful and accessible opportunities. Her approach offered students opportunities to re-do their assignments not just once but twice. Lillehaugen’s student consultant, Elisa Cooney, suggested learning from the students how they experienced this opportunity, and Lillehaugen gained insight both through Cooney’s questions and through the student responses—some surprising, some affirming, and all useful. Both Lillehaugen and Cooney rethought, through student feedback, the benefits of the approach and reaffirmed the importance of listening to student voices.

In “[STRIVING TO MAKE FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE STUDIES MORE INCLUSIVE](#),” Kathyne Adair Corbin, Senior Lecturer in the French and Francophone Studies Department at Haverford College, describes how she worked with her student consultant, Carol Lee Diallo, to develop a survey for all students currently enrolled in French courses across Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. Corbin notes some of the questions Diallo posed to her to prompt reflection, some of the questions she and Diallo included in their survey of students, and the perspectives students offered through their responses—all of which informed approaches Corbin will take going forward. Reflecting on her work with Corbin, Diallo notes that “the structure of the SaLT program allows professors and students to ‘translate’ their experiences for one another—it gives each person an opportunity to explain their thinking and intention. This engaged process creates space for students and professors to expand their understandings of student-teacher interactions by challenging the assumptions they make in the classroom.” This insight, and how Diallo and Corbin acted on the potential it names, provide one model for how others might develop interventions and approaches that strive to make their departmental offerings more inclusive.

In “[DWELLING IN DISCOMFORT](#),” Ken Koltun-Fromm, Professor of Religion at Haverford College, provides another departmental model. He describes a two-step process in which he engaged with two different student consultants. The first step, taken while he participated in the pedagogy seminar during the Spring-2019 semester, included working with his student partner, Amaka Eze, to collect stories from students and faculty about inclusive pedagogy and to generate recommendations regarding how the department might represent the major to prospective students, make particular revisions to courses to make them more inclusive, and work in more interactive and collaborative

ways with students. The second step, taken with a second student partner, Kameice Francis, during the Fall-2019 semester, focuses on revision of the departmental website and the way it presents the major in order to make the curriculum more transparent and navigable. More important even than these revisions themselves, Koltun-Fromm argues, is “building trust in conversation with vulnerable others.” He argues for embracing and dwelling in the discomfort that difficult conversations about difference require. Eze agrees: “By leaning in to the discomfort of our relationship, and of our very different positionalities, Ken and I were able to better identify systemic issues within the department and propose new channels for authentic collaboration.”

In “[PINK BAGELS AND PERSISTENCE](#),” Helen White, Associate Professor of Chemistry and Environmental Studies at Haverford College, reflects on the human connection she and her student consultant, Paul Wynkoop, developed during their semester-long collaboration focused on promoting greater equity and inclusion across STEM departments at the college. The goal of their conversations was this cross-departmental equity work, and to support that work, White explains: “Our conversations created a space of care, kindness, and patience – all qualities necessary to do work that at times can seem overwhelming and insurmountable.” Wynkoop also notes the balance he and White achieved between talking about “how best to support underrepresented students, particularly within the STEM fields,” and affirming and supporting one another’s efforts in partnership—as colleagues in “spirit and attitude” as well as practice.

Like the faculty and students who wrote about the brave space of partnership work and the bravery in classrooms that such partnership work supports (Abbott, 2016; Binder, 2016; Cook-Sather, 2016; Ntem, 2016; Perez, 2016; Perez-Putnam, 2016), the five essays in this issue of *TLTHE* address the particular form of bravery necessary for this form of partnership work—focused on equity and inclusion. The capacity to “sit comfortably with awkwardness” that student partner Maya Gorstein ascribes to Benjamin Le (this issue) in relation to the shifts he made in his classroom practice, and what Ken Koltun-Fromm (this issue) calls “dwelling in discomfort” to describe the state in which one must live to do this work, are essential attitudes of receptivity. The productive and affirming exchange of perspectives these faculty and students engaged through partnership made it possible to achieve this sitting and dwelling because of what I argue is the equally important “work of connecting with each other” that Helen White (this issue) describes—what happens when faculty like Brook Lillehaugen (this issue) and Kathryne Corbin (this issue) ask students about their experiences and continue to clarify and further revise their pedagogical practices in response to what they hear.

As the two quotes that opened this introduction capture, striving to make all student voices valid and welcome and “incorporating the students’ own voices into their learning experience” are essential dimensions of equity work. What these faculty see in what students see—and what their student partners see in return—offer hopeful glimpses into this necessarily ongoing work.

References

Abbott, C. (2016). Leaping and Landing in Brave Spaces. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 18. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol11/iss18/4>

Binder, C. (2016). Practicing Virtue in Teaching and Learning. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 18. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss18/5>

Cook-Sather, A. (2106). Creating Brave Spaces within and through Student-Faculty Pedagogical Partnerships. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 18. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss18/1>

Ntem, A. (2016). Learning to Be Brave within and beyond Partnership. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 18. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss18/6>

Perez, K. (2016). Striving Toward a Space for Equity and Inclusion in Physics Classrooms. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 18. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss18/3>

Perez-Putnam, M. (2016). Belonging and Brave Space As Hope For Personal and Institutional Inclusion. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 18. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss18/2>