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NAMING AND NAVIGATING TROUBLING TRANSITIONS: PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP DURING THE PANDEMIC

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In her thoughtful and thought-proving blog post, "Troubling transitions: Re-thinking dominant narratives surrounding students' educational transitions," Karen Gravett (2020) notes that "too often understandings of transition defer to narratives that reinforce stereotypic and limited understandings of students' experiences of life and learning." She calls into question the notion that transitions are "a structured *process*, or a linear *pathway*, to be smoothed and bridged." Problematizing these notions in general, Gravett (2020) suggests that "the need for more nuanced understandings of students' experiences into and through higher education has been brought into sharp focus recently with the unprecedented disruption to life and learning as a result of the coronavirus outbreak." In challenging us to recognize the ways in which we are "always experiencing a period of transition, or becoming," Gravett's blog resonated with us as we supported student-faculty partnerships at our own and other institutions through the move to remote teaching and learning prompted by the pandemic.

This issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* includes six essays, each of which tells a different story of transition. Each asks us to think more expansively about what we might have considered "normal" ways of being and what transitions from those can catalyze in theory and practice. The essays were written in the summer of 2020, after everyone had weathered the emergent transition to remote teaching and learning and in anticipation of what we all may become as we move forward. They offer inspiring glimpses of alternatives to "getting back to normal," which seems neither possible nor desirable. Each essay in this collection takes up the theme of naming and navigating troubling transitions, and each names experiences differently, offers a different take on what constitutes and characterizes the transition, and, like Gravett, offers us the notion of "troubling" as a generative process of disrupting the taken for granted. The global pandemic certainly troubled the world in some devastating ways that continue to affect many people, but it also has prompted people to question what matters and is necessary ... and what perhaps does not matter as much or may not be necessary. These essays ask us to engage such questions in particular relation to pedagogical partnership but also in relation to other practices in post-secondary education.

In "**SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND TRANSGRESSIVE HIERARCHIES: INSIGHTS WE GAINED THROUGH THE TRANSITION ONLINE WHILE PLANNING FOR PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP**," Jillian Impastato and Langley Topper, both Tufts University, Class of 2021, describe their journey developing a pedagogical partnership program while COVID-19 disrupted their academic and personal lives. They explain how support structures and check-ins eased the transition and built strong relationships, and they argue that, "during this time of social isolation, the need for supportive partnerships is all the more important." Their experiences shed light on developing successful pedagogical partnerships and creating inclusive classroom environments in an online

setting, and, like other authors of essays in this collection, they hope to see a different "'post-COVID-19' world" that centers partnership and student voices as "a sustainably permanent component of higher education."

In "**PARTNERING TO BUILD RESPONSIVE LEARNING COMMUNITIES THAT SUPPORT STUDENTS IN CRISIS**," Kate Weiler, Bryn Mawr College, Class of 2020, and Adam Williamson, Assistant Professor, Biology Department, Bryn Mawr College, trace the development of their partnership in light of the rapid, unexpected transition to remote learning, and they also stress the importance of "reckoning with white supremacy as a broader context for pedagogical partnership in the U.S." Their story exemplifies how a student-centered approach allowed for a smooth "transition during a time of crisis" and highlights foundational elements of their partnership that helped them grow as teachers and learners. Rejecting linearity, Weiler re-sees herself as student, future educator, and white woman in higher education who plans to continue "this process of critical reflection, learning, and growth," and Williamson describes how he has re-imagined his teaching as "iterative cycles of implementation, adaptation based on student feedback, and further improvement."

In "**UPROOTED RHIZOMES: COLLABORATING IN TIMES OF TROUBLING TRANSITIONS**," Corine Labridy-Stofle, Visiting Associate Professor of French at Reed College, was already focused on exploring complex questions in her course before the pandemic prompted a move to remote teaching and learning—questions such as: "How can I simultaneously center the experience of Black students (for whom such a course is long-awaited) and create a space where non-Black and/or non-femme students can learn and contribute all the while negotiating the complexities of their inherent privilege?" She and her student partner, Parker Matias (who also contributed to this issue) "prioritized community-building, looking for strategies that delved deeper than simply making students comfortable, but rather, tended toward creating comfort in discomfort." Labridy-Stofle explains that this goal did not change dramatically with the shift to remote teaching but that the shift "made visible realities they were always already contending with," and her work with Matias focused on how to embrace "their own and others' constant states of becoming."

In "**FOUR SIDES OF TRANSITION**," Parker Matias, Labridy-Stofle's student partner, tells his version of their partnership story situated in a reflection that mixes poetry and prose. He invites us in to his own time- and space-shifted experiences during the pandemic and, rejecting "transitions" as an appropriate descriptor for what he and we are going through, asks us to critically analyze what we assume—about transitions, about students, about living and learning, all of which are way more heterogeneous than we typically allow. Matias suggests that "distance learning uncovered the heterogeneity that was always there" and also "showed the fallacy of transition." He challenges us to reject the impulse "to establish 'a new normal' from an old one."

In "**TEAM GRADE ANARCHY: A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE TROUBLED TRANSITION OF GRADING**," Jared Del Rosso, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology & Criminology, and Blake Nordstrom-Wehner, Second Year Student, Gender and Women's Studies Major (GWST), Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Minor, and President of the DU Queer Student Alliance, both at University of Denver, discuss the effect of grades on teaching and learning by considering the university's adapted grading policy and police brutality in the U.S. Their conversation explores

feedback, evaluation in pedagogical partnerships, student and teacher priorities, extra credit, policies, and penalties in relation to grading. Like other contributors to this issue who question what Del Rosso calls a "return to 'business as usual,'" they conclude with Nordstrom-Wehner's hope that "faculty share the power to determine what counts as meaningful work, and ... that students, finally, can themselves determine what that means."

In "**MY PERSONAL TROUBLED TRANSITIONS INTO STUDENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS**," Adilene Lorenzo, Haverford College, Class of 2020, describes how her experience as a student partner encouraged her to reconceptualize teaching and learning. Analyzing her experience as a student partner for an online class, she contrasts remote and in-person learning to share insights and concerns. As she prepares for her next transitions, including "into teaching in my own classroom," she is aware and newly confident that, while these transitions will "be troubling in some similar and some new ways," she realizes, "I can not only move through them but that they are actually an integral part of my becoming."

As these essays make explicit, partnership has long been and is now, perhaps more than ever, a powerful mode of engaging and becoming. We see this in the rhizomatic growth of individual and of institutional commitment. Katherine Rowe, now President of William & Mary, was one of the five faculty members at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges who piloted the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program, when she was a Professor English at Bryn Mawr College. She has carried forward and made anew the partnership ethos and capacity to change and grow that partnership supports. In an opinion piece in *Inside Higher Ed*, she and student leader Kelsey Vita wrote:

> Academic leaders are called to new partnerships now. In our positions at William & Mary, we receive inputs from across our far-flung community. We translate them for each other, seeking common purposes: keep teaching and learning, listen to lived experiences around us, address the vulnerability of others in pragmatic ways. We help each other understand the consequences of university decisions, acknowledge our community's hopes and fears, and ensure all voices are heard. We do this imperfectly, making mistakes and learning from them—and with our best efforts. (Rowe & Vita, 2020)

Rowe and Vita (2020) capture the courageous, cross-generational work that student-faculty—and student leader-institutional leader—partnerships can support and enact. So too do the essays included in this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, authored and co-authored by the brave, visionary leaders mapping their ways through and to perpetual becoming.

References

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