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ILLUSTRATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PARTNERSHIP FOSTERED BETWEEN FACULTY AND GRADUATE STUDENT

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Our cross-cultural communication partnership all began literally at the beginning of Zirui Yan's program in the Master's in Science of Corporate and Organizational Communication. Professor Patty Goodman and Zirui were in our related roles for the first course, Introduction to Corporate and Organizational Communication in September of 2016. Most of the students in the class were international students who have little experience with North American academic institutional systems.

Patty's experience with learners from traditional or rote learning institutions reflected the differences theorists often describe: that students are not self-directed, requiring external "cheerleaders" to promote learning motivation. However, Patty also valued Victor Wang and Patricia Cranton's (2014) arguments associated with learning stereotypes and the benefit of cultural differences. Patty's personal curiosity about cultures and teaching cultural awareness prompts her to be self-aware. In retrospect she reflected:

I don't feel that I did anything differently in teaching the class Zirui was a member of; I always seek to connect with the students. I shared expectations, reviewed the syllabus, and genuinely sought to generate a welcoming learning environment. At that point in time, I would not have imagined how fostering an academic relationship and partnership through multiple touch points during Zirui's program could achieve so much richness.

Zirui's experience as a learner within a Chinese educational system in her early years set a foundation of rote learning. Through the exploration of different learning environments outside of China, in Spain and the US, Zirui identifies herself as an autonomous learner. She is eager to understand concepts of interest and is self-motivated to accomplish her goals. Zirui is inquisitive and found herself to flourish in a learning environment that was open to questioning the process. Zirui reflected that the flexible and positive learning environment developed by Patty was at times transformative. She recognized the differences in learning structures through self-examination of her meaning perspectives. Patty may have been in a role of nurturing Zirui's confidence to inquire about a concept, but Zirui gathered further insights and drew upon self-awareness moving cognitive ideas into learned behaviors, often experiencing a transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000).

How our faculty-student partnership was initiated

The leaders for the Corporate and Organizational Communication's program were exploring the idea of integrating an ePortfolio requirement at the program level that would be graded in the close of the capstone course. As this was a significant shift in student requirements, Patty sought to partner with students on developing this new option. Moreover, the ePortfolio system was new to Patty; hence, a student-faculty workgroup would be an opportunity to collaboratively gain skills in developing the ePortfolio. Additionally, the objective was to explore the value of an ePortfolio from both the students' perspective on a personal level and for career development.

Zirui's Perspective

Coming into the program with academic experiences from multiple global institutions, I was intrigued by the learning environment, and I also had a drive to excel. I reflected on my initial experience: "I wanted to learn, and Professor Goodman provided an inspiring and engaging class." When Professor Goodman sent a call for volunteers to collaborate on a new initiative for the program, I was excited to connect with her and participate in a student workgroup project.

The workgroup was a collaborative environment. Professor Goodman facilitated the first meeting where we developed our goals, roles, and a schedule to rotate facilitating the meetings. We met monthly over the academic year to research and create a program-level ePortfolio template. Additionally, I took two other classes taught by Professor Patty, as I grew to call her. As I had experienced previously, Professor Patty was consistently knowledgeable and creative in both Intercultural Communication and the Projects for Professional Capstone courses, promoting engagement as well as thought-provoking activities. I found her teaching style different from my expectations. She encouraged me and others to share ideas and be open minded. I recognized that we had different cultural backgrounds, but those differences didn't prevent our accomplishments. I learned to voice my thoughts and ask questions, mirroring what I noticed Professor Patty doing when she was uncertain if there was confusion or sought brainstorming ideas.

When that workgroup was coming to an end, I was hoping that there would be a way to continue our connection. I told Professor Patty that I had co-founded a women's empowerment group on campus, Lean In To Grow, associated to Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In (2013) challenge. It was exciting to share my passion and talk about how our group offered a supportive platform for international female students to succeed at Northeastern by organizing events featuring inspiring international women students, alumni, and faculty. I hadn't realized that Professor Patty knew about this student initiative through my peer co-founder, who was also her student. Professor Patty suggested that I write a feature for the Communications Alumni Network, our University program blog. She encouraged me and mentored me through the process. One step seemed to lead to another offering, and before I knew it we were collaborating on two conference presentations, one international and one local.

How our faculty-student partnership flourished

In reflecting on why our partnership has been successful over a three-year journey, we identified personal characteristics, shared values, and nuances in the structure of the learning environment. In the following, we have analyzed our encounters from a critical reflection framework, exploring our different perspectives, focusing on the value of knowledge gained, and challenging our expectations (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Additionally, we have recommended intentional strategies associated with cross-cultural communication employed to strengthen our partnership as learners and collaborators, along with advocating for mutual values to promote successful outcomes.

Patty's Perspective

From an adult learning perspective, I design my learning environments based on a grounded theoretical framework of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000); hence, I enjoy formulating a learning environment which might pose a disorienting dilemma and promote experimentation. I agree with Edward Taylor and Patricia Cranton's (2013) hypothesis related to the value of motivation as a contributor to a transformative learning opportunity. As a result, I may have unconsciously placed more energy into a positive connection when I sensed Zirui's motivation to learn. Even in our first encounter, I had a feeling Zirui was highly motivated to learn and be accountable for her learning opportunities. An example of this was when Zirui questioned how she might gather more direct knowledge about the stakeholders in a case. Since it was a real-life case, I suggested she contact the organization to see if she could speak with the leader for a brief interview. She emailed me to share updates, seek guidance, and demonstrate her follow through. Zirui integrated her curiosity, investigation, and knowledge to produce excellent work. This illustrated that she was not only ready to learn, but intrinsically motivated.

Zirui's Perspective

From a student's perspective, I gained experience with each question posed to Professor Patty. She would offer guidance and support, and I realized that she was not expecting a certain response. It was up to me to find the information and demonstrate why that thought or information had value. There were several examples of this in the ePortfolio Learning Group, student workgroup. Professor Patty would prompt the discussion with a topic and offer clarification if needed, but not kick off the brainstorming list with her own thoughts. I offered several ideas towards the purpose, goals, and norms, feeling comfortable that I was heard and valued. When I developed a section to introduce myself on the ePortfolio, I thought outside the box and made a video instead of using text. The leverage of multimedia became a highlight for my ePortfolio and turned out to be a must-have for high quality ePortfolios when it came to evaluation.

Patty's Perspective

The ePortfolio Learning Group was an exercise in vulnerability for me. In our first meeting, I proposed that we follow a team contract. As part of this process, we formulated the purpose, goals, and team norms. In order to create a brave space for each of us (Cook-Sather, 2016), I

facilitated the brainstorming and consensus voting for the team norms. Our team norms were a list of a dozen values as a means to share common ways of being together. The norms ranged from more academic ideals such as *Be prepared*, *Contribute our own ideas*, *Provide constructive feedback*, to expectations such as *Don't be late and Bring snacks*. Our last norm grounded our group: it was *Have fun*.

Zirui's Perspective

The purpose of the ePortfolio Learning Group was co-developed with Professor Patty and eight student volunteers. The following is an excerpt from our Team Contract:

- Gain perspectives on the use of ePortfolios,
- Understand ePortfolios function and what kind of ePortfolios would benefit us for our career,
- Illustrate our virtual resume, present our personality, and communicate effectively,
- Reflect on our strengths through ePortfolios, and
- Evaluate the strengths and challenges of ePortfolio for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Our team goals were also collectively generated to gather students' insights and gain student voice in the ePortfolio program process while learning how to add multi-media effectively and purposefully into our ePortfolio. In addition, we would create a showcase for other students to review our ePortfolios and gain their feedback for us to evaluation.

Patty's Perspective

I was purposeful to emphasize the students' voice and take a backseat unless we started heading toward a cliff. At times, we had several different paths due to having different students taking the lead or facilitating a session. Over the course of the academic year, Zirui was the most consistent and reliable student. She brought examples of her own ePortfolio with multi-media and taught the rest of us how to use various applications. She recognized why and how this platform could benefit peers in the Corporate and Organizational Communication program. Zirui had adopted a more explicit voice in the process, and it seemed to me that at times she was mirroring my communication style as her cultural awareness of our different communication style grew.

Zirui's Perspective

As I shared in the opening, the ePortfolio Learning Group became another steppingstone for collaboration by generating a proposal for Northeastern University's Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning Through Research Annual Conference for Advancing Evidence-Based Learning. The team for the proposal was comprised of our program Faculty Director, Faculty Lead for Public Relations, the program Instructional Designer, Professor Patty, and me. We jointly documented the Corporate and Organizational Communication ePortfolio process. After the proposal was accepted, our team collaborated to formulate an ePortfolio for the conference presentation by dividing up sections to construct, then meeting to review our pages for feedback. I felt a great amount of stress, at moments concerned whether I would be able to produce material at the level expected. Yet, I continued to gain confidence as my voice was equal and appreciated by all members of the team. Similarly, I proactively asked questions and offered my

own thoughts in our sessions, serving as a fresh pair of eyes for faculty members. I might not have identified my being proactive as an example of my cultural communication awareness; however, I did notice that the faculty recognized the value I was bringing to the collaboration beyond being a student. Dare I say, I felt I was becoming a contributor and colleague.

Patty's Perspective

As Zirui and I reviewed our collaboration, I realized that she would be an extraordinary partner with another educator for the Global Studies Conference proposal examining women across the globe in leadership and their impact to cultural resilience. In preparation for presenting our research for the conference, Zirui accepted ownership for drafting the slide deck. She designed graphics to effectively illustrate key concepts synthesizing ideas for the presentation. The work behind the narratives for the presentation are becoming a book proposal, which Zirui is again coproducing. Literally, one project seemed to lead to the next almost seamlessly.

Why was this partnership so successful?

Patty's Perspective

I challenged our expectations. Initially, I would have assumed success was attributed to my desire to engage students, support experiential learning opportunities, enhance cross-cultural connections, and provide students with new experiences. Through this critical reflection, I have also realized how much I gained in understanding different cultural backgrounds by working with Zirui coming from a younger generation and Asian culture. For example, when we were discovering ways to make an ePortfolio engaging, Zirui illustrated how to embed a personal video. In the video, she shared examples of her cultural values through visualizing relationships and activities in her travels. I recognized how I have become more flexible with my communication style and interpretations of communication. I learned to actively listen and weave together the meanings being voice when the conversation was more implicit in style. Moreover, I have released the feeling that I need my idea to be first or even voiced. I have adopted more of the improv voice, to build on what was presented, rather than derail it or leave it hanging. I realized our greater understanding of each other supported the ease of our working together and interest in continuing our work together. A significant learning for me was that being accountable does not always mean I am the only one doing the action; I can trust my partner and enjoy sharing the accomplishment together.

Zirui's Perspective

In reflection, my unanticipated realizations form interrelated values. As a former student of Professor Patty's, I truly respect her and admire her work. Being able to collaborate with her is a great honor and a valuable opportunity for me. During the partnership, I received the same level of respect from Professor Patty. She took my ideas seriously, valued my input, and treated me more like a colleague than someone beneath her level. This mutual respect was a powerful glue to our relationship. In conjunction with our mutual respect, we constructed an exchange where I felt empowered to provide an equal level of knowledge, skills, and specific expertise. I also

believe our partnership grew based on our differences, from culture of origin, generations, and work experiences. Getting to work together with Professor Patty has been a cherished learning experience. Her wisdom, professionalism, and strong work ethic made working with her a big accomplishment and a pure joy. What's more, the collaborations facilitated my exploration of a career that I had always dreamed of—Higher Education. My passion to be an educator has grown during my study at Northeastern University. The partnerships offered so many valuable opportunities that a student could never get from only attending classes—opportunities like presenting at conferences, developing journal articles, and getting involved in the whole process of publishing a book. These experiences have allowed me to examine teaching from a more holistic perspective and to acquire hands-on experience. Another benefit is that all the collaborations with Professor Patty have become stackable credentials advancing my career development in Higher Education as I return to China.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have formulated some strategies for teaching and learning together based on our own experiences.

First, it is critical to be open minded to new and different ideas. From the faculty perspective, that means being flexible and accepting varying views. For the students, that means being confident to share and value your own perspectives. When faculty see you as a colleague, you should see yourself as a colleague, not as a student.

Next, be aware of your communication skills and linguistics to ensure there is understanding of the meaning and intention. How might your mode of communication differ from your partner's? It is important to consider cross-cultural communication differences, such as communication styles and body language. Being observant and attentive to expressions, pauses, and word patterns can help make space to clarify confusion, share a concern, or introduce a fresh vision.

Lastly, a partnership requires authenticity and curiosity toward each other. Having an authentic presence helps to deepen trust and strengthen collaboration. At times, this could feel like an emotional risk or vulnerability. Developing emotional intelligence can support this idea of holistically caring about your partner's well-being. There is great value in being aware of commitments, challenges, and stressors, without oversharing or seeking grandiose idolization. We implicitly defined our successful partnership as one that fosters growing understanding, learning, and impact. There is no end to the relationship when there is an end to a project.

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