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## LEARNING AND UNLEARNING THROUGH PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP

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No one would debate the centrality of learning in relationships between teachers and students. But most focus on this process as a cumulative one—a matter of adding to and building on. As important is the less-explored process of unlearning—of recognizing, rethinking, and letting go of what no longer serves to further understanding and growth. On the syllabus of “Community Learning Collaborative: Practicing Partnership,” the introductory education course that colleagues and I teach at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, we write the following to orient students to the course:

The goal of the course is to engage in and work towards educational justice by deepening knowledge, skills, and inquiries into the practice of relationships, facilitation, and change. To meet this goal, we work to dislodge from a settled concept and set of practices, into unlearning—peeling back inherited assumptions to make room for unfamiliar, unknown, and creative potentialities. By way of power analysis, freedom dreaming, and collective practice, we move into new knowledge and questions.

This issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* includes seven essays, each of which explores in its own way the power of learning and unlearning through pedagogical partnership. As my colleagues and I articulate in the syllabus excerpt above, such work entails both deepening knowledge, skills, and inquiries and dislodging from settled concepts and practices. The authors of these essays engage in courageous and humble ways in analyzing the power dynamics always at play in the workings of higher education and in efforts to reimagine that education. They name and challenge multiple intersecting structures of oppression and both dream of and strive to enact alternatives. Through collective practice—working together in partnership—these authors let go of some of what hinders affirmation of wellbeing and productive change.

The processes of learning and unlearning the authors of these essays document are closely intertwined, as the essays’ authors articulate in various ways, with experiences of empowerment. As one of my colleagues and co-authors of the excerpt above notes, empowerment comes about through revision of oppressive knowledge/inheritance (unlearning) that was at first experienced as natural, inevitable. It also comes through the reclaiming of what that knowledge covered as other channels of possibility. The relational center of partnership, so clearly conveyed in these authors’ analyses, affords participants in this work a ready context in which to interact on the basis of different knowledge, creating much more expansive relationships and selves. The empowerment student and faculty partners experience and share in these essays is linked with finding a sense of wholeness, healing from trauma, developing trust in one’s self, and supporting the development of confidence and capacity in others.

In **“THE F@\$\$-UP’S GUIDE TO RECLAIMING AND REIMAGINING MY STUDENT IDENTITY THROUGH PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIPS.”** Jay Adams, Berea College, Class of 2022, narrates their journey and the insights they gained into how they had been burdened by their past “in a way that felt impossibly heavy.” They explain how, through partnership work, they “would begin to let go of those burdens and reclaim—and reimagine—[their] student identity.” Jay explores “reconsideration of the self”—a learning what that self can do and an unlearning of what it cannot do. Through pedagogical partnership work, Jay writes, “students are able to gain a new perspective on themselves, a new idea of wholeness.”

In **“FROM STUDENT CONSULTING AT MY LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTION TO APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL.”** Kaylyn (Kayo) Piper Stewart, Bryn Mawr College, Class of 2023, focuses on how partnership fostered “healing from personal educational trauma” and inspiration to become a lawyer. In her conclusion she asserts: “[This partnership work] changed my life, and I will carry with me into my study of law the insights I gained into how to recognize trauma...[and]... advocate for others.” The unlearning here is that a predominantly white institution like Bryn Mawr College might have no space for “a first-generation college student from Houston, Texas, and a Black woman,” as Kayo describes herself; the learning is that Kayo has the passion and capacity to be “someone who fights for justice for all but also teaches people that differences should be celebrated and respected rather than ridiculed and seen as a threat.”

In **“STUDENT VOICES AS THE COMMON THREAD THROUGH CHANGING PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIPS.”** Viktoriya Bardenova, Graduate of Florida Gulf Coast University, and Brenda L. Thomas, Director of the University Colloquium at Florida Gulf Coast University, reflect on three partnerships in which they engaged together: when Viktoriya worked as an undergraduate student consultant in Brenda’s introductory sustainability course; when the two of them redesigned an in-person section of the course after Brenda had taught it online for three consecutive semesters in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and when Viktoriya enrolled as a student in the same sustainability course that she had helped Brenda redesign. This multi-part, “unconventional” partnership, as Viktoriya and Brenda call it, afforded multiple opportunities for learning and unlearning, specifically “revising the traditional student-faculty roles by including student voices.” Viktoriya specifies that she “learned that even giving students ownership of parts of the teaching and learning process gives them agency and a sense of accountability for their learning.” Brenda offers insight into an important unlearning: that she was “still clinging to some control” regarding a particular assignment, which Viktoriya helped her let go of through “the process of developing a trusting and comfortable working relationship” in which Viktoriya’s “suggestions no longer felt like criticisms.”

In **“TRUSTING THE PROCESS: THE POWER OF A STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIP.”** Minahil Tariq, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Class of 2023, writes about her partnership with a faculty member focused on designing a criminology course that would include themes from sociology, political science, and anthropology. Minahil details the process of designing the curriculum and the parallel process of learning and unlearning in which she engaged through the partnership. About her unlearning, Minahil writes: “I unlearned two complementary things: that only faculty can bring subject-matter knowledge to course design, and that I was incapable of contributing to the course design.”

**“EMPOWERING DIVERSE STUDENT VOICES THROUGH PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP: EXPANDING PERSPECTIVE FOR INCREASING RELEVANCE AND ACCESS TO CURRICULUM AND LEARNING”** is co-authored by Lorna Hayward, PT, DPT, EdD, MPH, Associate Professor of Physical Therapy; Heidi Cheerman, PT, DPT, MS, NCS Assistant Clinical Professor of Physical Therapy; Isabella Addison, Physical Therapy Student ‘22, ‘23; and Lucy Zeng, Physical Therapy Student ‘24, all of Northeastern University. These co-authors describe their process of participating in a book group on *Promoting Equity and Justice through Pedagogical Partnership*. Each both learned and unlearned key lessons that will inform their sense of self and their subsequent work. As one student co-author, Lucy, notes, her Chinese heritage had previously felt like “a constant barrier that kept me from completely fitting in and understanding my classmates and teachers.” However, exploring the conceptual framework offered in the book, she explains, “provided a sense of affirmation that empowered me to talk about these experiences with some of my friends”—conversations that fostered learning and unlearning how one’s identity can be experienced. Another student partner, Izzy, describes her learning that “a nagging sense of discontent that had no tangible words to accurately describe how I was feeling” could be replaced by “an eloquent way to understand and discuss the qualities that a student brings to the classroom and, more importantly, how these qualities contribute to negative experiences when they are ignored or dismissed.” One faculty co-author, Lorna, writes: “With each conversation with our team, I am surprised by how much I learn, how careful I need to be in conversation, and how I can serve as a catalyst for facilitating a social justice driven learning community that includes a voice for students. I am amazed and humbled by the wisdom, experiences, and suggestions that the students have shared with me.” And second faculty co-author, Heidi, writes: “I have gained a greater appreciation of the power of pedagogical partnerships and the role I play as an educator to create a brave safe space for students to find, know, and share their voices.”

The final two essays in this issue focus on student partners fostering the development of confidence and capacity in their faculty partners, specifically through supporting reflection. In **“OPENING SPACE FOR REFLECTION,”** Olivia Harkins-Finn, Bryn Mawr College, Class of 2023, describes how she shifted from bringing to her partnership work already formed, and potentially impositional, perspectives to framing questions in ways that allow her faculty partners “to come to conclusions on their own.” In her essay Olivia situates this important learning and unlearning in relation to facilitation of reflection in a larger appreciation of reflection as a way of engaging. She concludes with thoughts on how she will take this embrace of reflection into her future work as a museum educator. In her words: “My time as a Student Consultant has provided me with space to imagine and inspired me to create and support these opportunities for others.”

Theo Smith, Haverford College, Class of 2023, also focuses on supporting faculty reflection in **“PERSPECTIVES AND PEDAGOGY: USING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICE AS AN AVENUE TO SHARE, REFLECT ON, AND ADJUST PERSPECTIVE.”** Theo’s essay reminds us that, because perspective is always shifting, we are always both learning and unlearning. Theo offers his insights on the importance of perspective in learning and teaching, shares the kinds of questions he asks his faculty partners that invite reflection on and sharing of perspectives, and discusses the power of making multiple perspectives transparent and the equity implications of reflection on perspectives. Theo reminds us that: “The basic identities that pedagogical partnership brings into dialogue are teacher and student, but each individual teacher and student approach that

positionality as an intersection of their own multiple identities. Making space for and supporting reflection on those can contribute to shifting power dynamics and making classrooms more collaborative, meaningful spaces of learning.”

Taken together, these essays that reflect on partnership across contexts—Berea College, Bryn Mawr College, Florida Gulf Coast University, Haverford College, Lahore University of Management Sciences, and Northeastern University—constitute and contribute to collective practices that affirm wellbeing and facilitate productive change. Through unlearning what might seem natural and inevitable and learning through new channels of possibility, these partnership practitioners and authors create more expansive relationships and selves. This is not easy work, but it is full of hope.