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Wearing Two Different Hats in Partnership Work – Student Partner and a Researcher at Lahore University of Management Services

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WEARING TWO DIFFERENT HATS IN PARTNERSHIP WORK – STUDENT PARTNER AND A RESEARCHER AT LAHORE UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

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Introduction

Pedagogical partnership, as a theoretical framework and practice, aims to "engage students as co-learners, co-researchers, co-inquirers, co-developers, and co-designers" (Healey et al., 2016, p. 2) with faculty, administrators, and other students. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to serve as a student partner in the Pedagogical Partnership Programme (PPP) with the LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences) Learning Institute (LLI) at LUMS in Pakistan. Such collaboration between faculty/staff and students is a new concept in South Asia. As a student of the field of Education, I was able to work closely as a student partner with LLI as an insider, while conducting my master's thesis on the impact evaluation of Pedagogical Partnership Programmes as an outsider. During this experience, I gained valuable insights into how LLI operates and the effects of pedagogical partnerships on students and instructors, who are referred to as 'facilitators' at LLI. This was a new term to me, as in my previous 16 years of education, I referred to our instructors as teachers, *ustad*, sir, or instructor, but not 'facilitator.' This reflection will center on my personal experiences and my making sense of some perplexing situations I encountered during my time at LLI as I learned to work in partnership with facilitators and other collaborators.

Working as a Student Partner

As a student partner, I had the opportunity to work closely with the faculty, staff, and students at LUMS. This role allowed me to gain hands-on experience in training, administration, and project management. I was responsible for the onboarding, training, and arranging the meeting of the new student partners who would be working with the faculty on course delivery, course design, or any other project related to teaching and learning. I felt privileged that I had some additional responsibilities along with my studies. In the beginning of my new role, I felt that I was becoming workaholic and no work-life balance, but with time I learned, as a student partner, that I was getting ready for the professional life ahead where this role of mine will help me. (It is helping me in my current role).

I joined LLI with a traditional mindset of getting instructions and working accordingly, but it was surprising for me when my staff partner encouraged me to take the lead on the work and varying tasks in the pipeline. At first, I was thinking, "How I can take the lead in the presence of senior faculty and staff?" Being asked to take the lead was very new for me. Keeping my responsibilities in mind, I was not only dealing with the administrative roles, but I was involved in the intellectual work, too. I must praise my staff partner (Fatima Iftikhar) here because her style of empowering me to learn at my own pace with a bit help of explaining the gist of the task or work in the pipeline heightened my learning experience. This kind of learning changed my

cognitive orientation. Now, I know that as a professional, I will always try to work with a student partner to make me learn things at the same time that he/she can learn from me. From my perspective, it is always a 'win-win situation' for everyone, and it is what we need as productive citizens of society because it promotes the culture of collaboration, synergy, and cooperation, which are pivotal for the healthier mindset.

According to Cook-Sather (2016), mutual respect, collaboration, and shared responsibility are the premises underpinning the success of any pedagogical partnership program. One of the most valuable aspects of working as a student partner in PPP was the opportunity to observe and learn from the experienced faculty and staff at LLI about the very concept of partnership. I was able to observe their working practices, the way they approached problem solving, and the way they worked with partners. For instance, the working environment was very collaborative in the sense that the staff and faculty at LLI were helping each other without considering their specific job responsibilities. My staff partner always went one step ahead in helping me to understand how to train student partners for their respective roles, and not sticking to it only. Such as, she helped me by sending all the relevant training material ten days before the event so that I could prepare well and ask her questions, if I had any, to clarify my confusions. This behavior of hers (prepare yourself well before time and help partners in it, in future) inspired in my behavior the practice of always going one step ahead in whatever role I perform.

I developed administrative as well as training skills. For instance, I learned how to write a proper email, send a calendar invite, manage my time, and appreciate people for the small things they did. In addition, as a student partner in LUMS' Pedagogical Partnership Programme I learned how to give and take feedback. My staff partner posed questions that made me think critically to improve on whatever task I performed. For example, I was working on the proposal for the development of new programme at LLI. After completing that write-up, I discussed that with my staff partner. During discussion, she just posed a question to me about what potential I could see in this new programme and whether I had analyzed its strength and weaknesses. At first, I did not think about the potential of the programme at all. I reflected on this question, though, and came up with a rationale and potential of the programme after some days. So, I absorbed this point of posing critical questions to the person to whom I am giving feedback to make them think and reflect.

All the skills that I learned from LLI are currently helping me in my job and opening ways for more collaborations with facilitators. My current job expects me to develop new programmes, to deal with things over emails, to send calendar invites for the meetings, and many other things. My work ethic, time management, and professionalism are helping me to build new connections with facilitators. All these things have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the role of an educator. I see an educator as a role model for society. This experience of partnership has helped me to develop my own teaching style, which is more of the involvement of students as important stakeholders. In teaching, if there are no students, there is no purpose in this profession. So, whatever I do, if I keep the students involved in my teaching, it will adapt my teaching style to help me to learn.

Moreover, working as a student partner also allowed me to develop a strong network of professional connections in the field of education. This network has been invaluable in my

personal and professional growth and has opened up new opportunities for me to pursue in the future. For instance, I worked as a member of a team who introduced the new *Professional Partnership Programme* to one of the food cafes at LUMS, *Baradari Café*, to train a group of students in restaurant management. The central idea of this programme was to instill skills in restaurant management in students; at the same time students were going to participate equally by working on the menu of the café. We had expected that students would have more of a say in the program during their session in the classroom and in the field. However, we did not get the response from the business professional that we were expecting. The program was a one-and-a-half-months-long pilot project in which top management of every field came on campus to teach some concepts and give hands-on experience to the selected students. What I learned through this experience is that it takes much more than simply calling something "partnership" to be partnership. Going forward, I will involve all the people during the process of the development of any programme to make sure that the rationale and conception of the programme is explicit and everyone is on-board.

Impact Evaluation of Pedagogical Partnership Programmes

As part of my master's degree thesis, which we call Practicum in the university, I along with my group members focused on the impact evaluation of Pedagogical Partnership Programmes at LUMS Learning Institute. Through this research, I sought to understand the impact of pedagogical partnership programmes on students, teachers, staff, and different schools operating within LUMS. To do so, I along with my groupmates conducted mixed-method research and interviewed students, teachers, and school administrators who had participated in the pedagogical partnership programmes. This experience allowed me to develop a strong understanding of the research process and to apply the knowledge I had gained through my coursework to real-world situations.

My shifting roles was a Herculean effort for me. I knew all the ins and outs of LLI as a participant, but being a researcher, I needed to be neutral and composed and take care of what to share and not to share. My shifting roles was Herculean because it takes lots of attention and cognitive effort. For instance, if I needed to share data from people who did partnership with LLI with my groupmates and we were sitting in an informal setting, I had to be cognizant of the fact that I should not take someone's name out of my mouth, whose information I know as a student partner, unintentionally. These kinds of mental efforts, almost all the time, needed lots of energy. In my opinion, this necessity did not act as an impeding factor for me but actually contributed to my growth. These shifting roles helped me in making my communication better by filtering the information and knowledge I had. Presently, I am applying this capacity in my multiple roles, and it is not difficult now. For instance, in my current role as an Education Specialist, I have many discussions related to the students with the Director of Academics and the Dean, and at the same time I am dealing with the students in their advisement. So, I always take care while advising them not to share anything that is confidential.

One of the key findings from my research was the importance of a collaborative approach in teaching and learning in partnerships. Through our surveys and interviews, we learned that partnerships that were based on collaboration and mutual respect between partners were more

likely to be successful and productive. This highlights the importance of establishing strong relationships between partners and ensuring that they share a common vision and goals for the betterment of their participants. I could relate to this finding in that my staff partner was also collaborative and flexible in terms of work and it helped me to take the responsibility at my own pace and perform the task in the efficient way.

Another important finding from my research was the impact that pedagogical partnerships have on the change in perception in terms of learning of students, faculty, and staff. Students who participated in these programmes reported improvements in their academic performance and critical thinking skills. Faculty reported that they improved their course evaluations for the course they partnered with a student partner. For staff, it was the importance of involving students in their work and taking their perspectives into consideration. These findings resonated for me because as a student partner, my perspectives were always being respected and listened to. When the participants of the research were answering that their perspectives were being respected, I felt fulfilled and happy that the core purpose of this partnership was being achieved. In the South Asian context, giving respect to a student's perspective means that mindset and perceptions are changing. It will take some time, but this partnership work will bring change in the long run in the education sector of South Asia, specifically Pakistan.

Finally, my research also highlighted the impact of pedagogical partnership and its value proposition. Some faculty members were of the opinion that it is a win-win situation for faculty and students for faculty to take students' perspectives into consideration in the design of the course, as students are the main stakeholders of the course. At the same time, students learn professional skills from the faculty and gain insight into the process of what faculty goes through and think about while they prepare the course or deliver any lecture. As I elaborated earlier on the win-win situation in my context, I learned training, administrative, and soft skills from my staff partner. My staff partner also learned and got some help for the Professional Partnership Programme. For instance, the programme timings did not match with my staff partner, and I dealt with all the professional people having their contact details, ensuring their smooth entry on campus, and facilitating their getting what they need. So, it was a kind of liberating experience for my staff partner, as she was involved in other important things.

Wearing Two Different Hats – Student Partner and a Researcher

It was my ethical responsibility to define the line between the roles I was in, that is, as a student partner and as a researcher. However, it was very difficult and demanding for me to define that line. Moreover, I faced the following challenges during my research. First, despite having access to confidential data from LLI, I prioritized ethical conduct and always sought official permission to share any information with my research group. Second, when conducting interviews and focus group discussions at LLI, I maintained a professional boundary, although it was difficult, with participants and ensured that their privacy and trust were respected. Finally, ass a member of a research group, I was committed to upholding the integrity of our research by separating personal thoughts and ideas related to LLI from the data we collected and analyzed.

So, to deal with these complex situations, I applied and learned some strategies:

Practiced self-reflection

According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), getting engaged in regular self-reflection helps in the betterment of one's understanding. I was engaged in a regular self-reflection that helped me to have a better understanding of my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. I tried to pen my thoughts on a piece of paper and find ways to mitigate the contradictory situation. Sometimes a small task seemed like an arduous task, but I was going through a range of emotions simultaneously. When I solved anything after self-reflection, I felt relieved. However, sometimes when the situation was a bit difficult, I felt overwhelmed. However, in my passive mind, I was reminding myself that it shall pass too. With the mixture of emotions and feelings, I overcame lots of things by reflecting on contradictions, and I gained insights into my motivations and developed a plan to address them.

Defined line and goals

I established clear objectives and boundaries that helped me in maintaining consistency in my position while pursuing research with LLI. By delineating specific goals beforehand, I attained the desired outcomes and cultivated a logical mindset. I felt accomplished, motivated, and fulfilled when I achieved the goals, but I felt frustrated and regretful when I crossed my defined line or did not achieve the goal. All these feelings impacted, positively and negatively, my overall well-being and the sense of self I was carrying. My regular self-reflection aided in the refinement of these goals and enabled me to remain effective in ethical considerations and other research-related areas.

Proofread my research writing

Getting the written work proofread by someone else including peers or any instructor is a way to take out many contradictions from the written work (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2015). I used to request that my peers proofread my written work before submitting it so that there would be less chance of bias. I can recall one of the instances where I had written an additional point unintentionally and gave explanation of that in the paper. One of my group members had a meticulous eye and requested that we not discuss that point amongst ourselves. They asked: "Are you writing it from a student partner perspective?" I realized that it should not be included in the paper. I have noticed these kinds of instances mostly while working in the group.

Final Thought

In conclusion, my experience as a student partner with LUMS Learning Institute and my research on the impact evaluation of pedagogical partnership programmes have been instrumental in my personal and professional growth. The skillset I developed as a student partner included how to effectively write an email, create a calendar invite, and devise

completely new programmes. Other skills I developed include deepening my perspective on working collaboratively with students and faculty and engaging in active listening as part of my professionalism. Through my experience, I have gained valuable insights into the functioning of a LUMS Learning Institute and the impact of pedagogical partnerships on students, teachers, and schools. Likewise, in the office of Academics, we always encourage students to give us feedback and share their academic concern without hesitation.

In the South Asian context, it is a big change we are trying to incorporate. It is instilled in me that wherever I go in the education sector, keeping all the stakeholders' perspectives in mind and giving them importance is essential. I gained lots of information related to dealing with conflicts of interest and implemented my new understanding in the best possible ways. My advice to the students who will be performing more than one role is, if it is in the same organization, make time for the learning that happens and get some experience before entering into a professional career. I would highly recommend a student to go ahead and take on more roles and avail themselves of more opportunities.

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