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WHEN THE PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCED MEET THE PARTNERSHIP CURIOUS: INSIGHTS FROM AND OUTCOMES OF A PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP WORKSHOP AT GRINNELL COLLEGE

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Over the past two or so decades, pedagogical partnerships between students and faculty have slowly become more common features of teaching and learning at colleges and universities across the United States and beyond. Such partnerships are not entirely new to higher education. However, a robust body of literature on the theory and praxis of pedagogical partnerships has emerged during this time, creating a scholarly community of practice.

In the summer of 2023, we teamed up to bring this community into more corporeal form, co-hosting “[Teaching and Learning Together: The Opportunities and Challenges of Pedagogical Partnerships](#)” at Grinnell College. The wonderful essays in this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* emerged from that gathering.

Made possible by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the conference brought together students, staff, and faculty from a wide range of institutions. The conference itself reflected the spirit of partnership. It included participants with deep experience in pedagogical partnerships and those who were “curious” about how they might begin a partnership initiative at their own institutions. Each participant brought their own form of expertise to the rich discussions that unfolded, reflecting their own experience of and role in higher education.

As co-hosts, we represented this spectrum of experience. Alison is a foundational figure in the theory and practice of pedagogical partnerships, having co-created one of the first pedagogical partnership programs ([Students as Learners and Teachers](#)) at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges in 2006 and consulted widely on pedagogical partnership work around the world. The workshop gave her an opportunity to reconnect with folks she has worked with for years and to meet people new to and excited about partnership work. For his part, Caleb was director of Grinnell’s Center for the Humanities at the time of the workshop and had recently become a principal investigator of a Mellon grant, Humanities in Action. The conference gave him, along with other “curious” participants, an occasion to consider how to expand and formalize partnership offerings at Grinnell.

Across two days, the conference provided a variety of opportunities for participants to share in each other’s experiences and expertise. These opportunities included more formal panels of faculty, staff, and students who had launched or developed pedagogical partnership programs at their institutions as well as less structured periods for reflection, conversation, and exploration.

Structured sessions included a panel of experienced participants discussing leadership, co-facilitation, and intersecting identities; constituency-based group discussion of partnership

experiences; a fishbowl exploring transformative moments in partnership work and how participants carried them forward into other contexts; and a panel on launching and sustaining pedagogical partnerships. We incorporated less structured, discussion-based opportunities after many of these sessions, often with an eye toward consideration of how participants—experienced and curious alike—might bring the insights they had heard into their own work.

Before many sessions, participants also discussed “pre-read” resources that we carefully selected to create a common basis for discussion. All publications were authored by the “partnership experienced” participants of the workshop—students, faculty, and staff—thereby at once affirming and humanizing the experts in the room. This was a crucial step in convening as a community of practice. Building in time for quiet reflection, informal conversation, and revitalization was equally important. We wanted to model a generative spaciousness that we see as an essential, and humane, element of pedagogical partnership.

We found that a balance between these different elements facilitated community-building in a very short period. Participants shared joyful *and* hard lessons they had learned. They revealed moments of great empowerment and real disappointment. They voiced what they were excited about when they thought about partnerships as well as what made them nervous and apprehensive. They asked thoughtful and hard questions of one another.

The essays we have gathered in this dedicated issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* reflect the vulnerability, capacity, insights, and action that emerged as a result of the care and generosity with which participants approached our time together.

In [“MECHANISMS OF CHANGE: HOW PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIPS CAN BUILD CONFIDENCE AMONG VULNERABLE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY.”](#) Heidi M. Williams, Collegiate Assistant Professor of Sociology at the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, offers reflections that proceed from two recognitions she articulated as a “first-gen, non-TT faculty-self.” The first is that if she had had “the opportunity as an undergraduate to serve as a pedagogical partner,” she too might have “experienced the liberatory feelings the student-partners embodied.” The second is that she wanted to develop partnerships for first-generation students at her own institution “so that they could experience a sense of belonging and move more freely within academic spaces.”

Khadijah Seay, a former student partner in the Students as Learners and Teachers program, a former Post-Baccalaureate Fellow for Student and Faculty Programs through the Teaching and Learning Center at Berea College, and the current Associate Director of Civic House at University of Pennsylvania, titled her essay [“TOWARD LIBERATION: LESSONS FROM A RULE BREAKER.”](#) Following in the footsteps of her grandmother, a successful medical practitioner who encountered barriers of attitude and opportunity because she is a Black woman, Khadijah writes about how to break the rules in order to live and extend to others opportunities to live in ways that are affirming and empowering. She offers glimpses into her own evolution as someone committed to empowerment, love, and thriving prior to, during, and after the Grinnell workshop.

IN [**“THE HARD WORK OF HAPPY ACCIDENTS: THE ORIGINS AND FUTURE OF PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP AT BARNARD COLLEGE.”**](#) Melissa Wright, Executive Director, Center for Engaged Pedagogy at Barnard College, alternates between reflecting on her experience at the Grinnell workshop and revisiting the work she has been doing at Barnard to develop pedagogical partnership. This dialogue between the workshop context and her own context allows Melissa to share insights into the necessarily recursive process of developing, analyzing, and revising partnership work through what she describes as “shifting institutional culture” and “building a staffing infrastructure to support both students and faculty.”

Hleziphi Naomie Nyanungo, Associate Provost for Learning and Teaching Innovation at West Chester University, launched a pilot partnership program at her home institution shortly after participating in the Grinnell workshop. In her essay, [**“LEARNING IN PARTNERSHIP: A REFLECTIVE JOURNEY.”**](#) she writes about the ways she first engaged in deep listening at Grinnell, particularly to experiences of systemic barriers that impede academic success for students from marginalized communities. Returning to West Chester University, Nyanungo developed structures and processes for listening and learning at her home institution, and she describes the lessons she is taking forward to grow their partnership program.

In [**“PARTNERS IN PARTNERSHIP WORK: GROWING FROM GRINNELL.”**](#) Scott Hamm, Assistant Director of the Adams Center for Teaching and Learning at Abilene Christian University, and Jillian Impastato, Mirken Coordinator of Campus Collaboration at Colby College Museum of Art, write about the partnership they created across roles and institutions to support the launch of a pilot partnership program at Abilene Christian University. Their essay takes the form of a dialogue, alternating voices in ways that build on shared goals and also narrate distinct experiences and perspectives based on the ways they worked together across institutions and roles.

Diane Skorina, Librarian of the College, Chair of the Common Intellectual Experience, and Co-Director of the Teaching & Learning Institute at Ursinus College, explores what she calls “several paths of thought” that emerged from her experience at the Grinnell workshop in her essay, [**“QUIET POWER: THE LIBRARIAN’S ROLE, A CO-LEADERSHIP MODEL, AND THE GENDERED WORK OF PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP.”**](#) As her title suggests, she reflects on her role as a librarian at Ursinus working with “differently disciplined” academics, her approach as co-director of Ursinus’s Student Consultant program, and the gendered nature of partnership work she has experienced and observed.

Bill Reynolds, who is Director of the Lucas Center at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), has five years of experience directing the partnership program he launched at FGCU. In [**“DIALOGUE IN PARTNERSHIP: RELAXING INTO RECEPTIVITY.”**](#) he addresses these questions: What does it mean to be deeply engaged in dialogue? What actions might facilitators and participants might take to cultivate genuine dialogue? and, Are there cautions to consider when facilitating dialogue-based SaP programs? In addressing these questions, Reynolds draws not only on his experience of running a partnership program and of participating in the workshop at Grinnell but also on a number of publications focused on definitions and practices of dialogue.

In [“SOME IS MORE THAN NONE: A GUIDE TO BEGINNING A PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM.”](#) Ebony Graham, Post-baccalaureate Fellow, and Katherine A. Troyer, Director of The Collaborative for Learning and Teaching, both at Trinity University, narrate how they came to the Grinnell workshop from different geographical as well as positional locations, preparing to work together at Trinity. Having heard the “partnership curious” articulate during the workshop a range of questions and concerns, as well as excitement and eagerness, about partnership work, they developed and offer in this essay a rubric to help guide those just starting out on their pedagogical partnership explorations.

Timothy Arner, Professor of English, and Lilli Moorish, a current undergraduate student, both at Grinnell College, describe the process by which they found greater belonging through their work together in [“FINDING BELONGING THROUGH CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP IN A FIRST-YEAR COURSE ON LINGUISTIC JUSTICE.”](#) Beyond the successful outcome of the partnership in curricular terms—a new course on an important and timely subject—they recount how their partnership helped create intellectual belonging for both of them as they traversed intersecting developmental journeys appropriate to their respective roles at the institution.

What we see across these essays is not only vulnerability, capacity, insights, and action but also meaningful shifts of mindset—rethinkings of long-engrained and often unarticulated assumptions about who might have what role in teaching and learning and revisions of those processes. We also see the deepening of existing relationships and the development of new ones, affirming what we know to be the importance of relationship-rich education (Felten & Lambert, 2020). We hope these stories inspire others to create opportunities that balance structure and openness to support the experienced and the curious in mutually informing dialogue about pedagogical partnership.

Reference

Felten, P., & Lambert, L. M. (2020). *Relationship-rich education: How human connections drive student success*. Johns Hopkins University Press.