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## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ARE NOT THE GOAL ANYMORE: DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IS**

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I was first introduced to student-faculty pedagogical partnership work as a second-year undergraduate in 2020 through the SaLT (Students as Learners and Teachers) within the Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. In my role as a student partner, I focused on identifying where in my faculty partners' teaching they were already engaged in inclusive practices and how they might build on those to make their classrooms more inclusive. As I progressed through the work, however, I realized that what a professor's practice can achieve and students feeling they belong are not the same thing. I saw and experienced myself, as a Black woman, that everyone did not have the same ability to take up space nor were students always equitably served in the classroom.

I thought about these differences again when I attended an expert meeting—a gathering of those with experience in pedagogical partnership work—at THUAS (The Hague University of Applied Sciences) in the Netherlands in November of 2022. The topic of diversity and inclusion was a constant, but I found that, during some of the conversations we had, those terms did not go far enough, especially in the face of certain ideas that exist on college campuses, such as the illusion that students, no matter where they are from, are the same or exist within one culture due to attending college on the same campus. Commitments to diversity and inclusion in action felt aspirational, despite the terms being very present in conversations happening on campus. Most people knew that they were concepts that were important to discuss, but it felt like the discussions only remained discussions and policy or conduct changes were rarely brought up.

This was compelling to me because it's not like BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) individuals, women, and other minoritized groups are not present in classrooms and participating in important conversations. In fact, many of my fellow student pedagogical partners in the SaLT program came from minoritized groups and saw the partnership work as an opportunity to advance the equity work that needed to be done. But, based on many conversations centered around diversity, you would think that we aren't there or using our voices to move toward the changes that we need to thrive on Predominantly White Institution (PWI) campuses. I have witnessed this in various roles I have held, including as a student at a PWI and a student partner in SaLT in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and currently as a post-baccalaureate fellow at a PWI in Texas in the southern region of the United States. All of these experiences have led me to the focus of this essay: diversity and inclusion are not the goals that institutions of higher education need to aim for anymore. The new aim must be inclusive practices and belonging for students and anyone else on college and university campuses. Although these concepts of diversity, inclusion, inclusive practice, and belonging may appear to convey similar ideas, there are key differences that set them apart from one another.

When I consider what diversity means, I think about who is present in an environment. A diverse environment includes people who come from a variety of backgrounds, origins, and places.

Diversity often doesn't take into account the agency or belonging that people feel in a given environment. I've seen cases of diversity without inclusivity or inclusive practice while at my university. At the time I attended (2019-2023), the gender breakdown of students who identify as women was 52% and 48% who identify as men. These numbers could make one believe that because women are the majority of the student population, their perspectives and voices would be centered in academic and extracurricular spaces. Yet, in many courses that I observed within my pedagogical partnerships and courses I attended myself, male-identifying students spoke far more than female-identifying students, with some courses having occurrences of men speaking on twice as many occasions as women, despite the larger presence of women on campus.

In one of my pedagogical partnerships, I was able to observe an economics course that included students from many different backgrounds, which was a major benefit because there was a diverse body of knowledge in the room as well. But, I found that despite the diversity of the students in the classroom, the same few voices, mostly from male and white individuals, filled the space most often. This led to my faculty partner and me having to brainstorm ways to engage the rest of the students, such as warm calling (informing students at the beginning of class that they would be randomly asked to answer questions or explain thoughts throughout lessons) to relieve possible anxiety about speaking, giving students clickers to answer multiple-choice questions as a silent but synchronous mode of participation, and introducing more partner and small-group work so that students had the ability to collaborate with each other to increase confidence in their answers and to build classroom community. These methods, in addition to the professor openly asking for new voices to join the conversation, did somewhat increase overall participation.

When it comes to inclusivity, it's not just about the people in an environment but who has the space and power to have their perspectives considered by the broader community in an environment. When we as students, teachers, faculty, or staff strive for inclusivity, we are only considering who gets a seat at the table, but not whose voice actually matters in the conversations that happen at that table. I learned this lesson in a pedagogical partnership where I observed a different economics course that included a diverse set of students and a nearly even gender distribution, but again, the same few voices participated much more than everyone else. I noticed in the syllabus for this course that all of the resources on it were by white authors and the majority of them were men. When I approached my faculty partner about this, even offering a recommendation for a new book by a female African economist on foreign aid money entering Africa, he explained to me that although he would like to add this to the syllabus, he could not deviate from the prescribed list of lessons and resources that he was permitted to use for the course. This led me to two realizations. The first was that I needed to understand the constraints that some professors work under that they may or may not agree with. Most of my mentors in college were very free in the resources that they introduced in the classroom, and I thought my faculty partner would be no different. The second and more difficult realization was that this could send a very harmful message to students about who belongs or even whose work is deemed important in the field of economics. How could students feel included when academics who look like them or hail from similar places that they come from are excluded from the classroom? Why would someone prescribe this kind of resource list to a faculty member without considering the effects that it could have on the students who will use these resources to learn?

The concept of inclusivity is usually tied to minoritized groups, whereas inclusive practices benefit all students and promote belonging across demographics. Inclusivity is not the ultimate goal of pedagogical partnership work. Rather, it is giving professors the tools to implement inclusive practices that help all students feel that they belong. Inclusive practices are defined as practices that “strive to serve the needs of all students, regardless of background or identity, and support their engagement with subject material” (Ambrose et. al, 2010). This can include giving a variety of examples in lessons for students with different learning needs, allowing students to turn in the same assignment in different forms, and intentionally including multiple or typically overlooked perspectives in lessons. An example of inclusive practices at work in the classroom came from a partnership where I helped to co-create a biology course that made it a point to study the intersections of DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) in the field. One element of this course was that students had to create a presentation about a topic (from a list the professor, other collaborators, and I created or of their own choosing) in biology that they had never studied previously. These topics ranged from environmental racism and the effects that it can have on the people it impacts to BIPOC pioneers in biology who go understudied to cases of systemic medical racism. The professor and I found that students across the board responded very favorably to this project in their feedback as it allowed them to study concepts that hadn’t been available to them and to hear perspectives that they had not considered in past educational contexts. Inclusive practices hold the key to moving our institutions, programs, and communities toward educational equity.

In my role as a pedagogical partner, I observed the need for a shift to inclusive practices since inclusion can quickly morph into tokenism, which is the intentional recruitment of people from underrepresented groups to appear diverse. But, when I became involved in partnership work, the opposite effect happened and I was affirmed as a Black woman on a majority white campus. Through this work, I felt that my voice and perspectives held weight in ways that I had not felt previously on campus. The observations, research, and thoughts that I brought to my various partnerships were not only heard but valued and appreciated. I had professors, experts in their fields, expressing their desire to hear what I had to say and being thankful for what I offered them. These experiences were very helpful for me while navigating a PWI as I was not used to seeing myself represented in the community around me. When I found myself in moments where I was overlooked or ignored, I was able to come back to the gratitude that my faculty partners expressed to me. This helped me more clearly understand the things that I bring to the table and the ripple effect that those things had on the community around me.

While I would like to honor the fact that individuals and institutions are making strides to rectify past harmful behaviors and practices, this essay is meant to consider the work that still needs to be done and to present reasons why DEIB work must be expanded. Based on what I have witnessed in pedagogical partnerships, inclusive practices may expand understanding of the variety of student needs on campuses around the world. Additionally, inclusive practices can help shift narratives that DEIB work is only for students of color or other marginalized groups. These practices can be implemented for those who have been historically marginalized or historically centered yet the benefits can be felt by both.

## **Reference**

Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M.W., DiPietro, M. & Lovett, M.C. (2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.