

Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

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From the Advisory Board

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TEACHING AND LEARNING TOGETHER: TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT

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The launch of a journal that focuses on college faculty and undergraduate students working together to explore and enact effective classroom practice is but further evidence of a growing commitment in higher education to the ongoing improvement of teaching and learning. For *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, this commitment is distinguished by the inclusion of students as partners with faculty members in a shared process of classroom-based development.

In the world of higher education represented and anticipated by this journal, students are seen less as unknowing neophytes who benefit from the wisdom passed on to them by knowledgeable teachers, and more as capable and active agents in their own development and in the development of classrooms they co-habit and co-construct with faculty members. Students are knowledgeable and collaborative (i.e., with faculty members and other students) actors whose insights into and expertise on their own ideas, comments, and actions are critical to a full understanding of what transpires and changes in the higher education classroom. As faculty members come to appreciate students as thoughtful, inquisitive, caring people whose ideas and experiences they should seek, come to know, and take seriously, they reconfigure ideas about who students are, what students can and should do, and what it means for students to be and to become productive participants in their courses and programs. Likewise, as students gain insight into faculty members' pedagogical goals and commitments as well as their interest in what students bring to the classroom, those students reconfigure ideas about who faculty are and how to work with faculty members as colleagues.

To access student knowledge, faculty members need to "listen" to students, that is to seek and work with how students make sense of what happens in classrooms and courses. Often this work is based on arguments about "rights" and "respect," that is, that students (as stakeholders, citizens, people, etc.) have a right to be heard and to have their views respected. Accordingly, the voices of students are increasingly sought and included in discussions about and improvements in classroom practice. In these interactions, faculty members not only listen to what students have to say but also create conditions for students to "have a say" in what classrooms and schools do. At the same time as students develop their voices, they learn to listen to faculty members in new ways, and they not only can respond more fully to what faculty have to offer but also inform the choices faculty members make in their teaching. The more faculty members and students share responsibility for learning, the greater the individual and joint investment in both learning and the improvement of learning.

As faculty members and students explore more and more ways to teach and learn together, they move towards a pedagogy of mutual engagement. In such pedagogical

encounters, engagement is about harnessing the knowledge that students bring to their studies and bringing that knowledge into dialogue with faculty knowledge within forums where both perspectives inform course-based curriculum experiences. Over time, it also includes the search for how best to involve students in decisions that touch every aspect of their lives in higher education classrooms. In the process, faculty members and students become co-protagonists in a curriculum production that only they can script, direct, and enact together.

This inaugural issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* documents three of the emerging themes that animate a pedagogy of mutual engagement: reflection and sustained dialogue, inquiry, and collaboration. Faculty members and students alike recognize the pedagogical power of conversation. In “A Semester in the Life,” Theresa Tensuan, an Assistant Professor of English, both reflects on alternative approaches to “engage a wider swath of students” and looks forward to the advice of a student consultant to enrich her repertoire of culturally responsive strategies. From the student perspective, Laura Perry, the Guest Student Editor, comments on the risk-taking yet empowering experience of conversations about teaching and learning with faculty members and students. The wondering and probing reach of inquiry is evident in the words of faculty members and students in the section entitled, “Insights on Student Engagement” and in Erica Seaborne’s examination of “How Consulting Increases Student Responsibility and Confidence.” Here we see students making sense of their classrooms through observations or focused deliberations (e.g. course planning), and faculty members exploring how to empower students through initiatives that suggest the beginnings of an action research cycle (see the quotes in the subsections: “Create Spaces for Students to Take Responsibility” and “Provide Structures for Students to Talk to One Another”).

Whether in dialogue or inquiry, the faculty members and students cited in this issue are forging a collaborative partnership that is based on building a mutually supportive and democratic community. The themes of dialogue, inquiry, and collaboration are clearly anticipated in Alison Cook-Sather’s introduction, “Background: Student Voice in Educational Practice and Reform.” Moving towards a dialogic, inquiry-based, and collaborative pedagogy of mutual engagement is both possible and desirable when students are genuinely heard, recognized for their significant insights in the everyday world of the classroom, and involved in decisions that affect the teaching and learning of their higher education courses, and when, in turn, they listen to and learn from faculty in new ways.