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Building Civic Capacity on Campus Through a Radically Inclusive Teaching and Learning Initiative

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Building Civic Capacity on Campus through a Radically Inclusive Teaching and Learning Initiative

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Abstract: In this article we explore the definition and development of civic capacity at a liberal arts college through a specific teaching and learning initiative. This initiative encourages faculty, staff, and students to share the roles of teacher, learner, and colleague as they gain educational opportunities and foster these for others. Through a description of two programs and analysis of participants' reflections, we identify four stages of change that foster civic capacity. We suggest that this initiative invites a re-interpretation of the institution as a site of educational opportunities and raises questions about how to broaden access to these opportunities.

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The civic spaces of a residential college campus — buildings, walkways and greens, and online contexts — are occupied and crisscrossed daily by the citizens of the college. Whom do we see in these spaces, and what is their work? With whom do we interact and to what ends? What do these images and interactions tell us about the nature and possible development of civic capacity on the college campus? At Bryn Mawr College our answers to these questions have changed dramatically over the last three years as we have developed programs under the umbrella of the Teaching and Learning Initiative (TLI). We have found that relationships change when campus community members who have differing institutional roles (faculty, staff, and students) engage the educational mission of the College as teachers and learners, and so does their understanding of the College's central mission of fostering learning. In the following descriptive analysis of our work through the Teaching and Learning Initiative, we tell the story of how the initiative developed and evolved, and we share the experiences of community members who have participated in the TLI to illuminate four stages of change that, we suggest, reflect the development of civic capacity.

In using the term "civic capacity," we return to the root of the word *civic*, which comes from *civicus in Latin,* meaning citizen, a person as a member of a society. While "society" can refer to the larger social order, it can also refer to a smaller group, even to one's sphere of co-workers (Fine & Harrington, 2004), those with whom one works in an academic department or other unit within an educational institution—what we might term a "micro-society." By "capacity" we mean both amplitude and aptitude — what can be taken in and what is already within. Thus, in the academic context, we define *civic capacity* as 1) the capacity of members of the campus community to access their own and one another's knowledge and experience as they work together to meet individual and common educational goals and 2) the capacity of the

institutional leadership to support this process. As civic capacity grows within the context of an educational institution, it enables persons in different roles to enrich each other's learning within and outside of the classroom, to discern connections between classroom-based and co-curricular learning, and to recognize the continuum of work and study. As we conceptualize it, civic capacity helps campus community members take up roles beyond the often isolating, narrow, and hierarchical functions of our campus employment (faculty, staff, and administrators) or activity (students) so that we can jointly enlarge the institution's capacity to support and respond to our own and others' needs and goals as learners.

Development and Evolution of the Teaching and Learning Initiative (TLI)

The TLI was conceived in 2006 when a group of administrators, members of the College's Board of Trustees, and faculty members took stock of the institutional history and context for faculty development and staff education at Bryn Mawr College. With support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, advisory groups created program structures and assessment processes that would support the development of programs for faculty and staff learning. We were committed to including students as partners in fostering educational opportunities for others as well as enriching their own education.

As articulated by a stakeholder group in the summer of 2007, the goals of the TLI are to create new structures within which *all* members of the campus community — faculty, staff, and students — interact as teachers, learners, and colleagues; to collaborate and create relationships that move beyond the limitations of the traditional roles we play; and to link everyone within the college community to educational opportunity and the opportunity to foster it for others (http://www.brynmawr.edu/tli). The TLI challenges the belief that expertise is hierarchical and that some people's work solely supports others' educational opportunity. While the dominant

cultural model in higher education is stratified and status-driven rather than democratic and reciprocal, the TLI seeks to foster a culture that operates on principles of equality and functions as an integrated, interactive, and evolving whole.

During the pilot year of the TLI, 2006-2007, one program, "Students as Learners and Teachers" (SaLT), partnered undergraduate student consultants with faculty members who wished to explore pedagogical issues. This program was overseen by Alison Cook-Sather, who serves as the Coordinator of the Teaching and Learning Initiative and facilitates the programs focused on faculty development. A second program, called "Computing," engaged undergraduate students as mentors to help the College's nonprofessional staff learn basic computer literacy since the College was moving many operations and channels of communications to an online format. A third program was conceived as a learning exchange project, called the "Empowering Learners Partnership" (ELP), through which staff-student pairs or small groups choose their own topics of study based on individual interests and goals. These two programs were overseen by Alice Lesnick, who serves as the Coordinator of Staff/Student Partnerships. All of these programs aim to develop the first part of the definition of capacity we offer above: the capacity of members of the campus community to access their own and one another's knowledge and experience as they work together to meet individual and common educational goals.

These and other programs supported by the TLI emerged in response to needs and interests of community members. Staff, faculty, and students alike wanted to further their education, and differently positioned members of the community were able to advocate for this pursuit. Administrators, students, faculty members, and other staff could advocate for staff education; faculty members could advocate for students' capacity to serve as pedagogical

consultants; and current faculty members could advocate for incoming faculty members as likely to benefit from work with student consultants. This mobilization and the financial support that followed reflect the development of the second part of the definition of capacity: the capacity of the institutional leadership to support this process.

In 2009, with further support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Offices of the Chief Information and Chief Administrative Officers and the Office of Intercultural Affairs at Bryn Mawr College, and the Provosts of Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges[2], the TLI has expanded considerably. The programs focused on faculty learning and development include not only "Students as Learners and Teachers" but also regular, semester-long pedagogy seminars for both experienced faculty and incoming tenure-track faculty (each of whom works with a student consultant); workshops and a pedagogy certificate for graduate students; and new faculty orientation programs. The programs focused on staff education have expanded beyond the "Empowering Learners Partnership" program and "Computing" to include programs focused on adult literacy, coaching in planning for continuing formal education for staff, and advanced technology education. For all these programs, participating faculty members receive stipends or course releases (supported by the Mellon grant and the Provosts' Offices), students receive an hourly wage (supported by the Mellon grant and the Provosts' Offices) or fieldwork credit in selected Education courses, and staff members receive paid release time to participate (supported

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[2] Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges collaborate in several arenas, and in the summer of 2007, Haverford College faculty members began to participate in the faculty branches of the Teaching and Learning Initiative, including the "Students as Learners and Teachers" program. In the fall of 2008, the Bryn Mawr and Haverford College Provosts co-funded the extension of the grant-supported model of faculty seminars to all incoming tenure-track faculty members. The staff education branch of the TLI is open only to Bryn Mawr College staff as it is funded by Bryn Mawr College, although both Bryn Mawr and Haverford students may participate.

by the Chief Administrative Office and the Provost of Bryn Mawr College). The institutional commitment to and support of these programs is thus quite significant.

Students who attend apply to serve in the roles of student consultant, mentor, or learning partner and are oriented and supported in their work with faculty and staff through weekly meetings led by program coordinators. Alison Cook-Sather facilitates weekly reflective meetings for the student consultants involved in "Students as Learners and Teachers," and Alice Lesnick and student co-coordinators facilitate regular meetings for students working as mentors or learning partners with staff members. As the programs evolve, the program coordinators and student participants develop and revise orientations, handbooks, and structures for the regular reflective meetings.

To date, 64 faculty members — 35% of the full-time faculty from across all three divisions of Bryn Mawr College — as well as 16 Haverford College faculty members have participated in one or more TLI forums. For the 2009-2010 academic year, 26 more faculty members from these two colleges plan to participate. As of fall 2009, a total of 52 students have served in the role of student consultant. There have been 128 partnerships between students and Bryn Mawr College staff (with 22% of college staff members participating): 48 Empowering Learners Partnerships; 72 partnerships in "Computing" (which now includes three levels, Computing 1, 2, and 3); four partnerships through the literacy program (Reading, Writing, and Communication) and four partnerships through our Continuing Education program for staff. We anticipate that in the 2009-2010 academic year, 60 staff members and 65 students will participate in partnerships and in program leadership and coordination roles.

Students Building Capacity with Faculty and Staff

We now focus on how TLI participants build civic capacity through two of the TLI programs: "Students as Learners and Teachers" (SaLT) and the "Empowering Learners Partnership" (ELP). These two programs illustrate the central role of students in the TLI and a reconceptualized role of faculty and staff members, with the goal of fostering learning.

Students who apply to serve as student consultants in SaLT must have experience in an educational or leadership position, supply two letters of recommendation (one from a faculty or staff member and one from a student), and explain why they would be appropriate in the role. Faculty members who participate in SaLT apply either to join a seminar with other faculty colleagues and student consultants or to undertake a stand-alone partnership with a student consultant. The program coordinator then pairs the faculty members and students with compatible schedules and also, where possible, according to faculty preference (e.g., a student experienced with the subject matter, a student not experienced with the subject matter). Faculty members meet with their student consultants at the outset of the partnership to identify pedagogical goals. Throughout the partnerships (which can last anywhere from several weeks to a full semester), the student consultants visits the faculty members' classrooms weekly; take detailed observation notes on the issue(s) the faculty members have identified; meet weekly with their faculty partners; conduct midcourse feedback within the class (if the faculty members wish); and meet weekly with the program coordinator and the other student consultants to discuss how best to support participating faculty members. (See Cook-Sather, 2008, 2009, and in press for other discussions of this program; see also Cox & Sorenson, 2000; Sorenson, 2001; Sorensen-Pierce, 1993; Wasley, 2007). Faculty participants come from different disciplines and divisions and from all ranks and levels of experience. Many student consultants, sophomores to

seniors majoring in different fields, are completing teacher certification or the minor in educational studies, though that is not a requirement for this position.

Students who serve in the role of learning partner through the "Empowering Learners Partnership" (ELP) come from a wide range of majors and backgrounds. They may apply through the campus job system or as students in selected Education courses. They must have experience in an educational or community-oriented position, interest in cross-cultural, cross-generational, and cross-role exchange, supply two letters of recommendation, and explain why they would be appropriate in the role. Staff members are invited to participate in ELP each semester through a series of information/outreach sessions led by the faculty and student program coordinators. ELP pairs students and staff members in reciprocal learning partnerships focused on shared educational interests as well as scheduling compatibility. Focal areas to date include Greek cooking, Italian language, Microsoft Excel, principles of Islam, crafts, baking, jazz appreciation, and PowerPoint. So far staff members have come from the departments of Housekeeping, Dining Services, Information Services, Facilities, Public Safety and Transportation, the Alumni House, and the Copy Center.

Theoretical Frameworks and Analytical Approach

Because these TLI programs invite people to cross the boundaries of traditional roles and responsibilities, the theoretical frameworks upon which we draw emerge from different literatures. We situate our analysis of the programs at the intersection of research in the areas of professional development, student voice, service learning, and social integration theory.

In the spirit of professional development for college faculty that emphasizes reflective and collaborative approaches (Cowan & Westwood, 2006; Huston & Weaver, 2008), we take as a touchstone the work of Lee Shulman and his generative term "pedagogical solitude" (2004, p.

140). Shulman argued that faculty members need to emerge from pedagogical solitude — the isolation in which most faculty operate — and "change the status of teaching from private to community property" (p. 140-141). Highlighting the importance of shared responsibility for and ownership of teaching and learning, this argument directly identifies the isolation faculty members have generally experienced. While Shulman's argument focused on faculty members, as do most models of professional development, we take that two steps further to include dialogue between faculty and students and between non-academic staff and students (as well as between faculty and staff — partnerships that are beginning to develop through the TLI).

The growing body of research on student voice also provides premises that underpin our work. Defined as approaches that include student perspectives on, student participation in, and participatory research focused on engaging and effective educational practices, student voice research is developing in England, Canada, Australia, and the United States. Scholars in England have written most extensively about the benefits to experienced teachers of consulting students on pedagogical matters (MacBeath et al., 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007), and research in both England and the U.S. has documented the benefits to prospective teachers (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2002; Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007; Donohue et al., 2003; Youens & Hall, 2006). Most of this research has focused on the role of students in K-12 education, but Rudduck and Flutter's (2004) claim about K-12 students applies to college students as well: student commentaries on teaching and learning in school "provide a practical agenda for change that can help fine tune or, more fundamentally, identify and shape improvement strategies" (p. 29). Aside from our own work and selected other texts (Cook-Sather, 2008, 2009, in press; Cox & Sorenson, 2000; Miller, Groccia, & Miller, 2001), few publications focus on the benefits to faculty members of collaborating with students at the college level — a gap our work aims to fill.

Literature on service learning does not commonly focus on college campuses themselves as sites of community building, but the theoretical framework of service learning is relevant to our work. The New England Resource Center for Higher Education stated in a research memo on intra-campus service learning that, "Very little research has touched upon the importance of building community from within, nor are there many campuses that seem to have truly incorporated the spirit of this project into their institutional priority" (NERCHE, 2003, p.12). The TLI faculty-student partnerships open dialogue and reciprocity about classroom-based teaching and learning. By including non-academic staff as subjects in the College's educational mission, the staff-student programs change who is invited to teach and learn from whom and in what ways. They also challenge an institution of higher education to reconsider limitations on its mission (Cook-Sather, 2001; 2006b; Shank, 2000) and how it might include a larger field of its own citizens. Building on our efforts to expand traditional roles in educational settings (see Cook-Sather, 2006b, 2002, 2001), our bidirectional model departs from the sometimes unidirectional emphasis of community service. As Mullen (2000) suggested, "Collaborative mentoring promotes a kind of counter-culture that is opposed to prevailing institutional practices of separation and exploitation" (p. 5).

Finally, social integration theory offers a meaningful perspective on the TLI. Variously defined across fields and communities, social integration theory highlights the potential value of interaction and affiliation with others. Scholars who study psychological wellbeing have focused on "social integration as a process through which individuals…develop and increasingly exercise capacities for interpersonal connectedness and citizenship" (Ware et al., 2008, p. 28). Sociologists concerned with social structure and role have highlighted people's struggles to balance and harmonize multiple, at times conflicting, social roles and expectations (Thoits, 1983;

Cohen, 1988). Those focused on community development, such as Putnam (1993), have emphasized the value of a social network to our ability to thrive and have an impact. In our own field of education, scholars insist that social capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1990) and cultural funds of knowledge (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) are resources crucial to learners' access to dominant educational narratives and processes. The TLI aims to help people develop interpersonal connections, overcome limitations of their formal roles, gain access to new sources of support, and become better able to make use of resources and opportunities — in short, to develop greater agency in their lives as teachers and learners. As Ware et. al. (2008) explained, "Realization of agency is dependent upon the synergistic combination of two essential ingredients: personal capacity and social opportunity" (p. 28).

To continue improving these programs, and to understand their impact better, we obtained approval from Bryn Mawr College's Institutional Review Board to conduct practitioner research on our work. We frame the present discussion as a descriptive analysis, and we used constant comparison/grounded theory (Creswell, 2006; Strauss, 1987) to analyze the data we gathered. The sources of data included the following:

- Formal assessment interviews of students, faculty, and staff members. For SaLT, these invited interviews totaled 37, 82% of participants at the time of the data analysis. For ELP, these totaled 16, 15% of participants, an invited representative sample of staff participants at the three ranks — service/craft, clerical/technical, and administrative/professional at the time of the data analysis — and 15% of student participants/volunteer interviewees.

- Participant Assessment Questionnaires. All participants of both programs were invited to complete these. 45 from SaLT were completed, 100% of those invited completed a

questionnaires. 37 from ELP were completed, 77% of those invited to complete a

questionnaire.

- ELP participants' weekly reflective logs. 22 students and 2 staff completed these as invited, as part of their weekly partnership work, totaling 50% of participants.

- 5 audiotapes of class sessions of the Education course in which ELP can be a course field experience, made during fall 2007. 30% of 9 class members were ELP participants.

- Audiotapes of the weekly reflective meetings in which students meet with TLI coordinators to process and plan for their experiences; audiotaped sessions of all weekly reflective meetings among SaLT participants between 2006 and 2008; 11 audiotaped sessions of weekly reflective meetings in ELP; 35% of 12-15 weekly participants in these meetings were ELP participants.

- 8 course papers by students enrolled in various Education courses between 2006 and 2008 in which ELP work constituted a field experience or campus job. Students volunteered to include their papers in the data set, an opportunity set forth in the assessment project's consent form.

In the process of data analysis, we considered all records of participants' voices in the two focal programs and have quoted those that were representative of at least three statements by other speakers. We also received critical commentary on manuscript drafts from three participants — one staff member, one faculty member, and one student — in the two focal programs. The preliminary account offered here is based on our reading, re-reading, and discussing this documentation in light of the concept of "civic capacity" described above, as we listened to participants reflect on their experience.

Four Stages in Building Civic Capacity

Our data suggest that the campus community members who participated in SaLT and ELP have built formal and informal structures as well as common goals around teaching and learning,

risks, and relationships. Participant reflections highlighted four recursive stages that contribute to the development of civic capacity on campus. Through all four stages we find people *uncovering*: typically inaccessible spaces, insights, and abilities; institutional structures and knowledge; personal knowledge, experience, and desire. This uncovering enables the *strengthening* of participants' relationships across traditional divisions of labor and communication. In turn, these programs enable access to resources (knowledge, classes, computers, libraries, perspectives, kitchens) by more members of the community, and nurture confidence that one can learn and change.

The four stages we see in the development of civic capacity are as follow.

1. Community members recognize their capacity as teachers and learners beyond their accustomed campus role.

2. Community members risk vulnerability in working beyond the roles and tasks within which hierarchies hold and sometimes appear to protect them.

3. Community members form more complex relationships through which they recognize one another as teachers and learners going beyond role-defined stereotypes.

4. Community members come to hold in common the hybrid roles of teacher and learner in addition to their prior and continuing campus roles.

Stage 1: Community members recognize their capacity as teachers and learners.
Because community members are accustomed to thinking of themselves in terms of their institutional roles, it is initially a challenge for many participants in the TLI to recognize their capacity as teachers and as learners. This is equally but differently true for faculty members, staff members, and students.

Faculty members and students who work together must push beyond the traditional teacher-learner dynamic where faculty members are the confident knowers and students the tentative, would-be recipients of knowledge. One faculty member articulated what many no doubt feel: "There's a need to overcome something that I would have thought had I not heard the students' thoughtful comments: 'What do they know?'" Another faculty member voiced a similar skepticism — and revision: "I wondered if our students can do the same things as a professional teaching and learning center, but I'm a convert." A third faculty member explained that working with a student consultant "gave me a sense of students being able and wanting to take certain pedagogical responsibility, and the counter of that is me taking a learning responsibility…and saying, 'I as a teacher am in the process of figuring it out.'"

A student preparing to assume the role of pedagogical consultant to a faculty member reflects the other side of this dynamic: "I was hesitant about my ability to do a good job given my lack of background in education, and given that I am just a student." Another student explained:

> At first I was kind of skeptical because you are a student and these profs have
>
> been doing this for quite some time they have advanced degrees, you're a kid with
>
> some college. And you are trying to come in and say, "Do this better, do that."
>
> You could easily be dismissed, and I didn't want to have that experience.

Students' questioning of their capacity as teachers is alleviated once they begin to work with faculty members and to recognize their capacity and their responsibility:

> I feel like now my role is more than just the student. In past discussions I've
>
> always been talking about what the profs do to us and it's been a one-way street.
>
> And now I am able to look at it as a relationship in the classroom; if we're

complaining about something that is going on, it's also the students' role to step

up and say something about that.

In the Empowering Learners Partnerships, both staff and students find challenge in taking

up the work and role of teacher. When we present information sessions to these groups, we often

hear initial uncertainty as people imagine what they might teach others. Comments such as, "I

don't know whether someone would be interested in what I can teach" or "I'm not sure what to

teach, but I want to learn everything!" are common. We also hear people struggle to define and

enact a teaching approach; as one staff member said:

> It's hard being a teacher. Trying to make sure that the students get out more than
>
> you put in — you don't want them to just regurgitate what you are teaching them;
>
> you want them to internalize it, sort of like when your math teacher asks you to
>
> show your work.

For this participant as for others, articulating and implementing a personal teaching philosophy is

an important part of the project. As another staff participant explained, "As a teacher I would

describe my role as a hands-on teacher, a patient teacher; I want them to learn; I want them to

visualize their learning. I hope that they take it to another level and develop what I taught them."

 For students as well as staff, it is exciting and initially challenging to think of themselves

as teachers. Students find that grappling with the age difference between themselves and their

partners sometimes poses a challenge. In the words of one student:

> From the time I was a child, I hardly ever challenged the idea that someone older
>
> than me necessarily deserved a leading role in whatever we were doing together…
>
> So when I attempted to take a leading role with Maria, my inner habits pushed

towards the front of my mind and I found it difficult to justify to myself why I

was acting so "boldly."

These comments reflect the fact that faculty members, staff members, and students alike must

recognize their capacity — both what is already within them and what they can take in — to

become something that their traditional roles do not readily suggest.

Stage 2: Community members become willing to risk vulnerability.

Recognizing that one has capacity is not the same as acting on that recognition. Thus a second

stage we identified is that of risking the vulnerability required to take up the new roles that the

partnerships create. One faculty member articulated the risk that these — and any learning —

partnerships require:

Yes, it makes you vulnerable, and in any relationship you don't gain anything if

you aren't vulnerable. This project is making a safer place to be vulnerable and

thus learn and grow and be out of your shell. So you can either be isolated and

safe or you can be vulnerable and connected.

For faculty, being vulnerable means not only accepting their capacity as learners but also

accepting students' capacities as teachers. Reflecting on having invited a student of color to

serve as a pedagogical consultant in the work of making her classroom more culturally

responsive, one faculty member mused: "On the one hand I felt that she had a certain legitimacy

as an informant, but it also made me feel more exposed — that she would be able to see all the

things that were problems." Embracing her vulnerability, this faculty member stated: "There is a

perspective that only she can provide, and it seems to me an important one. You could bring

experienced multicultural education people in and they wouldn't see the same things."

The student consultant in this dynamic is also vulnerable. As the student consultant who worked with this faculty member put it, she "could easily be dismissed." Once she began working with her faculty partner, though, risking being dismissed, she realized that it was in part her vulnerability that made her insights valuable: "I am honored that things I say have any value. It was so good that people wanted to hear and took in the perspective that I was bringing. It was so nice to think I had a perspective [my faculty partner] hadn't thought about."

For both faculty members and students, fear can recede if each party recognizes the capacity of the other person involved and one's own capacity as well. Faculty members taking up the role of learner and students taking up the role of teacher entail both a stepping out (although not entirely) of prescribed roles and a stepping into (although not entirely) of new roles.

The highly immediate, personal quality of the Empowering Learners Partnerships causes vulnerability in that it is a significant responsibility; as one student conveyed:

> It's been a very empowering experience and challenging experience, one that at
> times has made me feel on top of the world and at other times and has made me
> feel like I have let people down and discouraged. More so of the former, but like
> any experience it has two sides to it.

Staff and students also affirm that taking on the responsibility to teach invites vulnerability. In the words of a staff participant, "I didn't think that I could teach someone to do something. I feel relieved about it because I feel like I am helping somebody to understand."

Working in a one-on-one setting also brings about the uncertainty that accompanies a new role and relationship. One student explained:

I learned that students can tell when you are worried about something or when you are not quite sure how to explain a word/concept. [My partner] asked me to explain a word to him, but I hesitated and started to think, but before I even spoke, he said, "Calm down, spokino" (that means slow down in Bulgarian). I was surprised that he could tell that I was worried about how I was going to approach this particular word explanation.

The human connections that these faculty-student and staff-student partnerships nurture make possible the vulnerability necessary to move out of traditional role delineation and pedagogical solitude.

Stage 3: Community members form more complex relationships.

In the third stage, participants develop relationships through which they recognize one another as teachers and learners, personally and professionally.

Faculty members and student consultants talked about building a more collegial relationship through SaLT and, by extension, of making teaching and learning more of a shared responsibility. (For further discussion, see Cook-Sather, 2008). One faculty member said: "I definitely feel like there is more of a sense that we all own the class a little more." And a second faculty member explained:

I think I have a more collaborative model for the classroom…I feel there is a mode of professor as all-knowing font, and there's another possible model that I am kind of a classmate, and that somewhere in the middle there, somewhere in the middle is 'coach…I am feeling from this experience that I can move more toward the classmate side of the scale.

Student consultants make similar statements. Regarding the relationships between faculty members and students in their classes, student consultants offered comments such as: "Students are working with faculty to build courses, to build their learning experience." About relationships between faculty members and student consultants, one student consultant explained: "I found that this collaborative approach worked very well for us, that Professor Z and I were able to feel like colleagues who were working toward the same goal but from different sides of the problem." (For further discussion, see Cook-Sather, 2008.)

Through Empowering Learners Partnerships, sharing teaching and learning becomes a basis for mutual engagement. Students celebrate the growing ease they feel with their staff partners, which includes opportunities for shared humor and getting to know one another in more than one register:

> Although we've butted heads on a few issues . . . we have generally gotten along
> remarkably well. We have learned how to laugh with and at each other, and we
> have had some really interesting discussions. I realized (not for the first time) how
> many stereotypes there are about Americans, and we addressed those as well. A
> lot of our learning-teaching exchange (I will never take all the credit for teaching
> S., I learned as much from him as I taught him) was fairly undirected and spur-of-
> the-moment.

Another student in a staff-student partnership asserted: "You can think of your partnership as an opportunity to get to know a real student or staff member, instead of having to rely on stereotypes or preconceived notions about what 'kind' of person a student or a staff member might be." Going beyond stereotypes remains an essential goal and outcome of the Empowering Learners Program. As the student quoted just above commented:

When I first met [my staff partner], I had been somewhat briefed on his

background….It seems so strange to box someone's entire identity into a single

sentence denoting place of origin and original career. I have learned so much

about him since then, in retrospect. I have learned about his family, his friends,

his nicknames, his favorite foods, his life back in [another country].

Staff members, too, affirm the value of relationship they derive from participating in the

Empowering Learners Partnership. Many express appreciation for how this participation aligns

with their priorities and personalities. In the words of one participant:

Being a part of the [Bryn Mawr College] community is important to me. This is

like my second home. That is the way I am — I want to get to know everybody. If

someone needs something I want to do anything I can. It is like taking care of

kids, ELP is a great place for me. I can utilize the nurturing part of me.

As another staff member explained:

I can't say enough about what this experience has given me: more confidence

about computers and my knowledge of them, a chance to cook for fun and

prepare some really delicious food . . . and most specially, the chance to get to

know a student and work with her …. I feel so very lucky to have gotten the

chance to get to know such an incredible young woman and to be able to call her

my friend.

The sense of warmth, enjoyment, and friendship comes through clearly in these excerpts.

These life-affirming as well as educative experiences enable the expansion of what differently

positioned people have in common.

Stage 4: Community members recognize shared, hybrid roles in one another.

At this stage, community members come to hold in common the hybrid roles of teacher and learner in addition to their prior roles on campus and beyond.

Building on the more collegial relationships they develop through their partnerships, faculty members sometimes come to see student consultants as sharing aspects of the role of teacher:

> Recently I became aware that I was also (not consciously until I realized it by saying it to her) thinking of [my student consultant] as a kind of co-teacher, in the sense that when she was sitting in a small group, I wouldn't drop in on that group since she was already there. Now I'm thinking that there are ways that we are co-teaching.

And a student consultant asserted a different version of this reconceptualization: "We are all just teachers and learners in this community together."

A student who worked with a staff member articulated a very similar insight. Describing a partnership in which she taught computing while her staff member taught her craft-making, a student reflected:

> I barely noticed a difference: we were both teaching and learning at the same time; I never felt like it was one or the other. When we had an activity, we didn't try to each own the activity. One example: we were working on computers, doing Word, and we started playing with the different colors. We were in the program but she was teaching me art within the program. It was my medium to teach but we were both teaching.

The realization that that they have the roles of teacher and learner in common is one form of capacity building that can result from this work. Another is a "re-seeing," from a different

angle, of the community in which participants previously functioned uncritically. A student who worked with a faculty member said: "I certainly learned a lot more about the teaching aspect than I was expecting. I didn't realize there was so much work involved in thinking about teaching." And a student who participated in an Empowering Learners Partnership explained:

> I realized something with great surprise . . . I have been a student worker at [one of
> our dining halls] for three years, I consider the full-time workers of [the dining hall]
> to be dear friends of mine who mean quite a lot to me. And yet I have never had the
> opportunity to enter their communities outside of school. It was so good for me to
> be able to enter a community of [my partner's], especially something so special and
> important to him as his church community, and to walk through the neighborhood
> that surrounds his church. It is the literal experience of getting to know someone on
> their home turf, on their terms, seeing their world from their perspective. And wow,
> [my partner] is constantly on student turf, seeing the world from that perspective.
> What an imbalance. I feel like I am counteracting that imbalance just a bit.

These experiences lead staff and students to re-think the resources of the College. Sharing spaces such as libraries, the computing center, campus kitchens, the gym, and the Facilities Department workshop has the effect of opening the campus — paradoxically, to people already deeply invested in it. Program participation also gives people new ideas about ways to affiliate, as in the following staff comment:

> It would be cool to have a database or something to that effect where members of
> the community could look each other up and make their own connections. Kind of
> a like a staff directory, an ELP directory. Really in my opinion those could make

it better, and it seems that moves are being made to implement them, it's just a

baby. More people are hearing about it and getting involved.

The TLI is collaborating with community members to pursue some of these new ideas, including

an ELP partnership on "Green Housekeeping" between members of the Housekeeping

Department, the Biology Department, and the student environmental club.

Conclusion: Risks, Challenges, and Possibilities

Building capacity presents challenges to faculty, students, and staff that in most cases are still too

abstract to delineate. They could range, we imagine, from the vulnerabilities that all of the

constituent groups need to expose in order to teach and to learn. We can only speculate that at

some point some faculty members might wish to reverse course if they feel too vulnerable, and

some students might withdraw or show a decrease in confidence were this to happen. Some

community members, when faced with the possibility of pedagogical dialogue among differently

positioned people — or of change — might retreat to the familiarity of established structures.

On the contrary, students who experience the empowerment and agency these programs support

might grow frustrated with the more status-quo models they experience at the College and

elsewhere. However, the structures that we have put in place — the regular meetings, the

seminars, the one-to-one consultations — all seem to have worked against these possible

tendencies, as is evidenced by the continual rise in participation, the support from internal and

external funding, and the thoughtful, engaged reflection of participants.

In relation to the Empowering Learners Partnership, difficult questions also arise. What

are the hidden costs to their co-workers and supervisors of the released time that affords staff

members these opportunities, and how can we continue to broaden communication channels so

as to share the weight of these costs? How can we continue to work with and against the

constraints of time and scheduling, to ensure that staff with less institutional power and less

flexibility of schedule gain and maintain consistent voice in establishing and assessing program

priorities? All of the evidence to date points to a willingness, even eagerness, of all parties to

make these partnerships work, but each new semester and set of partnerships brings new

challenges.

Civic capacity as we conceptualize and attempt to illustrate it here grows as people

become open and vulnerable to the difference and uniqueness, vulnerability and strength, of

other people and their social experiences. It remains an open question what other changes the

relationships discussed here might foster. What is clear at this point is that, as participants move

through the four recursive stages we discuss here, supported in significant ways by the

administration of the institution, they are helping the campus community to reinterpret the

College as a site of educational opportunity. This analysis offered by a student who participated

in both the faculty and staff TLI partnerships describes and illustrates how civic capacity might

continue to grow on the campus:

> On the matter of implications of the TLI program for our college culture, I am
>
> reminded of several ideas I have encountered as a sociology student. . . . The first
>
> idea borrowed from sociology is that of labeling theory. . . . [L]abels can reinforce
>
> identities that limit and inhibit individuals from being understood in the full range
>
> of possibilities for what they can be, unless an opportunity arises that can change
>
> that label through a different context. The TLI program has served to change that
>
> context and subsequently the labels that members of this community are usually
>
> limited to. The program functions this way simply by putting students and staff in
>
> relationships where they learn and use each other's name, bringing an identity to

life where previously only the label of "student" or "staff person" was known. Secondly, it provides the new identities of "learner" and "teacher" to each member of the partnership, allowing students and staff members to conceive of themselves and each other in new ways.

Building capacity requires embracing a kind of vulnerability that leads to a different way of understanding the skills and roles of each other member of the community. It fosters respect between and among differently positioned people whose roles in the institution typically place them in hierarchical relationship to one another. It can model egalitarian, empowering possibilities that students carry out with them from the College. And it can help to nudge institutions of higher learning towards realizing the ideal of an all-inclusive community of learners, filled with teachers and learners in all of its job classifications and categories.

Acknowledgements

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