

Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

Volume 1

Issue 41 *Pedagogical Partnerships: Creating and Cultivating Authentic Relationships in Minority-Serving Institutions*

Article 4

September 2023

R.E.A.P.: Reciprocal Education Academic Partnership

Kimberly White-Glenn
Alabama A&M University

Byron Wesley Jr.
Alabama A&M University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tithe>



Part of the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

White-Glenn, Kimberly and Wesley, Byron Jr. "R.E.A.P.: Reciprocal Education Academic Partnership," *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*: Iss. 41 (2023), <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tithe/vol1/iss41/4>

R.E.A.P.: RECIPROCAL EDUCATIONAL ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP

Kimberly White-Glenn, Assistant Professor, Reading/Literacy, College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences, Alabama A&M University

Byron Wesley Jr., Language Arts Education Major, College of Humanities and Behavioral Science, Alabama A&M University

In the early 1970s, *The Paper Chase* was a popular television series. This series dramatized the lectures of sharp-witted Professor Charles Kingsfield. This all-knowing law professor pulled, prodded, and probed his students' minds until *he* made them critical thinkers who would one day be successful in the law profession. Dialogue from an episode expressed Kingfield's philosophy: "I train your mind! You come in here with a skull full of mush, and you leave thinking like a lawyer." Kingfield's motif demonstrated an accepted model for an ivy league university law professor. This motif of the omniscient professor represented a hallmark in western education as the professor held the power.

Historically, western society's educational system designed for the white male children of the elite often featured a taskmaster as an educator. A stern professor like Kingsfield sat high (at the top of the podium) in the ivory tower. He was the sage on the stage; what he said was proverbial law, and his students diligently paid attention to him and him only. Sitting in Kingfield's lecture hall were anxiety-ridden students who feared him. When asked or forced to answer questions, many of the college students were overwhelmed with anxiety. Although his students may have been successful in their careers, this educational design was far from a partnership. The professor and undergraduates shared no power, and reciprocity was absent. Nevertheless, this concept of teaching and learning has prevailed in many institutions of higher education. The professor holds the power and prestige, and he or she rarely shares either.

The concept of educational partnerships, however, was more prevalent in non-western societies where the educator shared some intellectual power with the student (Hilliard, 1997). Partnering in education expressed in the scholarship of theorists like Asa Hilliard remained in the margins, and this model did not appear in most mainstream textbooks. Hilliard's scholarship posited a different educational philosophy with the potential to reawaken the minds of marginalized students and engage in educational respect and reciprocity. Hilliard (1997) found:

in the African tradition, it is the role of the teacher to appeal to the intellect, humanity, and the spirituality in their students. To make such an appeal, one must first be convinced of the inherent intellectual capacity, humanity, physical capability, and spiritual character of students. (p. 110)

The "reawakened" professor refuses to view herself or himself as the only intellectual force to be reckoned with; the student is also viewed as an intellectual force. These forces practice education as a true meeting of minds. Accomplishing this type of educational reciprocity requires a partnership between the two parties; it also challenges and reassesses old notions of who the university is for, and who leads in it.

Partnering Pedagogy (Kimberley White-Glenn)

Prior to entering academia, I was a language arts educator. Instinctively, I have always taught from a student-centered paradigm. Although I began my career as an eighth-grade educator, my students were addressed as Mr. or Ms. The eighth graders may not have been my equals, but they were not treated as my subordinates. I never believed the classroom was about me, and this is where my philosophy of partnering pedagogy burgeoned.

After more than a decade of teaching 8th grade, I became an adjunct at Alabama A&M University (AAMU), which is a public, historically Black university located in Huntsville, Alabama. The current enrollment is approximately 6,000 students. Founded in 1875, by a former slave, William Hooper Council, AAMU is the home of many proud alums affectionally known as the bulldogs. One of AAMU's founding missions is education. The university's mission continues, and it is expressed in the motto: *service is sovereignty*.

Later, I accepted a full-time position as an instructor where I taught college reading courses. While teaching at AAMU, I entered the doctoral program, and I examined the reading abilities and attitudes of African-American male college readers to explore if an infusion in reading curricula could improve reading scores. Undergraduates became my partners as I solicited questions via interviews, feedback, focus groups, and surveys on what texts and instructional methods were beneficial for them. After I adjusted the traditional curricula, reading scores improved on three post-course assessments. This pedagogical partnering suggested beneficial student learning outcomes on qualitative and quantitative measures. When college students shared insight into the content they were to learn, underachievement reversed.

In addition to teaching reading courses, I taught educational courses. Being a mother of three sons, an area of concern flourished into academic research. I became immersed in educational advocacy on the plight of many African-American males. Much of my work and motivation emerged as I read Jawanza Kunjufu's books. In the early 1980s, Kunjufu's voice was one of the handful of voices writing, speaking, examining, partnering with, and providing solutions to the issues African-American males encountered both in and out of school settings. Kunjufu's name was cited in my methods courses, and teacher candidates were encouraged to read his books, watch his videos, and attend his townhall meetings.

In 2021, I returned to AAMU. In the *Reading in the Content Area* course, my morning section of the course overflowed with African-American male teacher candidates. During a lecture towards the end of the semester, I mentioned certain theorists who influenced my pedagogy, and intellectual inquiry. I cited Kunjufu, and to my surprise, one of the teacher candidates, Byron Wesley Jr., looked up, came to the white board, and wrote "KUNJUFU." Mr. Wesley's father read, and he also had Byron read, Jawanza's books during his son's formative years. I knew then this student and I had a cognitive connection.

Later, I discovered that Byron participated in various teams at AAMU, such as the Honda Campus All Star Challenge National Trivia Team. During the same academic year, I assisted a university sponsor in a contest led by the city of Birmingham, Alabama, during the Magic City Classic. The "classic" is one of the largest rivalries in Black college football. Inner state rivals,

the Alabama State Hornets and the Alabama A&M Bulldogs, descend on Birmingham and play a football game, which began in 1924. During the week of the classic, there is a plethora of community activities. Byron emerged as one of AAMU's leaders in a contest centered on how to pandemic proof education. His computer savviness and intellect proved to be an asset to the team, and the team won first place.

For the second time, Mr. Wesley and I were partners in education. Unlike the semester when Byron was enrolled in my method's course, Byron took the lead, and I was a partner with a faculty member who was the sponsor. The teacher had become the student, and I offered observations from the sidelines. My advice was limited to streamlining the ideas he and the other members of the winning team presented. This out-of-school partnership prevailed as the students took the ownership. Evidenced in the team's winning outcome, undergraduates provided solutions to a global crisis when inquiry emerged from their problem-solving abilities.

R.E.A.P: A Pedagogical Partnership (*Kimberley White-Glenn*)

During the 2022 Fall semester at AAMU, I entered a pedagogical partnership under a grant from Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED). The grant, *Reciprocal Educational Academic Partnership (R.E.A.P)*, proposed to improve technology as an engagement tool in my *Reading in the Content Area* methods course. My student partner, Byron Wesley Jr., successfully completed the course in Fall 2021, which made him knowledgeable of the course content. Mr. Wesley's new role as "interpreter of and authority on" (Jensen, 2003) the course changed the power dynamics in academia. Because of his experience and preparation for the final phase of the program—student internship—our focus would be on developing engaging course content. In our R.E.A.P. pedagogical partnership, I valued Mr. Wesley for his knowledge, expertise, and perspectives on teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, Bahti, & Ntem. 2019).

Fortunately, Byron Wesley is a Language Arts major and is familiar with the course's academic language, content, strategies, and requirements. As my academic partner, Byron encouraged me to not revert to the sage-on-the-stage model, which, as a public speaker, is my natural modality. My gravest concern centered on not lecturing for three hours due to a time change in the schedule to assure enough days to complete the field experiences component for education majors. Mr. Wesley's feedback through weekly conversations followed his course observations and were presented in the form of appreciations ("You did this well, and I like") and in coaching ("You could consider" ...) as outlined in the research (Stone, 2014). We became co-creators in my teaching and learning approaches, and in my presentations (Cook-Sather, Bahti, & Ntem, 2019). I welcomed Byron's positive feedback during our debriefings after the course sessions, and during our bi-monthly Zoom meetings where I shared my plans. I then incorporated Bryon's suggestions within the course content for upcoming class sessions.

Like many educators, I find auditory delivery my natural and most comfortable modality, but it is not the only modality 21st students acquire, transfer, and retain knowledge with. Initially, I hoped to begin my journey in our partnership by entering the world of educational virtual reality, but that lofty goal was not met. However, the insight offered from my pedagogical partner into student engagement from a student's perspective was the highlight of our partnering, and it

allowed me to gain perspectives I could not achieve from my vantage point nor on my own (Cook-Sather, Bahti, & Ntem, 2019).

Partnering Pedagogy (Byron Wesley Jr.)

During the Fall 2022 semester, I worked with BranchED in forming a pedagogical partnership with faculty member Dr. Kimberly Glenn at Alabama A&M University. This partnership was formed with a focus on exploring the integration of technology into lessons and the effect of that integration on student engagement and learning in Dr. Glenn's *SED 409: Teaching Reading in the Content Area* course. This course is a requirement for all secondary education majors seeking certification. We emphasized student engagement because the class is three hours long, and it contains a lot of content that needs to be learned over the semester. We agreed that engagement should include students who were actively paying attention, taking notes, observing the professor's actions, and interacting with the professor. Students should also respond to questions with genuine insight and express interest in the discussion. As a result of our choice of this focus, we first brainstormed and researched certain websites and programs that would prove to be beneficial for learning. We also discussed integrating these programs into Dr. Glenn's lessons without muddling the effectiveness of her teaching. The goal at that point was to strike a balance between technology and lecture-based discussion to ensure the former is not used as a gimmick for the latter.

During the beginning of the semester, we opted to increase the use of technology gradually throughout the semester to provide Dr. Glenn with an adjustment period and to receive initial feedback from the students. The first day of class was a discussion about the syllabus and expectations, so little technology was used. Students did pay attention and respond, but it seemed forced to keep the class moving. After discussing our findings, Dr. Glenn and I decided to place a focus on visuals (videos, handouts, large post-it notes, infographics, diagrams, and charts) as a reference for the students. This was highly successful as students were more engaged and responsive.

In addition, discussion, movement, and cooperative strategies transferable to the content areas of the different undergraduates were more prevalent throughout the class. *Reading in the Content Area* exposes education majors to content-area reading strategies to be replicated in the classroom. We selected strategies that facilitated active engagement. After the initial course observations, we agreed Thinking Maps, cognitive and physical breaks, and visual aids were the four frameworks needed for every lecture and then content could follow. These were selected to prevent disengagement in the three-hour weekly course. I also received some feedback from the students in the course, and they wanted visual aids for all information presented. As a student, I believe this is crucial for retention of content. Towards the end of the semester, we developed a system (exit slips, praises, and quick writes) in which students and the teacher gave feedback to each other with each lesson and my observations, which helped tailor Dr. Glenn's lessons to be more effective and engaging.

This pedagogical partnership's structure was very collaborative, which was different for me. In addition to my discussions with Dr. Glenn during our Zoom meetings, and debriefs after her course sessions, I also discussed my observations with a cohort of other students who were also participating in pedagogical partnerships as we figured out the best ways to communicate and

optimize our own pedagogical partnerships. This experience fostered collaboration with other college students hailing from different backgrounds. We discussed observations from our partnerships as well as what went well in the projects. I had a very good experience, and I relished the opportunities to listen to different perspectives as the peer groupings broadened my horizons. This experience provided an intricate view into learning how teachers adapt, the importance of communication, and impact of technology on students.

My faculty partner and I initially wanted to explore the field of virtual reality in education, but unfortunately schedules conflicted, and we were unable to do that. Despite the pivot, this experience was very enjoyable and insightful, and I learned a lot about pedagogy, planning, and pedagogical research. Takeaways included learning to communicate with a professor in a non-threatening manner and from a non-judgmental stance where my voice mattered. Watching the professor commit to openness and continuous improvement aligns with what all educators can incorporate in their content areas. The pedagogical partnership can help contribute to our overall goal of effective education while inviting all parties to have a place at the table as well as a voice where they eat and sit.

Staying Committed to Partnerships (*Kimberley White-Glenn*)

As a trainer of teacher candidates who must pass high-stakes assessments to gain their teacher certifications, I commit to pedagogical partnership. Because there are so many standards educational majors must meet, and course requirements from the state department and accreditation agencies, I am tempted to lecture as I try and cover the wealth of information the teacher candidates need. However, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* challenges my educational philosophy, and I reread his book to remind myself of my role as an educator and partner. Freire's (1970) scholarship continues to affirm the need for educational partnership between teachers and students. Freire found the "banking concept" (prevalent in higher education) is the norm in many lecture halls and is a tool of oppression. I am challenged to try to disseminate all the information I can, while the students sit passively and make mental withdrawals from my bank of knowledge. Freire asserted, "The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize concepts narrated by the teacher." As I seek a reciprocal relationship in my courses, I desire student-centered outcomes attained by the students, for my students, and with the students input to avoid oppressive pedagogy. Students cannot be marginalized or ignored in any educational setting. Students face new crisis, and students must find their own answers and solutions. Freire wrote, "Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge." Pedagogical partnerships facilitate students' problem solving and active participation in the world they live in, and in the world they will one day lead.

Additionally, Ritchhart's (2002) *Intellectual Character* compels educators to enlist others in our practices. "A group of colleagues can act to prompt inquiry, encourage reflection, push thinking, and hold each other accountable for taking action." Professional conversations among colleagues are normative, but there is too often an omission of two-sided conversations among professors and undergraduates. What engagement means to a student, and what it means in the theoretical mind of the professor are not always the same. As a pedagogical partner, I solicit questions, listen carefully, and foster discourse with students as I would a colleague.

Conclusion

Kimberley White-Glenn: The R.E.A.P between an assistant professor and a teacher candidate met some of its goals and some goals that were not initially specified. I selected Byron Wesley, Jr. because of his technological expertise, intellect, and prior completion of this course. I desired to enter the world of simulations and virtual reality, but time and technology did not allow it. Although there were instances where I called upon Mr. Wesley to be the “tech guy,” his roles as the silent partner, observer, and even encourager to the course participants were invaluable. Early in the partnership, Mr. Wesley offered encouragement as the teacher candidates were overwhelmed by the Praxis assessments, field experiences hours, course work, and other requirements for certifications (while some were trying to also balance employment). Byron arose as a coach to the undergraduates, and because he had completed those requirements, his advice was reassuring. Byron Wesley’s observations and feedback led to a more engaging course with emails and course evaluations expressing student enjoyment at the end of the course.

Bryon Wesley: We need the partnership between teacher and student to gain a unique perspective and to incorporate feedback for continuous academic improvement. Student partners can relate to how their peers feel, and they can give an accurate interpretation of what is effective in a lesson, and what needs improvement. As a result, teachers can incorporate this feedback in future lessons so that students are engaged and are learning more effectively.

Final Thought

The days of the all-knowing law professor have not completely diminished. The professor continues to hold and possess prestige, and the power. However, shared power in academic settings needs an awakening. Shared power with students assures academic collaboration, reciprocity, and real learning. Humanizing education is a powerful paradigm that welcomes students to the tables we set for them while allowing the tables to be theirs as well as ours. Their insight and opinions are warranted as teacher candidates will enter unprecedented and uncharted territories. Finally, this “means seeing knowledge not as a static but as a creative project, something that grows and advances, an artwork. But that’s precisely what makes it worthwhile,” stated Minna Salami (2020).

References

- Cook-Sather, A., Bahti, M., & Ntem, A. (2019). *Pedagogical Partnerships: A How-to Guide for Faculty, Students, and Academic Developers in Higher Education*. Elon University Center for Engaged Teaching Open Access Series.
<https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/books/pedagogical-partnerships/>
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. New York, London. Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.

Hilliard, A (1997). *SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind*. Gainesville, Florida. Makare Publishing.

Jensen, D. (2003). *Walking on Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*. White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

Ritchhart, R. (2002). *Intellectual Character: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Get it*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Salami, M. (2020). *Sensuous Knowledge*. New York, NY. Amistad.

Stone, H. &. (2014). *Thanks for the Feedback: The Art and Science of Receiving Feedback Well*. New York: Penguin.