

ARTICLE

‘Locations of Possibility’: Critical Perspectives on Partnership***Rhiannon M. Cates^a, Mariah R. Madigan^b, and Vicki L. Reitenauer^c**^a Portland State University Library Special Collections & University Archives^b Portland State University^c Portland State University Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies DepartmentContact: rhicates@pdx.edu

ABSTRACT

This article offers critical perspectives on collaborative partnerships and feminist teaching that revise paradigms of power, prioritize student agency, enrich curriculum and scholarship, and sustain empowered communities of learning that challenge institutional compartmentalization. The authors reflect on how co-created curriculum can catalyze new professional partnerships that in turn contribute to refreshed learning experiences and communities. This article presents evidence of how a partnership orientation effectively encompasses an ethic and practice of feminist teaching, posits a framework of feminist pedagogy and praxis into the discourse of partnership, and exemplifies possibilities of these practices as important steps towards a (re)vision of liberatory learning.

KEYWORDS

critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, reflective practice, students as partners, student partnership

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (hooks, 1994, p. 207)

Learning, teaching, and working in institutions of higher education can be compartmentalized, demoralizing, and alienating experiences. Students, faculty, and staff are governed by notions of the primacy of individual achievement earned through successful negotiations within systems stratified by power relations and may well experience their lives to be marked by missed and missing connections, appeals to recognition by authority figures, and less-than-meaningful tasks (Basile, 2016; Freire, 2000; hooks, 1994).

As bell hooks suggests in the quote above, it doesn't have to be this way—and those of us who engage in partnership practices grounded in critical perspectives and approaches (including the authors of this article) may well have experienced the co-created paradises of transgressive learning spaces towards which hooks points (Fitzmaurice & Reitenauer, 2017; hooks, 1994; hooks, 2003; Reitenauer, 2017). This article explores the shared values of collaborative partnerships and feminist teaching as they serve to revise paradigms of power and prioritize student agency, enrich curriculum and scholarship, and sustain reciprocally empowered learning communities that challenge institutional compartmentalization. In addition, we reflect upon how co-created curriculum catalyzes new professional partnerships that in turn contribute to refreshed learning experiences and communities. Through this research, we mean to demonstrate how a partnership orientation encompasses an ethic and practice of feminist teaching and enter a framework of feminist pedagogy and praxis into conversations of partnership in order to exemplify possibilities of these practices as important steps towards a (re)vision of liberatory learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To construct an understanding of the principles integral to the practice of partnership, we looked to its literature to identify themes that characterize successful and equitable collaboration. We find it useful to consider partnership “a process rather than a product,” which represents a conceptual approach that sees collegial relationships as intentional means to achieve certain goals (Kehler, Verwoord, & Smith, 2017, p. 5). A defined pedagogical process, partnership is “motivated by a desire to enhance the student voice in higher education, to challenge traditional institutional structures, and to disrupt traditional student-faculty power relations” (Kehler et al., 2017, p. 4). Acknowledging the conventional roles that students and faculty are positioned to adopt (in which faculty perform as experts and students as blank slates), the three core principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are especially imperative to sustainable and equitable partnerships (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014). “Genuine partnership,” in this sense, is distinguished from general collaborative labor by the prioritization of and intention to ensure equity in its exchanges and outcomes, in contrast to traditional educational paradigms that often fail to foster cultures of respect and mutuality (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, p. 3).

Reciprocity in partnership requires that “the perspectives and contributions made by partners are equally valued and respected and that all participants have an equal opportunity to contribute” in the process (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, p. 7). This ensures that experiences of partnership are, ideally, grounded in authentic and equitable collaboration. The responsibility inherent in genuine partnership provides students with opportunities to assume more active

positions in their learning and asks faculty and others invested in this practice to reconceptualize their authority (Cook-Sather, 2015; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). As it engages “experiences and expertise into dialogue in ways that inform and support more intentional action,” partnership is simultaneously sustained by and serves to enhance these foundational themes of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Cook-Sather et al., p. 7).

Critical and feminist pedagogies have emerged as responsive tools for resisting “control-oriented pedagogy dominating educational thought and practice” and as challenges to “the emphasis on efficiency and objectivity that perpetuate the domination of masculine rationality,” (Scering, 1997, p. 62). In doing so, critical and feminist pedagogies are understood as “different way[s] of thinking about the relationship of schools and society and the hierarchical social relations for teaching and learning contexts” (Scering, 1997, p. 62). In other words, a framework of feminist teaching is motivated by the same institutional and intellectual conditions that call for a critically informed notion of student partnership.

At its heart, a feminist pedagogical approach functions to identify and reject imbalanced and “rigid teacher-student relations” as well as “individualistic views” of knowledge and success, reaching instead for accountability to shared success through “active construction of connected and critical ways of knowing” (Scering, 1997, p. 65). In practice, critical and feminist pedagogies present a “very different perception of the classroom than that where teachers have responsibility for teaching and students for learning” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 14). Instead, agency is both an integral value and superlative result of collaborative learning that tasks each participant with “responsibility arising out of the relationships” they share as members of a larger intentional learning community (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 14). Framed this way, instructors can strategize methods to redistribute their allotted power to “enhance both autonomy and mutuality” and empower students to be better positioned and prepared to act as agents of their learning (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 10). When students are asked to claim, rather than passively receive, an education, their stake in the process and product of their learning is renewed (Rich, 1979). As outcomes and responsibilities of teaching are shared and developed collaboratively, the need for mutual, equitable accountability replaces the static academic standard of instructor as sole and absolute authority.

A critical pedagogy informed by a commitment to enhance agency and revise power imbalances “provides a model of interrelationships that can be incorporated into a developing vision of a world in which hierarchical oppressive relationships are exchanged for autonomy within a community that celebrates difference” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 11). Establishing and sustaining opportunities for students to practice accountability to themselves and to their instructors and colleagues as they navigate and achieve their education reimagines the learning community as a site of “the practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994, p. 207).

METHODS

The authors of this article are a student, a library staff person, and a faculty member who first worked together in an Introduction to Women’s Studies course at Portland State University (PSU) in the Fall term of 2015. Early in the term, the 30 students in the course, taught by Vicki, visited our University Library for an in-class practice session to develop their research

skills and introduce them to primary sources held in Special Collections, including materials ranging from medieval manuscripts to contemporary records of local community activism. Each student was invited to conduct further research in support of an individual project through continuing engagement with participating staff members, including those working with these archival collections and artifacts.

A particularly fruitful connection developed as Mariah, the student, recognized the treasures available to her through Special Collections and developed her project in close collaboration with Rhiannon, Library staff. The outstanding results of this engagement led us to develop this article, as we recognized that the partnership we have cultivated and cherish shines a light on the possibilities that reside at the intersections of feminist pedagogy and partnership practice, an important example of student-faculty (and, in our case, student-faculty-professional) partnership as a transgressive and liberatory practice.

The methods we developed for this research project followed from the pedagogical principles embedded in the course in which we met. That is to say, our reflective investigation into the nature and meaning of our partnership experience was itself a fully collaborative process. Through multiple in-person gatherings, we thought and felt and acted our way through this process collectively, much as we had thought and felt and acted our way collectively through our shared course. Our work as researchers began with an exploratory meeting initiated by Vicki, who recognized the potential importance of telling our partnership story. We quickly established our interest in continuing our partnership, now as researchers and co-authors, and we determined that our first step would be to undertake a review of partnership and pedagogical texts. At a second meeting, we shared our insights from that review, and we tentatively outlined a grounding theoretical framework (namely, a revisioning of Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten's *respect, reciprocity, and responsibility* framework) that reflected our own lived experiences as engaged partners in teaching and learning. A third meeting found us entering this framework into conversation with a selection of the feminist voices and values that inform our praxis, during which we traced the ways in which a partnership model is ideally positioned to embody and enact critical pedagogy.

At our final meeting before writing, we decided to construct the bulk of this article as a dialogue of individually authored sections. Our choice of this narrative model is intentional, informed by a feminist recognition of the subjective self as a valuable source of knowledge and of the "use of personal experience as data [as] a significant and subversive act in the process of constructing new methods and theories" (Foss & Foss, 1993, p. 42).

Our methods for this project were informed by our dedication to making knowledge together while simultaneously honoring each partner's voice and unique positionality within this larger collaborative endeavor. In practice, this ensures that the contents of each narrative were preserved as they were contributed: they were edited and expanded only after discussion and eventual consensus. Through this union of collaborative analytical research and experiential narrative, and by presenting this project itself as an example of partnership practice in action, our intention was to illuminate critical insights about the implications of feminist teaching and thinking for partnership, and of feminist partnership for liberatory learning.

Deeply inspired by the work of Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014), we chose to reframe their themes of *respect*, *reciprocity*, and *responsibility* in the more explicitly feminist terms of *agency*, *accountability*, and *affinity*. We intended, through this recasting, to tell the story of our particular critical partnership grounded in our appreciation of the scholars (of both partnership and feminist theory and practice) whose contributions have made our work possible.

THE PARTNERS REFLECT

In this section, we share our individual reflections on our orientation to, experience of, and long-term takeaways from the partnering we engaged in through Introduction to Women's Studies. First, the instructor, Vicki, shares the pedagogical foundation for the course as rooted in a feminist praxis interested in *accountability* both inside and outside the classroom, as well as the distinct curricular features of this course that grounded the partnering practice. Next, Mariah, the student, offers her perspectives on the transformation from student-being-acted-upon to student expressing *agency* in claiming her education, and the ways this claiming has continued to shape her trajectory. Finally, Rhiannon, professional library staff and graduate of the department sponsoring the course, reflects on the power of *affinity* in creating networks of caring relationships that sustain a critical partnership orientation among colleagues beyond discrete partnering events.

Critical perspective: Accountability (Vicki, faculty partner)

Long before I became a faculty member in a department that engages in critical interdisciplinary studies—in my case, women, gender, and sexuality studies—I have been compelled to understand the ways power is felt, understood, and acted upon by persons in relationship with others. As a worker in the domestic violence and reproductive health fields, my personal preoccupation with power found expression in the daily ways I went about my tasks. For example, in accompanying a person seeking a protection order in court or talking with a teen about her birth control options, I attempted to enact a critical praxis (meaning the reciprocating relationship of practice and theory). I sought to understand the oppressive power dynamics of person-seeking-services and person-empowered-to-serve and the ways that power is held in hands that can be open or closed, thus disrupting the mechanisms that replicate these inequitable power relations from the start. That is to say, as a person institutionally empowered to enact service in a power-over way, I recognized a responsibility not only to refuse and resist that co-optation into an oppressive system, but to actively seek to transform the power-over dynamic which attends unjust systems through the redistribution of power and to practice accountability for the impact of my actions in so doing.

When I began teaching at the University, what had been the daily stuff of my work became deeply and unsettlingly distilled in ways I hadn't anticipated. Now I was not only seeking to act justly in transactional encounters within community-based settings, but I was operating within a critical field full of theorizing about power and its expression. Here in the academy, the locus of a particular kind of knowledge production and transfer, I experienced a keen sense that the stakes had been profoundly raised. How was I to engage in this fraught

endeavor of teaching with any integrity unless and until I challenged the very foundation of my professorial engagement with the teaching and-learning proposition?

As an instructor in a college classroom, I have an extraordinary amount of power vested in me by my institution. I get to decide what the content of any given course should be, and I get to communicate to students that this is not actually a choice but a foregone conclusion. I get to decide whether to take up every moment of our class time lecturing, save the hours I give exams and require students to repeat back to me what I've been saying to them. I get to decide how to reward or punish them for how well they perform for me.

How, then, to be accountable for this power—to myself, to students, to colleagues, to the world? If I say that I am committed to working for change, to seeking to enact social justice in the spheres in which I operate, how might I and must I practice accountability inside the classroom, and out?

The collaboration at the heart of this article provides a micro-view of the pedagogical commitments I attempt to engage in all of my courses. At the heart of this commitment is a foundational understanding of students as partners in a learning community's every moment. Quite fundamentally, there is no teaching without learning—so my desire to be a channel for some change to happen, for some learning and growth to transpire, can only be accomplished if there is agreement among us to learn. The teaching and learning proposition, then, begins with learning, with the tacit agreement of those gathered to open themselves up to what might be changed in them through their engagement with the experience at hand. In this view, partnership is not only useful for genuine learning to happen, it is required—a necessary condition for the transformations in knowing that constitute learning.

What I'm doing, then, as I prepare a course and unfold that preparation in the classroom, is to become accountable to my students for the power I hold to frame and initiate an experience in which I am asking them to choose to participate. Because only each one of them can know how they best might learn through this experience that has been framed by me and my power, I have, over time, come to practice accountability for my power and to redistribute that power within the learning community through a number of pedagogical practices:

- Collaborative development of course content: As Mariah and Rhiannon share below, each of them (and all of the students in the course) contribute to course content in essential ways. Rhiannon regularly visits class to share strategies and approaches for conducting research and communicating it to an audience, and she and her library colleagues host our class for an in-depth look at the Special Collections, among other resources. Mariah and her colleagues in the class teach us content through sharing their projects and linking their chosen topics to the overarching themes of the course, among other content-contributing assignments. My intention in this pedagogical intervention is to disrupt students' expectations that course content is a fixed and impenetrable force that acts upon them and to catalyze students' active participation in designing course content as curators of knowledge.

- Collaborative sharing of the facilitation of course activities, on both individual and group levels: In addition to formally assuming the role of teacher during the presentation of each individual project, students also share responsibility for opening each class session in the manner of their choosing (such as a check-in, a video and discussion, or a freewrite). Students also engage in collaborative co-teaching, as they self-select a book group in which they discuss the text, design an interactive class session to engage their colleagues around its themes, co-facilitate that session, and evaluate their achievements. If “how we teach is what we teach,” as a colleague insightfully said (D. Osborn, personal communication, March 11, 2015), then teaching a critical interrogation of power in a learning space requires a sharing of power within that space.
- Individually-designed projects, with scaffolded steps: There is no way I could ever come up with the rich panoply of projects that students design and develop when offered the power to name and pursue what speaks most deeply to them. As Mariah’s project (described below) evidences, the inherent meaningfulness of intellectual, emotional, and behavioral engagement with a project skyrockets when that project is self-selected and pursued with steadiness and discipline. The results, presented within the group, allow us all to learn not only from the content developed, but also from the lived experience of producing and sharing knowledge.
- Individual goal-setting for learning and self-grading of engagement and achievement: Certainly the most vital practice I have developed for being accountable for my power in the classroom, and arguably the most impactful mechanism for students to experience, is self-grading. Self-grading as a foundation for liberatory learning is a core feature of the grounding of my courses in a principle of partnership. The liberatory learning that attends this practice has been mine as well as students’, as my freedom from being required to ultimately express my power in the form of a grade leaves me available for delight, astonishment, and gratitude for the learning that I am witness to and, reciprocally, that I learn from. Instead of ending a course with my power in full and final flourish through the bestowing of a grade, I instead offer myself as a partner to students as they claim their own grade for their efforts and achievements, through critical self-reflection.

Nothing had prepared me for the distinct honor it has been to design, hold, and tend the space in which co-learning and co-teaching happens with reciprocity, integrity, and care. Engaging with Mariah, Rhiannon, and the many students with whom I have shared learning experiences has stretched me in ways I couldn’t have predicted, challenging me to practice my politics, to engage my feminist praxis, and to be accountable for my power. In these most difficult of times in our world, it is, for me, the stuff of inspiration, gratitude, and hope.

Critical perspective: Agency (Mariah, student partner)

I began my education at Portland State University after a few years at a local community college. Throughout grade school, I attended alternative and public charter schools that focused on student-teacher relationships and student-led learning and gave many

opportunities for students to pursue their interests. When I began my journey in higher education, I found myself in an environment where it was easy to detach from my surroundings. I was balancing work and college along with the responsibilities of growing up and moving out. I quickly fell into a rhythm of going to class, work, and then home, without making connections on campus.

Outside of school, my passions began to grow in a way that felt separate from my college education. I had been working in childcare since I got my first nannying job at the age of 14. As I grew older, this love for working with children grew into an interest in education. My mother was the founding director of the school that I attended from 5th grade through high school, and in my early years of college, all the talk about my mother's vision for change through education began to sink in. I became very interested in the ways in which education has the power to challenge the status quo, increase upward mobility, and change the physical and emotional health of children. I also started reading about the many ways that the public education system in the United States often does not do these things for its most vulnerable students. The disconnection I felt between my classes and my life outside of school made me uneasy about the time and money I was investing in my college career. I felt the burden of working for each professor rather than doing any of my coursework for myself. As I struggled to balance work and school, my dwindling faith in college as a life-enriching experience made it harder to push through the most difficult tests, classes, and assignments. I found myself panicking and dropping classes near the end of each term. As I transferred to PSU, I was discouraged and unsure if my goal of graduating was attainable.

My first class at PSU was Vicki's Introduction to Women's Studies class. Sitting through the first day of the course, I was struck by the intentionality behind every word she said and every activity we did. Her engagement with my classmates and me reminded me of my favorite moments with teachers in my childhood. I was brought back to the joy that learning had been in elementary school. Vicki designed her course to be self-directed, while maintaining a communal learning environment. Vicki introduced one of our course assignments, an individual project that we would work on throughout the entire term. I was excited about the project but tried not to get too invested. Many times throughout my college classes I had been told that I would be allowed to choose a project to work on. Each time, as the project got underway, it became clear that I would be working on this project to the particular values of my professor. There were small choices within these projects, but the assignments were all the same: research what the professor wanted me to research, write how the professor wanted me to write. The projects were facades, trying to mask the power structures of higher education with minor choice presented as student empowerment.

During a meeting with Vicki, a requirement of every student, I began to realize that this course and project would be different than what I had experienced in higher education so far. I could not believe that Vicki was making time to meet with each student, while in other courses I had to wait in line for other professors' office hours for a chance at five minutes of their time. We met for an hour, discussing whatever I wanted to. We talked about where I was in my transition to PSU and what my goals were in and outside of school. This led to a conversation about my interest in education and vision for the project. I listened for signals of what Vicki

wanted but did not find any. The conversation was collaborative, something I had not experienced with other professors. Vicki offered insight and resources without judgment or expectation. I came away from our meeting feeling empowered; I had agency over my education.

As I jumped into researching my project, I found the most compelling information to be about racial inequality in the school district I had grown up in, Portland Public Schools (PPS). The project was relevant to my life as I looked back at my education within PPS, and forward towards a career in education. This connection to my research served me throughout the entirety of the project. I learned about the real and local ways that education perpetuates the status quo. Without knowing this, I would not be able to disrupt it in my own future teaching practice and current work in childcare. I worried that my focus would not work for the scope of the course. I discussed this with Vicki and she made it clear that I was in charge of my learning this course. “Go where the project takes you,” she said.

Perhaps the most magical moment of this project came when our class visited the Special Collections at the PSU Library. It was there that I had the pleasure of working with Rhiannon. I told Rhiannon about my project and she immediately said with excitement, “I have something for you.” Rhiannon pulled boxes and boxes of relevant documents and handed them over to me. I could not believe that I was being given access to these documents, that I had the right to do my research in such a legitimate way. I felt like a researcher, not just a student working for a grade. Holding these pieces of history gave new weight to the work that I was doing. Though I had done so much research on the computer, I had not experienced the documents in such an emotional way. It made everything I was researching real. Sharing this moment with Rhiannon was a powerful experience, as she was as excited as I was to share the moment with me. After our trip to Special Collections, I fully committed to my project with the belief that I was a researcher with the power to learn something and to say something. This was real agency. I became responsible for my coursework in a way that I had never experienced before. The requirements for the project were undefined, I could do as much or little as I wanted, and the course would be self-graded. My grade, project, and class work, it all fell on me—not just the responsibility to get “good” work done, but to own my experience and learning. This dismantling of the classroom power structure gave me freedom I had never known in higher education. To my surprise, it made me work harder than I ever had. I began calling my mother every night to tell her what I learned that day, attending meetings at local schools, and talking to anyone who would listen about my research. By the end of the term, I had completed the longest, most well-researched paper of my college career. At the end of the course, my classmates and I all presented our projects. Seeing each project, powerful and unique, was magical.

The outcome of this experience for myself, as a student, grew beyond the project. I began the term floundering, unsure if college was the right place for me, unsure if I was capable, and disconnected from campus. After this course, I found confidence that I did not have before. I became more involved on campus and more engaged in my classes and with professors. I began learning how to get what I needed out of college, rather than producing work that felt meaningless just for a grade. Vicki recommended me for a mentorship program,

something I would have never considered. I applied, was accepted, and, for a year, mentored a group of 30 first-year students. As I write this, I am on track to graduate, something I was never sure I would accomplish.

Vicki used her position to disrupt traditional power structures. Our partnership gave me power in a place I had previously felt powerless. I was able to find a stronger sense of self and to succeed when I became less isolated and began connecting with others through my research, when I was shown that my thoughts carried weight, when I was listened to and given deep respect. This experience motivates me to move toward a partnership mentality in my working as well as personal relationships. In working with children, I hope to allow them the agency that Vicki allowed me, to collaborate with them in their experiences instead of dictating them, to truly know and listen to the children I work with. I believe that partnership has the power to create more equity in education, both on a small scale and system-wide. When we give students agency and let them know their power and value, we are letting them own their experiences rather than passively working for a grade. My deep engagement in my work for Vicki's course made me care more about social justice in education than I ever could have if she had handed out the exact assignment that I ended up completing. Expecting agency from those at the bottom of power structures is a radical act that gives way to meaningful change.

Critical perspective: Affinity (Rhiannon, staff partner)

Like Vicki, I came into my career from a social service background. In that work, the notion of community informed and sustained every effort. Beyond place or population, in my work then and today I regard community as authentic connection and understanding supported through kinship of identities, experiences, or goals. Feelings of affinity that bloom through community bring powerful meaning to our work, serving to guide and sustain us as we strive towards a vision of the world we would like to teach, learn, and live in.

I began my degree program in women, gender, and sexuality studies at PSU just as I was hired to work at the Library. Cultivated together, my librarianship, my understanding and experience of critical pedagogies, and my feminism are inextricably interwoven. Over time, I have worked to make sense of my feminist praxis, that is, how the theoretical principles that inform my feminism are embodied and enacted through my work in higher education.

As a student, I often felt dissonance between my academic and professional communities. As I approached graduation, this sense of liminality weighed heavily, and I was ultimately uncertain if I would continue to pursue this kind of work. Over one term, however, this tension was reframed, and that liminal state soon became an advantageous position for which I have come to be profoundly thankful. In an upper-division seminar, Vicki and I collaborated to develop a session of teaching for the course, an exercise carried out by each student, that drew directly upon my professional work at the Library. From this, our co-created curriculum blossomed into a new, ongoing partnership between the Library and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies department. Through this, I have come to recognize that partnership is a core and catalyzing element of the feminist praxis I aspire to develop and enact in my work.

As Vicki, Mariah, and I have consciously worked to enact a feminist practice of partnership, I have again witnessed community functioning as a guiding principle as well as a great reward. As reciprocity infused with accountability and affect, this affinity satisfies what I had yearned for, manifesting in my work and collegiality as a renewed sense of joy and gratitude. In my multifaceted role as student/alumna and campus professional, I find that I have new and revived stakes in my projects, research, and writing and that I am more easily able to trace how I contribute to and benefit from the learning communities around me. In this way, I have found that daily tasks—labor that can be challenging to draw inspiration from and measure in impact—feel more closely and tangibly connected to larger, driving outcomes of student success and social change.

In the ways that I am supported, inspired, and empowered by my experience of partnership, the liminal, dualistic status that once troubled me now affirms my work and provides me, as well as my departments, with enhanced visibility and opportunities that have led to new and expanded partnerships and projects across campus.

As students like Mariah have engaged with library staff and resources through the activities and course sessions Vicki and I have co-developed, and like those that have followed that model, I have critically considered and evaluated the means and methods by which I enact my work stewarding library materials and the experience of conducting research. Engaging with students in new and dynamic ways has rekindled my affinity for this work. As the way I consider myself professionally has evolved, it has been constructive for me to imagine how I can foster this affinity for my colleagues and work to weave it into the institutional culture we operate from and through.

As Mariah so powerfully describes, an effective practice of partnership positively impacts students' senses of place and agency. True for all partners, recognizing affinity as both a principle and product of partnership underscores how we understand similarities across disciplines and departments and identify how our differences serve to enhance the work we do. Acknowledging the often fraught and siloed nature of higher education, a partnership mentality stands to disrupt cultures of competition. It helps us to resist complacency and compartmentalization by recentering learning and shared success as our goal, and by framing collaboration as a strategic response to scarcity and institutional isolation. I continue to be moved by the lasting impact my participation in a student-faculty-professional partnership has had on my work, and I am inspired by the possibilities it lends to the future.

DISCUSSION

As we engaged in the process of framing our method for investigating our experiences of student-faculty-professional partnership, we uncovered several insights both about our partnership(s) and about the deeper implications of partnership for us as individuals, as current and future professionals, and as members of a large educational institution. We believe that these insights may be applicable across institutional contexts and particular models of partnership, and we share them in the hopes that they further our readers' partnership philosophies and practices.

First, we noted that we have each experienced affective outcomes on the personal level that have been vitally important to our well-being: namely, that we each have felt less lonely as persons and in our roles because of the connections we have forged. Asserting agency and practicing accountability—twin processes in the sharing and redistribution of power—have catalyzed the development of affinity across differences in roles that have enhanced the feeling of connectedness and belonging for each of us. In creating community through the enactment of partnership practices, we have deepened our investments in our institution as well as recognized that personal satisfaction and success may be pursued and mutually supported even within our large and highly bureaucratized institution.

As we widened the frame, we perceived that pursuing a partnership model at the level of our courses has had the disproportionate effect of disrupting our felt experience of the compartmentalization that is necessary to institutional life. After just one 10-week course together, each of us extended our network in important, institution-influencing ways: Mariah became a peer mentor and actively contributed to the success and retention of first-year students; Rhiannon has increasingly reached out to faculty to link their courses to the living archives she stewards and has begun presenting and publishing on those efforts; and Vicki has connected with colleagues both inside and outside the University, through formal scholarship venues and faculty support efforts as well as informal networking, to share about the risks and rewards of employing a partnership ethic rooted in critical power analysis.

Because the benefits to this partnership model have been so significant for all of us, we have come to understand that the challenges to engaging it—the institutional structures that atomize tasks and actively work against collaboration, and the ready acceptance of power imbalances on the part of both teachers and students—are necessary to the struggle. In other words, the difficulties in navigating across power differentials in ways that build relationship and illuminate individual and collective possibility are, precisely, the work at hand, and the rewards of engaging with that work are the breakthroughs we have each experienced as persons, as teachers, as students, as professionals, and as members of communities.

CONCLUSION

We have come to believe that operating with a partnership ethic and from a partnership orientation is always available for us to adopt and practice from our personal and professional standpoints. In recasting the powerful frame of *respect*, *responsibility*, and *reciprocity* (Cook-Sather et al., 2014) as *agency*, *accountability*, and *affinity* in this article, we offer a model to interrogate our partnership practices as locations for the negotiation of power and to ground our continuing efforts in the possibilities for redistributing power in ways that change us, that deepen our bonds, and that intervene towards social justice in our world.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

Rhiannon M. Cates works as a library technician in Special Collections and University Archives at Portland State University. She has a bachelor's degree in women's studies and sexuality, gender,

and queer studies from PSU, and is especially interested in queer historiography, popular culture, and archival possibilities of teaching and activist-scholarship.

Mariah R. Madigan is a senior at Portland State University graduating in June 2018 with a bachelor's in social science. As a student at Portland State, she has served as a peer mentor in the University Studies program. Mariah hopes to pursue a career in education.

Vicki L. Reitenauer serves on the faculty of the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department and the University Studies program at Portland State University, where she employs community-based, feminist, and participatory pedagogies and reflective practice for integrative, transformative learning; facilitates relational faculty support processes; and co-creates faculty-led assessment practices.

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