OPINION PIECE

The necessary "anchoring innovation" of pedagogical partnership

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"Anchoring Innovation," a project funded by the Dutch Research Council, posits that successful innovations must be "anchored" in some way to become "acceptable, understandable, and desirable" to a relevant social group (Sluiter, 2016, p. 23). Innovation in this project is defined as "purposeful or intentional change" aimed at solving newly identified problems or coping with old issues "in as yet unexplored ways" (Sluiter, 2016, p. 21). Anchoring occurs when people "can connect what is perceived as new to what they consider familiar"; innovation fails or falters when the "human factor" is ignored or neglected, most notably when people's perceptions and evaluation of what is old and new are not taken into account (Sluiter, 2016, p. 23, p. 21). "New" here refers both to what did not exist before and to what might already exist but is being perceived or experienced for the first time. "Old" refers to what belongs to the past and is understood either as established and therefore to be kept or outdated and therefore to be changed or replaced. How might efforts to develop or engage in pedagogical partnership benefit from the concept of anchoring innovation? And why is anchoring the innovation of pedagogical partnership necessary?

Pedagogical partnership work aims to cope with an old issue—the purposes and processes of education—through changing who is involved in developing, enacting, and analyzing educational practice. Such changes have been shown to have significant benefits (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017)—indeed, to be transformative (Kupatadze, 2020)—yet pedagogical partnership has yet to be adopted as an innovation by the majority of the social group involved in knowledge production and application in higher education. The human factors that can facilitate or impede this innovation are the lived and felt familiarity of hierarchy and established educational roles, as well as the fear of change in both relationships and practice.

As Sluiter (2016) notes, innovations may become acceptable, understandable, and desirable when relevant social groups can effectively integrate and accommodate them in their conceptual categories, values, beliefs, and ambitions. This is the case when people can connect what is perceived as new to what they consider familiar, known, already accepted—when, that is, innovations are anchored. Anchoring can take place horizontally, between different contemporary domains, or vertically, when creative constructions of the past are used as an anchoring device. Two examples follow.

In Eastern contexts, pedagogical partnership premises and practices have been perceived to clash with basic Eastern belief systems as those play out in educational roles and

relationships (Chng, 2019; Kaur, 2020.) For example, if it is understood as embracing "a rigid hierarchy where the teachers are the experts with absolute authority of their opinions and knowledge" (Liang & Matthews, 2020, p. 11), Confucianism, China's foundational belief system, can serve as an anchor to impede the development of partnership approaches. However, if it is interpreted to assert that "anyone can actually be the teacher of others (Ding, 1999)" [三人行, 必有我师焉] (Liang & Matthews, 2020, p. 11), Confucianism can anchor the embrace of partnership as an innovation.

In the bi-cultural country of Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Māori principle of ako (to learn and to teach through a process that is relational and social) is congruent with the premises of partnership: respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility for teaching and learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). However, the term "partnership" itself evokes what many Māori experience as failed promises made by the Crown traced back to the Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document of the country (R. Bourke, personal communication, April 4, 2018). The term "partnership" could, in that context, be an anchor that impedes movement toward this innovation. Alternatively, this reciprocal teaching and learning work can be framed in terms that are experienced as "the stable basis for innovation" (Sluiter, 2016, p. 32), as it is by the program Ako in Action at Victoria University of Wellington (Leota & Sutherland 2020). Through "agency and conscious activity" (Sluiter, 2016, p. 32), the student and faculty co-creators of and the faculty and student participants in Ako in Action anchor their work in principles long honored and enacted by Indigenous peoples and more recently and formally embraced by the country.

As Sluiter (2016) illustrates, some innovations are about effectiveness and efficiency (e.g., the grand-scale use of coined money in sixth-century BCE Athens), and some are about survival and success (e.g., the creation of a contraption at the beginning of the first Punic war that saved the Romans in a battle against the Carthaginians). Partnership might be about both. I am writing in the United States where an intellectual and social movement, critical race theory, is being weaponized to perpetuate, within (and beyond) higher education, white supremacy culture—the founding premise of this country and "a devastating force in all our lives, used by ruling class power brokers to maintain vast and violent structural inequality" (Okun, 2022, para. 7). The potential for pedagogical partnership to foster equitable and just practices (de Bie et al., 2021) makes it incumbent upon us to find ways to anchor this innovation.

Despite being grounded in human interaction, pedagogical partnership as both concept and practice can nevertheless fail to take hold if what those involved already know and understand—the "old" purposes and processes of education, including one-way, top-down, impersonal delivery of established knowledge—are not connected in ways that resonate with the "new" that partnership requires and enables: reciprocal engagement; empathy for and empowerment of all involved; and epistemic, affective, and ontological justice through co-creation. We are at a moment of crisis when well-being, capacity to thrive, and even survival are at stake. Evoking conducive interpretations of conceptual categories, values, beliefs, and ambitions and linking those with the necessity of change for survival and thriving can anchor the innovation of pedagogical partnership. What might anchor the innovation of pedagogical partnership for the human beings in your particular part of the world?

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