

AUTHENTIC LEARNING WITHIN THE BRAVE SPACE CREATED THROUGH STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS

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Engaging students as pedagogical partners creates a brave space for students to become critical thinkers and beings that shapes not just what they know, but also who they are (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011). The language of brave space conveys a tone for engagement while also proposing a manner of engagement (Cook-Sather, 2016). The transformative experience of engaging in student-faculty partnership in and of itself constitutes a brave space where learners transition from dependence on authority to self-authorship (Baxter-Magolda, 2009, 2014). Within this paper we share Nicole's lived experience engaging in authentic learning within the brave space created through pedagogical partnership. Nicole's expression of her teaching philosophy privileges the importance of the shared accountability that students and educators have for teaching and learning and represents how she embraced the notion of self-authorship to create an understanding of how her teaching philosophy informs her growing practice as a registered nurse.

Key Words: authentic learning, students as partners, brave space, teaching, education process, phenomenological pedagogy

Engaging students as pedagogical partners creates a space where students experience the freedom to become critical thinkers and beings which shapes not just what they know, but also who they are (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011). Student-faculty partnership serves as a means through which students navigate the vulnerability associated with engaging in authentic learning. Understanding education as partnership among students and educators enables the creation of a brave space to learn through taking risk; fostering courageous change and growth (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Cook-Sather, 2016). This writing is an expression of student-faculty partnership experienced between undergraduate student and co-author, Nicole, and her co-teachers in a senior level nursing course. The paper explores authentic learning as courage, the concept of brave space within student faculty-partnership, and the influence of brave space on student self-authorship through the exploration of learning associated with a creative class project. Nicole shares her authentic learning resulting from the creative project; her teaching philosophy which embodies the notion of partnership. Authentic learning in brave spaces creates meaningful learning that situates students beyond the classroom and into the context of their lives as they navigate the complex reality of the real world (Pearce, 2016).

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AUTHENTIC LEARNING AS COURAGE

As co-teachers in a nurse educator course, we often talk with students about meeting learners where they are – in their own world, through their own context, building knowledge from their level of understanding. Authentic learning experiences are those that are personally relevant from the learner's perspective and situated within appropriate social contexts (Iucu & Marin, 2014). We also discuss the importance of being authentic. We challenge students to reflect on who they are, both as learners and as developing educators. They are invited to explore their values and beliefs about what constitutes effective learning and teaching. For their final assignment Nicole and the other students were invited to explore a creative means to express their teaching philosophy. By creating their own conceptual framework or using a photograph or piece of art to represent their teaching and learning philosophy, students made explicit their values and beliefs about effective learning and teaching. Nicole chose a lone image of two runners clasping hands as one runner helps the other runner who has been injured. This image along with the other students' creative expressions became a patchwork of images that came to represent a pedagogical quilt. This pedagogical quilt, known as the quilt of teaching philosophies, came to symbolize students' authentic learning. Engaging in and reflecting on experiential and creative learning opportunities promotes authentic learning that reveals the complexities and ambiguities of real-life. This authentic learning creates meaning that situates students beyond the classroom and into the context of their lives as becoming registered nurses (Pearce, 2016).

Students enter into authentic learning with some trepidation. Learning is vulnerability. Nicole experienced vulnerability in selecting an image that she felt represented her values and beliefs that supported her teaching philosophy. When we learn, we make ourselves vulnerable (Siemens, 2014). Armstrong (2017) speaks to vulnerability as both a strength and an essential pillar of learning. Embracing vulnerability and engaging in authentic learning requires one to be courageous. Boostrom (1998) suggests that learning requires bravery as it "...involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former condition in favor of a new way of seeing things" (p. 399). Educators are called to create environments that balance contradictions in a student's current way of thinking with positive encouragement to explore new ways of thinking and being (Baxter-Magolda, 1992). Often positive learning environments are referred to as safe spaces. Arao and Clemens (2013) challenge us to redefine safe space as brave space. Building on the work of Arao and Clemens (2013), Cook-Sather (2016) suggests that as a concept, brave space captures "...both the combination of active risk and built-in affirmation..." that "...focuses our attention on the active engagement and agency required of participants in spaces intended to support learning" (p. 1). Using the language of brave space conveys a tone for engagement while also proposing a manner of engagement (Cook-Sather, 2016). Creating a brave space recognizes the vulnerability associated with authentic learning and encourages students to be courageous in embracing their vulnerability as an opportunity to learn and grow.

We were intentional in fostering a brave space through ongoing efforts within the course to promote trust and encourage students' active voice within their learning. Relative to the creative assignment, we fostered brave space through offering one on one opportunity for students to share their image or thoughts on a conceptual framework and discuss their understanding of how this represented their teaching philosophy. Via these discussions we were able to validate, inquire, and encourage students' exploration of their understanding. Through establishing partnership in this way, Nicole and her peers felt comfortable embracing their

vulnerability and engaging in authentic learning by creating or choosing an image that became an embodied reflection of their values and beliefs.

STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIP AS A BRAVE SPACE

The transformative experience of engaging in student-faculty partnership in and of itself constitutes a brave space; one where students and educators learn to trust and move beyond a place of vulnerability to one of confidence, strength, and courage to embrace authentic learning (Cook-Sather, 2014, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Through the brave space of student-faculty partnership, students “felt courageous enough to risk, explore, experiment, assert, learn, and change, knowing that they would be supported in those necessarily destabilizing and unpredictable processes” (Cook-Sather, 2016, p. 1). Nicole experienced a growing confidence which was evident in her verbalization of why she chose her image, and how this represented her understanding. The quilt of teaching philosophies became a manifestation of the authentic learning that the students experienced as a result of engaging in partnership. The brave space created through student-faculty partnership supported learners’ transition from dependence on authority to self-authorship (Baxter-Magolda, 2009, 2014). Entering the realm of self-authorship, students were encouraged to develop the internal capacity to construct their beliefs, their identity and social relations; in essence, to navigate the complex reality of the real world (Baxter-Magolda, 2009, 2014). Building student-faculty partnership throughout the course, students became more comfortable finding their voice relative to teaching and learning. Through dialogue and inquiry within the one on one conversations between students and faculty, students became more confident in taking accountability for their understanding and expression of their learning. Through the foundation of student-faculty partnership, Nicole transitioned into self-authorship and gave voice to her values and beliefs to support her understanding of her teaching practice.

INFLUENCE OF SELF-AUTHORSHIP ON PRACTICE

An intriguing aspect of students’ experiences engaging in partnership is that they incorporated this same approach when they themselves engaged in a co-teaching relationship with a peer in addition to extending the invitation to partner with junior colleagues that they taught. Another outcome of their lived experience with student-faculty partnership was how this manifest itself as a foundation for engaging in their relational practice with clients in their care. This sense of self-authorship is evident in Nicole’s expression of her teaching philosophy within which she refers to the importance of the shared accountability that students and educators have for teaching and learning. Figure 1 and the following written work represent Nicole’s lived experience of engaging in authentic learning through pedagogical partnership and how she embraced the notion of self-authorship to create an understanding of how her teaching philosophy informs her growing practice as a registered nurse.



Figure 1. Untitled illustration of marathon runners. [Untitled photograph of marathon runners]. Retrieved from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3743486/The-inspirational-moment-Games-far-New-Zealand-runners-HELP-finish-race-fall-5-000m.html>

The intention of this paper is to reflect upon the foundational principles that define my approach to teaching and learning. Understanding my teaching philosophy is significant given the inherent relevance and applicability that patient teaching has in day-to-day nursing practice (Daley, 2001). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2001), the definition of pedagogy is the “art, science, or profession of teaching” (para.1) which is indistinguishably related to the practice of nursing. Throughout this paper I will explore the applicability of the image that I have selected in relation to my pedagogical approach and the influence this has upon the learners and the environment in which knowledge is acquired.

PEDAGOGY

A phenomenological pedagogical approach best resonates with the image I have selected and with my philosophy of teaching and learning. The image of the descended marathon runner signifies the disintegration of the notion of ‘competition’ which is what I believe a phenomenological pedagogy encompasses. The process of education can be competitive at times, where learners push themselves to the limit and force others out of the way to solely expand their personal growth. This concept is comparable to that of a marathon where competitors advance themselves without taking others into consideration. The foundational principle of a phenomenological approach is the recognition of the competitive aspects of education and the instilment of the principle of a co-partnership where the educator and the learner utilize one another’s strengths to aid their individual learning (Ironsides, 2003). The image displays the concept of co-partnership because the athletes are no longer focused on individual advancement

as they succumb to losing the race to ensure that both mutually benefit from the process of racing, and not the victory of coming in first place.

As stated in the article by Ironside (2003), when learners and instructors share their “common experiences and the shared meanings of learning, they understand rather than critique and deconstruct” (p.77). This indicates that learners and educators thrive when they utilize their former knowledge and integrate it in the learning environment through vocalization, ultimately prompting others to share their experiential learning, which benefits all. Phenomenology as a pedagogy values the concept of contextualized learning which allows learners to thrive because it produces a sense of relevance in the material being covered. The image encapsulates contextualized learning as self-regulation where everyone is responsible for acting in a way that they believe enhances the quality of their experience and the choices they make to instill a learning opportunity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The concept of phenomenology is said to “privilege language over silence” meaning that there is inherent value in the expression of knowledge and experience and the relatability to the content (Ironside, 2003, p. 81). This image represents this notion because in this race coming in first place is no longer the ultimate measure of success; participation is honored, and the co-partnership formulated in the process is embraced.

LEARNER

The image I have chosen displays a marathon runner from an opposing team providing a helping hand to one of the runners that has fallen. At first glance, this image appears to be a depiction of the process of teaching, however upon critical analysis it is evident that this image, is the epitome of effective learning. Embedded within this image are features that define the intrinsically valuable aspects of the learner that are critical to my personal philosophy of education. The helping hand that the runner provides metaphorically signifies the presence of connection, which I believe is of importance to create that ‘co-partnership’ that overcomes the historical paternalistic approach to teaching. The helping hand signifies a partnership where competition and ‘winning’ are no longer the goal and it becomes about the process that matters, not just the destination. This correlates significantly to the importance of partnership between a learner and an educator where helping each other in the process accelerates growth collectively as opposed to one individual benefitting above all and ‘winning the prize in the end’. Based on the color of their jerseys it appears as if the runners are from two opposing teams which ultimately symbolizes the diversity of each learner. These features represent equality in the education process as two differing individuals come together for a common goal of learning which relates to the marathon runners coming together for the common goal of engaging in a race. This concept is intertwined with teaching and learning because we all come from different backgrounds and experiences, yet we put aside our differences for the sole purpose of expanding our knowledge. As a learner, I value diversity and the inherent value everyone contributes to the process of learning and teaching. I believe that the process of acquiring knowledge is reciprocal and thus the instructor benefits from the experiential knowledge shared by the students.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment within which students and educators engage in is critical to successful learning and teaching. Regarding a phenomenological approach, the teacher and learner engage and support one another through the exploration of common experiences (Ironside, 2003). Just as the athletes are being supported by the crowd cheering them on throughout their marathon, students should be encouraged through the process of education. Engaging in

learning and teaching in a supportive environment can enhance effective learning. Marathons can be hectic and overwhelming as can the process of learning; however, a phenomenological approach mediates this chaos by “understanding rather than critiquing and deconstructing [...as] students and teachers recognize that they are more alike than different” (Ironsides, 2003, p.81). This recognition of shared commonality can be likened to the image, there is the depiction of the defining moment where competition is put to the side and the intrinsic value of participation is emphasized as opposed to a glorification of a final victory.

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Phenomenological pedagogy can be described as an integration of devoting oneself to the learners and the process of education through de-centering the concept of competition and paternalism, and the devotion to overcoming differences through creating an open concept for discussion and participation (van Manen, 2016). In this approach to education, knowledge is a compilation of each unique individual’s lived experiences and narratives, which is comparable to the individualized training approach each athlete embodies; there is no “right or wrong” in their routine they simply follow their individualized training regimen. In this metaphorical representation of the de-centering of the hierarchal approach of the educator, the “lead” which is represented by the racer that provides the helping hand depicts the invitation for the partnership in joining together to complete the journey in unison (van Manen, 2016). Knowledge in this pedagogical approach is determined by the composition of everyone’s lived experiences and the contributory role each plays in enhancing the education process. This pedagogy is transferable to nursing practice as it integrates the concept of client-centered care where education can be centered on the assumption that patients are experts of their lived experiences and thus are valuable contributors to their individualized plan of care (College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, 2009). In summary, my preferred process of education is a combination of multiple factors such as my preference of pedagogical approach, the influence this has on my perception of how learning occurs and how this connects to the learning environment that I have set out to create.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Through this paper we have expressed our understanding and experience of engaging in student-faculty partnership. The paper explored authentic learning as courage, the concept of brave space within student faculty-partnership, and the influence of brave space on student self-authorship through the exploration of learning associated with a creative class project. Within the brave space created by student-faculty partnership within our course, students were able to embrace their vulnerability and freedom to engage in authentic learning. Nicole’s teaching philosophy is an expression of the impact that a partnership approach can have on learning and teaching and demonstrates the courageous growth that results when students find their voice within the brave space of student-faculty partnership. As active participants in pedagogical practice, there is an inherent understanding of students and educators as co-learners with equitable opportunity to contribute their voice in pursuit of the common goal of learning (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). Being intentional in promoting student-faculty partnership provides a fertile ground from which to promote the creation of brave spaces for students to engage in authentic learning.

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