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"I Saw a Change": Enhancing Classroom Equity through Student-Faculty Pedagogical Partnership

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Abstract

Persistent inequities in access to and experiences of learning in postsecondary education have been well documented. In line with efforts to redress these inequities and develop more just institutions, this study explores the potential for pedagogical partnerships in which students and faculty collaborate on teaching and learning initiatives to contribute to classroom equity. We investigate this issue by drawing on qualitative interviews with students who have participated in extracurricular pedagogical partnership programs in institutions in Canada and the United States, and who identify as members of marginalized groups (e.g., racialized students, 2SLGBTQ+ students, students from religious minorities, disabled students). While much existing research on equity and student-faculty partnership primarily focuses on the outcomes of partnership for participating students, we instead investigate students' perceptions of the extent to which their partnership efforts contributed to wider impacts—such as developments in faculty thinking and teaching practice and student experiences in the classroom. We also consider challenges students noted connected to power imbalances and faculty resistance, which influence partnership's capacity to contribute to equity and raise important considerations for those interested in partnership practice.

Les inégalités persistantes concernant l'accès et les expériences d'apprentissage dans l'enseignement supérieur ont déjà été bien documentées. Conformément aux efforts déployés pour redresser ces inégalités et créer des établissements plus équitables, cette étude explore le potentiel pour des partenariats pédagogiques dans lesquels les étudiants/les étudiantes et les professeurs/les professeures collaborent sur des initiatives d'enseignement et d'apprentissage afin de contribuer à l'équité en salle de classe. Nous enquêtons sur cette question grâce à des entrevues qualitatives auprès d'étudiants/d'étudiantes qui ont participé à des programmes de partenariat pédagogique extrascolaires dans des établissements du Canada et des États-Unis, et qui s'identifient en tant que membres de groupes marginalisés (par ex. racialisés, 2SLGNTQ+, minorités religieuses, personnes handicapées). Alors que la plupart de la recherche menée sur l'équité et les partenariats entre professeurs/professeures et étudiants/étudiantes se concentre principalement sur les résultats du partenariat pour les étudiants et les étudiantes qui y participent, de notre côté, nous enquêtons sur les perceptions des étudiants et des étudiantes concernant la portée dans laquelle leurs efforts de partenariat ont contribué à des impacts plus vastes – tels que l'évolution de la réflexion et des pratiques d'enseignement du corps enseignant et les expériences des étudiants et des étudiantes dans la salle de classe. Nous prenons également en considération les défis indiqués par les étudiants et les étudiantes liés aux déséquilibres du pouvoir et à la résistance des professeurs et des professeures, qui influencent la capacité du partenariat à contribuer à l'équité et soulèvent des considérations importantes pour les personnes intéressées à la pratique des partenariats.

Pedagogical partnerships, which support student-faculty collaboration on teaching and learning initiatives, can facilitate attitudinal and practical shifts in postsecondary education (Bovill et al., 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). This article considers the extent to which such partnerships, also called "students as partners" work (Healey et al., 2016), contribute to the development of equitable teaching and learning cultures and practices. In particular, we explore the experiences of students who have participated in pedagogical partnership programs, and who identify as members of equity-seeking groups (groups that experience social marginalization, oppression, and inequity). We ask how such students perceive the capacity of partnership programs to support equity and inclusion in the classroom, and thereby contribute to the growing body of literature considering the intersections between partnership and equity (Colón García, 2017; Cook-Sather, 2018; Cook-Sather et al., 2018; Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; de Bie et al., 2019).

This focus on partnership's potential contributions to equity is essential, given that inequities regarding who is welcomed and feels included in postsecondary education and what structures and practices are in place to foster such experiences are well documented (Barnett & Felten, 2016; Braidotti et al., 2018; Quaye et al., 2020). While increasing attention has been paid to reducing barriers to access, research suggests that students who identify as members of equity-seeking groups continue to experience exclusions and inequities once they arrive on college and university campuses. For instance, what Stephens et al. (2012) identify as cultural mismatches, such as those between institutional norms of independence and values of interdependence that first generation, working class, or other marginalized students may be socialized in, can contribute to negative emotional experiences for students with these backgrounds. Indeed, equity-seeking students have been found to experience a wide range of epistemic, affective, and ontological harms in postsecondary institutions, including a lack of recognition of their knowledge, the emotional burnout that comes with navigating oppression, and the internalization of negative and dehumanizing views of themselves (de Bie et al., 2021).

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of initiatives intended to address the inequities students experience on postsecondary campuses, ranging from the creation of administrative positions focused on equity (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019) to the growth of faculty development programming aimed at fostering accessible and inclusive classrooms (Haynie, 2018; Moriña et al., 2015; Vander Kloet, 2015). While some of these begin to alleviate issues students from equity-seeking groups face, critics point out that such approaches are not sufficient. For example, efforts that "recognize" diversity are not enough to achieve justice (Fraser, 2004) and creating new roles, such as chief diversity officer, can actually signal "the absence of wider support for diversity" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 23). Legislative approaches to generating institutional change, which mandate movement toward greater educational access and inclusion, have also been found to have notable shortcomings alongside their potential benefits (Marquis et al., 2012; Marquis, Fudge Schormans et al., 2016). At the same time, the significance and persistence of the inequities described above underscores that additional efforts are needed even where existing initiatives may have led to positive outcomes. We consider the potential of pedagogical partnership as one such strategy.

The Potential of Partnership to Contribute to Equity in Teaching and Learning

Pedagogical partnership has been defined as "a collaborative, reciprocal process" through which students and faculty/staff "have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making,

implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6-7). For example, students and faculty might collaborate on course (re)design or review, curricular revision, or teaching and learning scholarship, endeavouring in each case to develop relationships that demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Partnership, conceived in this way, aims to rethink and restructure traditional hierarchies, roles, and relationships in postsecondary education. It draws on histories of "radical collegiality" (Fielding, 1999) through student voice (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018) and critical pedagogies (Freire, 1970/2006), and, by repositioning students from those who receive knowledge to those who co-create it (Healey et al., 2016), it makes way for radical forms of engagement (Fedeli & Grion, 2016; Matthews, 2016), and the transformation of institutions into more egalitarian learning communities (Matthews et al., 2018).

Some students and faculty have raised concerns about who has access to partnership (Bindra et al., 2018; Felten et al., 2013; Marquis et al., 2018; Moore-Cherry et al., 2016) and the potential of this ostensibly inclusive approach to reproduce patterns of exclusion. However, when attention is paid to ensuring that a diversity of students have the opportunity to take up the role of student partner, pedagogical partnerships can support faculty in soliciting under-heard perspectives and creating new spaces in which diversity and difference are seen as the very conditions for engagement rather than as add-ons or separate issues (Felten et al., 2013). When intentionally constructed to be inclusive, pedagogical partnership can afford students from equity-seeking groups in particular "a seat at the proverbial table" (student quoted in Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, p. 277). Having such a seat can, at best, achieve what one African-American student describes: "It made me feel like who I am is more than enough—that my identity, my thoughts, my ideas are significant and valuable" (quoted in Cook-Sather, 2015).

Although much of the scholarship examining the relationships between partnership and equity has focused largely on outcomes for participating students (e.g., Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015; de Bie et al., 2019), as is illustrated in the quotations above, if the inclusive attitudes, structures, and practices called for by pedagogical partnership are embraced, the personal outcomes students describe can reach beyond the partnerships themselves (Stanway et al., 2019). In particular, students who identify as members of equity-seeking groups are uniquely positioned, by virtue of their identities, experiences, and knowledge, to contribute to the creation of more inclusive classrooms, and their work in partnership might support meaningful change in faculty teaching practices (Cook-Sather, 2020; Cook-Sather & Des-Ogugua, 2019; Marquis et al., 2019). And, rather than expect students from equity-seeking groups to do this work as invisible and uncompensated labor, pedagogical partnership legitimates the knowledge of these students and remunerates their work (Jack, 2019). When there is faculty/institutional resistance to partnership, however, it can be more challenging to realize such benefits (Marquis, Black, & Healey, 2017; Ntem & Cook-Sather, 2018).

Given this backdrop, the current discussion seeks to build on existing research, and on a preliminary consideration of ideas about broader change in practice arising from our data (Cook-Sather, Krishna Prasad et al., 2019), by attending to students' perspectives on how pedagogical partnership might contribute to equity-related outcomes that affect students beyond those immediately involved. We also note particular challenges that arise for equity-seeking students working in partnership, considering how these both affect individual participants and mediate partnership's capacity to contribute to equity on a broad scale.

<center>**Research Contexts and Methodology**</center>

SaLT and the SPP

This research examines partnership as it plays out within two extracurricular pedagogical partnership programs: the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges in the United States and the Student Partners Program (SPP) at McMaster University in Canada. While the institutions housing these programs differ considerably (two small, liberal arts colleges in the US and a medium-size, research intensive university in Canada), they are both located in settler colonial states with ongoing histories of inequity in education. Although SaLT and the SPP are not focused exclusively on redressing such inequities, they each create opportunities for students to work with faculty in ways that might contribute to educational equity and have featured projects/partnerships that take this focus specifically. For example, partnerships supported by the programs have focused on enhancing the experiences of underrepresented students in STEM courses (Narayanan & Abbot, 2020) and on conducting research about how best to support accessible teaching (de Bie et al., 2020).

In SaLT, undergraduate students take up the paid position of pedagogical consultant to faculty while not enrolled in that faculty member's course—a position that typically involves attending the class once a week, taking observation notes, and meeting weekly with the faculty partner to discuss pedagogical issues on which the pair has elected to focus. Within their partnerships, students explore how to address complex classroom dynamics and design effective and inclusive assessments, and they meet weekly with fellow student consultants and the program director to engage in supportive discussion (Cook-Sather, 2015). SaLT was designed in collaboration with students who are underrepresented in postsecondary education, and approximately 50-75% of participants in a typical year identify as belonging to such groups.

At McMaster, the SPP likewise invites students (undergraduate and graduate) to collaborate with faculty/staff to enhance teaching and learning by working as paid student partners. One stream of this program, based on the SaLT model, pairs students and faculty who work together, with support from student and staff educational developers, to co-design and/or review courses faculty partners are teaching. A second stream establishes partnerships related to curriculum review and quality enhancement processes, while the largest component of the program focuses primarily on supporting co-inquiry on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning projects (Marquis, Puri et al., 2016; Marquis, Haqqee et al., 2017). Although the program was not developed primarily as an opportunity for equity-seeking students and is advertised broadly across campus, several students who identify as members of equity-seeking groups have participated since its inception (unfortunately, specific demographic data are not available).

Methodology

This research is underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology that understands realities as socially constructed (Merriam, 2009) and focuses on students' experiences and perceptions. In particular, it seeks to centre and explore the experiences of students who have participated in partnership and identify as members of equity-seeking groups (e.g., racialized students, 2SLGBTQ+ students, students from religious minorities, disabled students). The research was informed by our own positionality; we are a team of two faculty who occupy various positions of privilege and oversee or previously led the partnership programs at the focal institutions and four

recent graduates who participated in those programs as students and identify as members of varied equity-seeking groups.

After receiving research ethics approval from Bryn Mawr College and McMaster University, we invited all students who had participated in SaLT or SPP since the programs were piloted in 2007 and 2013, respectively, and who identified as a member of one or more equity-seeking groups to participate in an in-person or online interview. We did not require that participants had been involved in partnerships focused explicitly on equity; rather, we were interested in all marginalized students' perspectives on partnership and its potential relationships to equity. Eight students from McMaster and 33 from Bryn Mawr and Haverford elected to participate in full or in part. While we did not collect specific demographic information about our participants, we did invite them to speak about how their social locations affected their experiences of partnership, allowing us to foreground the dimensions of participants' identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, culture) they chose to highlight. We also do not have demographic information about participants' faculty partners; although some faculty participating in SaLT and the SPP themselves claim equity-seeking identities, others occupy the privileged social locations most commonly represented amongst faculty in North American institutions.

Interviews were led by one or two members of the research team. Given our involvement in the programs being assessed, the potential power dynamics involved, and our desire to be flexible and accessible in our research methods, we also offered participants the option to submit their interview responses anonymously via an online survey tool, and (at McMaster) to be interviewed by a student member of the research team. At Bryn Mawr and Haverford, 25 interviews were conducted by the faculty partner, and eight participants elected to share one or more responses via the survey tool.[1] At McMaster, four interviews were conducted by the faculty partner, three were co-facilitated by two student partners, and one person submitted anonymous responses via the survey tool. In total, data collection generated 15.5 pages of survey output and 342 pages of transcripts (McMaster interviews were transcribed verbatim, while Bryn Mawr and Haverford transcripts used the interview guide and focused on capturing participant responses, which were sometimes slightly abridged or summarized rather than typed out in full).

Data were transcribed and subsequently analyzed using constant comparison (Merriam, 2009). A subset of the transcripts was first open coded by research team members, a process which involved examining the transcripts and highlighting points that resonated with our research questions. One researcher subsequently combined these open codes to establish a preliminary code tree, and after this coding framework was confirmed by the team, we each took responsibility for coding a subset of 24 transcripts and the survey output using it. We then checked the initial coding (each reviewing data we had not yet coded), and we highlighted additional ideas and points that could be interpreted differently, engaging in discussion to clarify concerns as necessary. Finally, team members reviewed all items coded at each branch of the code tree to check for conceptual clarity and note key ideas arising. By having multiple researchers involved in the coding of the data (coding or checking codes), we aimed to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis while also benefitting from the different perspectives we brought to bear as a research team.

Here, we report select findings speaking to perceptions of partnership's capacity to enhance equitable teaching practices, and factors that mediate that impact. Further categories related to

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[1] Interview responses collected via the survey tool at Bryn Mawr and Haverford were exported by question rather than by respondent. While the first question had 8 responses, subsequent questions had only 2-6 responses. Since all data were analysed, we have listed 8 survey participants here, though we underscore that not all of these participants completed the full set of interview questions.

these issues were developed in the course of writing this manuscript in order to enhance clarity and emphasize important dimensions of the reported themes not highlighted in our initial coding structure, and transcripts were scanned for additional illustrative quotations. As we finalized the paper, the eight remaining transcripts were also coded by a member of the team (looking primarily for issues relevant to these themes) and checked by another member. All team members reviewed and agreed with the representation of the data presented here.

Results

Students taking part in this study described several ways in which participating in pedagogical partnership enhanced their confidence and sense of agency (de Bie et al., 2019; Cook-Sather, 2018, 2020) and contributed to their attention to equity and development as teachers, learners, and scholars, thus affirming that partnership can have transformative impacts for marginalized students who take part (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015). Here, we build on these common findings in two ways: 1) documenting participants' views on the extent to which partnership might contribute to more equitable classrooms for students beyond those involved in partnership itself, and 2) exploring particular equity-related challenges participants experienced, which affect partnership's capacity to contribute to equity in significant ways.

Contributing to Classroom Equity

Several participants reported feeling their work had contributed to greater equity, with the potential to affect the experiences of other students. Such perspectives were primarily reported by SaLT students, who had worked in partnerships focused on developing, analysing, or enhancing courses (likely because these partnerships are more proximally related to faculty teaching than are research partnerships).

Facilitating Change through Equity-Specific Expertise

In some cases, the shifts participants observed were facilitated by students mobilizing their own perspectives and experiences as members of marginalized groups in postsecondary education contexts:

> Being cognizant of things that I felt myself or peers of color, other international students, made me very aware and eager to have those conversations with faculty. I have an "in" with the faculty and room to influence or at least bring perspective that they can reflect on. ... Also as a student who has battled with mental health obstacles, one thing I kept in mind is how the wording in the syllabus can be alienating or inclusive to students. ... I am not even sure if I was explicit enough about it. I did mention it, and I saw a change in the syllabus. (P20[2])

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[2] We use codes of this sort to identify participants while protecting their confidentiality. Codes beginning with P mark interview participants, while codes beginning with S indicate responses contributed via the anonymous survey tool.

> Since my partner and I belong to different cultural groups, I talked about my Filipino culture whenever I thought it was relevant to our discussion. Looking back, I think by doing that, we were able to reveal the extent to which culture and socioeconomic status affected how we experience and conceptualize education. (S6.4)

In addition to drawing on their experiences as members of equity-seeking groups, some participants described bringing to bear the knowledge they had developed through engagement in equity-related intellectual and community-based work. Students explained that this knowledge encouraged them to attend to particular features of courses and instruction, including, in some cases, those they may not experience personally, but that might marginalize their equity-seeking peers. One noted, for example,

> Something I had a lot of trouble with in [my faculty partner's] class was that it was neurobiology of sexual behavior, so gender was a huge part of the conversation. Doing the work I do, I react – what if a gender non-conforming student feels bad about hearing that? ...I didn't bring up my identity with her but she knew I was doing this [social justice] work on campus. ... I think what I said to her would be helpful is being really careful that dimorphic differences were trends and tendencies and not inherent differences. And she did try to highlight that. (P5)

Participants explained that drawing on these perspectives, experiences, and knowledges within their partnerships permitted them to contribute to enhancing classroom equity by (amongst other things) promoting faculty reflection and supporting change in teaching practice.

Promoting Faculty Reflection

Some participants emphasized the ways in which the equity-related dialogue facilitated by partnership could promote reflection with the potential to support long-term faculty transformation. In such cases, students emphasized that participating in partnership enabled instructors to develop new kinds of awareness about equity and a willingness to engage with student perspectives:

> I am so amazed with the things [student partners] share about awakening these faculty partners [who, in this case, do not claim membership in equity-seeking groups themselves] to challenges and identities that they might never have recognized. … [Some faculty] get to this place and start teaching and equity isn't something that they have thought about. … [H]aving partners who say, "There is this huge group of your students in the class that aren't talking, do you want to talk about why that's happening?", [e]ven if nothing is done in the moment about it, …raises an awareness that might not have been there otherwise. … I see the professors I have worked with considering the identities and needs of all their students as a result of the learning they have done through this program. (P19)

> My faculty partner was talking about how he thought that having a really difficult assignment at the beginning of the semester was a useful way to challenge and prepare students to be ready for the work of the semester. I talked about how I thought

it would be helpful to give students some sort of guidance and scaffolding if the work was going to be difficult… His perspective was that if some students can do it, then they should all be able to. ...I brought it up [as a point of conversation] in the context of my interest in making classes more inclusive and something that I had read. I talked about it as something to think about rather than blaming him for doing something wrong, and I think it was a really productive conversation and I really think that he was going to think about how he structures his classes. (S7.2)

Student partners thus develop a repertoire of strategies for facilitating faculty recognition of otherwise unconsidered equity-related perspectives.

Contributing to Change in Pedagogical Practice

Some participants reported that, in addition to supporting changes in thinking, their partnerships led to concrete shifts in faculty's pedagogical practices, which made courses more inclusive and equitable for a wide range of students:

I definitely thought a lot about gender in both my partnerships … especially because both my partners were thinking about dynamics of discussion, thinking about participation and who is taking up space and time. … And then it became something that we figured out how to address, how to be more equitable in thinking about who gets called on. (P18)

Several other shifts can be seen in previously provided quotations, such as P20 observing a change in their faculty partner's syllabus, and P5's partner nuancing their discussion of gender to affirm non-binary identities. As another example, Participant 13 observed that "at the very least [my partner's classes] were different from what they would have been. That trickle-down system at the very least has some change, and I think there is larger change as well."

Such comments make clear many participants' belief that partnership work can have equity-related effects that impact teaching practices and student experiences in the classroom. A number of other participants affirmed this belief and argued that partnerships could or might impact classroom equity without providing observed examples: "[It] [p]robably has [contributed to more equitable classrooms]... I can't imagine that it has done the opposite. So I don't know, but I would guess" (P21). Several also referred to the "ripple" (P1; P4) effect and momentum they expected would occur over time as the number of people thinking about equity through partnership expands. Participant 24, for example, suggested that each year of "[e]ven just having the small number of professors that were engaging in this program" would begin to "saturate the community" with more inclusive practices and "carr[y] over into other courses."

That said, participants were not naive about this transformative power; several pointed to the fact that many faculty are not engaged in partnership and thus remain comparatively untouched by its effects, for instance. One observed the difficulty of achieving wider classroom impacts in an historically oppressive institution:

Sometimes there would be an issue that we [student and faculty partner] both were trying to make better but it was a bigger problem with how school works or how

> racism or sexism runs in a classroom. …So how can we make the situation better for an individual and know it's a bigger problem? (P8)

Likewise, many expressed general uncertainty about the broad impacts of their partnership work, with some finding it difficult to articulate specific examples and others indicating that they did not have enough direct evidence on which to base claims about impact:

> Speculatively, the way that the course that I helped to develop was set up would be pretty unique, and for students who don't necessarily feel comfortable or want to engage in a traditional classroom setting, this course would have been an opportunity for them to engage in a very different way … So in that way speculatively perhaps that contributed to the development of more inclusive classrooms, but I can't speak to that specifically. I haven't talked to people who were in the course. (P39)

Similarly, Participant 34, who was conducting teaching and learning research in partnership, expressed hopefulness that their results would enhance classroom equity, but indicated that they had not yet seen their work translated to practice. Several students also explained that they had not been explicitly thinking about their partnership work through an equity lens, which may have increased the difficulty of identifying specific equity impacts; and a couple mentioned that their "faculty partner started out having an inclusive and comfortable classroom" (P1), suggesting that perhaps the course was in less need of intervention and that additional equity-related impacts might be less easy to discern.

Nevertheless, students often remained optimistic while acknowledging these limitations. One, for example, noted that extracurricular partnership programs can be themselves inequitable given that only some students have opportunities to take part (a concern raised by many participants). Still, they argued, "I think the positive impacts it has on classrooms benefit every student and that makes it worthwhile" (P6). Others were enthusiastic because they experienced equity-related impacts personally, and recognized how they would carry this confidence and analysis forward in their own thinking and practice to their peers and beyond.

Challenges in Working Toward Equity

Participants also described a number of challenges they experienced while working in partnership. We highlight two—navigating power/authority and experiencing resistance—that specifically affect the experiences of student partners from equity-seeking groups, and influence the likelihood of the kinds of equity-related change described earlier taking place.

Power, Authority, and Social Location

Like other students engaging in pedagogical partnership (e.g., Marquis, Puri et al., 2016; Seale et al., 2015), participants in the present study faced the challenges of navigating power dynamics and taking up new roles. Some noted feeling as if they had to adhere to unspoken rules of authority, for example, or were conscious that they were less likely to be taken seriously than more senior colleagues. As one put it, "I was only in third year of my undergrad so I suspect my thoughts were taken with a grain of salt" (S8.5). While these dynamics were often raised in relation to faculty-student hierarchies, for some they also played out in relation to the intersecting

complexities of "race, class, and gender and all that" (P25). In such cases, power imbalances related to social location made sharing ideas (and thus contributing to equity-related change) particularly difficult:

> How do you tell a white male professor who's straight … how this works when he is supposed to be the cognitive authority of the class and of his syllabus and all these things…? I remember that being very hard but something we talked a lot about. I remember him getting a lot from it. (P4)

> I think one thing I am realizing about myself recently, which I think is from identifying as an ... Asian-American woman, is that I am really slow to speak, and I often listen, but it's like listening to a fault and then internally processing everything because I don't want to offend anyone. I take on a facilitator perspective. I want everyone to feel comfortable sharing their stuff, then I lose a part of myself so they feel safe around me to share their full selves. So that's been tricky. Because as I am translating between them, I am trying to figure out where do I go. How do I care for me in that? I think, "Wow, that is offensive to me, but I am here to listen to you." (P12)

Where equity-seeking students partner with faculty who do not share experiences of marginality, then, power imbalances might be felt as especially pronounced and difficult. While some student partners might nevertheless engage this challenge and advocate for more equitable classrooms, others (reasonably) may not feel comfortable doing so. And, in any case, the potential for this to be "very hard," as P4 suggests, or for an equity-focused partnership to result in "feeling further disenfranchised" (P24), remain important considerations.

Some students also indicated that cultural attitudes towards authority figures led to challenges in their student partner role. One, for instance, noted, "this job started out as very uncomfortable for me because I grew up in a culture that emphasizes respecting your elders and upholding the hierarchy" (S3.4). Similarly, another suggested,

> There are people who are very comfortable because of their privilege challenging what teachers say. Culturally that would not have been okay for me, coming from a lower class and coming from Black culture. It's like you don't do that. (P4)

These comments, while comparatively rare in the data, imply that the notion of partnership might itself be bound up to some degree in Eurocentric conceptions of equity as connected to levelling hierarchies (themselves created by Western thought), which do not necessarily reflect other cultural values connected to age or seniority. To the extent this resonates for students, it suggests that those identifying with cultures that operate according to different understandings of equity or interpersonal relationships (e.g., those that feature a relatively greater "power distance" between students and instructors [Kaur et al., 2019]) might experience partnership as especially challenging and uncomfortable. Interestingly, some participants framed this sense of cultural difference as an opportunity for learning and personal development; Participant 22, for instance, noted, "Culturally, for me, I was always a passive receiver, but it was really through this experience that I changed my understanding." Nevertheless, by emphasizing an approach that focuses on mitigating

hierarchies (assumed to be oppressive rather than culturally respected), partnership programs risk re-marginalizing some students' perspectives.

Faculty Resistance to Ideas

While many participants emphasized how receptive their faculty partners were, some echoed other literature (e.g., Ntem & Cook-Sather, 2018) in noting that their partners were, at times, resistant to their ideas and contributions. In the present case, some students encountered resistance to equity-related considerations specifically:

> [My faculty partner] felt that [providing scaffolding] end[ed] up limiting what was possible or that we were coddling [students]. And it was really hard ... for me to connect with her on that sentiment because I was trying to help her recognize how giving scaffolding can be really beneficial for students … and it also gives cues, especially to students who are underrepresented in higher education ... and who really struggle because they are first generation or because they haven't had access to all of the social cues and social capital that people like I have had. (P6)

> With [one faculty partner], [he] was the old male science teacher man who doesn't get the plight of the woman. … I remember feeling a wall with him. … His perspective was that [he] will volunteer and do [female program lead] a favor, but he didn't think he had anything to learn. And my perspective was that [he] had plenty to learn. Then after seeing his classroom, I really felt there was something for him to learn. Even like a sexist energy toward teaching. (P7)

While many moments of conflict noted by participants did not centre on equity-related concerns, these quotations make clear that students sometimes faced resistance to equity-specific work from their faculty partners. In some cases, this contributed to feelings of frustration and the awareness that the effects students had on equity in their faculty partners' classrooms could be limited. Moreover, such experiences of resistance again demonstrate that partnerships can inadvertently reproduce instances of marginalization and harm—particularly when those involved are members of equity-seeking groups.

Resistance was not always framed as insurmountable, however; several participants described working through difficult conversations in ways that ultimately proved productive. As one put it, "faculty resistance … was a challenge that, at times, was truly frustrating. But that resistance was part of the process in some cases, and it certainly didn't always end in continued resistance" (S3.1). Equity-related issues were amongst the topics that some participants felt compelled to push for with their faculty partners, even if this led to difficult experiences. One explained,

> Being a queer woman has been really influential. I don't separate it from my whiteness, which is not an equity-seeking group, and also I think it has added a really important sense of urgency to having difficult conversations because I know from personal experience that there is a lot that can be said that is not understood by the speaker as harmful and hurtful or even as intrinsic to power structures. (P14)

Such responses, while rare, suggest both the potential and the challenges of partnership in relation to equity. Many student partners advocate for greater equity, with potentially significant results. At the same time, however, if they encounter resistance, this can be challenging, especially when the resistance comes up against students' own marginalized identities and reproduces other personal experiences of injustice.

Discussion

Beyond corroborating increasingly common findings about the benefits of pedagogical partnership for participating students from equity-seeking groups (e.g., Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; Colón García, 2017; for detailed reporting of these results from the present study see Cook-Sather, 2018, 2020; de Bie et al., 2019), this article builds on preliminary study findings reported elsewhere (Cook-Sather, Krishna Prasad et al., 2019) by offering further insight into partnership's capacity to contribute to equitable classroom practices. As participants noted, key dimensions of this potential impact include the mobilization of student partners' equity-specific expertise to promote faculty reflection and concrete shifts in approaches to teaching; however, there are also notable challenges to advancing equity through partnership.

Importantly, while much previous partnership literature emphasizes that students can offer insights based on their experience of being students (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Kandiko Howson & Weller, 2016), our data document student partners also drawing on a wide range of knowledge from their intersecting identities, as well as from prior advocacy work and education, to affect faculty thinking and teaching practice in ways that advance equity. Many participants experienced and observed these changes, or imagined and believed that they could occur, offering useful preliminary evidence of partnership's capacity to contribute to classroom equity.

Nevertheless, our data also point toward several limitations or areas for further consideration in this regard. Several participants underlined that partnership's potential to contribute to equity is affected by who takes part, for instance, and hoped that more faculty and students might become involved, echoing a growing body of literature that articulates a desire to "scale up" partnership activities to enhance their institutional impact (Bell, 2016; Flint, 2016). There were also participants who felt uncertain about the equity impacts of their partnerships, and those who commented on positive effects on teaching practice generally, without fully articulating connections to equity. While this suggests alternative methods beyond student self-report may be required to thoroughly assess the equity-related contributions of working in partnership, it also raises questions about how to enable students to gain this first-hand affirmation of their contributions. For example, how might we better resource student and faculty partners to identify, assess and share equity-related impacts; invite students into partnerships earlier in their studies and/or extend the duration of partnerships so that students can see changes as they unfold over time and contribute to associated documentation and dissemination (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017); or facilitate communication between student and faculty partners to share updates on project impacts once they have concluded? Being able to point to concrete examples of how their work and expertise have contributed to greater equity may be one underexplored strategy for mediating the potential burden of the work itself.

Equally importantly, our data affirm that we need to continue exploring how partnership practices themselves can be made more responsive and equitable. Our findings underscore that student partners pushing for greater equity while occupying less privileged social positions might experience (and experience personally, through their social identities) particularly pronounced

power differentials and complex forms of resistance, which can lead to re-marginalization and harm. This raises significant questions about the risks and emotional labour that may be involved in pedagogical partnership for marginalized students, particularly when they are engaged in partnerships explicitly focused on issues of equity (Cook-Sather, Bahti & Ntem, 2019). While difficult, however, this resistance may not always or only be a bad thing. Ntem and Cook-Sather (2018), for example, explore how student partners can transform encounters with faculty resistance into enhanced interpersonal resilience. The resources required to persist through challenges and develop a sense of resilience are of course important to consider and not equally distributed, which crucially encourages us to ensure students working in partnership are well supported (Ntem & Cook-Sather, 2018), such as through the weekly consultant meetings available to participants in the SaLT program. With such support, student partners can develop resilience through difficult negotiations, which, at times, can translate into further commitment and capacity to engage in equity work.

That said, the notion of resilience has been subject to critique, for example by disabled students who point out that discourses of resilience often deflect attention from the need for systemic change by focusing on how individuals might adapt to their situations rather than trying to alter them (Aubrecht, 2012). Moreover, there are risks attached to responsibilizing individuals from equity-seeking groups for transforming unjust institutions. While some students might welcome the opportunity to contribute to paid equity-work in their universities through partnership, we need to consider the possibility that equity-focused partnerships might become a kind of "cultural taxation" (James, 2012, p. 136) for participating students from equity-seeking groups, placing additional burdens and expectations on them relative to their non-marginalized peers. Given these complexities, equity-focused partnerships should be seen as one piece of a larger set of institutional strategies aimed at enhancing equity and should be broached with active attention to and reflection on their potential risks as well as their considerable benefits.

Finally, in line with scholars who note that partnership has largely been studied within "Western," English-speaking contexts (e.g., Bindra et al., 2018; Kaur et al., 2019; Pounder et al., 2016), our findings also encourage further attention to the ways in which cultures (including Western cultures) operate within partnership and influence its effects. Just as Kaur et al. (2019) illustrate that partnership practices were experienced somewhat differently by students in a Malaysian context than what is typically described in research focusing on "Western" students (though with many of the same outcomes), so too do our data affirm that a range of culturally-mediated experiences of partnership exist within North American institutions. Like other approaches to equity-work that acknowledge the need for universities to meaningfully respond to a diversity of knowledges and ways of being rather than simply "supporting" students to adapt to unchanging institutional norms (Smit, 2012), partnership would also benefit from further attention to cultural responsiveness, particularly when it is framed as a means of working toward greater equity in postsecondary education. This might mean attending to the reality of cultural diversity within individual contexts (Fanghanel & Cousin, 2012) and thus being aware that different students will experience partnership differently; making space for other models of respectful and reciprocal relationships across age and role; and actively considering how partnership might unintentionally reproduce oppressive discourses or undercut its own radical goals. For example, Pounder et al. (2016) point out that a partnership programme in the Hong Kong context needs to be "doubly vigilant so as not to replicate colonial attitudes or structures of power," particularly when students "become the bridge between their classmates and, at times, expatriate faculty

members" (pp.1200-1201). This consideration surely applies to the settler colonial contexts of Canada and the United States as well.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. Students may have been reticent to report negative or challenging experiences—such as ones that emphasize the difficulties of enhancing equity through partnership—particularly given the fact that research team members are affiliated with the programs being studied. To some extent, the fact that we provided an opportunity for participants to respond anonymously to the interview questions online or be interviewed by a student partner from an equity-seeking group should have mitigated this possibility. Nonetheless, students who are supportive of the programs overall may have still been concerned about reporting negative elements that could have reflected badly on partnership opportunities (thus choosing not to participate at all, or not to disclose these components of their experience). It is also important to underscore that our own positionalities and affiliations with the programs studied surely influenced our approach to data collection and analysis. While this may have contributed to us finding positive outcomes in our data, we also actively attempted to be open to tensions and seek critique, as reflected in the challenges and limitations we report here. Given some of these reported challenges, we might also have attended more actively to how power differentials could have played out within our own partnership and shaped our experiences and analyses. Additionally, due to the small number of McMaster participants in this research and the fact that students were especially likely to report broader equity-related change when they were in roles more directly connected to faculty teaching practices, the results we report here tend to emphasize the experiences of SaLT participants who were acting as consultants and co-designers of courses. Further research is thus required on the extent to which research-focused partnerships, such as those unfolding as one aspect of the partnership program at McMaster, might contribute to classroom equity. Likewise, beyond our focus here on student perceptions and observations of equity-focused impacts, future research might adopt a wider range of research methods to further investigate partnership's contributions to equity in teaching practices (e.g., observational studies or analyses of revised course materials, longitudinal outcome tracking), and/or explore the perspectives of faculty partners or other students enrolled in courses worked on in partnership.

Nevertheless, the preliminary findings reported here suggest partnership has the potential to contribute to more equitable and inclusive teaching practices in several ways, adding to the existing body of research that has focused primarily on the individual experiences of participating students. Looking ahead, we need to further consider how to maximize this potential and mitigate the possible harm student partners might encounter, as well as further attend to other ways of assessing the impact of partnership on equity. By doing so, we can continue enhancing partnership's capacity to contribute to equity and justice in postsecondary education.

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