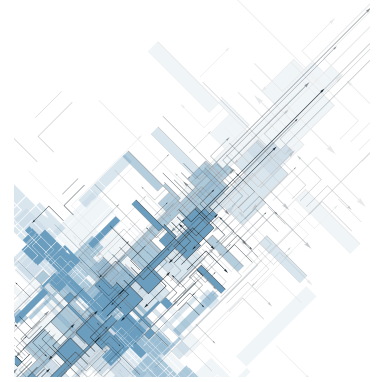


Abstract

The intersection in 2020 of the new COVID-19 pandemic with the ongoing pandemic of anti-black racism exacerbated existing injustices as well as caused and revealed new inequities in US higher education. Because inequities in assessment in particular were intensified by these twin pandemics, faculty at several US colleges revised assessment approaches as part of their pedagogical partnership work over the last year. This paper describes the one-on-one, semester-long, pedagogical partnerships these faculty undertook with undergraduates not enrolled in the faculty members' courses. It reviews the commitments of such partnership work to equity and justice, offers examples of how four faculty-student pairs across the disciplines at three US colleges revised their approaches to assessment, and analyzes how these examples work toward equity and justice. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of such work not only at the intersection of twin pandemics but under all circumstances.



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Responding to Twin Pandemics: Reconceptualizing Assessment Practices for Equity and Justice

A few months into 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic put colleges and universities around the world into lockdown. Most US institutions responded by pivoting to remote and hybrid teaching and learning, and many continued with these modes through the Fall-2020 and Spring-2021 terms. The intersection of this pivot with the worldwide uprisings against anti-black racism threw into stark relief long-standing socio-economic injustices and inequities in US higher-education contexts and revealed new ones (Fain, 2020). The double disadvantaging—and, in some cases, devastation—at the intersection of the life-threatening pandemic and the life-affirming uprisings added urgency to the need to reconceptualize practices in US colleges and universities. This article focuses on the efforts of four pairs of student-faculty pedagogical partners at liberal arts colleges in the northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and southern regions of the US to revise assessment practices as part of their work to address injustices and inequities in higher education.

The widest context in which these efforts unfolded is that of anti-black systemic racism—a “transnational phenomenon” born of global white supremacy (Busey et al., 2020). As Tometi (2017), co-founder of Black Lives Matter, argues, “anti-black racism is everywhere—globalized in large part by the legacy of the enslavement of people of African descent, the colonial legacy and the current neo-colonial relations” (para. 4). The effects of anti-black racism in US higher education include high mental health costs (Anderson,

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2020) and low completion rates for black and Hispanic students (Shapiro et al., 2017). These outcomes are not manifestations of students' failures but rather "of our broader, historical social system of privilege and oppression" (Williams, 2018, p. 2; Malcom-Piqueux, 2018). In the spring of 2020 in the US, these existing injustices were compounded by new inequities, such as higher rates of job loss and of mortality among black and Latino workers (Fain, 2020), many of whom were college students or members of their families.

Research has documented that every student does not have an equal opportunity to succeed in higher education (Cahalan et al., 2018; Singer-Freeman & Robinson, 2020). The twin pandemics revealed and exacerbated the ways in which socio-economic disparities intersected with race-based inequities in students' experiences. As Casey (2020) documented, while one student retreated to a vacation home to learn remotely, another struggled "to keep her mother's Puerto Rican food truck running while meat vanished from Florida grocery shelves." The shift to remote learning, one faculty member asserted, "made visible realities [students] were previously contending with, although there had not been an occasion to bring them to light until then" (Labridy-Stofle, 2020, p. 3). The intersection of the pandemic, the systemic racism in the US, and racial inequities in higher education has, according to Clayton (2021), "prompted a clarion call for more effective strategies that will result in more equitable outcomes for underrepresented populations" (para. 6).

Inequities in assessment have consistently been a concern in higher education (Leathwood, 2005; Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017), and these too have been exacerbated by the intersection of the twin pandemics. Most approaches insist on "assessing students in the same way without paying attention to their differences" (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, p. 16). Furthermore, many methods of assessment, like much else in higher education, both consciously embrace and unconsciously manifest characteristics of white supremacy culture (Jones & Okun, 2001), such as only one right way, either/or thinking, and objectivity. These characteristics contribute to the erroneous conflation of equity and sameness, to the failure to recognize multiple ways of problem solving and creating, and to the discounting of alternative logics and pathways to those privileged by those in power.

Characteristics of white supremacy culture inform the very structures of our educational systems. They are embodied in practices such as grading, which, as undergraduate student Nordstrom-Wehner argues, constitutes "a scale that inhibits learning and perpetuates existing inequalities" (Del Rosso & Nordstrom-Wehner, 2020, p. 7). Inoue (2015) has noted that, "Racism seen and understood as structural...reveals the ways that systems, like the ecology of the classroom, already work to create failure in particular places and associate it with particular bodies" (p. 4). Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) argue that equitable assessment practices are those that afford all learners an equal and unbiased opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and achievements. The twin pandemics have revealed that historical patterns, institutional structures, and individual practices militate against all learners having such opportunities. Refusing the characteristics of white supremacy culture and creating assessments that are equitable—that take into account how students and institutional structures influence ways of knowing—involve, according to Montenegro and Jankowski (2020), providing opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge in different ways.

Faculty and students participating in pedagogical partnership programs at a number of colleges saw the necessity of revising assessment as the intersection of the twin pandemics made them newly or more deeply aware of long-standing injustices and inequities. This paper begins with definitions of pedagogical partnership offered in current literature and highlights commitments of partnership work to equity and justice. It then presents the revisions to assessment faculty-student pairs across four disciplines developed during late 2020 and early 2021 at Bryn Mawr College, Davidson College, and Vassar College, and it analyzes how these examples work toward equity and justice. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of such work not only at the intersection of the twin pandemics but under all circumstances.

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Student-Faculty Pedagogical Partnerships for Equity and Justice

Through pedagogical partnerships, academic and professional staff, administrators, and other students “engage students as co-learners, co-researchers, co-inquirers, co-developers, and co-designers” (Healey et al., 2016, p. 2) in and of approaches to learning and teaching. Pedagogical partnerships constitute “a collaborative, reciprocal process” whereby “all participants 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, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, pp. 6-7). In all four of the examples featured in this paper, faculty and student pairs worked in semester-long, one-on-one partnerships through which the student partners: visited their faculty partners’ classrooms weekly; took observation notes focused on pedagogical questions and practices they and their faculty partners agreed to analyze; met weekly with their faculty partners to discuss the observation notes and both affirmations and potential revisions of practice; and met regularly with the partnership program facilitator and other student partners. In each case, the student partners earned monetary compensation or course credit for the time they spent.

This kind of partnership work has been shown to deepen engagement and enhance learning and teaching for all participants (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Matthews, Mercer-Mapstone, Dvorakova, et al., 2019; Mercer-Mapstone, Dvorakova, Matthews, et al., 2017). Of particular importance to the present discussion, pedagogical partnership work has the potential to foster more equitable and inclusive practices (Cates, Madigan, & Reitenauer, 2018; Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; Cook-Sather, Krishna Prasad, Marquis, et al., 2019; Cook-Sather, Signorini, Dorantes, et al. 2020) and redress some of the epistemic, affective, and ontological harms caused by the structures and practices of higher education (de Bie et al., 2019; 2021). A participant in Curtis and Anderson’s (2021a) study noted that “[assessment in the classroom is one of the] most highly guarded and protected aspects of higher education and one of the last holdouts of sole faculty ownership” (p. 56). And yet, like the pedagogical partnership work described above, the co-creation of assessment by instructors and enrolled students can “empower and improve perceptions of the classroom, toward the end of fostering a more equitable learning environment for all students” (Chase, 2020, p. 11; see also Deeley & Bovill, 2017; Deeley & Brown, 2014).

Increasingly, pedagogical partnership programs name inclusion, belonging, equity, and justice as foundational commitments. In the US, for instance, Smith College (Cook-Sather, Bahti, & Ntem, 2019), Berea College (Cook-Sather, Ortquist-Ahrens, & Reynolds, 2019), and Florida Gulf Coast University (Cook-Sather, Ortquist-Ahrens, et al., 2019; Cook-Sather, Bahti, et al., 2019; Gennocro & Straussberger 2020) all named equity goals as foundational to their advent. Partnership programs beyond the US also explicitly embrace such commitments, including those at Victoria University of Wellington in Aotearoa / New Zealand (Leota & Sutherland 2020; Lenihan-Ikin et al. 2020), Kaye Academic College of Education in Beer-Sheva, Israel (Cook-Sather, Bahti, et al., 2019; Narkiss & Naaman 2020), and McMaster University in Ontario, Canada (Marquis, Carrasco-Acosta, et al., 2019).

Supporting the Development of Assessment that Moves Toward Equity and Justice

As the creator of a long-standing pedagogical partnership program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, I am often asked to support other institutions in developing such programs, including at Davidson College and Vassar College. In March of 2020, at the suggestion of a student partner at Vassar College, she and I invited student partners from all institutions participating in [Pairing Student Partners: An Intercollegiate Collaboration](#) (a support structure she had created with my guidance) to participate in a Zoom conversation about how best to support their faculty partners when colleges pivoted to remote teaching and learning. Student partners at nine different institutions generated a set of [recommendations](#) (see linked resource) that was published on Haverford College’s website as well as on other institutions’ websites with the goal of reaching as wide an audience as possible. These recommendations included four overarching considerations and detailed approaches under each: (1) start with and sustain the human; (2) embrace practices that

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are equitable and accessible; (3) offer students choices; and (4) create regular opportunities to assess learning goals.

Hoping to showcase the work student and faculty partners were doing at these institutions, I contacted program directors at all nine institutions. I asked them to extend an invitation to all faculty participating in their partnership programs to share examples of developing more equitable practices of assessment. Four faculty members and their student partners responded, sending the detailed examples included below. Each of the examples was drafted and revised by the faculty and student partners and approved by them for inclusion in this discussion.

Assessment for Equity and Justice in a Psychology Course at Bryn Mawr College

Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) was conceptualized in 2006 and piloted in 2007 at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, two liberal arts colleges approximately 14 miles outside Philadelphia. SaLT developed in response to faculty desire to engage in more culturally responsive and inclusive practices (Cook-Sather, 2019; 2018b) and was supported by several grants from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Since its advent, each semester SaLT has included between 50% and 75% student partners who identify as belonging to under-represented and under-served groups. All student partners are paid by the hour for the time they spend on partnership activities.

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In the Fall-2020 term, one faculty participant in SaLT, Ariana Orvell, Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department at Bryn Mawr, and her student partner, Sarah Phillips, Class of 2022 and a psychology major, worked together through the SaLT program on Orvell's course, Introduction to Psychology. This course was taught remotely, and Orvell used a flipped classroom (asynchronous lectures followed by synchronous Zoom sessions that addressed student questions, fostered discussion, checked for understanding, and extended concepts from lecture). In thinking through assessment, Orvell set up exams so that they would not feel quite as 'high stakes' and so that students could learn how to improve their studying/learning of the material and be rewarded for that when it comes to assessment. For example, she introduced an option for students to weigh the lowest grade on any of the three exams less heavily. Students also completed written responses after viewing the lectures, which gave them the opportunity to engage in deeper processing through synthesis, asking questions, and making connections between the course content and their own lives.

Feedback from her students and from Phillips informed Orvell that students appreciated being able to participate in this course in a variety of ways (e.g. chat, polls, discussions). Orvell therefore modified and expanded opportunities for students to engage in the course material. These modifications to respond to pandemic conditions intersected with uprisings in protest of anti-black racism. For instance, Orvell received emails from approximately one third of the students enrolled in her course expressing their intention to engage in the student-led strikes for racial justice that took place at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges in the Fall-2020 term. In collaboration with a colleague, Laura Grafe, Orvell responded to students' desire to engage with content related to issues around racism by modifying an existing form of assessment—a 3-5-page reaction paper in which students synthesize and comment on an article—to focus on a particular article: "The Psychology of American Racism," written by Steven Roberts and Michael Rizzo (2020).

With Phillips' input and support, Orvell developed additional alternative assignments and readings, integrated language on DEI and anti-racism into her syllabus, strengthened her commitment to integrating perspectives from psychologists from diverse social identities and cultural contexts, and extended to students an invitation to question the implicit (or explicit) norms of the white hegemony that underlie many of the theories/studies covered in Introductory Psychology.

The changes described above were implemented at different points throughout the academic school year, in response to different types of student feedback, contextual factors, and discussions between Orvell and Phillips. For example, being intentional about giving students multiple ways to participate (e.g., chat, polls, discussion) was informed through

feedback and observations that Phillips shared with Orvell, as well as mid-semester feedback that Orvell and Phillips gathered from the class through an anonymous online survey. The Reaction Paper assignment was adapted during the student strike, in response to the strikers' call for classes to integrate learning about race into coursework (previously, students would have been given a choice between several articles that covered different topics in Introductory Psychology). The decision to allow students to weigh exams less heavily was largely informed by the recognition that the pandemic introduced severe mental health burdens for large swaths of the population, [particularly adults 18-29 \(see linked resource\)](#), in addition to Orvell's belief that assessment should reflect and reward students' growth and progress. This was built into the course from the onset. Orvell made changes to the syllabus (e.g., inviting students to question norms, DEI statement) after the Fall-2020 semester to promote a more inclusive classroom. Finally, Orvell received feedback from several students after teaching Introductory Psychology in the Fall-2020 semester indicating that students appreciated changes that were made to the course and evaluated it as inclusive.

Assessment for Equity and Justice in a Religion Course at Vassar College

The Student Teacher Engaged Pedagogical Partnership (STEPP) program was piloted in the Spring-2020 semester at Vassar, a small, liberal arts college in the Hudson Valley, New York. The program was an outgrowth of the Engaged Pluralism Initiative (EPI) Inclusive Pedagogies Working Group (Bala, 2021; Bala & Kahn, forthcoming). Through STEPP, Professor of Religion, Jonathon Kahn, and his student partner, Ananya Suresh, Class of 2021, undertook what they called "an experiment in student self-assessment during covid" in a 100-level course Kahn was teaching in a hybrid format. There were 28 mostly first-year students enrolled. In-person meetings were in an outdoor tent classroom, with 20 students in person and eight fully remote. Suresh had previously taken the course, but she was partnered with Kahn because of her involvement in the EPI working group. She was a two-year veteran of EPI and was involved in the development of the pilot, and she received academic credit for the partnership (.5 credit).

Kahn and Suresh worked together to revise grading procedures to follow a self-assessment structure. The emphasis was on encouraging students to take a more active role in their learning experience by reflecting on their goals, hopes, and effort for the semester. Furthermore, the revised grading procedures emphasized the role of collaborative learning in the classroom, prompting students to contemplate their extended engagement with one another during class (small partner groups for 40-45 minutes at times). The students were asked to give qualitative descriptions of what it was like to spend time in class together during Covid; with that description as a prompt, students were asked to give accounts of how and in what ways they got to know their classmates. In an effort to promote these interactions, Suresh and Kahn structured the final writing exercise as an interview; each student was assigned a class partner to write a profile of in terms of their experience in the class; students were encouraged to ask their partner how the experience of the class material newly shaped their experiences as a member of the Vassar community.

The self-assessment strategy Kahn and Suresh developed was a response to Kahn's discomfort with grading a class during a pandemic. Because interaction was circumscribed, and because he normally weighed class participation 20%, he was uncomfortable basing a grade on so much work that would go unseen at best. Self-assessment became a way that he could engage the students in their own learning process, prompt them to reflect on what they valued and how they wanted to develop over the course of the semester, and then have them see if they accomplished what they set out to do. For students, the benefits were several fold. The approach gave them more flexibility during a time (a pandemic) when life was exceedingly unpredictable (at any time they could test positive and have to quarantine for 10 days) and precarious. It allowed them to continue to learn—at least this is what they reported: they learned—while not feeling as though the pace and demands were backbreaking. Students reported a high degree of satisfaction both in terms of what they learned and their enjoyment of class.

Reflecting on this work, Kahn acknowledged that any time we attempt more equitable practices, we have only inequitable experience to pull from. He also noted,

The approach gave them more flexibility during a time (a pandemic) when life was exceedingly unpredictable (at any time they could test positive and have to quarantine for 10 days) and precarious. It allowed them to continue to learn...

though, that this is true with any grading scheme. But over time and through dialogue that addresses the norms we have in place for assessing work, students and faculty can become better at assessment—including students assessing themselves. Through such an evolution, self-assessment represents a type of work through which we transform the inequitable experiences we pull from.

Kahn found that talking with students about the norms they use to assess themselves, and offering his perspective on their work without the authority of determining their grade, led to students' growing understanding of why they work, what they like to work on, and what counts for them as fulfilling work—outcomes that are consistent with Kahn's course goals. He also found that students' self-assessment allowed him to engage more fully with the students' writing. His comments on their work were not aimed at justifying a grade. Instead, they were more directly tied to pointing out what was working well in a paper, what wasn't working, and what could get better. Not having to append a grade at the end of such comments made the experience of grading much less burdensome and more fulfilling for him, too. He has continued student self-assessment in subsequent semesters, both refining the self-assessment questions and planning to continue the evolution.

Assessment for Equity and Justice in a Chemistry Course at Davidson College

More frequent low-stakes assessments helped to encourage a growth mindset by checking comprehension and allowing for opportunities for clarification before the next assessment.

Fostering Inclusivity and Respect in Science Together ([FIRST](#)) is an initiative supported by a grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute to Davidson College. Davidson is situated in Davidson, North Carolina, a small town north of Charlotte somewhat at the suburban/rural divide of the region. As part of this initiative, the More Inclusive Learning Environments (MILE) was created in 2019 to improve the state of inclusivity and leadership in its science education (Hernandez Brito, 2021; Hossain, 2021). Student partners, identified by the FIRST Program coordinators, were chosen for their passion and interest related to inclusivity initiatives. They were then matched with faculty partners based on whether they had already taken a course with the faculty member (not allowed) as well as the likelihood of the student taking a future course with their faculty partner (the less likely, the better, and ultimately highly discouraged). The students in this cohort typically are victims of microaggressions, marginalization, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. The student and faculty partners participated in training, both student- or faculty-only and with student and faculty partners together. The students were encouraged by the program leads to communicate with the faculty partner about any and all observations and use the program leads as another outlet for observations. These positions were funded for both the faculty and student partners. The mantra throughout the experience was that the students were experts in their own experience.

Through the FIRST program, an Assistant Professor of Chemistry, Mitch Anstey, and his student partner, Claire Tobin, Class of 2021 and a Physics and Economics major who would not need to take the Inorganic Chemistry course (and the associated pre-requirements) that was the focus of the partnership, worked together in the context of one of Anstey's courses. Upon the shift to students moving off campus, the course converted to synchronous/asynchronous, and lectures were recorded in real time for students to view later for studying or for a first viewing if they couldn't attend. Attendance was typically greater than 90% in the fully remote setting. The class had 32 students, which is the maximum at Davidson College (total student population of 1,983). The course is both a requirement for chemistry majors as well as an elective for pre-health students.

Upon the shift to fully remote learning, all assessments (tests and problem sets) were divided into smaller portions to decrease study time and lower grade impact of any one assignment. This change resulted in more frequent assessments that were shorter in duration and smaller in terms of student effort. The changes aimed to break down the units, so students were responsible for less material on each assessment. More frequent low-stakes assessments helped to encourage a growth mindset by checking comprehension and allowing for opportunities for clarification before the next assessment.

Representing not so much changes *per se*, but a reinforcement of existing methods, Anstey and Tobin made a number of adjustments. They included small, low-stakes assignments due roughly each class period. These assignments were only graded for completion and could be completed collaboratively, and answer keys were provided. The class itself was conducted using the process-oriented guided instructional learning (POGIL) pedagogy (Farrell et al, 1999). This approach to group work has advantages in learning to support and debate claims, learning to give space and make space for others, using multiple viewpoints to understand topics/issues, and building community within the classroom that persists outside of the classroom. Because working in a group is often met with unease and leads to negative feelings around the activity (as supported by student course evaluations over several years in previous iterations of this course), group composition and support play a large role in how well the group functions, especially as many students are not skilled in working group dynamics.

Through MILE, Anstey and Tobin were able to work together to make even more observations about how well groups were functioning, and they developed strategies for choosing future groups that would ultimately facilitate the best outcome for all involved. In one instance, a student was often seen observing but not directly contributing to their group due to the presence of two students who knew each other previously and were already comfortable interacting. Additionally, this student self-identified as black and later mentioned that they felt the group was dominated by the other two, who did not make efforts to ask for others' contributions or thoughts. Even before this information was offered by the student, Tobin had identified the dynamic, alerted Anstey, and worked to find a new group where the dynamic was more equitable. Additionally, the two close friends were separated in future groups to enable more discussion among all parties.

Anstey and Tobin received a lot of positive feedback. The final student feedback specifically about the use of MILE in the classroom was positive, and Anstey and Tobin often heard throughout the semester that even the presence of the MILE student partner was a signal that inclusivity and equity were valued in the classroom.

Assessment for Equity and Justice in a Biology Course at Bryn Mawr College

Immunologist and Assistant Professor of Biology, Adam Williamson, and his student partner, Kate Weiler, Class of 2020, worked in partnership for two semesters through the SaLT program during Weiler's senior year at Bryn Mawr College. Weiler and Williamson were paired based on scheduling compatibility, as is the case with virtually all student-faculty pairings through SaLT. Weiler completed an independent major in education and was paid for her work as a SaLT student partner.

In Spring 2020, Williamson and Weiler worked together in a senior thesis seminar. The course enrolled eight senior biology majors and met in person for the first six weeks of the term before a shift to a remote-only format. At the end of the term, students were required to submit a thesis to meet their major requirements. During the transition to remote learning, Williamson and Weiler, in collaboration with students in the seminar, reconfigured the course as a sequence of twice-weekly meetings dedicated to student support and accountability opportunities for Williamson and the enrolled students.

Specifically, Williamson and Weiler made the following three revisions. First, they moved to student-set (rather than faculty-determined) deadlines for draft sections of the thesis. After a sudden transition to remote learning, students were working under difficult circumstances. For instance, many students in the course took on new job or childcare responsibilities at home that made working to the schedule on the syllabus impossible. Williamson and Weiler encouraged students to work towards self-set deadlines to complete draft sections of their thesis.

Second, they de-emphasized student peer-review of other students' work. Williamson and Weiler had planned for students to review one another's work and provide critical feedback, but they removed this requirement for students because peer review was impossible when

Williamson [faculty] noted that his conversations with Weiler [student] always made him think differently about his teaching, so he rarely assumed that his first idea for how to solve a problem would be the optimal one.

students were working on different, self-set schedules. Instead, Williamson provided timely feedback on student work. Finally, they removed a required student-led seminar meeting. They had planned for students to lead a seminar meeting during the semester about their thesis work for discussion with the class. They removed this component of the course so students could focus time and energy on the time-sensitive thesis work required to graduate.

The revisions Williamson and Weiler made were directly influenced by the students in class. They asked students to complete a brief set of questions about changes that would best support their learning and offered a set of proposed changes rather than a set of new rules. Students offered suggestions about these changes during their first remote meeting. Thus, Williamson and Weiler developed the course revisions as part of an iterative process in collaboration with their students, not as unilateral decisions about what they assumed their students required.

In reflecting on this work, Williamson noted that his conversations with Weiler always made him think differently about his teaching, so he rarely assumed that his first idea for how to solve a problem would be the optimal one. Weiler was instrumental in communicating to Williamson the importance of regular weekly contact as a full group. While Williamson's initial instinct had been to switch to individual meetings to help students complete their thesis work and graduate on time, Weiler's concise, convincing argument about the importance of class community and student-led mutual support networks was an important factor in building their revised seminar structure. Williamson has adopted the revised structure of the course (twice-weekly meetings, with a full class meeting dedicated to build seminar community) as the new format in which he teaches this class (most recently in the Spring-2021 term), and students have voiced appreciation of a community-focused, full-class meeting once per week supplemented by "writing workshops" that serve as spaces for individual meetings and conversations about student research.

Implications

The examples included here emerged in response to a particular crisis and intersection. The heightened awareness, care, willingness to rethink, and specific revisions these faculty-student partners co-created reject characteristics of white supremacy culture (Jones & Okun, 2001). They move toward affording all students equal and unbiased opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and achievements (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). And they respond to the student partner recommendations to start with and sustain the human, offer students choice, and create regular opportunities to assess learning goals.

In the psychology course at Bryn Mawr College, Orvell and Phillips developed alternative assignments and assessments that responded to student desire for content related to issues around racism, afforded students more choice, and more explicitly prioritized their learning. In the religion course at Vassar, Kahn and Suresh revised grading procedures in ways that shifted the sole locus of control from faculty to students and, like Orvell and Phillips' revisions, shifted the focus from performance of what faculty expect to engagement in what deepens student learning.

In the chemistry course at Davidson College, Anstey and Tobin created shorter, more frequent assessments that, like Orvell's and Kahn's revisions, encouraged a growth mindset. They also built class community, linking to the refusal of one right way, since different students take different approaches. Finally, in the biology course at Bryn Mawr College, Williamson and Weiler reconfigured the structure of the course, shifting to student-set (rather than faculty-determined) deadlines for draft sections of student theses, de-emphasizing student peer-review of other students' work to lower pressure, and reducing requirements. All of these changes, prompted by the pandemic-necessitated shift to remote teaching and learning, also reflected, according to Weiler and Williamson (2020), "necessary and overdue conversations about white supremacy and what to do to create a sustained anti-racist academy" (p. 6).

Through their approaches, across disciplines and institutions, these faculty refused the conflation of equity and sameness, recognized multiple ways of problem solving and creating, and embraced students' alternative logics and pathways in demonstrating knowledge.

The examples included here emerged in response to a particular crisis and intersection. The heightened awareness, care, willingness to rethink, and specific revisions these faculty-student partners co-created reject characteristics of white supremacy culture

Furthermore, they did this work in partnership with students not enrolled in their courses, which led, in turn, to greater partnership with enrolled students—a phenomenon that has been demonstrated across student-faculty partnerships (Cook-Sather, 2014; Cook-Sather, Hong, Moss, et al., 2021).

Faculty and student partners alike note that the changes made in response to a crisis are actually important to consider under all circumstances. Williamson notes that “partnerships are uniquely positioned to help faculty build and sustain trauma-informed learning spaces, respond to mistakes in content and facilitation quickly in a student-centered way, and avoid making blunders in the first place” (Weiler & Williamson, 2020, p. 6). Weiler notes that Williamson’s caring approach “was present before we shifted to remote learning and continued through the disruption caused by COVID-19” (Weiler & Williamson, 2020, p. 3). She asserts that Williamson’s “care-centered pedagogy exemplifies that showing care towards students should be prioritized always, not only during unprecedented circumstances” (Weiler & Williamson, 2020, p. 3).

These reflections are consistent with what other participants in pedagogical partnership have argued. Reflecting on the partnership she developed not only with her formal student partner but also with all the students enrolled in her literature course, Labridy-Stofle (2020) anticipates:

When we return to in-person teaching (one day), I will keep with me this new understanding of my students. How I can continue to make room for their multiplicity in a face-to-face setting and to think in terms of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ is something I will keep striving for. In truth, however, as a Caribbean-born person, I already carried notions of multiplicity, intersectionality, and the rhizome within me, but I am more determined than ever to infuse them more consistently in my teaching (p. 3).

Labridy-Stofle (2020) credits her work with her student partner, Parker Matias, for helping her achieve this clarity: “My partnership with Parker made me realize the possibility of such collaborations becoming the norm, rather than isolated experiments, and how they could be deployed in the as-yet-incomplete project of social justice” (Labridy-Stofle, 2020, p. 4). Such collaborations “becoming the norm” might contribute to student-faculty partnership becoming part not only of one-on-one partnerships, as discussed here, but also program-level assessment in higher education (Curtis & Anderson, 2021a, 2021b).

In the context of long-standing inequities and injustices made (more) apparent by the intersection of the global pandemic and the protests against anti-black racism in the US, reconceptualizing assessment practices is more important than ever. There is both opportunity and imperative to ensure that this focus on humane consideration, equity, and justice not get lost in the overwhelm (for many people) of engaging in remote and hybrid teaching or in the rush to return to in-person modes. If enough faculty prioritize the creation of equitable and just approaches to assessment, we can begin to dismantle the structures, not only the practices, that sustain inequity and injustice.

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In the context of long-standing inequities and injustices made (more) apparent by the intersection of the global pandemic and the protests against anti-black racism in the US, reconceptualizing assessment practices is more important than ever.

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