

The Power of Partnership

Students, Staff, and Faculty
Revolutionizing Higher Education

Edited by Lucy Mercer-Mapstone and Sophia Abbot



Elon University Center for Engaged Learning

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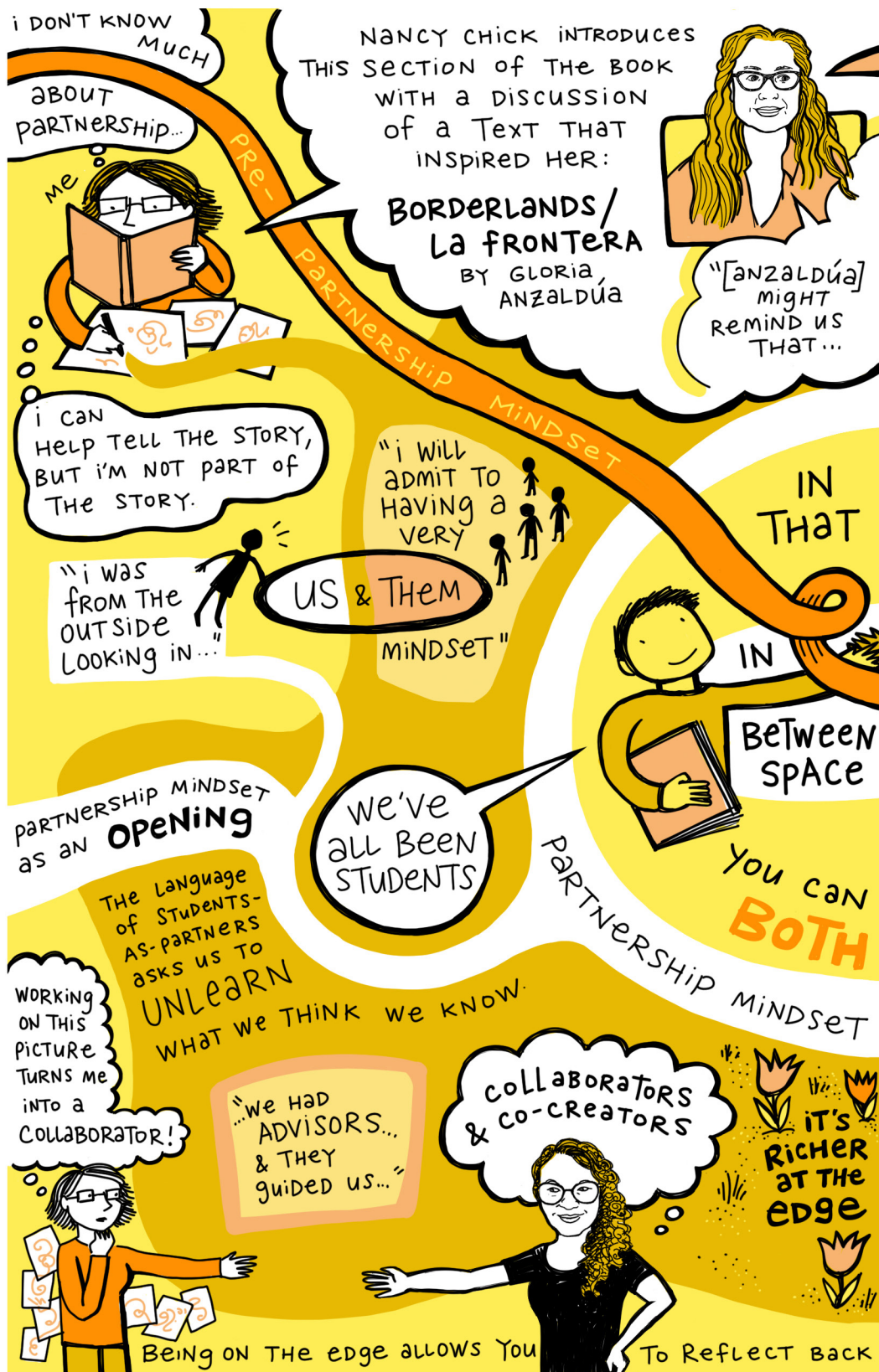
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SECTION TWO

INTERSECTIONS



SECTION INTRODUCTION

Annotations on the Spaces in Between

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“Engaging in learner-teacher partnerships in hierarchical educational structures is messy work fundamentally about human relationships in a particular socio-cultural context.”

—Kelly Matthews (chapter 7)

“We are interested in thinking about partnership as a radical, political practice.”

—Rachel Guitman and Elizabeth Marquis (chapter 9)

As I read the four chapters in this section, my mind immediately called up Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987), a tour de force of prose and poetry, autobiography, essay, theory, history, and song. It is one of the most influential texts of my formative academic years. I periodically return to my old copy, annotated with blue, yellow, pink, black, purple, and green inks, each of which marks the different inquiries that have brought me back. Reflecting on the following chapters drew me to all the inks.

“... the complex and multiple lives students inhabit outside the university.”

—Tai Peseta et al. (chapter 6)

“I was looking in from the outside. . . . And in those moments, I didn’t feel like I was a student *per se*.”

—Amani Bell, Stephanie Barahona, and Bonnie Stanway
(chapter 8)

“A Chicana *tejana* lesbian-feminist poet and fiction writer” (as begins her biographical blurb), Anzaldúa reminds us—in the book, in the idea of the book, and in the self that lived the book—that our identities are never singular. In the section “*Si le preguntas a mi mamá, ‘¿Qué eres?’*” (If you ask my mother, “What are you?”), Anzaldúa answers,

We call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas. (63)

This was “intersectionality” before Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term that has become the *sine qua non* for who we understand ourselves to be in the twenty-first century.

“So, there were several different spaces in-between—between the various languages, between students and staff, between generations, between cultures, and between hierarchies.”

“It’s richer at the edge.”

—Amani Bell, Stephanie Barahona, and Bonnie Stanway
(chapter 8)

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* is, among other things, "wherever two or more cultures edge each other" and "where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (iii).

Here, she tells us, race, culture, class, gender, nationality, language, and history mix, producing "hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool" (77).

"This [partnership] mindset has enabled me to enjoy aspects of my life a lot more because I recognize what I bring to the table."

—Tai Peseta et al. (chapter 6)

"The whole partnership thing . . . is messing with what we do in higher education. . . . How is your partnership messy?"

—Kelly Matthews (chapter 7)

"There was the aspect of translation between students' and academics' worlds. . . . The language academics use does not invite students into that space. . . . 'What's a colloquium? That doesn't sound like somewhere that students are welcome to go.'"

—Amani Bell, Stephanie Barahona, and Bonnie Stanway (chapter 8)

Here, Anzaldúa tells us, she writes from all of her identities by the "switching of 'codes,'" specifically "from English to Castillian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these" (iv).

But the multilingual text is not simply a representation or celebration of this complex identity. It forces readers to do some work in order to understand, and to reconsider assumptions about, the sovereignty of our language.

Indeed, what *is* a colloquium?

"We've all been students. . . . So, it's talking about our past and future selves." —Amani Bell, Stephanie Barahona, and Bonnie Stanway (chapter 8)

Now in conversation with Anzaldúa and the authors in this section, I think she'd agree with Amani Bell that faculty and staff were once students. And arguably still are. On every page of *Borderlands* is evidence of the presence of the past. (Also on every page of *Borderlands* is the annotated evidence of the presence of my own past.) "My Chicana identity," she says, "is grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance" (21). How are faculty and staff identities grounded in their histories of being a student? How does (or should) that fundamentally change this concept of *student-staff* or *faculty-student partnership*?

And I wonder what she would make of the expressions *learner-teacher* or *student-staff* or *student-faculty partnership*. She might say it sets up two distinct, dualistic, and thus hierarchical groups. She might remind us that in her *Borderlands*, in this space in-between, in place of the hyphen, is a "massive uprooting of dualistic thinking" (80).

"I will admit to having a very 'us and them' mindset about the divide between academics and students."

—Tai Peseta et al. (chapter 6)

"In this context, partnership can function as a means of pushing back and doing things differently . . . and offers a re-humanizing space. . . . I'm struck by the potential need for 'both/and' understandings of partnership's political work."

—Rachel Guitman and Elizabeth Marquis (chapter 9)

"We emphasize how a 'partnership mindset' is emerging as a feature in students' accounts of their lives outside the academy."

—Tai Peseta et al. (chapter 6)

Here, Anzaldúa tells us, "dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened" (iii), forming a "new consciousness" that creates "a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the

ways we behave” (80). One of the most enduring concepts from *Borderlands* is what she calls “The Mestiza Way”: “She puts history through a sieve. . . . She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct” (82).

And now here, in this revolutionary work among students, staff, and faculty, say the authors in this section, a “partnership mindset” is being awakened. They put roles, power, and hierarchies through a sieve.

“The language of ‘students as partners’ . . . asks us to unlearn what we think we know.”

—Kelly Matthews (chapter 7)

Unlearn, learn.

References

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
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