

# The Power of Partnership

Students, Staff, and Faculty  
Revolutionizing Higher Education

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Edited by Lucy Mercer-Mapstone and Sophia Abbot



Elon University Center for Engaged Learning  
Elon, North Carolina  
[www.CenterforEngagedLearning.org](http://www.CenterforEngagedLearning.org)

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## SECTION ONE

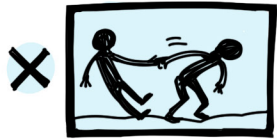
# **POWER AND POLITICS**

IN HER INTRODUCTION,  
HUANG HOON CHNG  
SPEAKS UP AGAINST  
"THE SINGLE STORY"

SHE'S TALKING ABOUT FACING  
UP TO THE (UNFORTUNATELY)  
DOMINANT NARRATIVE: THAT  
PARTNERSHIPS ARE DIFFICULT.

THE 2 IMPORTANT STRANDS

SHE'S SAYING  
PARTNERSHIP DOES  
NOT JUST MEAN  
STAFF LEADING  
STUDENTS.



"SHOULD  
IT BE  
THIS  
WAY?"



"WHY  
SHOULD IT  
NOT BE THIS  
WAY?"

...IT SEEMS THAT THERE  
ARE MANY PATHS TO  
PARTNERSHIP...

I'M TRYING  
TO CAPTURE  
SOME OF  
THESE KEY  
MESSAGES  
ABOUT PARTNER-  
SHIP... IN ONE  
GRAPHIC THAT HAS  
A GAP IN THE  
MIDDLE!!

THAT  
MAKES  
ME GO  
"HMMM"...

WE CAN  
HONOR THAT  
NECESSARY  
CONTEXT BY  
INVITING  
PEOPLE TO  
SHARE THEIR  
STORIES



THE  
CORSET  
IS OFF!

"WORK DIS-  
THE

A PLACE WHERE THOSE  
BUMPS, CURVES & IMPERFECTIONS  
ARE EMBRACED & CELEBRATED

PARTNERSHIP  
HUMAN



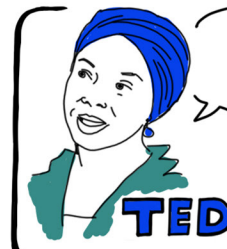
ALLY-  
SHIP

CENTRE  
THE

HUMANITY

OF  
POWER

CHIMANANDA NGOZI ADICHIE



THE DANGER OF  
A SINGLE STORY

WHERE  
ARE THE  
STUDENTS?

THAT BINDS US

MAKES US  
AGAIN

IN SHORT,  
I HAVE  
MANY  
QUESTIONS

LEARNING  
FROM  
COLLECTIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS

AND POLITICS ARE DELIGHTFULLY LAID BARE

WE ARE  
STEPPING  
OUT OF THE  
SAFE  
SPACE...

AKO

ON  
SOLVING  
BARRIERS"

EXTEND  
THE  
BOUNDARIES  
TO WELCOME  
NEWCOMERS

WELCOME  
TO THE  
MARGIN!

THANKS!

THE  
LISTENING  
BOWL



## SECTION INTRODUCTION

# Re-envisioning the Academy

*Speaking Up against “The Single Story”*

**Chng Huang Hoon**

*Associate professor*

National University of Singapore  
Singapore

Since hearing the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TED Talk *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009), I have been repeatedly reminded of the need for us to guard against dominant narratives. It would, therefore, be naïve to attempt any story about staff-student partnership without first facing up to the *one* dominant story that has been circulating in the academy—that such partnerships are either difficult to forge, or if they exist, they can take only one form, with staff leading students. This section on *Power and Politics* addresses these important and difficult issues from five different angles. Authors deploy different genres in the form of two dialogic pieces (chapters 1 and 4), two pieces of narrative prose (chapters 2 and 3), and a final poetic transcription (chapter 5). The different linguistic forms aptly capture the many “colors” of partnerships, illustrating the complexities of discoursing about this dynamic human interaction. This book as a whole and the chapters in this section collectively challenge the current “way of being in the academy” (chapter 11, Flint) and drives home the point that “the single story of partnership could [and would] be a barrier to growth” (chapter 10, Mathrani).

The two important strands of power and politics are laid delightfully bare through honest discussions and critiques by the authors of each chapter. In their poetic (re)envisioning of partnership in the introduction, Lucy Mercer-Mapstone and Sophia Abbot set the stage for this book with the many questions posed by authors, the most fundamental being “What is partnership?” (from chapter 13, Ntem). Among the many statements Lucy and Sophia quote in their poem, what I found most enlightening were the following two timely reminders: “We’ve all *been* students” (from chapter 8, Bell, Barahona, and Stanway) and “Partnership makes us human again” (based on the ideas of chapter 7, Matthews). These words push us to rethink the challenges surrounding staff-student partnership and to find a productive resolution, even if it means that we will need to rework the practice of our academy and cease treating student partners as “naïve voices” (chapter 5, Lenihan-Ikin et al.), or as “novelties” (chapter 2, Wilson et al.). In confronting power and politics, I urge all of us to call up our empathetic memory and understanding of what it means to be students, and to center the humanity that binds us, regardless of our ascribed identities and the roles we play in our institutions.

A message I believe worth highlighting here is one offered in chapters 2 and 3 about what established members in the academy *can* do. Both chapters allude to the role—and I will add, the responsibility—that can be actively assumed by “the powerful insiders in SoTL” (chapter 2, Wilson et al.), that “those already within the partnership community [must] increasingly look outward . . . [to] reach out and extend the boundaries of our practices, our discussions, and our networks to welcome newcomers with an ethos of absolute inclusivity” (chapter 3, Guitman, Acai, and Mercer-Mapstone). As Wilson et al. put it, “Active ally-ship is central.” I believe wholeheartedly that we must *intentionally* include individuals and groups so that we do not *unintentionally* exclude them. An attitude of generosity and advocacy towards others newer to the practice is crucial if we wish to enrich the academy to grow and to improve.

Another kind of “ally-ship” is mapped out in chapter 4 by Abbi Flint and Hannah Goddard, who bring us into the terrain of student representation systems like student unions and discuss how they relate to the academic community. This chapter takes the form of a dialogic exchange



between an educational developer/researcher and a student engagement professional and presents the situational reality of student unions as both independent of and interdependent with the institutions of which they are a part. The nature of such partnerships presents a curious situation where reps experience a kind of split reality in which power remains elusive because they are, to rephrase Roselynn Verwoord and Heather Smith, hampered by the ever-present specter of the student-staff hierarchy (chapter 1). If we work on reducing and dissolving barriers, or, if we cannot eliminate them, then actively backgrounding power differentials, student reps can be better empowered to perform their role. The position we choose to adopt, the openness and willingness of spirit, our conscious decision not to involve ourselves in ethnocentric thinking, and the reflexive stance that we must bring into our practice—all captured by the P.O.W.E.R framework in chapter 1 by Roselynn Verwoord and Heather Smith—will go a long way in promoting “ally-ship” and equity in our relationships with professional peers, students included.

The final chapter in this section, by Isabella Lenihan-Ikin et al., takes us out of the idea of partnership as a political process into the realm of civic space to, as they say, “investigate how best to encourage university-community partnerships through civically engaged curricula” and to view “the university itself as a civic space” (chapter 5)—a space of inclusivity and frank engagement, a sanctioned safe space that allows for collaboration and free exchange. Though this may sound idealistic, we should remind ourselves that, ideologically, academic institutions should be built on principles like freedom of knowledge pursuit and exchange, rather than as political arenas that favor hierarchy over partnerships. Our institutions ought to be spaces where we critically deconstruct normativity and be vigilant in asking, *Well, is this normal? Should it be this way? Why should it not be this way?*

It should come naturally to us to relate to one another as equals, as humans, as authentic voices, rather than as individuals on different sides of an unscaleable fence. I do not believe in “neutral spaces” (chapter 5, Isabella Lenihan-Ikin et al.) or in power being eradicated, but I do have faith in a humanity based on shared citizenship, community, and collaboration. I have learned a great deal from the generosity of the

authors who have taken the time to explicate the different ways in which partnership can be forged and how power can be alleviated. I applaud them for resisting the single story of partnership and, in their own way, advocating for *ako* (chapter 5, Isabella Lenihan-Ikin et al.)—teaching and learning, together.