The Power of Partnership

Students, Staff, and Faculty Revolutionizing Higher Education

Edited by Lucy Mercer-Mapstone and Sophia Abbot

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CHAPTER 2

From Novelty to Norm

Moving Beyond Exclusion and the Double Justification Problem in Student-Faculty Partnerships

Sean Wilson
Graduate student
Duke University
United States

Julie Phillips
Attorney
U.S. Government
United States

Helen Meskhidze
Graduate student
University of California Irvine
United States

Claire Lockard
Doctoral candidate
Loyola University Chicago
United States

Peter Felten
Executive director
Center for Engaged Learning
Elon University
United States

Susannah McGowan
Assoc. director for curriculum design
Georgetown University
United States

Stephen Bloch-Schulman
Professor
Elon University
United States

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) aims to investigate student learning in a disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and systematic way. Though SoTL practitioners are deeply interested in the experiences of students and invested in student learning, students themselves are rarely

included as collaborators in SoTL projects (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017). Students, because they are so rarely included, are typically viewed as novelties when they are involved in SoTL. Our focus in this chapter is on the experiences of students who *have* been included—specifically, students who partner with faculty to conduct SoTL research—and yet remain outsiders to the work in significant ways. Our research team is composed of four such students and three faculty members who frequently partner with students. We will be speaking from and analyzing our own experiences in the context of the broader SoTL community.

We begin with two anecdotes, each written by the former undergraduate students on our research team who worked in two independent student-faculty partnerships. These anecdotes highlight the fact that though we (the students) were being included in SoTL research, we nonetheless experienced a kind of exclusion from the SoTL community predicated upon a presumed set of norms regarding who has the capability to engage in SoTL activities. Put differently, even when we were included in the SoTL conversation, we confronted exclusionary barriers.

We, as a research team, then analyze these experiences with frameworks offered by two scholars who study oppression, Iris Marion Young and Kristie Dotson. We characterize these experiences as instances of what Young calls "internal exclusion" (2000, 53) and critically examine the justificatory norms that prevented the students on our research team from becoming full members of the SoTL community. We find that students (and the faculty who partner with them) bear a *double burden of justification.* We are excepted to produce high quality scholarship that contributes to the ongoing needs of the discipline and the students who should be the beneficiaries of our collective knowledge of how to teach for the best learning—an expectation that everyone in the field faces—and the additional burden of continually justifying students' engagement in and with SoTL. We offer suggestions to the SoTL community in the concluding section, particularly to faculty members, on how to affirm students' presence in SoTL and how to treat student partners more justly.

Anecdote #1: Policing Student Voices

Claire A. Lockard, Helen Meskhidze, and Sean P. Wilson

We were student members of a research team investigating the under-representation of female-identified people in philosophy several years ago. Our research team noticed a dearth of qualitative methods in the literature, so we decided to use focus groups as a means of gathering data on female-identified undergraduates' experiences in philosophy (see Lockard et al. 2017). Our inclusion as undergraduate researchers presented interesting methodological and epistemological opportunities and challenges. For instance, we took the lead in developing, facilitating, and transcribing focus groups consisting of female-identified undergraduate students with varying degrees of experience in philosophy. Our research team anticipated that excluding faculty researchers from this phase of our research would encourage students to speak more candidly regarding their gendered experiences.

We encountered a memorable challenge while presenting our work at the 2014 International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference in Quebec City. Our student-faculty panel had just presented potential reasons for the underrepresentation of women in philosophy departments. The opening response in the question time, however, was neither a question nor a comment about the content of our presentation. Instead, the audience member offered a recommendation for the two female-identified undergraduate presenters to change our voices: to speak up, to use less vocal fry (i.e., to not drop our voices' pitch), and to speak more like our male undergraduate colleague on the panel. This audience member went on to remark that vocal fry is a fitting metaphor for the way women do not feel heard in philosophy. The commenter suggested that if only women spoke up, things would improve. To our disappointment, much of the discussion devolved into us explaining why it was not our voices that were the problem. We wondered: would this comment have been made if we had been female-identified faculty, rather than female-identified students? During the break after the session, the female-identified students on the panel reflected on our voices and the times in our lives when we had been told to keep quiet. This experience was our central memory of the

conference long after we left Quebec City, overshadowing numerous positive experiences we also had at ISSOTL 2014. Despite how important sharing power was among the students and faculty on our research team and the positive outcomes engendered by working in a student/faculty team, we were met with repeated institutional and personal challenges throughout this two-year project because of our status as students.

Anecdote #2: Exercising Power in Research

Julie C. Phillips

Two other undergraduate students and I joined with three faculty to collaborate on a research project about the differing perspectives of students and faculty on teaching literature reviews in political science (Rouse et al. 2017). Our project consisted of student researchers conducting interviews with political science faculty and undergraduate students to determine how students and faculty approach the literature review process. The interviews illuminated as much about student-faculty interactions as about the literature review process. Specifically, my fellow student researchers and I found that when conducting interviews, the student-teacher hierarchy was ever-present. Both the student researchers and the faculty interviewees instinctively fell into traditional roles of "student" and "teacher," despite the research-based context.

One particular faculty interview stands out. The method of the project was a traditional Decoding the Disciplines interview (Middendorf and Pace 2004): the student interviewer asked questions about how the faculty member taught literature reviews and conducted literature reviews in their own research. Participants answered our questions in the vast majority of our interviews. But in this particular interview, we were unable to guide the conversation. The professor sidestepped every question we asked, either by answering the question he apparently wanted to be asked or refusing to answer at all. His refusals were polite, but were refusals nonetheless. This was especially evident when we asked him to map out his literature review process on a whiteboard, and he refused to even attempt to do so. To say this was infuriating is an understatement. How were we supposed to get anything out of the research if the professor would not cooperate?

This one interview seemed like an outlier at first. But as we began conducting our analysis of the collected data, we quickly realized that this interview was comparable to the other faculty interviews. This prompted us to wonder why we had not noticed that trend during the other interviews. Why was something so obvious in a paper transcript inconspicuous during the interviews themselves? My fellow student researchers and I discussed the trend and concluded that we were not seen as researchers. We were seen as students. Even though we intended to present ourselves as members of academia on the same level as the faculty, the power dynamics associated with the student-teacher relationship remained (Cook-Sather and Felten 2017). And in that frustrating interview, what had felt like the professor's apathy was more a mutual failure to engage with the new dynamic of researcher-interviewee.

We were proud to have the opportunity to present at the inaugural EuroSoTL Conference in Ireland in June 2015. Throughout the conference, we often found ourselves being approached because of our novelty as student presenters. All of our interactions with other conference attendees were positive. During the Q&A following our panel, the audience was engaged and wanted to learn more about both the research and our experiences as students conducting the research. While we were still viewed as students, I felt that we were also viewed as fellow academics, albeit with less experience. This perception stems from the questions we received, which focused on our perspective as researchers, not just as students.

Theoretical Perspectives on Exclusion and Justification

These anecdotes do not represent the full range of student experiences in SoTL, but they illustrate how significant challenges may persist within student-faculty SoTL partnerships. We (the chapter authors) will now analyze some of these ongoing challenges using the vocabulary and tools of two scholars who study oppression. We do not mean to draw direct comparisons between the oppressed populations discussed by these scholars and students as a social group. We do, however, find the tools developed from the study of oppressive social systems to be useful in

understanding the experience of students in SoTL (and this usefulness might give us all pause).

Iris Marion Young, in *Inclusion and Democracy,* highlights two types of unjust decision-making practices: external and internal exclusion. External exclusion occurs when certain individuals or groups are completely left out of decision-making, while others dominate and control it (Young 2000, 52). This form of exclusion is typified by decisions made behind closed doors by an exclusive group that fails to (or chooses not to) adequately consider the concerns of those who are not part of the decision-making process. Even as the importance of students as partners is heralded (see, for example, Felten 2013; Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten 2014; Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2014; Werder, Pope-Ruark, and Verwoord 2016; Matthews 2017), students are rarely included in SoTL projects as researchers, despite the fact that students are so central to the goals of SoTL. And even when students partner with faculty on SoTL inquiries, faculty often determine the focus, goals, scope, and roles of the research before the partnership begins (Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten 2014).

The solution to external exclusion may seem obvious: simply bring in more students. But external exclusion is only part of the problem. The anecdotes above illustrate that the second type of exclusion Young discusses, internal exclusion, is also at play. Internal exclusion prevents people from having the "opportunity to influence the thinking of others, even when they have access to fora and procedures of decision-making" (Young 2000, 55). Internal exclusion, for example, occurs when a conversation privileges certain styles of communication that may be inaccessible to some (Young 2000, 53). Internal exclusion occurs in the case of SoTL when faculty members—even well-intentioned ones—unknowingly or unreflectively dismiss or patronize students who are conducting or presenting SoTL research, as our anecdotes demonstrate.

One way that internal exclusion operates in the case of student participation in SoTL is through the pervasive call to justify students' presence as researchers. The concept of the burden of justification was put forward by Kristie Dotson as a barrier to inclusion in the field of philosophy. Dotson posits that the concept of "real" philosophy, or philosophy that

incorporates "commonly held, univocally relevant, historical precedents," creates a barrier to more diverse perspectives entering the field (Dotson 2012, 5). Instead of analyzing their arguments, critics force philosophers who fall outside the bounds of "real" philosophy to defend their work as legitimate philosophy. People from marginalized populations and people who utilize uncommon philosophic methods tend to be called to do this justificatory work more than others, and this, in Dotson's view, might be one reason why these people often leave philosophy.

The above anecdotes illustrate that SoTL places similar burdens of justification, both explicitly and implicitly, on students and the faculty with whom they partner. We are frequently explicitly asked to talk about the reasons for having student participation, the difficulties of student participation, and the knowledge gained and lost because of student participation. Students' presence in SoTL is itself seen as unusual and thus worth interrogating, sometimes at the expense of a focus on and respect for the SoTL research being done. While we do not find it universally problematic to discuss students' involvement in SoTL research, we do worry about the shift in focus from the research itself to one particular aspect of the methods and the potential for internal exclusion during such discussions.

All academic research requires some form of explicit justification and legitimation. We argue, however, that student-faculty partnerships are faced with an additional burden of justification. As such, student-faculty partnerships are faced with the problem of double justification.

The above anecdotes also illustrate an implicit burden of justification that influences SoTL research. In the second anecdote, for instance: although the student researchers had expertise in facilitating interviews and understood the disciplinary norms, their status as students prevented faculty interviewees from fully engaging in the interviews. One reading of this is that perhaps faculty interviewees assumed because the student interviewers had not justified their presence as *researchers*, the students did not have the expertise needed to make any credible knowledge claims. The implicit call to justify their presence prevented students from fully occupying their roles as researchers.

Students in SoTL are diverse practitioners who are susceptible to exclusion, whether external or internal. To make the SoTL community more welcoming to diverse practitioners (in this case, students), we encourage SoTL to move away from asking "How can SoTL benefit from student participation?" or "How can SoTL benefit students as researchers/ scholars?" to "How can SoTL practitioners make SoTL more welcoming to student researchers?" We borrow the framing of this question from Anita Allen, an African-American female-identifying philosopher, when she suggests that philosophers should "shift the burden to the discipline to explain why it is good enough for us; we should be tired of always having to explain how and prove that we are good enough for the discipline" (quoted in Dotson 2012, 4).

Toward a More Affirming SoTL

We contend that faculty must take responsibility for addressing the forms of exclusion already present and likely to persist within SoTL and students as partners work. SoTL-active faculty and staff cannot assume that this exclusion, especially internal exclusion, will be remedied by patiently waiting for more students to join the SoTL community, eventually tipping the cultural scales without any affirmative efforts by faculty and staff. Nor can faculty and staff ethically expect students to (continue to) justify their own presence within the SoTL community. As the powerful insiders of SoTL, faculty and staff must act.

But where to start?

Echoing Jenny Marie, who builds on Mick Healey's work, the community should ask *every* SoTL project, "Where are the students?" (2018, 39). A good first step is to recognize that we can only do the best research possible with student partners. The goal for perspectives toward student engagement is what Carmen Maria Marcous refers to as "affirmation." Marcous (2014) argued that affirmation requires the community both acknowledge that underrepresentation is a problem and prioritize efforts to address said problem. The SoTL community must recognize that student underrepresentation is problematic for the methodology and epistemology of the field.

Adopting the perspective that *we can only do the best research possible with student partners* shifts the burden of justification from inclusion to exclusion: it does not make the inclusion of students necessary but makes their exclusion automatically suspect and in need of justification. By systematically asking "where are the students?", we will prompt significant changes in SoTL practices—the processes we use to develop and value the questions that guide our inquiries, the research methods we employ to gather and analyze evidence, and the ways we present and write about this work.

As the student experiences detailed in this paper illustrate, however, growing students' presence will not necessarily be sufficient to address the chronic internal exclusion students encounter in SoTL or engender an attitude of affirmation throughout the community. Faculty and staff need to critically examine our own assumptions and privileges. When do we act in ways that exclude student partners or that cue the culture of justification in SoTL? In our enthusiasm for welcoming students into the SoTL community, are we unintentionally reinforcing exclusive practices and beliefs? Below we offer some suggestions and questions that arise from our own experiences as students and faculty in SoTL partnerships.

Because a central practice of the SoTL community is the presentation of research at conferences, interaction with students at conferences can be just as important as interaction with students while conducting the research. For participants in SoTL who are unfamiliar with working with students as researchers and peers, engaging with a student presenter may seem different from engaging with a faculty presenter. We thus suggest:

1. *Before asking a student researcher a question, ask yourself: Would I ask a faculty researcher this question?*

Student researchers are often the recipients of different types of questions than faculty researchers, as demonstrated in our anecdotes. We have argued that the difference in questions stems primarily from students being viewed as novelties in SoTL. Students are not treated as researchers because audiences want to learn more about their experiences as students. But if the students have not thematized their research position as students, such questions are often problematic. If, however,

a presentation thematizes the students *as being* students, then questions about the student researchers as students are relevant.

2. ***Assume the value of students and students' perspectives.***

It is very often the case that students, and particularly undergraduate students, have less academic experience than professors. This lack of academic experience does not mean that students lack insight or understanding regarding their own research. We urge faculty to take student research just as seriously as they take their own or that of their faculty colleagues.

3. ***Make sure students are treated with respect and act as allies toward them.***

Faculty and staff need to hold respecting students as an imperative in formulating questions and comments for student researchers (Schroer 2007). For example, commenting on a student presenter's voice, as seen in the first anecdote, is not respectful. Nor is patronizing students, which can result from seeing students as outsiders. Faculty may need to call on one another to increase their respect and regard for students' voices in SoTL to ensure students are treated with respect. Active ally-ship is central for the kind of respect we envision and is an important element in ensuring that students will continue to bring valuable contributions to SoTL.

These steps demonstrate what should exist at the core of any partnership, particularly when partnerships go public.

Reflection Questions for Readers

Taking "How can SoTL practitioners make SoTL more welcoming to student researchers?" as our main question, we suggest our readers consider the following sub-questions:

- **For students**: Can you think of a time when you were taken seriously as a researcher? What happened to allow your inclusion, and how might that situation be replicated?
- **For faculty:** Can you think of a time when students were, from your perspective, taken seriously as experts and researchers? What

happened to allow their inclusion, and how might that situation be replicated?

- **For students:** What are some ways that student SoTL researchers can encourage one another either at conferences or during the research process? What are some ways that faculty and staff SoTL researchers have encouraged you?
- **For faculty:** What resources does your institution have to help you improve your collaborative practices in your SoTL research? What resources might you help develop further?

What Does the "Partnership" in Student-Faculty Partnerships Mean?

A Ruminating Postscript

Stephen Bloch-Schulman

In the editing phase of bringing "From Novelty to Norm" into print, an important issue was raised to the author team by the editors, Lucy Mercer-Mapstone and Sophia Abbot. Lucy writes on behalf of herself and Sophia:

> One point I would like to invite you to consider is what your structure and use of voice within certain sections communicate to the reader. I raise this because I think the way your wonderfully powerful messages are communicated may not be having the desired effect, or at least not one you intend. bell hooks discusses how, often when faculty invite student reflection with good intentions, they implicitly reinforce power hierarchies by asking students to share so much of themselves and their experiences in ways that faculty do not—thus placing students in a place of vulnerability while they remain "safe" in not having to do so. Something of that notion comes across to me (and to Sophia) in the way your piece is currently written: where students share vulnerable and uncomfortable experiences under their own names, while faculty partners do not, remaining anonymous in the use of the academic "we." I do

not think that it was your intent, but I think it important to consider that it may be construed that way. An additional connotation of that is that the "we" (faculty) appear to be examining the experiences of students, which is the antithesis of the powerful argument you make for authentic inclusion of students in SoTL. I don't doubt that you all constructed this piece together, but that doesn't come through explicitly.

Here, I would like to think on this comment both in light of the writing of "From Novelty to Norm" and to place the issues raised into a larger context of questions about equity in student-faculty partnerships. These issues are quite complicated and hard, if not impossible, to resolve in a short postscript or in the writing of any one chapter. My modest goal here is to highlight the complexities of the issues raised by Lucy and Sophia's concerns and to spell out how some of these were addressed or failed to be addressed by our process and in our chapter. Finally, I describe the way language around equality and equity point in the right direction but remain open to multiple interpretations. I advocate for those of us who engage in and write about these kinds of partnerships to think more carefully about what these terms might mean and why we highlight certain meanings over others. I end with a call for further discussion, hoping to center these conceptual questions when students and faculty engage in projects together.

The larger ethical and political challenges implied within the above comment, as I read it, is to ask what makes a partnership a partnership. Lucy and Sophia note hooks' suggestion that it is vulnerability that is *a* or *the* key to something deeper and more meaningful. And it is true, as the editors highlight, that the students' voices—and their ways of being emotionally and reputationally vulnerable—are the focus of the chapter "From Novelty to Norm." And faculty do not speak in the chapter from first-hand, personal experience. We faculty thus do seem invulnerable or hidden (or both) in this particular respect. An excellent point.

This point is all the more important because of how faculty typically write and show up in their work. Even as faculty turn up and are heard typically (though, of course, less for faculty from certain groups and

of certain identities—a difference the importance of which is never to be underestimated), academic writing remains decontextualized, and authors (and, in SoTL, the subjects of our research) often remain generalized and disembodied. We often write as "the author" or "we," without any sense of who the author is, or who the collective "we" are. *[Note: this was true in the article as we originally wrote it, though, through editing, the authors hope that it is less present now than in earlier drafts.]* This points to a bigger and deeper set of questions about the nature of academic writing and the stance of authors and researchers—one well beyond the scope of this reflection, but one hinted at herein and needing more exploration, as Lucy and Sophia suggest.

So, faculty might be heard but heard in only certain, invulnerable—or maybe inhuman—ways (for more on this, see Cook-Sather, Abbot, and Felten, 2019). And students might be often generalized into "the students," rather than naming specific ones and noting their individual contributions.

It is, however, true that part of our hope is simply to raise the voices of the students so they are centered, given how—as the former-students eloquently speak to in this chapter—their voices are so often ignored. We faculty and administrative and academic staff are less likely to be ignored, so there is less need to highlight our voices (again, this is more true of those, like me, who are cisgender, white, straight men). This dynamic is often evident in the citation and acknowledgment practices within SoTL, where students are very rarely mentioned by name, even when they have contributed excellent ideas (being seen as "subjects" of the research and thus needing special protections), and faculty are often named and thanked (being seen as contributors). This is a difference especially important within academia, given that name-recognition and the connection between one's name and one's ideas are the coins of the realm. That is, there is a way, by working with students so their voices are heard, that faculty—who could publish elsewhere and be recognized for our own work—are sharing respect and risk. There is signal boosting here, along with a chance for faculty to encourage our own reflection and even self-criticism.

Another important note is that while Lucy and Sophia have rightly pointed to the way the first-hand experience and emotional work is uneven, there is another way we were quite intentional in attending to the historical and contemporary challenges for equity in student-faculty partnerships. Namely, in the typical way these projects place students in a position to speak personally while faculty do the heavy theoretical lifting. I have grown wary of the "students bring experience, faculty bring disciplinary expertise" model I often see in faculty-student collaborations. To avoid this, our authorship team explicitly shared the theoretical work. Claire (one of the student partners) did the heaviest lifting in reading, addressing, and making relevant the work of Kristie Dotson, whose writing is the most theoretically complex of the resources we used. I worked on and wrote the section about Iris Marion Young, which is more straightforward. So, in one way, her doing the theory-work made things more even. But even as we avoided the students-bring-experience/ faculty-bring-theory dynamic, questions about equity persisted. Claire doing this theory-work may have been a form of exploiting her exceptional skills, when she has a dissertation to write and she had already put in significant effort on another section in the chapter, and I could have done the work (though likely not as well).

In my work on and thinking about student-faculty partnerships and questions of equity elsewhere, I have often turned to Iris Marion Young's political conception of equality in the workplace (Bloch-Schulman and castor 2015; Jacquart et al. 2019). Iris Marion Young (1990) argues that businesses embody forms of injustice by placing the "task-defining" work—that work of determining the goals and agenda of an organization and determining the main ways that organization will meet those goals—in the hands of the (often societally privileged) few, while leaving the "task-executing" work—the activities to achieve these goals—in the hands of the many. I have come to see that I want to help students develop these "task-defining" skills. Teaching students to set appropriate goals for their and the class's learning and to set the agenda allows them to gain invaluable experience.

It is not clear to me that we achieved this type of equity, either, though there were plenty of times when we agreed to split up the work

and everyone had a chance to take on a challenge they were willing to or interested in. The current postscript is an example of having taken on this work—I volunteered to address the particular comment cited at the beginning of the chapter. This too has complicated matters; Lucy and Sophia asked me to expand the original postscript, making it long and my voice overrepresented relative to the overall length of the chapter.

Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014, 4) define the principles of partnership as respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. They wisely note throughout their book that they are

> not suggesting that students and faculty get and give exactly the same things in pedagogical partnerships. Indeed, partnerships invite faculty and students to share different experiences and perspectives; those differences are part of what can make partnerships so rich and diverse.

But we might note, with our experience here and through the lens of Lucy and Sophia's comments, that what respect means for each of us might be quite different, as does the question of what *kind* of respect we are valuing.

Under various constraints, we might have to choose to highlight some goals in partnership over others. Figuring out which to value and when requires some reflection and leads to difficult choices that we should be explicitly discussing within our partnerships and in our writing. Different equity focuses in partnerships address different educative and research goals, and—given how unlikely it is that we can address and achieve them all—we need to think carefully about which foci would help achieve the desired goals. For example, vulnerability might create deeper emotional connections between faculty and students and be a way for students to fully experience faculty as human beings who struggle, fail, and work hard in light of those struggles. But it wouldn't teach task-defining. Taking task-defining as a central goal of a partnership would allow students to play roles, both within groups and for themselves, of organizing and prioritizing. But teaching task-defining may be separate from, and not address, the kind of emotional vulnerability Lucy and Sophia call for and want to make more equal.

The questions raised here require judgment, and there are multiple problems to try to resolve at the same time: might Lucy and Sophia's suggestion for such equity in such a short chapter be another form of the double justification needed in this work? We typically don't expect vulnerability or equity in other academic products. Might there be other forms of equity that are more valuable in this particular context? Might there be solutions that are efficient and clear that we are missing, and could or should have been implemented?

I, therefore, invite you, reader, into some of my own uncertainty and ask you to join me in addressing these multiple and complex questions—with Lucy and Sophia (now part of the conversation, too).

Reflection Questions for Readers

Thinking on the discussion of equity in this chapter's postscript, consider:

- What are the possible separate educative goals for different people in student-faculty partnerships?
- How should we, and who should, decide which of these goals we should value and strive for?

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