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Show me how to do like you: Co-mentoring as feminist pedagogy

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Abstract (Abstract):

The reflection of three teachers on the experience of creating a learning community with 22 students during the spring of 1993 is presented. Their project demonstrates practical strategies for incorporating feminist scholarship and pedagogy into the core curriculum and for integrating core courses originating within diverse disciplines.

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Show Me How to Do Like You: Co-Mentoring as Feminist Pedagogy

Show me how to do like you

Show me how to do it

Structuring the curriculum

The three authors of this article are all experienced university teachers. We have been drawn to teaching for many reasons, perhaps the most important of which is that we share an attraction to the continual renewal and surprise that teaching offers. It is predictable or fully subject to our control; teaching can take us to places we did not expect to go. We want to share our recent journey to a new place. This article presents our reflection on the experience of creating a learning community with twenty-two students during the spring of 1993. This project' demonstrates practical strategies for incorporating feminist scholarship and pedagogy into the core curriculum and for integrating core courses originating within diverse disciplines.

The structure for this curriculum innovation consisted of the following elements:

*Two courses, one in the English department and the other in philosophy, were linked; that is, students had to register to take two particular sections of these classes in the same semester. The two courses shared the title "Ethics and Fiction." Linked courses overcome one budgetary impediment to constructing learning communities in that each teacher may then carry the community as part of her/his regular teaching load. This does not address the additional faculty time required for performing the work of coordinating the linked courses, both in terms of planning and executing the connections. The attendance of almost all of the classes by all three teachers involved in this project was an overload, in the sense that it was not something for which any of us received release time or financial compensation. This is an important factor that all of us believe must be addressed. Engagement in a project such as this one is a vital part of faculty development, and it should receive institutional support that conveys a strong message about its importance.

*The classes were scheduled so that the English literature course, "Studies in Fiction," met on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and the "Ethics" class met on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Mary Jo was the instructor in the fiction component of the course and Rose Mary in the ethics section.

*The instructors for the classes chose their reading material and organized their syllabi so that themes and questions would overlap. As part of an effort within the university's women's studies program to encourage the integration of this work into the core curriculum of required courses taken by all undergraduates, both teachers made a commitment to using feminist scholarship.

*Other aspects of the courses were also designed to encourage students to connect their work in the two disciplines, for example, in writing assignments and class discussions.

*The two instructors were present for almost all of the classes in both courses (exam days were an exception). The third member of the team (Jane) acted as a participant observer and attended two thirds of the classes.

*The two classes were also related in terms of pedagogy. Both teachers stressed that collaborative learning strategies would be practiced in the classroom. Collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of classroom practices designed to foster shared inquiring and responsibility for a course.

All three faculty members involved in this project spent the year before the courses began meeting among themselves, sometimes with two other colleagues interested in eventually teaching in a similar format, to discuss possible course reading and how these might be taught with a variety of methods. In addition, all had attended conferences and/or discussion groups on alternative pedagogies and were members of the core faculty group that wrote the proposal for a women's studies program that was eventually accepted and established. It can be said, then, that the authors of this article have had considerable experience in reading, thinking, and talking about curriculum change. We have learned that changing what we teach and learn is changing the way we live; that is, the relationships we have and want to have are continually transformed as we read different texts and talk about new ideas. Telling what we knew and had done before embarking on our learning community adventure is important for the story we are about to tell because it is a story about many things we did not anticipate and our efforts to make sense of them through the image of comentoring.

Although we planned conscientiously for our learning community, "Ethics and Fiction," we were also inventing it as we went along. This was a new course for all of us, and we had never worked as a teaching team' before. We did not know most of the students in the class. So, in the beginning, we had syllabi, high hopes, and lots of enthusiasm. We still had all of these at the end of the semester, but also much more, because we discovered how a learning community might work and that its work depends upon the development of a particular kind of relationship. The students sharpened our sense of this relationship, and the story of how they named what they were doing as "comentoring" seems the best place to describe what we learned.

Unexpected insights

By midsemester we were reading Alice Walker's The Color Purple. Mary Jo passed out four questions for students to discuss in small groups, including the three teachers. In order to provide a thorough and persuasive response to these questions, students were encouraged to accompany each other into the text, locating important scenes, analyzing recurring imagery, and organizing an approach that would allow them to articulate the ideas raised by the group. The students were given nearly fifty minutes to grapple with their questions. At the end of the period, each group was required to offer an extensive analysis of the novel in terms of the question they were given. Each group was helping to prepare the entire class for an eventual written response on a subsequent essay exam.

The group that worked on the question regarding The Color Purple as a Kunstlerroman" offered important insights on the nature of creativity. They said that while creativity often is fueled by pain and anger, it cannot be sustained by it. When Celie discovers that Mister has been stowing away all the letters her sister Nettle has sent to her throughout the years of their separation, she wants to kill him. Celie's accumulated years of anger and resentment against her husband have silenced her; her pain prevents her from healing. Shug rescues Celie from self-imposed silence. Celie has already been down the road of deprivation and has used writing less as an act of revenge and more as an act of survival. Her present voicelessness is a form of self-punishment. At this point in the novel, Shug actively participates in Celie's healing. She prevents Celie from killing her husband, she shares private information about her own damaged relationship to her mother, and she encourages Celie to make herself pants to wear while she is working on the farm. These activities result in the development of Celie's own pants-making business. The business frees her from being financially dependent on Albert, and it also liberates her from being imprisoned by her dress while she works outside. Celie comes to understand the motivation behind Shug's encouragement by uttering: "A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think."

The students realized that Celie's artistry is fostered by the nurturance she receives from other women in the

text, especially Shug and Sofia. Throughout The Color Purple, the women were engaged in artistic acts: quilting, letter writing, and blues singing. Each of these activities was fostered by more than one woman. Each of the women working in these areas needed help from other women to inspire her creativity. They gave and received from each other the kind of assistance called "mentoring"; that is, individuals modeled desirable ways of acting and supported the capacity of others to engage in them. The kind of mentoring that goes on in the novel is not hierarchical and one-sided, but shared and mutual. No single character is locked into the role of mentee or mentor.

The students also suggested that Walker was expanding the traditional meaning of "artist" to accommodate less appreciated and often undervalued forms of creativity: quilting and sewing. They noted what Mae Henderson points out in her article, "The Color Purple: Revisions and Redefinitions," that the art of quilting and sewing more than decorative and utilitarian, it is an activity shared with men, not only in the African-American world of the novel but also in the Olinka tribes of Africa. Nettle writes to Celie about the Olinka tribes, explaining that the men are known for their beautiful quilt-making. The students realized that Walker was compelling us to reconsider traditional and rigid dichotomies of female and male activity, popular modes of expression and "high" art, artistry as collective and collaborative enterprise, and artistry as individual and solitary work. Celie eventually teaches Albert, her former oppressor, to sew shirts to match the pants. As she teaches him to sew, Celie also informs him about African culture, thus helping him to grow out of his misconceptions about appropriate male and female behavior. Celie's artistry is liberating to Albert; it allows him to heal from his own suffering. The quilts and sewing in Walker's text ultimately become an outward symbol of the bonding between women and the potential mending of relations between men and women.

Ultimately, Walker expends the meanings of artist and artistry to include an African/American female aesthetic, one that focuses on collaboration and reciprocity. Tutelage occurs mutually between learners at different times during their lives. Thus, the mentor is sometimes the neophyte, though these terms are not quite exact enough to accommodate the concept of co-mentoring. As Walker's text demonstrates, the activity of co-mentoring involves a context of companionship in which learners and teachers participate in a collaborative effort, that is, they labor together to produce something beautiful.

The small group reported these fruits of their shared labor to the whole class with satisfaction and pride: they knew their work was good. When their report was almost completed, one of the members of the group declared, "We are co-mentors here." Many others in the class nodded immediately, recognizing the truth of the connection between our classroom experiences and the experiences of Celie with Shug and Sofia. This connection became a recurrent theme throughout the rest of the semester, as the students sought ways of relating the ideas expressed in course readings, about how relationships shape our choices and actions, to their experiences in shaping ties with each other through their shared work.

The students in this learning community were a mix of different ages, personalities, and experiences. Some were married, many were not. Some were parents, most were not. Some were lesbians, most were heterosexuals. Most were female. We were companions on a remarkable learning journey. We co-mentored one another, and we supported one another's learning experience. The care that students took to support each other's learning did not rest, for most of them, upon personal friendships or even upon affection. They did come to know each other quite well. They were in class together every day where they interacted frequently in small discussion groups, as well as in the larger full class discussions which were often conducted with students facing one another in a large circle. Although they were not intimate with one another, they did develop a degree of trust that allowed them (in varying degrees) to discuss the course material in terms of their own experiences. The care that students demonstrated toward one another was based on the relationships they developed as a community of learners. It emerged out of their shared experienced that learning can be transformative when students and teachers create a learning community in which intellectual, emotional, and moral growth are seen as interconnected.

For the teachers involved in this experiment, there was never any doubt that we wanted to employ feminist, collaborative learning strategies and build a learning community. Each of us had used these teaching methods in our individual classes, and we were excited by the prospect of spending more time with each other and with a self-selected group of students. We began, then, with high hopes and what we thought was a clear sense of what could happen in the course. What actually happened took us by surprise. Our students claimed the course's learning projects of intellectual collaboration in literary analysis and ethical reflection as their own. They entered into co-mentoring relationships by making explicit choices about their relationships with one another and with us. They chose to become co-laborers with us in a common work. When the students named what was occurring in the class as comentoring, we were struck by the richness of this concept and its potential for deepening understanding of the dynamics that emerge while becoming a community that learns. We have been working since then to define for ourselves what co-mentoring means and to characterize its usefulness for understanding new models of teaching and learning. Mentoring and co-mentoring

Mentoring is a word for two-person relationships in which one individual serves as a trusted counselor or teacher for the other. The word mentor refers to this wise guide and is derived from the name of Odysseus's friend who was entrusted with the education of his son and guardianship of his household while Odysseus was away at Troy. Its derivation and continued usage indicate a presumption of hierarchy in a mentoring relationship: one leads, the other follows; therefore, one is presumed to be more experienced and capable than the other. The mentor shows the way, and the mentee appreciates and heeds the example.

Mentoring takes its purest form in the case of an elder guiding a younger. This may last for a relatively short time or be a lifelong process; typically, at some point the mentee also becomes able to mentor others. In a traditionally defined mentoring relationship, there is a clear boundary between the mentor and the mentee. They do not switch roles within their relationship. If the mentee is ready to become a mentor, this entails the development of a different relationship with someone else.

There is an emphasis upon action in mentoring. Mentoring cannot be reduced to telling or talking. The mentoring relationship assumes that its participants are located in the same context, are acting within it, and that the actions of the mentor can serve as a model for the mentee. While the mentor may also talk about how to do this or that, talking is not enough. The mentor performs for the mentee, presents the mentee with a demonstration, rather than simply offering a commentary. Mentoring refers to a special type of relationship that can emerge when a neophyte is granted close access and attention by an established figure who is willing to provide support, encouragement, and guidance as the newcomer "learns the ropes" of a new endeavor.

The image that is most clearly associated with mentoring is of two men - Mentor and Telemachus, the professor and the graduate student, the senior executive and the up-and-coming manager. Placing women into these pictures, either in the mentor or mentee role, complicates our reading of the relationship. When we imagine teaching or counseling relationships, that involve women only, the context seems to shift away from mentoring and toward nurturing of family: mothers with their daughters, older sisters with younger, aunts with nieces. Traditionally, women's teaching and advising have taken place in the private world of home, or the homelike elementary school. Even now when women are more and more involved in the workplace and politics, often acting in positions of responsibility, it can be difficult to place us within a mentoring frame. This difficulty seems to have a deeper source than women's restricted access to the resources that mentors need, discrimination against women as potential mentees, or problems in defining nonromantic, cross-sex relationships. It seems that there is an incompatibility between how the "feminine role" has been understood and the kind of relationship that mentoring really is.

Traditionally, femininity has not been associated with authority and power. Girls and women have been more encouraged to follow gender norms that orient them to seek the roles of follower or friend, except in their relationships with children. Women are more likely to be given authority as mothers or teachers of young children. It is less likely that women will have authority, or be viewed as experts and leaders, in areas that

involve the more prestigious public world of adulthood: higher education, the workplace, politics. As children develop into adolescents and adults, they are expected to move into these spheres where men are usually the leaders - as coaches, administrators, professors, supervisors, and office-holders. These roles may or may not be contexts in which mentoring happens.

Bernice Sandler has suggested that mentoring among women may often be hidden or unacknowledged because supportive relationships that facilitate a woman's development may be regarded as "personal" (and thus undervalued) rather than as mentoring. This suggestion that personal relationships and mentoring relationships are distinct from each other points to the problems previously identified regarding the split between private and public and the differential in how prestige is allocated. We are inclined to reserve the term mentoring for relationships that are carefully circumscribed as "impersonal" and that take place "away from home." Sandler also identifies several dimensions of mentoring that constitute it as a hierarchical relationship: the mentor has superior knowledge and connections; the mentor sets the agenda; the mentor should be older; mentoring is initiated by the mentor; the benefits of mentoring run in a single direction - from the mentor to the mentee. Sandler discusses how each of these characteristics may inhibit the fruitfulness of the mentoring bond, and render it less supportive of women's development than the assistance provided by a social network.

Burke and McKeen's review of the literature on the mentoring process in organizations contains a question that converges with Sandler's emphasis on networks as supporting women's development: "Are peer relationships `better fit' for women?" (329). Burke and McKeen wonder if women, given the freedom to design ways of working rather than struggling to accommodate established organizational rules and practice, might create a different, nonhierarchical way of mentoring. The study by Wolf, in which 240 women aged 34 to 64 answered questions about their classroom experiences as adult learners, takes a step toward answering their question. Wolf's participants described a complex mentoring process marked by interactive; collaborative relationships with their teachers in which they felt both supported and challenged. Our experience shows that this process can be extended to include student-student relationships as well.

We believe that the possibility co-mentoring presents for understanding classrooms and their occupants benefits differently both men and women. The insights generated by analyses that reveal the limitations for women of the traditional mentoring frame need not be interpreted as applying to women only. They may be interpreted as prompted by questions about women's experiences but also as leading to alternative understandings that can enlarge opportunities for both women and men. Our understanding of co-mentoring, while it is based upon an experience with a class composed almost completely of women, is not gender specific. Just as collaborative learning is not restricted to one gender but is presented as enhancing and empowering for both, co-mentoring is a human capacity and activity. Regarding mentoring as both restrictive and masculine and developing an alternative that lifts the constraints and encompasses experiences that have been categorized as feminine is not an effort on our part to establish a gender-based parallel. "Let men do mentoring and women co-mentoring" is definitely not our motto. The aim of our construction of mentoring and co-mentoring as reflecting some dimensions of the differences between men's and women's relationships is not to reinforce such differences but to indicate an escape route from their confines. If we're right that thinking about intellectual collaboration in terms of co-mentoring clarifies pedagogy in both its theoretical and practical aspects, then comentoring as done by women and men may serve as one strategy for moving beyond the rigid boundaries set by gender rules.

Co-mentoring gives a name to supportive assistance provided by several connected individuals." Placing the prefix "co" before "mentoring" reconstructs the relationship as nonhierarchical; "co" makes mentoring reciprocal and mutual. This reciprocity means that over time the mentee and mentor roles may shift; no one is stuck in one or the other for the duration of the relationship. It does not, however, remove the elements of counseling, modeling, and teaching preserved in the term mentoring. Co-mentoring names a dynamic that may evolve within collaborative learning. Both co-mentoring and collaborative learning are social, active, and appreciative of

differences among individuals in terms of their backgrounds, talents, and learning styles.

Co-mentoring is a specific way of being together that adds to companionship the elements of sharing work in a manner that invites the participants to act as teachers, demonstrators, and counselors for each other. These participants may include more than two because co-mentoring allows for the sharing of the mentor/mentee responsibilities by several individuals. Co-mentoring is not a method, but a relationship. Co-mentoring assumes that everyone has something to teach and something to learn. Rather than constructing teacher and learner as static positions, co-mentoring formulates these as tasks that may be performed at different times by individuals who are not strictly defined in terms of either. Go-mentors are collaborators - they labor together. They need not be friends in the sense of having deep affection for and intimate ties with each other. They are better termed "companions"-individuals who share an association and a common activity. To do their work, co-mentors discover ways of showing each other the way.

The awkward quality of the term co-mentoring indicates how impoverished our traditional category system is. It shows how we lack words for relationships in a learning environment that are not hierarchical and dichotomous. Lacking such words, we may be hindered from developing such partnerships. The collaborative learning model's emphasis upon sharing the talks of teacher and student is concretely embodied in the activities of co-mentoring and the relationships these activities build. Co-mentoring extends our imaginations and invites us to trespass, to cross the lines that divide the experts from the ignorant, the masters from the apprentices, the fathers from the sons. As women have moved in greater numbers and with louder voices into work organizations and college classrooms, the difficulties of living within these visible lines have become all the more apparent. Perhaps many also have the desire to explore another way to work and learn.

To summarize, working from our experience in a learning community where students employed the term co-mentoring to characterize their working relationships, we argue in this essay that this concept bridges insights being developed in various contexts about the need for different ways to understand the connections among learners and workers. The traditional conception of mentoring is androcentric, meaning that it is centered upon the experiences of men, and hierarchical, meaning that it accepts knowledge/power differences as necessary and stable. Some research that examines women's experiences in business organizations and college classrooms suggests that an alternative model is both possible and attractive. This model focuses upon mutuality, shifting exchanges of perspectives and talents, and dispersion of responsibilities and accountability. It provides a perspective on what communal work can mean, which avoids identifying community with in tense personal affection, and which links communal reflection among individuals who share a work with the development of virtuous character and ethical practices. Learning about co-mentoring from The Color Purple Among many other possibilities, Alice Walker's novel, The Color Purple, is about co-mentoring. The characters show one another how to do well in a world that has caused them to suffer relentlessly. By the time we read The Color Purple, the students had established feelings of trust and mutuality with each other, thus enabling a more explicit form of co-mentoring. During the analysis of Walker's novel, the students named what they were doing as comentoring and saw a parallel between their intellectual activity and what they saw happening in the novel between Shug and Celie, who nurtured each other's talents. Encouraged to offer solid, textual evidence for their interpretations of Walker's novel, the students not only offered lucid, often stimulating responses to the questions, but they also generated a care for each other's learning that we have never seen so dramatically and successfully effected in any other classroom environment. What had been implicitly understood to be the objectives of the linked course was then explicitly named and desired. By choosing to become co-mentors, the students assumed responsibilities to facilitate each other's intellectual journey as well as to cultivate their own. They acknowledged the duty of each participant to hold all others accountable in this work, to challenge and critique the work of others for the purpose of extending and improving it. We believe that the students fostered creativity among themselves. Both the collaborative classroom structure and Walker's novel brought this about. Before the students worked in groups, Mary Jo introduced Alice Walker as a writer who subscribes to the belief

that mentoring fuels the creative act. Walker's novel begins with an epigraph by Stevie Wonder - "Show Me How to Do Like You/Show Me How to Do It" - embracing the idea that the act of demonstrating an activity for another's enhancement is imperative to one's development. "Show me...Show me," Wonder writes, and Walker responds at the end of her novel with a tribute to the Spirit, "without whose assistance neither this book nor I would have been written." Upon first reading, Walker seems to be implying that as a writer she has been inscribed by the spirit, perhaps reinforcing the traditional belief that the writer is inspired by God; she is God's instrument and as such is speaking God's words. This implication, which constructs the relationship as one of subordination, is not supported by the novel's depiction of the evolution of Celie's theology. Celie moves from submission to mutuality, from sorrowful and passive acceptance to joyful responsibility for her own life. She questions and grows stronger, more able to have mutual relationships with others, and with the god who has made purple flowers. This change allows us to reinterpret Walker's thankful tribute to the Spirit not as an expression of gratitude for a hierarchical mentoring relationship but as an affirmation of the dynamic relationship between the writer and her spirituality. At the climax of the novel, when Celie verbally defends herself (for the first time) against Albert, she attributes her ability to speak to a kind of divine furor, come from nature itself: "`I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening, but I'm here'...look like when I open my mouth the air rush in and shape words" (italics added; 214, 213). Celie knows that she, like her creator, is getting assistance. As readers, the students came to realize that such help was grounded in a context of mutuality already nurtured by the examples of Shug and Sofia. They showed her how to do it. Celie recalls and borrows her initial description of Shug's manner of speaking - "Her mouth just pack with claws" - at this pivotal moment in the novel. Shug showed her how to do this.Walker's novel offers the teacher and the student a powerful model of co-mentorship in which success and personal fulfillment are based on interdependence and assistance from others. Implicitly, Walker tells us that being successful (in the classroom, in the kitchen, at the writing table) does not require competitive individualism and need not only emerge from a hierarchical relationship between a vessel of wisdom (the mentor) and his/her empty vessel (the initiate). This message is vitally important for the students to hear again and again because it validates the enterprise of collaborative learning. Although the students in our classroom may not have suffered as viciously and relentlessly as Celie, they have been socialized to be silent in the classroom, to depend solely on the teacher for the information, to believe that the teacher is the only person with valid ideas, and to see themselves in turn as diminished persons because of what they do not know. Similarly, teachers have traditionally dispensed information, functioning as the sole authorities of the subject, though they were taught by others and have read critical work on the subjects they teach. Students need to be encouraged to value their own thinking and the ideas of their peers.

Group work with clearly conceived goals enables students to share in the process of making meaning. The students modeled the behaviors of co-mentors within the classroom small groups, within the large circle often used for full class discussions in the Ethics class, and during ongoing library sessions they set up to prepare for exams. The seminar group that some students had casually established in one of the library nooks turned into a place for all of the students to go, if only for an hour, to share their ideas and get help from the rest of their peers. It continued to function this way for the rest of the semester, becoming a continuous study place just before the final exams in the two linked courses.

The students showed us that when collaboration works well, it teaches better than any other learning technique. Co-mentoring compels taking responsibility for one's own learning and the learning of others. One student gleefully mentioned that she felt like an artist, constructing the meaning(s) of Walker's text. Both students and teachers were participants in each other's creativity. Though as teachers we did not initially set out to facilitate co-mentoring, the students showed us that that was what we were doing: re-visioning authority, modeling collaborative learning, and relating to each other dialogically.

When we began discussing The Color Purple, students readily claimed the language of co-mentoring as an

interpretive lens." They excitedly identified several co-mentoring relations in the novel. Beyond this they experienced The Color Purple as an affirmation of the strength of relationships, especially in how certain qualities of relating may empower us to become different kinds of people. The novel also concretized the main theme of the Ethics course: that morality is not simply about resolving controversial moral dilemmas, but more profoundly it is about what kind of people we want to be. Learning to be ethical takes place in the context of relationships in which we continue to be apprentices while also becoming teachers. We become who we are and develop our ethical perspectives within a continuing set of examples and responses that we experience and reflect upon with others.

Ethics and Fiction repeatedly challenged our students' view of their world, of gender, and, consequently, of themselves. As a result, students felt alternately unsettled, liberated, confused, illuminated. We worked hard at creating a classroom environment that would feel safe for students as they took the risks necessarily involved in consciousness-raising and in remaking themselves. These included the risks of conflict in the classroom, as well as with friends and family outside the classroom. Students talked about how taking and talking about these courses had created conflict with friends and classmates who felt threatened by the kinds of questions they were raising. As we read The Color Purple, our students recognized that they, like Celie, were being empowered through co-mentoring to become different people.

One vivid expression of empowerment occurred after an exam in Studies in Fiction. Mary Jo returned the essay exams, and, as usual, she asked two or three students to read portions of their essays to the class. One student (H.) whom she asked to read had struggled in both classes with her writing, was very quiet, and was often not very articulate in class. The class was sitting in a horseshoe with H. next to the last person in the horseshoe. As H. read a very lucid and insightful essay, many of us sat listening with amazement to our most quiet student. The student sitting next to her was smiling with pleasure and satisfaction. After class, this student described to one of the teachers how three of them had studied together, helping each other to formulate their ideas for the essays. It was clear that all of the students in the class were especially proud of H.'s work and delighted that her work had been recognized; they applauded when she finished reading. We believe that the students were pleased not only with H.'s intellectual work, but also with how this public recognition would empower H. to become more self-confident in her intellectual abilities. They applauded because of the quality of H.'s essay and because they recognized the significant intellectual and emotional growth that it represented. They felt some investment in H.'s learning process because they saw that their individual and collective learning was enhanced by the respect and concern which they extended to one another.

Near the end of our course, we offered a three-hour workshop for interested faculty during which four of our students discussed their experiences in the course. They emphasized how they came to feel accountable to one another for being prepared for class and for small group discussions. They also emphasized how their ideas and attitudes had been challenged and how they had grown through this course. They recognized that these changes in how they viewed their world would require them to reweave their own webs of connection. They credited the co-mentoring that they received from other students and the instructors with facilitating and supporting their journeys. Their relationships with one another in the classroom encouraged them to take risks there and to consider new choices they might make about their lives. One choice they all declared was the decision to remain active learners and to take responsibility for creating learning communities in other classes.

Conditions for co-mentoring

In retrospect, it seems that we designed Ethics and Fiction in ways that fostered co-mentoring: * We made a commitment to the continuing co-presence and interaction in the classroom of the teaching team of two instructors and one participant observer. This meant that on any given class day, usually one of the two instructors was at the front of the class or in the center of the large circle while the other instructor and participant observer sat among the students, usually in different parts of the room. In this way, we exposed the students to conversations among us in which we each clearly assumed the tasks of guiding and following at

different times and in different ways. As students in each other's classes, we asked and answered questions and we worked along with other students in the small groups, refusing to take on the role of group leader. We allowed the students to see and hear conversations among faculty that distributed the authority any one of us might otherwise have had and revealed us as alternating responsibilities for leading and following in different situations. This is not to say that the two instructors relinquished their responsibilities to select readings, structure discussions, provide lectures, and evaluate student work. The students had many opportunities to see the teachers also doing nonauthoritative kinds of things, such as raising our hands to ask each other questions, being called upon by each other for certain kinds of input when we were not officially in charge, struggling within small groups with the students to cooperate in accomplishing the discussion tasks. All three of us often operated as co-learners, working alongside students to think about disciplines and questions that were not our own. We modeled role shifts.

*We shared an investment in creating and facilitating group conversations that worked, both in terms of the relational dynamics and completion of assigned tasks. We were in an advantageous position for monitoring these because we had teachers in more places, and at least two of those present did not carry the responsibilities of the primary facilitator. It also helped that we met frequently before and after classes to share information and insights. Each instructor had a much fuller reading of what was happening in the classroom than she could have produced with only herself to rely upon. This also helped the instructors to feel more confident about whatever decisions they made, for example, in changing the composition of the small groups. We let our students know that we relied upon one another for advice, and we let them know that we gave and received criticism from one another. They saw how we changed our own teaching styles under the influence of one another's feedback and example. In short, we modeled co-mentormg in our teaching process, and we let our students know how inspirited we felt by this co-labor. We built opportunities for student criticism into the course and shared with the entire class our responses to their comments and the reasons for the adjustments we made.

*Classes were spent working through the assigned readings. It was made clear from the beginning that everyone in the classroom would be held responsible for analyzing the texts. The readings were not delivered to the students as analyzed, nor was an analysis performed for them while they listened and watched. They were pushed to engage in analysis, to learn by doing. This was indeed hard work, and at the start, it often meant that the presiding teacher would "call on" others; later, this became unnecessary as a classroom culture developed of mutual responsibility. Everyone participating in the course seemed to recognize that each individual had to be prepared and willing to contribute in order to produce the understandings we needed. We had a shared project. This engendered anxieties in both teachers and student - will we know how to read, will we stumble around, will we look foolish? It made a difference that classroom expectations minimized competition and made it okay to struggle out loud.

*The reading materials chosen by the instructors also focused on relationships and experiences that encouraged the students to think about the ways that relationships between people can foster or inhibit the development of character and ethical behavior. Although this focus was constant throughout the semester, the fiction read during the last five weeks of the course was directly concerned with this theme, and the philosophy readings dealt with relationships as a context for moral development. While we have focused in this article on how The Color Purple brought forth an epiphany, it is important to acknowledge that the ground had been well prepared, although not with this specific revelation in mind.

In addition, other dimensions were not an explicit part of the course design but were definitely important influences on our students. These included the ways that we made visible our connections with each other - the frequency with which we were seen with each other outside the classroom, the proximity of the offices of two of us, and our references to each other as valued mentors.

Implications

Co-mentoring presents students with opportunities for growth. By acting as mentors to one another, students learn about their gifts and practice using them. As mentees, they learn how to receive criticism and suggestions from peers. This makes the teachers' judgments less definitive and encompassing. Co-mentoring distributes responsibility throughout the class. It is an alternative to classrooms in which all the authority and direction rests with the teacher. The teacher is no longer the only one who is charged with fostering commitment and improvement. The teacher is then free to shift roles openly and explicitly - to both teach and learn. The teacher does not bear the whole burden of "creating" learning. What occurs in a course is co-created by all the members of a class. This co-creation is facilitated by structures of mutual accountability based on shared needs; that is, we mentor and are mentored because we recognize that these relationships give us resources and opportunities for learning more than we can accomplish alone. Individual learning is not replaced or discarded. We have to prepare ourselves to give and receive when we come together. Co-mentoring reveals that each of us needs to be responsible for our own work, that we can also rely on others to be similarly invested in the task, and that the work each individual produces is enhanced by sharing it.

These revelations are the common-sense wisdom of "the whole is greater than its parts," an insight often neglected within an individualistic, competitive educational system. Within the model of separate, isolated students and teachers, it can seem unnecessary to be in the same room. Why not tape the teacher speaking to empty chairs and allow each student to check out the tape at a convenient time for a private viewing? Co-mentoring is a radical movement in a counterdirection, moving toward a different set of goals. Co-mentoring makes co-presence essential and meaningful. It assumes that we need to be shown how and to show how, again and again; it declares, this is the way we learn.

As students and teachers co-mentor, they affirm for each other the value of each person's participation. They experience themselves as "citizen" teachers and learners, as people who make decisions together and shape understandings. Co-mentoring is not going through the motions of discussing topics. It is an active process of leading and following. It is not school-time, divorced from real-time. What makes school seem unreal is that we often act there in a manner that is remote from our usual activity. We do busy work, go through the motions, feign attention, jump through hoops - all of these common phrases express the experience of school as a place where we pretend. Students pretend to learn, teachers pretend not to notice. Comentoring is a commitment to do something else: to be genuinely engaged in a common task that we take seriously. When co-mentoring occurs in a course, the roles of students and teachers are more fluid. Expertise is not denied but defined in various ways and distributed throughout the group. Empowerment happens as individuals recognize that their insights are important and necessary. Knowing becomes a public action. In this way, work done in university settings becomes part of our practice of public life, helping us to develop skills in communicating our ideas, negotiating conflicts, and reaching a consensus.

Co-mentoring offers a way of identifying what can happen within collaborative, feminist learning environments that explicitly confronts the criticism of these pedagogies as replacing intellectual rigor with emoting, transforming classes into mushy support groups or forums for ideological indoctrination." Choosing to connect affect and intellect does not entail sacrificing scholarly discipline, and it does not require that everyone in the collaborative classroom become friends or convert to a cause. Instead, co-mentoring allows the focus to be on the shared work of learning together. When we name ourselves as co-mentors, we attend to our obligations to each other as partners in a task that requires our best efforts. Co-mentoring cannot happen if we surrender the labor and concentrate on developing personal relationships. Co-mentoring makes the shared work central and encourages patterns of relationship that facilitate it.

Coming out of a class like this one is both exhilarating and dispiriting. The teachers and students were exhilarated by what transpired in the classroom: we were collaborators, being for each other together. We did not necessarily have deep affectional ties, but we knew that we were beautiful because we were learning. What is sometimes dispiriting is knowing that to keep alive such a classroom, an immense fund of energy and

engagement is needed. This would not be dispiriting if we knew that we could count on the resources to sustain this kind of work and rewards for doing it. While we recognize that budgetary constraints are often used as an argument for why teaching like this is undersupported, we believe that these may be more flexible than is usually acknowledged. Compelling accounts of the benefits of curricular and pedagogical innovations may make the difference in helping decision-makers see how vital it is that colleges and universities find ways to encourage faculty and students to build learning communities in which co-mentoring can happen. We hope this account has made such a difference.

Notes

1. We received a seed grant from the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education that supported the development of the learning community. This center is located at The Evergreen College in Olympia, Washington. It was established in 1985 as an inter-institutional consortium to support educational reform. The grant supported summer planning time for the teachers and the development of materials for a workshop attended by interested faculty members at the end of the course.

2. We formulated team-teaching in a specific way. Each instructor assumed primary responsibility for one of the linked courses, but both (as well as the participant observer faculty member) were actively involved in the design of syllabi, planning of class activities and assignments, development of class discussions, and so forth.

3. We have found that students must be provided with a strong motivation and clear task for small group work in the classroom. This enables students to regard the work they do in these groups as significant, rather than a time-filling exercise.

4. This was the question: a novel that recounts the youth and young adulthood of a sensitive protagonist who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and the art of living has been traditionally termed the Bildungsroman (novel of development or apprenticeship). When such a novel focuses on the development of an artist or writer, it is called a Kunstlerroman. In what ways does the protagonist, Celie, develop into an artist? What kind of artist does she become? Some considerations include the following: the importance of mentors/models who aid in the artist's development; the utilitarian and aesthetic purpose of art; Walker's expansion and redefinition of art in American culture. How, then, does Walker revise traditional and/or exclusive definitions of the artist figure?

5. Mark Schwehn's analysis of constructions of the academic vocation following Max Weber's influential lectures distinguishing science from politics makes it clear that these connections may be problematic for many academicians today. Although more and more educators are shifting to an understanding of truth as a communal process, there is continuing uncertainty and argument about what inquiring communities require and what purposes they serve. While there is considerable agreement about the faculty's responsibility to share knowledge and to impart skills and information to students, the responsibility to build character and the notion that inquiring together depends upon the exercise of virtues is more controversial. Since we teach in a university whose mission statement explicitly links the acquisition of knowledge and skill with the promotion of social justice, the connections between intellectual achievement and character formation are matters for a different sort of debate - not about whether we should tie these together but about how best to do this within different disciplines.

6. For additional background on these pedagogical approaches, see Finkel and Monk and Gabelnick, MacCregor, Matthews, and Smith.

7. This description follows the characterization of mentoring given by Levinson whose focus is men's development. Levinson asserts that mentoring has great developmental significance for men.

8. Parker and Kram discuss this difference in terms of how the mentoring relationship is often imaged in Father-son terms and the difficulties of simply expanding this image to include the mother-daughter relationship. They maintain that women's authority is most often identified with motherhood, a role perceived as both comforting and powerful. The comfort and power of mothers, however, is problematic for adults within nonfamilial settings.

It is also noteworthy how much of the criticism directed at Hillary Rodham Clinton has to do with seeing her as having too much authority over the government. The numerous, and often venomous, attacks indicate a discomfort with women in power.

9. Burke and McKeen relate their question to the research findings of Kram and Isabella and of Noe which suggest that "peer relationships may be as important to women as mentoring and may be preferable to women. This suggests that women should actively seek not only mentoring relationships but also a broadly based peer network in organizations" (Burke and McKeen: 328).

10. We are grateful to Eloise Buker for suggesting this term when Rose Mary was writing an essay in which she discussed the role played by colleagues and friends in the development of moral judgment (see Volbrecht "Careful Mutuality").

11 Parker Palmer's work has been especially helpful to us in drawing a distinction between the virtue of charity required For learning communities to be successful and the more restrictive understanding of love as intense intimacy. We began our course with a discussion of an essay by Palmer. We asked students to prepare by thinking about how the structures of a traditional classroom shape the learning that takes place there and how these might be changed if we understood learning as a communal process of searching for truth, rather than as individual competition for knowledge that is detached from knowers. We think it is important to give students direct access to the foundations for pedagogical decisions, so that they can develop their own perspectives on what is at stake in these choices (Palmer To Know, "Community").

12. See Volbrecht ("Friendship"). In this essay, which was part of the assigned reading in "Ethics," Rose Mary argues that duty ethics emphasizes law and distrusts the concrete, particular, and contingent. This marginalizes friendship, which Aristotle treats as central to ethics. Our understanding of learning in community is an extension of Volbrecht's analysis of friendship to incorporate the companionship of classroom collaborators as another context in which we learn the habits of critical reflection and its connection to living well.

13. It is important for the students to hear how Walker's novel came into being; how she modeled her book on her maternal and literary ancestors; how she sees herself in several contexts - familial, literary, national, and transnational. This information radically challenges traditional beliefs in originality and creativity. Walker dispels the illusion that creativity is highly individualistic and divorced from the ordinary. In modeling Celie on her own slave grandmother, who was raped at age twelve by the slave owner, Walker writes, "I liberated her from her own history...I wanted her to be happy." Walker's liberatory strategy in The Color Purple offers the students an example of redemption through healing. Healing can only occur in the context of co-mentoring, epitomized by the Celie-Shug relationship throughout the book (Anello and Abramson).

14. Walker's message of co-mentoring is reinforced by the novel's framework - its epigraph, its concluding gratitude to the Spirit, and its final thanks. Walker writes, "I thank everybody in this book for coming. A.W., author and medium." Defining herself as creator and medium suggests that Walker's purpose is twofold: to create and control literary images of African-American women and to give voice and representation to such women who have been silenced in life and literature. Walker functions as much as their instrument as she does the Spirit's; perhaps they are one and the same. Alice Walker ultimately functions as a medium who gives voice to the Philomelas of this world: those spirits whose self-expression has been cut off through intimidation, deprivation, and brutality. See King- Kok Cheung's article, "'Don't Tell': Imposed Silences in The Color Purple and The Woman Warrior," for a superb analysis of the theme of silence and the ways the female protagonists proceed to "defend themselves with words...sound themselves out - through articulation" (162).

15. Rose Mary used the term co-mentoring in the Ethics course to refer to the ways that sound moral judgment is developed and refined through contextual learning with good models and by ongoing communal critical reflection about values and practices. The Ethics course emphasized that morality is not simply about resolving controversial moral dilemmas, but more profoundly about what kind of people we want to be, individually and as communities. When reading The Color Purple later in the semester, the students were able independently to

appropriate this theme.

16. By "safe" we do not mean that we avoided challenging ourselves and our students. We did not encourage students to emote for its own sake, and the learning community was not defined as a support group. In our view, this is another misleading and dangerous dichotomy; namely that classrooms can either be intellectually rigorous or safe havens for emotional expression. We do not accept that this kind of choice is necessary. Thinking and feeling can and should be connected within a model of reflection that holds to high standards for mutual critique.

17. In addition to the article by Volbrecht cited earlier students in this course also read Friedman, Gilligan, and Houston.

18. As examples, see the following for caricatures of women's studies classes: D'Souza and Lehrman. Alice Jardine responded to D'Souza's description of his visit to her feminist theory class at Harvard. Her response appears as part of a forum on the "political correctness" debates in The Women's Review of Books in 1992.

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