

## **Power, Voice, and Positionality: An Undergraduate Student-Faculty Research Team Podcasts Their Experience With a Students-as-Partners Framework**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A faculty-student partnership records a podcast to share their experience of a students-as-partners framework. The commentary invites the listener to explore some of the inherent tensions associated with power, voice, and positionality. Listeners are gifted with the story of the Ani to Pisi (Spiderweb), which informs this work.

*Keywords:* students as partners, faculty-student partners, SoTL, podcast

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This paper is not a paper, exactly. Rather, we present a shared reflection that lives in a mix of mediums, including some brief text-based ideas, photographic elements, and [a podcast](#).<sup>1</sup> We are two professors and two undergraduate students located at Mount Royal University in western Canada. We are cisgender women—three of us white; one, a woman of colour. In our twenties and our fifties, we travel figuratively and literally with a host of other people dedicated to researching and sharing best practices in the delivery of academic field schools.



L-R: Sally Haney, Michaela Chronik, Amanda Creig, and Yasmin Dean relax after presenting at the Symposium on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Banff in November 2019

Our audio-based commentary highlights our experience of getting started as a research team doing work in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) realm. We report on our early engagement with a students-as-partners framework, generously lent to us by another research team of educators and students. From their submitted manuscript, *Stages of Engaging Students as Partners: A Guiding Framework for Successful SoTL Activities* (McCollum, Akesson, Allen, Chen, Spencer, & Verwood, 2019),<sup>2</sup> we extrapolate key questions that continue to inform

<sup>1</sup> This url directs to the podcast: <https://mru.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/mru:716>

<sup>2</sup> In this article, we have chosen to include all authors' names in the in-text citations in order to avoid the deletion of names—often the names of students—that results from the use of *et al.*

how we are thinking about our shared roles, responsibilities, and relationships.<sup>3</sup> And while we lean heavily on McCollum et al.'s manuscript, we also continue to examine other models and reflections, including Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2016).

In the podcast, we also share an Indigenous story, gifted to Mount Royal University by elder-in-residence Roy Bear Chief. The story of Ani to Pisi, or the spiderweb, finds its way into our partnership by helping us to position students in the centre of our work. The story reminds each of us to keep an ear to the ground for vibrations, which can be indicators of tensions in the web, and where there are tensions, there are troubles. We are reminded that these tensions can be fixed through kindness and actively helping one another.<sup>4</sup> At this point, we encourage the reader to leave this space and engage with [our podcast](#), which runs about 33 minutes.

Podcasting in the academy remains contested but is growing in popularity across teaching, learning, and research contexts (Ferrer, Lorenzetti, & Shaw, 2019; Nelson & Faux II, 2016). We choose to privilege audio over text because it offers a powerful way to literally amplify voice, particularly the voice of the undergraduate student. The podcast format enables us to more easily share our uneasiness with some of the rigid structures that guide relational work in the academy. In doing so, we also examine some of the ways we are trying to negotiate power, positionality, and participation within our partnership.

Some readers may appreciate additional context, including how we came to know one another, as well as a synopsis of the framework we used to support our research team's early formation. Our group of four first connected in 2017, in advance of our 2018 field school to India. As faculty leads, Yasmin Dean and Sally Haney recruited students from several disciplines, including Amanda Creig and Michaela Chronik, from the department of Child Studies and Social Work. In all, 18 students traveled with Dean and Haney for several weeks in northern India,<sup>5</sup> visiting cultural and religious sites and, for eight days, living together at the Sri Ram Ashram, a permanent home for abandoned and orphaned children.<sup>6</sup> There, students and ashram youth co-created community service learning projects.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on experience, several field school students and ashram members eventually shared related research with international, national, and campus-based

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<sup>3</sup> We thank Brett McCollum of Mount Royal University for taking the time to meet with our research team, share his team's draft article, and support our analysis of that manuscript.

<sup>4</sup> We thank Elder Roy Bear Chief for gifting the story of Ani to Pisi. His story and other elders' stories informing our work can be accessed [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> The India Field School guide is located [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> More information on the Sri Ram Ashram can be accessed at <https://sriramashram.org/> <sup>7</sup> The service learning projects may be viewed at <http://mruindia.ca/>

audiences. The professors then wrote a successful SoTL grant proposal that enabled them to hire Creig and Chronik as student researchers. Not long after, to help us get started, we drew on the students-as-partners literature, including a yet-to-be-published framework developed by McCollum et al. A member of that team, Brett McCollum, took time to meet with our team, share some food, and review the framework. Having consulted with his research group, McCollum also invited us to publicly share how we interpreted the proposed five-stage process of engaging in student-faculty partnerships. For context, we provide below a brief review of the stages.

Stage one asks participants to consider what partnership can look like and encourages everyone to read scholarly literature about the dynamics of partnership, to evaluate personal availability for partnership activities, to consider specific factors and needs of a project, to explore possible challenges, and to reflect on the potential contributions the partnership might bring to the field of teaching and learning.

Stage two emphasizes the need for planning. A specific project might not yet have materialized. This stage asks partners to clearly determine personal and professional goals. This discussion plays an important role in pleasurable and successful partnerships. Other key activities include choosing a target funding source, finishing administrative and institutional tasks, and deciding how partners will be recruited.

Stage three outlines the importance of co-creating a project and identifying shared goals between partners. Sharing goals with one another helps members in the partnership understand everyone's motivations and aspirations. Co-creating project goals also allows for multiple distinct perspectives. In this stage, the sharing of individual goals helps the group prepare for potential challenges, such as power hierarchies. If the group is aware of this, mitigative steps can be taken.

Stage four spells out key actions needed to support active participation and the management of relationships. These can include building in time to regularly discuss partnership dynamics and review roles and responsibilities.

Stage five highlights the significance of dissemination and reflection activities. As partners reflect on their experiences, they can propose strategies to capture and replicate things that went well.

Our podcast positions us within some of the stages, captures the elements we find most useful, and asks additional questions about potentially missing elements. Importantly, the development of the podcast and writing of this paper offered a way to disrupt traditional forms of scholarship, giving all of us the chance to challenge how we know what we know and providing an exploration of the ambiguities that exist in student-faculty partnerships.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Sally Haney, [shaney@mtroyal.ca](mailto:shaney@mtroyal.ca), is an Associate Professor of Journalism and the chair of the Department of Journalism and Broadcast Media Studies. Her interests include international field school delivery, student-generated local news within journalism school settings, and journalism program collaborations. Her research is informed by the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Yasmin Dean is an Associate Professor of Social Work and the current chair of the Department of Child Studies and Social Work. Amplifying voices to end all forms of social injustice is a personal and professional lifelong commitment. Dean's interests focus on the decolonization of Social Work education.

Michaela Chronik is a fourth-year student in Early Learning and Child Care. Her career goal includes educating others about the critical early years and the lasting impact they have throughout adulthood. Her favourite MRU memory so far has been taking part in the 2018 India Field School.

Amanda Creig is a recent graduate of the Bachelor of Child Studies program at Mount Royal University. Mentoring and making connections with others were the most meaningful elements of her undergraduate career. Creig hopes to pursue graduate studies in pediatric psychosocial care.

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