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Lost in Learning: Mapping the Position of Teacher in the Classroom and Beyond

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INTRODUCTION:

MAPPING AND STORIES

Over the last thirty years or so, conversations about teaching pedagogy have consistently focused on the benefits of experiential learning and interdisciplinary connections. In order for students to learn in an optimal way, to develop their critical thinking skills while simultaneously mastering content, they must engage with multiple ways of seeing and knowing.

They should learn to acknowledge complexity, to evaluate information, and to challenge their own positionality and self-assuredness. Put succinctly, they must become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

These practices provide students with the skills they need to be successful in whatever paths they choose: adaptability, creativity, innovation, the ability to work collaboratively, and understanding the need to see issues from multiple perspectives. As teachers in higher education and supporters of Place as Text (PAT) pedagogy, we have searched for strategies to encourage students to engage in ways that promote these skills.

Perhaps one of the best examples of teaching strategies designed to transform students can be seen in Longwood University's Yellowstone National Park Program (LU@YNP). This place-based course, designed to connect interdisciplinarity with experiential learning, places students in Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) with a faculty team. As students engage with issues and ideas during this immersive course, they are thrust into new contexts and pushed to see the world in new ways. The course is an example of deliberately placing students in what Mary Louise Pratt calls "contact zones," which are "spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in the world today" ("Arts" 34). Those who exist in these zones—in our case, faculty and students—are subject to perspectives, according to Pratt, that emphasize "how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among . . . travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices" (*Imperial Eyes* 7). During LU@YNP, students are immersed in a myriad of contact zones as they consider numerous social, political, and environmental issues, all while looking through multiple lenses. For example, while students in this class often look at wildlife through the literal lens of a telescope, they cannot be passive observers of grazing antelope, lumbering bison, or gamboling bear cubs. They learn how to put their observations into political, economic, cultural, and environmental contexts. They hear the impassioned words of wildlife conservationists, they listen to the concerns of ranchers who live with the wolves that have moved beyond the park's boundaries, and they see the effects of

invasive species in GYE, all of which forces them to navigate and negotiate competing discourses. The positive result, one that participants repeatedly call transformative, is that they emerge with a greater awareness of those “interlocking understandings and practices” (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 7).

This type of learning is exciting for students. During the course, they create maps—both literal and figurative—to consider and articulate their experiences and position themselves relative to other physical and philosophical markers. A map becomes, then, another kind of story: it is a particular kind of story of course, one made of lines and shapes and symbols and words and colors. But it most definitely tells a story that this is a place; this is where we are; this is where we have been; this is the way to another place. As students engage with a multitude of stories and construct their own maps, they realize that they must get lost in order to learn how to find themselves. Perhaps best of all, they learn how to recreate this process over and over again, thus promoting healthy inquiry into complex issues. The faculty team has discovered ways that recursive mapping generates stories to explain these maps: stories that subvert linear, predetermined explanations of experience, and stories that are continuously revised and retold. The students are always seeking, evaluating, and mapping.

The mapping experience is great for students, but what about teachers? Obviously, those of us who have taught in this program for years, those who keep coming back, enjoy the class. We like to see the effects it has on our students as they engage with new ideas and begin to ask complex questions. At the same time, something deeper results from teaching this way that is rarely discussed but is as important as the effects of PAT pedagogy on students. Bernice Braid notes that, in NCHC Faculty PAT Institutes, “Participants undergo the stress that students feel in radically unfamiliar territory, but equally they experience the exhilaration students exhibit when they see patterns emerge from a dizzying array of fresh stimuli. Integrative thinking and connected knowing are energizing and provocative” (10). The same is true for faculty involved in LU@YNP. While dizzying and discombobulating, LU@YNP also serves as a

safe place for faculty to take risks in how they teach. The program provides a quick means to assess how new ideas engage students in learning, and the varied resources in GYE serve as a giant teaching laboratory. As faculty, we, too, are participating in experiential learning and making interdisciplinary connections with colleagues in ways that traditional teaching institutions fail to encourage. In this way, we map out new and interesting ways to teach and learn.

All of us who have taught in the GYE course carry many maps with us. We have defined and redefined that space many times; we have considered and reconsidered countless moments of information, observation, and possibility; and we have written many stories, telling them over and over, replaying them in our minds, writing them down, sending them forward, calling them back. We keep our physical and mental maps close, telling the stories that guide us again to that place, to those students and colleagues gathered together in the first light, starting to make maps all over again. The teaching experiences associated with this course have altered the way we approach learning and made us better instructors.

This chapter, in fact, is a story, one that articulates the effects on faculty that stem from designing, implementing, and participating in a PAT course: we talk about where and how LU@YNP began, how it has evolved, and where we see ourselves heading. We reflect on our roles in this dynamic, mobile learning community and consider how the power of this immersive experience has shaped

1. our senses of self as teacher-scholars;
2. our notions of connectedness among the disciplines;
3. our worldview of students and ourselves as parts of communities;
4. our roles as professors in authentic, shared inquiry with students; and
5. the transformative influence on our pedagogy beyond the LU@YNP context.

Thus, we see ourselves as students in our own classroom and consider what we have learned as explorers on a learning quest to

address complex civic issues. This chapter—in process, form, and content—is a mirror of the program: many voices contributed to its articulation, and just as when we teach in Yellowstone, it becomes difficult to determine where one person’s idea blends into another’s. The natural motion of a group of teachers who accept openness and exploration will always demand self-reflection, introspection, and even repetition. We circle back, start out again, and call to each other to find our way, resisting the disciplinary boundaries that too often impede exploration.

Our story is one map among many but also many maps that make one, and we hope it might inspire other explorers to start their own journeys.

THE STARTING POINT:

BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION OF LONGWOOD UNIVERSITY’S YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK PROGRAM

The genesis story of LU@YNP begins in 2003 with the American Democracy Project (ADP), an effort of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities that was initiated in partnership with *The New York Times*. In 2005, three members of the Longwood faculty participated in ADP’s Stewardship of Public Lands (SOPL) seminar. Just over one year later, two Longwood faculty members co-taught a spring semester pilot for a new capstone course. Dubbed “Science and Civics in Action,” the course focused on the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone, and Longwood students travelled to GYE. The first excursion of Longwood students to our first national park was transformational for both students and faculty, and, more than any of the preceding events and activities, it fueled the development of the LU@YNP program that exists today. Over four field days, students interacted with key stakeholders, including ranchers, business owners, and biologists, and they explored two gateway communities: Gardiner at the park’s North Entrance and Cooke City-Silver Gate in the northeast. Faculty were deeply affected by the students’ responses, many of whom had never been to the West and some of whom had never flown on a plane, so the semester was a liberating

experience for them. Observing wild wolves had a profound impact on them just as it had on faculty participating in the SOPL seminar. Faculty also learned such lessons as how to keep students, garbed in Virginia winter clothes, warm at daybreak in a Montana March. From the good and the bad, we were convinced that an immersive field experience in the human communities and physical landscapes of GYE was a unique way of achieving Longwood's institutional mission of developing citizen leaders prepared to make positive contributions to the common good of society. Over the next few years, Longwood continued to organize small groups of students for a field-based course in Yellowstone. Interest in participating in the program continued to rise, leading to expansion of additional faculty and a variety of professionals with specific expertise. With growth, assignments and activities were revised and improved.

The evolution of the LU@YNP program—from its inaugural offering in 2006 to its markedly different descendent today—has focused on promoting transdisciplinary, collaborative, and immersive experiences that promote transformative learning by students. That change over time extends beyond programmatic elements: faculty members themselves have experienced their own transformative learning. We have moved away from our roles as content experts and instead have led as experts in extra-disciplinary inquiry, information literacy, collaboration, and communication. What we have come to discover is that our power as educators does not necessarily lie in content knowledge but in our ability to enter the educational space as true members of the community, as travelers as much as guides, modeling the skills and strategies that enable all of us, students and teachers alike, to take the transformational educational journey. On that journey are as many maps and destinations as there are travelers.

THE JOURNEY

The First Steps

The LU@YNP learning community is mobile, crisscrossing GYE in a caravan of minivans and SUVs, and often faculty and staff are recruited to be drivers throughout the course. The role of

driver allows faculty members to have a first experience with the program without the pressure of being an instructor of record. All traveling faculty members play key roles in instruction, particularly through the vital conversations that happen in the vehicles; however, for their first trip, drivers are spared the pressures of answering detailed questions about the syllabus or grading written work. Several team members commented that, on their initial responses to being invited to participate, they were insecure about their unfamiliarity with GYE but felt liberated at not having to be in charge or contribute discipline-specific knowledge. One team member recalls:

When I was first invited to join LU@YNP, I was prepared to be solely in the utilitarian role of driver; all I had to do was drive students from place to place and occasionally attempt to engage them in conversation. I anticipated feeling liberated because I did not feel responsible for course content, I would not have to do any grading, and I would get to drive around GYE for nearly two weeks. I also felt quite underprepared. I had never been to Yellowstone National Park; I knew nothing about the reintroduction of wolves; I had never met the students before this class; and I had never seriously contemplated stewardship of public lands issues. Because I felt so underprepared, I anticipated hiding behind the role of driver, happy to be a passive figure in this adventure. Ultimately, though, the course made it impossible to be passive, and with each successive year, I saw my engagement and participation in a new light.

Joy Ochs, reflecting on PAT experiences for students, observes: “Participating in experiential learning does not allow students the passive option of hanging back and forming an opinion later. Immersed in the experience, one must constantly assess and refine one’s perceptions” (29). The same goes for faculty. Even as new participants in LU@YNP, most faculty have recognized their inability to be passive even when thinking of themselves as “just a driver.” The dynamic space of a van filled with inquisitive students demands that faculty start to engage in ways they may never have considered.

Sometimes these instructors start to feel lost and have to find new paths and positionalities. Teaching starts to feel different.

For most faculty members, including some very seasoned teachers, the first year in Yellowstone creates apprehension. One person reported that she had as much, if not more, to learn as our students: “In Yellowstone, my answer to most questions was ‘I don’t know. Who can we ask?’ To be honest, it felt really good to let go of any control over course content. I WAS a student.” Another faculty member reported being anxious about learning to play new roles in which he had little control: “My greatest discomfort was learning how to pivot while in the field. What do we do when something goes wrong, such as the weather isn’t cooperative for an activity, a facility is unexpectedly closed due to federal sequestration, or a stakeholder cancels a meeting at the last minute?” The above responses are similar to the experiences of students in the class. Anxious about being in a new space, one that is outside the walls of a traditional classroom, faculty are taken out of their comfort zones and thrust into contact zones. In the field, faculty and students speak with members of the local communities, some selected intentionally to ensure that a particular viewpoint is shared (e.g., cattle rancher, wildlife biologist), and countless others with whom students—in small groups or individually, in souvenir stores and coffee shops—interact informally. In this setting, academic expertise is not privileged; rather, it exists alongside local expertise and indigenous knowledge, contributing in similar ways to the students’ deep inquiry. The unscripted and largely unpredictable milieu further challenges the faculty members as they relinquish the standing of expert and the control of the class script.

The reflections above show faculty identifying uncomfortable feelings. For some, that discomfort came from not knowing the place in this place-based course; for others it came from the teams of faculty and community partners with whom they were working. For everyone, uncomfortable feelings come from the unknown and the uncontrollable, yet in the midst of this uncertainty, faculty forge new connections and start to map their locations as teachers in powerfully new ways.

Along the Way: Connectedness among the Disciplines

For first-time faculty team members, a predictable phenomenon is that they bring new ideas and seek to contribute something related to their disciplinary expertise. In the early years, we enthusiastically chased all these ideas, piloting countless new projects, sometimes incorporating multiple new projects in a given year. We initially felt pressure to cover all disciplinary bases, to bring in everything each of us considered to be pertinent, essential information. Although no students were harmed in the process, it was taxing for all involved. In retrospect, we recognized that we were clinging to the ways we were trained, performing the trappings of education in a westernized, structured academic culture. We operated in the world of intellectual *competition* when we needed to embrace intellectual *community*. Milton D. Cox, observing a “nationwide decline in community,” wonders if this decline is “mirrored in the way we teach and our students learn” (83). He quotes Parker J. Palmer: “Academic culture is a curious and conflicted thing . . . infamous for fragmentation, isolation, and competitive individualism—a culture in which community sometimes feels harder to come by than in any other institution on the face of the earth” (qtd. in Cox 83–84).

Team members, trained in individualized pedagogy with little experience in team teaching, are so used to fragmentation and isolation that making the shift to community teaching and learning can make faculty feel that they are not doing their jobs. One team member states, “I didn’t have any idea how to use my disciplinary expertise, so I didn’t contribute much in my first year. This made me feel bad, like I wasn’t doing my part.” Another member notes: “In graduate school I had been taught to conquer information. Learn the research, study the methodology, compare studies, and be able to speak confidently about findings. That is how I approached teaching my first year of teaching. For every class, I prepared for hours reviewing material—most of which I never got to bring up in lectures.” Our team learns pretty quickly that there is not enough room in the course to accommodate individual pedagogies. Gradually, though, we find that the more we reject disciplinary silos and

expertise, the more we find community. Mirroring what Cox calls “the positive accomplishments” of participating in a learning community, faculty identify the most important skills that they transfer to their students: “an ability to work productively with others,” being “open . . . to new ideas,” the “ability to think holistically,” and the “ability to think creatively” (86). When faculty work communally, they pass on the positive impact to students. We do draw on our disciplinary expertise at key moments, but it is more important to get students to think about what they observe, ask good questions to promote exploration, and guide students in the process. Consequently, faculty must be open to new ways of seeing and to competing ideas, particularly ideas that challenge their own disciplinary knowledge. For example, one might assume that data on wolf movements are key for biological research. But what happens when we pose the question of whether we really need these data, asking what it is used for and by whom and asking also whether the wolves have a right to exist without the tracking collars that provide such data. Eventually, we come to see that we have to be open to ideas that challenge our typical ways of thinking just as we ask the students to be. We have to let go of our control of knowledge and trust our peers and our process. We have to find ways to model intellectual inquiry and collaborative mapmaking.

The LU@YNP program really matured when faculty let go of instinctive, discipline-guided ways of thinking and, instead, worked to identify key emergent themes and ensure that new ideas could be meaningfully connected to those themes. As we focused on these themes, we also emphasized core practices necessary for students to see the whole forming from all the pieces. Chief among the core practices were intentional reflection, identification of connections, and critical dialogue. We started to learn how to challenge everything, even each other. The evening debriefing sessions with all students and all instructional team members became a dynamic space for talking, questioning, and wondering. A faculty member reflects:

One of the most interesting teaching techniques I enjoy is a discussion of a particular topic from many different lenses

while having subject matter experts from the different lenses. We are able to alternate between professors and stakeholders and students in the discussion to discover the interconnectedness of the topic to many different fields. Students come to understand that large, complex issues require examination from many perspectives (lenses) to understand it better.

In a discussion on a subject like bison, the biologist may discuss topics that include brucellosis, an infection tied to cattle ranching; the mathematician may use a quantitative lens on how we estimate herd sizes and population; the geographer may use a spatial lens on a particular route that migrating bison take when resources are limited; the literary scholar may adopt a narrative lens with stories about bison, who tells them, and how they are told; and the sociologist may discuss the park visitors' reactions to the slaughter of bison outside of the park. Students may bring into the discussion their observations from the field such as

1. public documents (what type of information is being distributed?),
2. community involvement (how are the local citizens engaging with issues?),
3. stakeholder information (what local, state, and federal policies are relevant?), and
4. information from local authorities (wildlife departments and policy).

This process allows students to see how large issues in the community require multiple disciplines to understand the topic fully but also to recognize that acknowledging multiple perspectives is essential to negotiation and decision-making processes; of course, this process works only when the faculty are as willing as the students to challenge ideas, explore issues from all sides, and relinquish the podium of expert.

One time, a student said, "I came into this class thinking I knew a lot about these issues. I see now that I have so much to learn and

to think about.” When explaining what we ask students to do, one faculty peer said, “The simple—yet immensely complex answer—is THINK: observe, reflect, analyze, repeat. These are the practices found in all academic disciplines and are the foundations of PAT courses.” We, too, have so much to learn and think about, yet all team members express feeling delighted and refreshed as a result of the shift from teaching specific content to modeling ways of seeing and of negotiating the places, people, and issues presented to us. Alan W. Grose reminds us that “[p]erhaps the most valuable ingredient that we can bring to the learning situation is not our theoretical expertise but our practical experience of having struggled to make sense of things for ourselves” (126). Our own struggles are—and should be—apparent to students. Through our process of thinking, evaluating, asking, telling, describing, doubting, and deciding, we are learning how to make maps while we are helping students make them. In effect, each team member is saying, this is where I am right now, this is how I got here, but this does not mean that I end here. The maps are a collage of interdisciplinary considerations and reconsiderations, and this foundation of teaching is exhilarating.

Joining a uniquely large interdisciplinary team creates angst for some faculty who have never participated in team teaching nor had to think through the logistical challenges of teaching a large number of students in the field. We have had to consider how to organize the class so that all the faculty members feel that they make contributions beneficial to the overall goals, one of which is to release the hold the faculty team often has on “expertise.” One member observes:

The teaching that I had done before this experience had me as the sole professor. It can be difficult to teach a class with one other professor, but this class had five different professors from different fields co-teaching the class. . . . It takes a lot of work to get the courses organized—from logistics to pedagogy to coursework. Each professor has her own style of teaching.

Integrating into the team is a process involving many conversations within the group to develop a list of mutually accepted objectives.

New proposed assignments go through a process to determine how they fit into the current course structure and learning objectives to make sure that they align with and advance these objectives. One faculty member reflected:

One of my epiphanies as a professor came when I developed more comfort with team teaching in the course. I find that the course is so much richer with this style. Although the workload is large, especially at the beginning, having a team to discuss new ideas is great. Having a team of experts in the field is also great. The team has different faculty and staff with different talents. One person does not have to do it all, which is a very big advantage when teaching a large class of students in an off-campus location.

For many, this part of the journey is practice in getting lost. Being surrounded by people who have different ways of seeing the world and who understand information differently can be disorienting. Losing the comfort of one's own disciplinary silo can be shocking, but it is a good place to be when setting off to create new maps as new discoveries are made. Feeling lost or uncomfortable pushes students to engage with new ideas and to start to develop their own strategies for mapping their positions. To facilitate this process, faculty must experience it, too. This method of teaching becomes exhilarating; not only do we see the passion of discovery in the students, but we also feel it ourselves.

This kind of engagement is not for everyone since it requires a real trust in the pedagogical process—something acquired over time—and extensive practice in “sitting on your hands.” For some faculty members, this horizontal structure has been a reason to decide not to continue with the project; for others, it is the key ingredient in a course experience focused on transitioning students out of their nearly two decades in a “write for teacher” mode and into a role of civic agent. Faculty can experience a pedagogical high in not focusing on students' learning the facts we want to teach but instead setting in motion and facilitating an experience that is dynamic and improvisational but also clearly focused on how students are thinking.

Along the Way: Teachers—Scholars—People

Perhaps one of the scariest acknowledgements is that our disciplines and our expertise are not the center of students' learning experiences, that content is not as important as the ways we help students think about the world in which we live, and that we can learn from our students. One team member stated:

As faculty, we need to be reminded that helping students think is ultimately our role. Not that we have to help students to learn to analyze a poem, or to recite the definition of a keystone species, or to orient themselves on a trail with a topographic map. Instead, we have to extract commonalities among disciplines. We are forced to recognize the bare-boned, foundational exercises upon which any disciplinary knowledge rests: observe, reflect, analyze, repeat. Once we drop the role of expert, we are then open to what our students can teach us.

We want to make it clear that the scholarly journey is also a personal journey, and who we are is bound up in the ways that we understand. Thinking, speaking, and writing are ways of *being* in the world. At the same time, the world can shape us in unexpected ways. One colleague remembered well one of those moments:

During one wildlife observation, I was required to move the minivan to a location away from the group. Being a half mile away, I couldn't hear any noise from the group. On the other hand, the quiet was not quiet at all. Birds were everywhere, although I didn't necessarily see them. The birds' melodic beauty tempted me to walk further to a sage flat. The night before dusted this area with snow, looking like it had been sprinkled with powdered sugar. As I slowly walked, each step made enough sound to break the birdsong, but then my sense of smell noticed the refreshing scent of sage. Soon the warmth of the sun felt good on this chilly morning. It seemed that my brain had turned a

dial that heightened all of my senses. It was a transcendent moment. Self-awareness at this moment made me feel that I had entered another world.

This personal experience turned into an isolation activity that all faculty and students engage in. The type of self-reflection that leads faculty to reflect on how assignments and activities affect students is exactly what makes the pedagogy so powerful. The faculty *are students*, but, unlike most undergraduate students, we are capable of analyzing our maps while in the process of creating them. We see connections and wonder how we can push the students to let go, to reevaluate, to become the careful explorers we want them to be. We want them to want to know how and why they know.

Teaching an interdisciplinary course reminds us that we are not just faculty; we are, first and foremost, humans, humans grappling with the world. It reminds us how fragile connections are, how tenuous connections can be, how quickly friendships can be lost, and how easy it is to lose the very self you think you know. Sometimes when we lose a sense of self, we also lose the world. To keep it, we must constantly examine the stories we encounter and contemplate the ways that we know. One faculty member stated: “We are as much students as teachers, as much country folk and urban adventurers as faculty. We should all consider our own stories and learn from the webs of connection all around us. My time with my colleagues in the GYE course has taught me this again and again.” Some faculty participants experience liberation in not needing to be responsible for knowing everything. One peer stated: “We cannot ignore that students look to us as experts and expect us to have all the answers, so it can be challenging to deal with the disappointed student who wants to be told what to do. But how fun is it to say ‘I don’t know’ to a student question!” Another team member gained a greater understanding of self as faculty:

Over time and several return trips to Yellowstone, more than my course assignments have changed, my sense of self as a sociologist has also changed. My status is no longer wrapped up in being an area expert in cross-national

comparative policy but is now shaped by my dedication to encouraging student inquiry with the belief that students can't learn sociology inside a classroom alone.

If we want to help students see without lenses or, more likely, to acknowledge the lenses through which they see, then we must identify our own.

Along the Way: Roles as Professors in Authentic, Shared Inquiry with Students

LU@YNP moves faculty from being experts to just being people who are engaging with ideas. As Paulo Freire observes,

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (80)

Students often think of the professor as a subject matter expert, but even though the professors may lead an activity in the specific field of their discipline, most often discussions are transdisciplinary by nature and design. Faculty in the LU@YNP program become discussion leaders to assist students in finding the information. One professor may ask another team member to give more information about a topic while in the field. Frequently students ask a question for which the "lead professor" may not have a ready answer, but another professor might. One professor noted: "This seems to be a very fun part of the class. Students can see that no one has all of the answers, but together we are able to learn much more. Even better is when we do not have an answer, but we are able to suggest that 'that would be a great question for the wildlife biologist tomorrow morning.'" Because our pedagogy depends on team-based inquiry while we are in the field, professors also participate in the PAT exercises. These have now become second nature for the faculty.

We can experience each community in the ways that the students do. As students gradually become more comfortable and natural in the exploration of the community, so do faculty. According to one faculty member: “One of the most enjoyable and enlightening activities, for me, is the evening debriefing meeting in which students discuss their new discoveries in the surrounding communities. These meetings bring new insights for me as well as the students.” Another team member recalled:

One of my favorite memories from my first year was when we were on a guided hike through the back country. Our guide, a former park ranger, encouraged us to use all five senses to experience the hike. The group of students and I took that as a challenge. When we found things along the trail, we would pick them up, smell them, and then put them back. One item we found was an antler. The students asked me to taste it, and after checking with our guide, I did! I licked an antler that was lying out in the woods. As you can imagine laughter ensued. But we learned about the taste of an antler; and we bonded over the experience.

Faculty members who view themselves as participants in this educational adventure also enhance the shared experience of the entire group:

Life and literature take us many places, and I love to go on the journey of discovery with my students. There is magic in witnessing their travels as they engage with new and interesting ideas and really start to figure out, not only *what* they think, but also *how* to think. If nothing else, experiential learning shows us that we are always in negotiation. We must consider where we have been in order to understand where we are going, or where we could go. My colleagues and I only want to give our students the tools with which to figure out what *they* think, to decide for themselves what stories they will write and tell.

Another faculty member reported a shared journey with students, one that developed through the creation of a reading assignment:

I don't remember the first time I met Rick McIntyre, a park ranger who has studied Yellowstone wolves for over twenty-four years through daily observations. I know it happened. I remember a team leader being excited. I remember everyone being in a circle. But I don't remember Rick. It was my first year in Yellowstone, and my job was to drive a van and not hit anything. I had no context and no meaning behind the name Rick McIntyre. I think a lot of our students used to be like me. A lot of our previous students probably don't remember meeting Rick, even though most of them have. That changed last year (2019) when we had students read Nate Blakeslee's *American Wolf* before they traveled to Yellowstone. Nate features Rick and his stories about wolves in *American Wolf*. Our students fell in love with the romance and tragedies of wolf packs before they ever got to Yellowstone, all told through the lens of Rick's eyes and heart. And when we saw Rick, they knew. They knew he understood the wolves better than any other human on Earth. And they will remember the first time they met Rick McIntyre.

Obviously, this anecdote underscores the power of language and print to heighten experience.

As these quotations have shown, not only the students are learning how to "observe, reflect, analyze, repeat" but also the faculty. We are constantly reflecting on the course and our connections to each other, to the disciplines represented on the team, and, most importantly, to the larger purpose of the course. We try out new and innovative assignments or experiences, we observe what happens, and we make changes based on our collective analysis of what works and what doesn't, linking our skills with our knowledge and, most importantly, highlighting our ability to learn. One person wrote about the PAT pedagogy as transformative:

I have been on NCHC PAT faculty institutes and have been able to teach a semester-long course using PAT and techniques employed in LU@YNP to explore different cities with students. Each time I travel with students, I get caught up in their excitement for exploring and discovering a place

and its people and issues. LU@YNP has made me, I hope, a more engaged educator who is able to ask the right questions to spark further interest and inquiry. Even when I am not in the classroom, I use the skills of observation, conversation, and mental mapping to explore new places and even those familiar to me. The concept of seeing a place with fresh eyes is something that I keep in the back of my mind, and it is my hope that it allows me to connect with my students and show them that learning never stops.

The shift from content experts to co-learners is challenging and sometimes seems to colleagues either impossible or simply bad pedagogy. We have all heard the retort that students must memorize “x” to understand “y,” that we cannot send them out to explore without some kind of agenda. Once we recognize, however, that our core values are student-driven inquiry, community engagement, and place-based learning, then we begin to see that as faculty we are participants in a process that democratizes learning, a process in which faculty members are partners rather than purveyors, a process in which we are continuously learning alongside our students. We are in a perpetual state of “becoming”; we are, as we should be, “unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (Freire 84).

Transformative Influences on Our Pedagogy beyond Longwood University’s Yellowstone National Park Program Context

Being part of the faculty team results in new perspectives and new pedagogies, thus informing other teaching strategies and opportunities outside of LU@YNP. Faculty have developed new skills arising from the perspectives they have learned in the LU@YNP context. One team member noted:

Before departing for Yellowstone, a place that I had only seen in books, I was included by my colleagues in preparatory meetings, which were very exciting. I was learning about how the sciences connected with sociology or policy

and the written word. Experiencing this course for the first year, especially, it is difficult to describe other than transformative.

Some of these transformations have resulted in different approaches for other courses faculty teach:

After my first year, I took the inspiration I had received from Yellowstone, the faculty team members, and the students and redesigned my on-campus courses to make sure my students were doing sociology in the community. Lower-level students did oral history projects (inspired by the Yellowstone Oral History Projects) with volunteer fire fighters in our community, then with elders at a senior center, then with volunteers at a therapeutic riding center. Upper-level students started doing evaluation research with a local Head Start program. We are now in year four of creating and evaluating programs that encourage parent involvement. All of my students do PAT explorations early in the semester to sharpen their sociological imaginations. Over time and several return trips to Yellowstone, more than my course assignments have changed, my sense of self as a sociologist has also changed. My status is no longer wrapped up in being an area expert but is now shaped by my dedication to encouraging student inquiry with the belief that students can't learn sociology inside a classroom alone.

Several team members have taken the model that is used in LU@YNP and adapted it to other communities. Longwood colleagues have taken students to Alaska to examine stewardship of resources including oil, minerals, and wildlife; here the students explore firsthand the sociological, mathematical, and societal effects of land rights and usage while considering how citizens can serve as best stewards of our natural resources. Lessons from GYE also have impacted elementary and high school teachers through teacher workshops. One faculty member noted:

I applied for and received a National Geographic Society grant to fund in-service teacher institutes focused on the

Chesapeake Bay watershed. Lessons learned out West made for a strong foundation for a transdisciplinary approach for teachers across the curriculum and grade levels. A multi-disciplinary team from five organizations was formed to facilitate a series of workshops. We met several times to understand our roles to promote thinking among the teacher participants. After a year of participation, a large proportion of the 100 teacher participants indicated significant changes in their teaching by getting students outdoors for meaningful watershed explorations, use of geospatial visualization, and talking about environmental issues in a civic context.

LU@YNP has also had an impact on Longwood alumni. In 2016, the Brock Endowment for Transformational Learning was established to support the development of place-based programs that steep students in challenging civic issues. To date, five Brock Experiences have grown from the roots set by LU@YNP: Arctic Circle, Chesapeake Bay, Colorado River, Borderlines, and Boston. Although diverse in location and focal topic, all require authentic explorations of communities and dialogue with diverse stakeholders.

Additional examples of LU@YNP influences include a middle-school science teacher who joined the team for several years and was inspired to return to school and complete his doctoral degree based on research he completed in the field with LU@YNP students. We also host professional development programs on our respective campuses, helping colleagues recognize the ways they can be co-learners and facilitators of exploration as opposed to using pedagogy strictly focused on telling students what to see and how to respond.

Along the Way: Worldview of Students and Ourselves as Parts of Communities

One of the most powerful lessons to come out of the program, for students and faculty alike, is the importance of understanding ourselves as a part of communities, of realizing how connected all

our maps actually are. LU@YNP emphasizes the development of multiple learning communities among students as they explore issues and disciplinary lenses. Through a combination of both structured planning and serendipity, we constantly and intentionally mix student groups so that they can learn from the diverse perspectives—disciplinary and personal—of their fellow students. Faculty also are part of these groups, further challenging them to think beyond their disciplinary expertise. One colleague stated:

The recursiveness of the foundational practices (observe, reflect, analyze) is part of what builds community in this course. As students observe, reflect, and analyze, so do faculty. No matter how many times you might visit a place, the content is never the same: the weather is different, we meet with different stakeholders, we see different wildlife, walk different paths, the students are different. The content of GYE is never mastered, so the class is always new.

Navigating the opinions and experiences of diverse stakeholders is a practice that is transferrable to any civic issue. In this class, faculty and students work together on that navigation. One faculty contributor reported:

Again, it all comes down to telling stories. Whenever I start a new class, I tell the students two things. First, we are a community. Our successes and failure will depend on everyone, on the ways that we speak and listen and on the ways that we respect and care for each other. We will be engaged in learning, and that means developing ideas and discussing those ideas openly in a safe environment. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I explain that stories tell ourselves and others who we are. We all have a story to tell, a way to articulate ourselves to the world. As we navigate our lives and loves, our struggles and successes and failures, everything is filtered through language and the magic of stories. And to study stories is to learn how to navigate the worlds we live in and those we imagine, to believe in the power of language and to respect the

potential of human experience. We are asked to ponder where we are, both literally and figuratively, and are pushed to consider where we may be going.

As faculty and students travel through GYE, they form communities that are grounded in interdisciplinary experiences and steeped in story. These experiences and the skills learned during the course are unforgettable and transferrable, informing how we will grapple with the world beyond our time in GYE.

The multitude of stories we bring into the course, the materials we read, and the stories we tell each other demand negotiation, collaboration, respect, motion, and balance. We are working on something, and so we build our community, we start our interdisciplinary journey into GYE, and we open conversations, forever changed by the stories we read and hear, stories told by students, faculty, and community members. The experiences of others make us consider our own experiences. Along the way, other stories become entwined with our own stories, and we choose what we will accept, what we will internalize, and what we will tell—and, of course, sometimes the stories choose us.

The benefit to student learning of this educational approach is incalculable because students are positioned not as receivers of academic information from a professor but rather as true participants in a dialogue with persons who are at once very different and quite similar—as humans, Americans, workers, family members, and concerned community members. For faculty and students alike, this course has shaped, and continues to shape, who we are as people and molded us into better teachers and learners.

CONCLUSION:

WHERE WE GO NEXT

As we find our way with each other as educators, we have reached a few realizations:

- We function better as a team.
- The best teachers are also students.

- Academic disciplines are inherently connected.
- Uncertainty leads to inquiry.
- We are all parts of communities.
- One must get lost to find a way.

As the program grew and the approach matured, we came to understand a new faculty identity. On campus, we are teacher-scholars associated with our disciplines. How many times in our careers must we introduce ourselves to a group using our name, institution, and discipline? In this mobile learning community, though, we wear different hats. We are expert question-askers, adept facilitators, and seasoned agents of change. In collaborating with stakeholders, we defer to them the content expertise, allowing students to hear new perspectives and grapple with inconsistencies. The biology professor could surely cover the topic of the trophic cascade efficiently and succinctly, but how much more meaningful it is for students to piece that together from conversations with ranchers, wildlife biologists, and hunters. Passing the hat to others, we guide the students' asking of key questions, their processing of seemingly conflicting data, and their search for public information that exists well outside the more familiar academic databases. This stepping out of the disciplinary role of "sage on the stage" sets up deep, meaningful, and authentic collaboration among colleagues and with students. Since no one is wearing the nametag of "expert," we all are working together to explore issues, to uncover new ideas rather than cover course material, to come to new understandings together. In that, the LU@YNP program really is a mobile learning community, one with a horizontal structure and with critical contributions being made by all members.

Just as we ultimately are asking students to create new maps that will assist them through life, the faculty are pushed to reconsider their own maps and mapping skills. Most faculty have—through experiences, training, and the development of "expertise"—positioned themselves in spaces and on maps that are fairly rigid. When a group of teachers, however, is brought together with the expressed goal of crossing disciplinary boundaries, of developing

strategies and assignments that problematize issues and beliefs, of seeing through the eyes of others, the lines and delineations fall away so that we, too, must create new maps, finding our way into new spaces, into new ways of being and of interacting in the world and with each other. What happens to the faculty who teach in this program should serve as an example of professional development that has a direct and positive impact on student learning. The experience has taught us how to engage with each other, with our students, and with ourselves in new ways. Through it all, we have developed the maps that push us into innovative educational spaces.

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