Book Review: Conrad, C., and Lundberg, T. (2022). *Learning with Others. Collaboration as a Pathway to College Student Success.* The United States: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dan Manolescu (Corresponding author)
ESL Freelance and Award-Winning Author, USA
Email: Dan.manolescu@att.net

A unique approach comes from the pages of *Learning with Others*, a project focused on the concept of collaborative learning, which the authors define as "learning with, from, and for others about what makes for student success in college." (intro p. vii) Research conducted over a decade of dialogues and conversations aiming at "an alternative vision of undergraduate education" led those involved in the process to consider educational practices that should be welcome across American colleges and universities. The starting point was a group of teachers and students at twelve Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), who basically functioned as a stepping-stone towards similar places of higher education where the common ground was blending teaching and learning which ended up as learning together.

The Introduction is followed by six chapters of intense discussions about collaborative learning, starting with "unsettling individual learning as the cornerstone of a college education," continuing with "placing collaborative learning at the forefront of student success," situating it "at the center of the undergraduate experience," then "blending roles and responsibilities of faculty, staff, and students," "receiving and giving feedback," and ending with "anchoring the curriculum in shared problem-solving." The Afterword takes the reader into the vision for the undergraduate education for the twenty-first century America.

The underground education for twenty-first-century America, as presented in the Introduction, takes us to the very beginning of the project. A three-year study included twelve Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs): The Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HGCUs), and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Institutions (AANAPIs), which also involved researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Pennsylvania. Students, staff, and faculty at these twelve institutions were eager participants in this endeavor.

As stated from the first pages of the book, the authors' goal was to "welcome and support minority students in college and contribute to the well-being of the communities from which students come, the MSIs students, staff, and faculty to engage in what we refer to as collaborative learning." (p. 3) As defined in this context, "collaborative learning […] is fundamentally different from cooperation and collaboration, where roles and responsibilities are distributed among group participants." This view is clarified when the reader is informed that ""in collaborative learning, everyone is an active participant in joint-problem-solving. Group members engage in back-and-forth dialog in working together to frame shared problems and in coming up with promising ideas to solve them." (p. 3-4) A tall order with a seemingly debatable goal, but beautifully accomplished when we find out that collaborative learning happens "when two or more people learn *from, with*, and *for* others in shared problem-solving that addresses real-world challenges and opportunities." (p. 4)

The main contours of decades of research point to valuable finding regarding interactive group work: "when students have opportunities to engage in learning with peers, they tend to learn more, learn more deeply, and learn skills for interacting with others (Barkley, Major, and Cross (2014); Springer, Stanne, and Donovan (1999)."(p. 7) Collaborative projects, the approach claims, have supported student learning through "math emporia, first-year experiences, bridge programs, tutoring, and peer review." When viewed from the MSIs perspectives, group-learning strategies have been named "hubs," "networks," "organically forming cohorts," and "learning communities." What makes these programs successful, as postulated in the book, is the fact that "collaborative learning techniques serve as a means to knit together interdependent networks of learners who are engaged in pursuing promising ideas that address shared problems." (p. 8) Besides the obvious benefits for students, the college education is also meant to cultivate "a commitment to serving the minoritized people and groups within the institution and in off-campus communities." (p. 9)

Chapter 1 takes the reader on a review of individual learning, which, in Conrad and Lundberg's view, is deemed "unsettling" in the mainstream culture and practices at most institutions where undergraduate education has been "the cornerstone" promoting "individual learning and achievement." The undergraduate experience is then analyzed in the context of Benjamin Barber's (1992) work entitled *An Aristocracy for Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America*, whereby two completely different models are clearly explained: the purist (liberal) and the vocational:

> The purist emphasizes learning for its own sake, while the vocational (professional) emphasizes learning that prepares students for the workplace. Both the purist and the vocational (professional) place primary emphasis on the education of individuals. (p. 16)

Furthermore, the Morrill Act (Land Grant Act) of 1862 was responsible for "the rise of the utilitarian-vocational model of a college education with the introduction of a wide range of professional programs in such fields as engineering and agriculture." The end of the Civil War in 1865 brought a new idea that was embraced, in his inaugural speech at Harvard University by President, Charles Eliot, who encouraged students to choose most of the undergraduate courses and thus become free "to pursue their journeys as individual learners." (p. 16)

Due to the ever-growing numbers of students between 1865 and 1990, access to higher education grew exponentially, especially between 1940 and 1990, when "enrollment in higher education grew by roughly 800 percent." Consequently, the benefits of colleges and universities became obviously relevant in the workforce development structure in the United States (Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl, 2010), parallel to a rising cost of college, although learning was definitely understood as central to individual achievement that brought recognition of knowledge and skills with overwhelming appeal to students. The efficiency of individual achievement and learning in the American system of higher education is acknowledged with examples of "pockets of collaborative learning" as illustrated by Alexander Meiklejohn, who "introduced the Experimental College, 'a college within a college' in which faculty and students shared living quarters in lakeshore dorms." (p. 18) This innovation also included six-week modules instead of semesters, no conventional grades, and a two-year curriculum. The Experimental College was dissolved in 1932, but "it became the precursor of the Integral Liberal Studies program that continues to be a vibrant program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison." (ibid.)

In their concerted efforts to understand the emphasis on individual learning, the authors leave little doubt that the traditional pedagogies empowered individual students' learning and achievement through lectures, "often accompanied by blended learning, active learning, simulations, and personalized learning." (p. 19) As such, personal success enabled students in their pursuit of social mobility, as well as "securing employment upon graduation or pursuing a graduate degree."

This project then switches our attention to the shortcomings of placing individual learning at the forefront of student success, with the mainstream emphasis on individual learning failing "to appreciate the magnitude of learning both *from* and *with* others." (p. 21) Additionally, the research also points to the lack of opportunities students might have "to benefit from feedback from others – such as feedback on an idea they are exploring in a research project." By the same token, the authors argue that "individual learning undermines the value and importance of students learning *with* others." (p. 22) To better comprehend the above concept, according to the authors, we need to reinforce the power of "learning to build interdependent relationships and networks in which participants validate one another as 'teachers' and as 'learners' and, in turn, strengthen their capabilities for engaging in problem-solving." (ibid.)

Building upon the concept of collaborative learning, and inspired by John Dewey (1938), Chapter 2 proposes that "schools should connect the learning experiences of students to their everyday lives through problem-solving that prepares them not only for employment but also for their lives as citizens." Along the same lines, research done in 1998 refers to the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University assessment that "inquiry, investigation, and discovery are at the heart" of the student experience. (p. 28) As noted in the same chapter, Conrad and Dunek (2020) astutely observe that "undergraduate education should place primary emphasis on educating 'inquiry-driven learners'; people who are equipped with the capabilities to explore and cultivate promising ideas in their workplace, public, and personal lives." It is in this regard that collaboration and teamwork are poignantly outlined as twenty-first century skills that students are encouraged to acquire.

In order to substantiate their claim, Conrad and Lundberg resort to researchers like Trilling and Fadel (2009), who, in their *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times*, consider collaboration as a key "learning and innovation skill." Furthermore, The Commission on the Future of Undergraduate Education (2017) is also adequately referenced for their promotion of teamwork and collaboration. As revealed in the same context, the authors' definition elucidates the definition of collaborative learning "as taking place when two or more people learn *from, with*, and *for* others in shared problem-solving that is focused on the pursuit of promising ideas for addressing *real-world challenges and opportunities.*" (p. 31)

This new perspective is then supported by what might be called core practices, whereby participants act interdependently to find solutions to shared problems. A plethora of such examples would include, among others, activities that encourage students to do the following:

• Develop a shared endeavor that is anchored in "burning questions" (Harter, 2006, p. 331) […]
• Cultivate a culture of trust, vigilant listening, genuine humility, and respectfulness […]
• Obligate each member of the group to seize responsibility to engage in spirited back-and-forth dialogue […]
• Preserve spaces for diverse and contrarian voice and perspectives […]
• Encourage group members to take the time to reflect and share their reflections […]
• Question self and others […] throughout their inquiry and, in doing so, embrace uncertainty and risk-taking.
• Hold participants accountable to one another to ensure a shared commitment to problem-solving. (p. 32)

Such education, as discussed in the same section of the book, can be traced back to the Greeks, and then to artists and scientists like Michelangelo, Newton, and Einstein, who "found collaborative problem-solving to be more effective than individual problem-solving." In other words, readers are led to believe that, following such principles and noble ideas, "humans learn not only by drawing on their knowledge and experiences but also by exploring ideas with others."

A smooth transition takes the reader to Chapter 3, *Situating Collaborative Learning at the Center of the Undergraduate Experience*, which clarifies the difference between "collaboration" and "collaborative learning." While the former is recognized as "cooperation or teamwork in which individuals mostly divide up roles and responsibilities to solve predefined problems rather than blend roles and responsibilities in shared problem-solving," the latter might be better described as the "students' need to be educated to learn from, with, and for others." Research was conducted at two Minority-Serving Institutions: Paul Quinn College (PQC) and the College of Menominee Nation (CMN), where the emphasis was on "We over Me." The same study reframes undergraduate education as collaborative learning: "making explicit and sharing the norms of interdependence and collaboration; expecting students, faculty, and staff to embrace the identity of a collaborative learner; and networking programs and practices with the public and private sectors." (p. 50) During their visit to PQC and CMN, the authors were told that "college was a collective as much as an individual journey: students were responsible for contributing to the learning of their peers and connecting what they were learning to serving their home communities." (p. 52)

In their promulgation of collaborative learning, Conrad and Lundberg also underscore the closely linked resource pedagogies as supported by researchers like Castellanos and Gloria (2007) as well as Guiffrida (2006), who "view the identities, literacies, and cultural practices that students bring to school as resources 'to honor, explore, and extend' while they encounter the identities, literacies, and practices that are taught and used in school." (Paris, 2012, 94; quoted on p. 54) The body of research, as the authors contend, has repeatedly underlined the inherent values of the sense of belonging, which may fuel "a kind of social capital that includes a "repertoire of information and behaviors helpful in navigating the educational system," "affective support and encouragement with relationship to schooling," connections to a social network that leads to feelings of reciprocity and trust in the institution, and an obligation to give back. (Nunez, 2009, p. 25)

As noted in the current project, the results of collaborative work compel us to redefine undergraduate education simply as "curated educational materials and services relevant to their students." What is included in this venture, with reimagined content of required courses, "unfolds a series of opportunities for scaffolded engagement in collaborative inquiry" which also entails ways in which their learning with others has had an impact on their own learning and development. (p. 64) In order to accomplish such feasible goals, the authors posit, campus cultures are needed "to validate the diverse cultural capital that each participant brings and invite all participants to draw on their cultural capital as they learn together." (pp. 71-72)

Visits to several places of higher education prompted Conrad and Lundberg to extend their research to the blending roles and responsibilities of faculty, staff, and students, and thus reframing the undergraduate experience on campus. Chapter 4, therefore, delves into collaborative learning as perceived as interdependent networks in places like Salish Kootenai College (SKC), where the Department of Academic Success (DAS) devised a program "to support underprepared students along their pathway into and through college."(p. 74) In simple terms, since roles and responsibilities are fluid, "staff and faculty associated with DAS are expected to learn about financial aid, scholarships, and policies related to formal academic warnings." Deriving inspiration from their daily routine, several faculty members discovered "that they needed to respect students' need for silence and, at times, space to work out for themselves." In doing so, students, staff, and faculty came to realize that they were all "expected to listen to, respect, and learn from the ideas advanced by others." (p. 75)

A concrete example of effective collaborative work also includes co-teaching, which in this case refers to courses team-taught by two or more faculty members, courses taught sequentially by different teachers, and classes in which students or staff members teach different segments during the same time period. Specifically, the current project pleads for the positive virtues of co-teaching which integrate collaboration into the structure of educational experiences, and thus transforming teachers into co-constructors of knowledge and students from passive recipients of information to active participants in their own quest for knowledge. A further example recognizes the aforementioned inherent values at the University of Calgary, where students are given the opportunity to observe nursing faculty team-teaching, and routinely designing a health education session, or expressing their own thoughts regarding the efficacy of co-teaching for their own benefits.

According to the authors, when co-teaching is regarded as having "more voices," course material becomes even more relevant and curriculum content leads to better problem-solving techniques. It also inspires and motivates students to appreciate the blending of traditional teaching roles looking at their immediate educational experience while succeeding and struggling for success. The availability of new voices in the classroom, coupled with the reframing of issues and problems, turns into

debates, dialogues, and much needed practical solutions. Such valuable insights, as posited by the authors, have led to the idea that student progress should be the responsibility of the entire institution. In this vein, student support services are basic assisting tools in meeting basic college requirements. Although important, such services have been found to be somewhat limited in their impact when they "merely provide information, without teaching students how to correctly and effectively apply that information in different context across time." (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins, 2015, p. 67; quoted on p. 82)

Student support services, along with cross-functional teams of staff and faculty, are viewed in their viability as intrusive and required, thus challenging the well-known conventions of student experience. Since culture may become an obstacle, student support should be "proactive" and provide real chances for development, assistance, and guidance, especially when students face hurdles and need help. Personnel, programs, and financial support might very well become relevant sources of support, which in some cases, as revealed by Museus and Ravello (2010, should include academic advising in dialogues about solutions regarding the students' social and psychological challenges. Foremost, "a culturally engaging campus involves participants expecting to take up students' needs together." (p. 86) As importantly, a "humanized support" given as a successful example at El Paso Community College, students took advantage of advising and tutoring programs, and were allowed to re-take placement tests, "took courses in sequences that supported their language learning, and pursued scholarships set aside for working Latinas seeking health care and business degrees." (p. 87) Consequently, culturally engaging support at many MSISs have become an integral part of undergradute education.

The value of programs offering a range of opportunities to engage in research can hardly be overestimated. As noted in the authors' analysis of MSIs, course-based undergraduate research and apprenticeship-based undergraduate research initiatives re-assessed the roles of students, staff, and faculty, which eventually re-defined the student-faulty relationship altogether. In this vein, Beloit College is mentioned for its commitment to provide students with extra-curricular activities. In one such program at this institution, the Sanger Summer Research Program, students temporarily turn into employees of the college and are expected to be on campus during the entire program. Throughout the program, students and faculty meet regularly with a "research cluster" of other teams and participate in weekly meetings. "In effect, program faculty become de facto staff who schedule meetings, advise, and manage logistics as well as inquirers who explore other people's questions, sometimes in interdisciplinary groups." (p. 91)

Reframing of roles, as recognized in the book, is at the heart of a cognitive shift. "Leaders become interdependent team members who rely on less experienced and less expert team members to guide their action; they learn with and from others in joint problem-solving." (p. 95) In higher education, such changes shatter traditional hierarchical roles and responsibilities, and embrace a new division of labor. To answer their own question regarding the worth of such disruption, the researchers strongly believe that "distributing responsibility to educate all students across all participants, including students, creates more diverse points of connection to the educational mission for students, staff, and faculty." (p. 96)

When looking at the basic rules for learning and teaching at an institution, Conrad and Lundberg became interested not only in collaborative networks, but also in receiving and giving feedback, which are exquisitely presented in Chapter 5. In contrast to feedback practices generated by teachers and treated as an instrument that "spells out what the requirements are and how well students have satisfied those requirements," this section of the book explores a different kind of education. Decades of studies of feedback in higher education have shown that, through feedback, student learning and motivation can be significantly improved. Such remarkable results can be achieved, according to Cowan (2010), and Shute (2008), if feedback is centered on student learning, matches their needs, and promotes student engagement. Other researchers, like Braxton, Eimers, and Bayer (1996), as well as Myers and Myers (2015) have called for reform in undergraduate education that suggested giving students more informative feedback on their learning. (p. 98-99)

Giving and receiving feedback led the authors to three findings. First, the students saw feedback as an invitation to "ask their own questions." Second, giving students feedback made them aware of what was needed to change, and third, "organically-forming cohorts" at Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC) students worked in partnerships and drew on feedback as a group, and followed up on unpacked feedback in dialogues with instructors. Specifically, when feedback is a respectful exchange of ideas, it generates confidence and transforms students experience "from a solitary journey to participation in networks of learners." (p. 103)

A practical example of learning-centered feedback comes from Cary Moskowitz (2017), who defines feedback as invitation to "reflection, rethinking and revision" about a "meaningful communication risk." Detailed class assignments and volunteer training material is used to draw the participants' attention, accompanied by a dialogue facilitated by a project manager, who introduces students to one another, makes participant commitment explicit, and sending regular reminders about their timeline. A careful analysis of this approach discovered that students wanted more feedback earlier in their project and that they were interested in more real-time, face-to-face discussions of their work. (p. 106) Another self-explanatory example comes from Daniel Reinholz, who elaborated on a model of "peer-assisted reflection," which separated feedback from grades and "positions students and teachers to look at problems in mathematics classes as sources of creativity and innovation." (p. 107)

Effective feedback is also understood by Nancy Sommers (2006) as a partnership, in which "teachers engage students as apprentice scholars, and students remain open to ideas to take with them to their next assignment and to being engaged in solving 'big problems' and not simply to learn what is correct." To exemplify, "This is the case even in a college algebra class where the problem is not simply solving an equation but becoming a scientist who can explain to other scientists the way an approach to that problem moves toward a solution." (p. 108) To complement this idea, the authors argue that students also benefit from problem-solving through what is called looping, "students stepped away from course work get 'a small piece

down' and 'connect' it to the problems that they were learning to solve in class." By doing so, they shared the connections they had made, and by going "back, forth, back, forth, loop, loop, loop, loop." (p. 114) In devising such tasks, teachers created spaces in which sharing was routine, and, in time, infused reflection into curriculum.

By tracking and responding to students' completion of benchmarks in a timely manner, mentors at the MSIs offered "informal opportunities for students to observe and learn from the experiences and strategies of others," and thereby designing "group exercises not only so students could work together to solve problems and produce artifacts but also so that they could watch one another contribute to the process through which they arrived at solutions." (p. 119) They all shared "a commitment to strengthening the capabilities of all members to solve problems," a process that enabled regular "check-ins" on the emotional statues of the participants. This experience found common ground among those who were frustrated or overwhelmed, but found that others exactly the same way, and together explored "state[s] of mind" that might help them. (p. 121) Furthermore, class projects combined reading, reflection, writing, and assessment which implied core activities negotiated by the whole class. The book found this kind of landscape to be most productive in advancing the learning in our colleges and universities. The chapter sums up the dialogues, partnerships, and landscapes by calling attention to a continuous assessment in which, according to Evans (2013) and Shute (2008), feedback plays a major role and certifies its meaningful contribution to student learning. (p. 124)

The corollary of Chapter 6 takes problem-solving into the curriculum and renews the value of incorporating reading, writing, and arithmetic, but, at the same time, placing education at the center of a new perspective of shared problem-solving as the driver of collaborative learning. This section of the project starts with a plea for an undergraduate education for our times that "should be anchored in shared problem-solving that is focused on solving local problems," which explores "how to begin building a curriculum around local issues." The emphasis, in this case, would be on engaging students in analyzing what is relevant to their learning experience, with "problem-solving that transfers not just from course to course and level to level but from school to the outside world." (p. 129) In placing practical problems at the core of undergraduate education, students found collaborative work extremely useful in "addressing such problems as water quality, health challenges in a family or community, preservation of a language, the development of local businesses, and success in college." (p. 131)

As envisioned by the publication of the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities* (1998), research-based learning is based on a curriculum that would rebuild "the division of labor in undergraduate education so that student – even first-year students – had mentors who 'watch, correct, assist, and encourage' problem-solving and who view diversity and newbies as assets." (p. 137) Several institutions of higher learning like the University of Delaware, Northwest Arkansas Community College, Sam Houston State University, York College, and Worchester Polytechnic Institute readily integrated research-based learning and project learning across the curriculum. Such a curriculum anchored in solving real-world problems "comes with a commitment to addressing the problems shared across the communities from which students come." Specifically, students "enter a space in which their goals and questions shape and are shaped by the interests of others in the network, novices, experts, and members of different disciplines and communities." (p. 151)

Student learning outcomes viewed in the context of problem-solving in local communities led to projects and initiatives whereby students obviously acquired skills and knowledge that deepened the overall picture of student learning. The University Studies Program at Portland State University provides a good example of linking learning and community life through the design of an appropriate curriculum, and, at the same time, carries the responsibility to serve as a center and resource for community building. In 2020, University Studies devised "a curriculum that is inclusive, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based, and:
• Provokes students to build self-efficacy through relational leaning across differences:
• Encourages a community of educators to practice engaged teaching for transformative learning; and
• Advances civic engagement, reflective practice, and the scholarship of teaching and learning." (p. 162)

Fruitful discussions at MSIs enabled the authors to recognize that success in college through collaborative research was linked to students solving problems in their families and in their communities. In other words, successful networks taking on real-world problems also provided opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to practice entrepreneurship. At San Diego City College, the authors explain, "peer mentors, academic advisors, and faculty described the program as an incubator in which students practiced using existing networks to find new ways to address challenges on and off campus." (p. 169) Programs in the MSI study prepare students to go beyond well-established boundaries in higher education. They invited students and their teachers to view themselves as educational innovators, and in doing do, become social entrepreneurs. (p. 170) Along the same lines, Burton Clark (1998) is brought into the discussion and praised for his five elements of transformation: "a strengthened steering core, an expanded developmental periphery, a diversified funding base, a stimulated academic heartland, and an integrated entrepreneurial culture - were offered as a recipe for institutional change." (p. 172)

As presented in the book, community engagement tied to a focus on collaboratively creating values can be perceived as an invitation to learn from, with and for others. When problem-solvers take on local issues, they find solutions through collaborative work, which "requires the networks to deliberate about what problems are important, who needs to benefit from solutions, and what side effects are acceptable." (p. 180) And this brings the conversation to an evaluation of creating values, such as financial rewards, social benefits, cultural resources – all of which promote entrepreneurship into undergraduate education through collaborative learning. The exploration of higher education focused on shared endeavors, as viewed through the eyes of active participants, can be compelling, but courses, assignments, and extra-curricular activities can be used by students and their peers to find common needs, concerns, and interests. Solving shared problems leads to the creation of new

value in a curriculum that engages everybody in collaborative learning. Besides the locally relevant knowledge and skills acquired through linking their learning to local issues, students' education "comes with two other requirements. First, they are obligated to become able to learn with, for, and from others in the locales where important problems are anchored. Second, they are obligated to challenge received solutions and to look for new ways to use resources to create sustainable value." (p. 184)

When students assume responsibility for their own work, participate collaboratively and responsibly in our society, communicate creatively and effectively, demonstrate integrative, independent, critical thinking, such powerful goals prepare them for qualitative and creative modes of inquiry, and consequently brands them as innovators. At the MSIs, the overwhelming participation of students, staff, faculty as well as administrators redefined the intrinsic values of educational practices evaluating the undergraduate experience viewed from collaborative learning. Native American, Black, Hispanic, and Alaskan Native, Asian American, and Pacific Islander students' identities took center stage in this masterful exploration of learning *with, from*, and *for* others.

The conclusion of the book circles back to the starting point and reiterates the idea that "collaborative learning is an overarching template and a set of practices that are part of a continual process of re-setting norms and values, rethinking identities and roles, communicating about participation, and deciding what problems are worth solving." (p. 197) The journey of discovery teaches readers that diversity and collaborative learning, as highlighted in this project, might help higher education in preparing better programs and practices for the challenges in social inequalities and political polarization that our society is facing today – a worthy cause to fight for and a goal that the authors have masterfully accomplished.

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