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Forward

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Dr. Susan R. Jones

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this issue of The Vermont Connection; it is indeed an honor and a privilege. I suspect that the invitation to write the foreword for this special 40th anniversary issue is because I was part of the cohort that helped to create TVC 40 years ago; and in fact, my very first publication appeared in it! Although it is unfathomable to me that it has been 40 years since I began my master's degree program at UVM, I have always been very proud to be a graduate of the Higher Education and Student Affairs program and part of such a vibrant community. Much of what drew me to Vermont's HESA program, in addition to its stellar reputation, outstanding faculty, the beauty of the location, and Ben & Jerry's, was what I understood at the time (in my 21-year-old mind) as a commitment to student activism, equity, and inclusion. Yet, what struck me during my years in Vermont was just how complicated Vermont was when advancing equity and social justice goals—it was the whitest state in the nation at the time and UVM was inhabited by a large number of students who came from mostly white, upper/middle class families and privileged identities. Yet, student activism permeated the culture at UVM. I can still recall the day (captured in a now iconic photograph) when President George Davis climbed a ladder to get to his office in Waterman to talk with students who were occupying the office in protest of the institutional racism they saw reflected in areas such as the absence of racial and cultural diversity on campus among students, faculty, and staff, and in the curriculum.

I came to understand that the realities of race and racism were complicated everywhere, not just Vermont. And this took me to a professional, personal, and scholarly commitment to understanding more deeply the structures of inequality that pattern not only societal institutions, like higher education, but also the lived experiences of those holding both privileged and oppressed identities. And it is into this organizational framework of power and privilege that I think about resilience and resistance, because how we both conceptualize these terms, as well as the ways in which they are lived out in the day-to-day realities of contemporary lives is influenced by power, or what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) termed, a matrix of domination. Dominant understandings of resilience and resistance often fail to honor the lived experiences of those who are marginalized, and the “outsider-within” perspective (Collings, 1990) those with marginalized identities bring to their experiences in higher education. Consequently, neither resistance nor

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resilience may be understood as monolithic terms and as a result, definitional clarity should not be a goal. It matters who is doing the resisting (and why) and who is described as resilient (how, by whom, and for what reasons). For example, in my own research, I have seen white students resist the learning that may occur in programs like service-learning or study abroad because these experiences disrupt their taken-for-granted beliefs and values, which are likely entrenched in whiteness. Conversely, students from minoritized groups may actively challenge and resist dominant narratives as an act of self-preservation; and in the context of service-learning referenced, experience a greater sense of belonging at the service sites in which they were engaged than they did on their campuses. In these settings, it is typically students with marginalized identities and the community members with whom they interact at community service organizations that get named as resilient. Resilience then is often framed as an individual's ability to combat and overcome challenging situations, rather than as a community-based practice (Nicolazzo & Carter, in press). As educators, interested in understanding these concepts, as well as in promoting resilience and resistance, we need to consider, as sociologist Troy Duster (2000) suggested, "whose questions get raised for investigation" (p. xii).

As an academic who holds both privileged (e.g., race, social class) and oppressed (e.g., gender, sexuality) identities, I see the possibility of research as a place where important questions should get raised up for consideration and theorizing as a site for resistance, resilience, and liberation. I have had a love of theory from a very young age (e.g., at a very young age, I was completely fascinated by Erik Erikson's concept of identity crisis, mostly likely because I was sure I would have one!) and much of my scholarly work has been devoted to theorizing student development from multiple perspectives. What continues to drive my research interests was my experience of not seeing my own life reflected in the theories I studied at UVM in my master's program. At that time, we studied the work of scholars such as Erikson, Perry, Chickering, Kohlberg, Loevinger, and the Heath's---some names MA students now would most likely not recognize. And I was quick to critique (and dismiss) these theories as irrelevant to my own experience and those of many other students who did not fit the dominant grand narrative of who college students were at the time (given that many of these theories were based upon samples of mostly white males from elite institutions). My dissertation examined how students came to understand themselves when social identities (such as race, gender, faith, sexual identity, culture) were considered. What I have learned over the years is that the question of "Who Am I?" is still a relevant one; and so is the question of "Who Are We?" and that the answers to these questions are dynamic ones based upon social location, shifting contexts, and systems of power. I have also learned that the ways in which these questions are raised up for consideration is influenced in part by who is asking; in other words their biographies. For example, if one knows that Erikson was a German Jew who lived in Austria and moved to the U.S. with a Canadian-born partner, who grew up during WWI and

was a parent during WWII, and whose early work was an effort to understand the impact of the trauma of war on the sense of self among veterans returning home after war (Coles, 2000), then it makes sense that he took up questions of the interaction of the individual in their environments and what difference this made to identity development.

I regularly reflect on a quote from bell hooks (1994) who wrote: “Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end” (p. 61). So in (re) thinking resistance and resilience in higher education, in order to illuminate and center the lived experiences of our students and advocate for change, student affairs educators can start by critically reflecting on how we have come to think about these concepts and why; and how our own biographies influence our thinking. The importance of a practice of critical self-reflexivity cannot be underestimated; however, as Osei-Kofi (2011) pointed out, self-reflexivity will be self-serving if “we position the Other as what is to be known in the service of our transformation while erasing any acknowledgement of the social conditions that structure relationships between dominant and oppressed groups” (p. 390), which necessarily means implicating ourselves in these situations. It is here that many student affairs educators get tripped up. How do we acknowledge, and then act on such knowledge, our own complicity in maintaining the structures of domination that permeate institutions of higher education? Theorizing with healing and liberatory goals in mind help us to unveil the ways of thinking, practices, and structures that both honor individual narratives and bolster new approaches that promote the values of equity and inclusion we purportedly hold. To do so however, requires moral courage and respect (Jones, in press).

Finally, when thinking about resilience and resistance, I am reminded of a book I read in a class with Professor Robert Nash written by feminist ethicist Nel Noddings, titled *Caring*. In this book, Noddings (1984) writes about the role of ethics in education and the importance of caring. She defined caring as not so much the ability “to walk in another’s shoes” but more so as an ability to imagine another’s reality as your own. With this idea she makes an important distinction between projecting our own interests, values, and assumptions onto others, and instead, receiving others, caring with, rather than for individuals, which requires receptivity, recognition, reciprocity, and respect. James Baldwin (1962) reminds us that “not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced” (p. BR11). In this 40th anniversary of *The Vermont Connection* focused on (Re)Building, Resistance, and Resilience in Higher Education we see a thoughtful, courageous, and honest collection of narratives that will help educators face the realities of contemporary practices in higher education with greater insights about how resilience and resistance are narrated through the lives of students; and that when we listen with care and respect, we open up the possibilities for

re-building and re-imagining. I close by drawing from a book I read as a result of my UVM years, “Their story, yours, mine—its’ what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (Coles, 1989, p. 30).

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