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## Editor's Notes IUJSL Volume 3 Issue 1 Fall 2013

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## The Editors' Notes

For the past few months I have jumped on the opportunity to reverse roles. Rather than create service-learning in my courses, I have been doing service-learning. I sit in a “class”; I have to read and discuss material I am unfamiliar with; I have to figure out how to tie together our discussions in the class with the service we are doing; and I have to do reflective prompts.

I am doing this under the guidance of Dara Brown, an MPH and certified yoga instructor. She is also a mentee of Matthew Sanford, founder of Mind Body Solutions. Sanford is not your average yoga instructor. Paralyzed from the chest down in a car accident at the age of thirteen in which he lost both his father and older sister, Sanford learned through yoga to re-integrate his mind, his body, and his spirit. He certified as a yoga teacher and has developed a yoga program for those with spinal injuries and other physical disabilities. Most of these individuals are wheelchair bound. They would never have thought that they could do yoga. Most of us would not think so either. He has captured this in a rather inspirational read – *Waking*.

Dara Brown connected with him when she received a call from person with cerebral palsy about the possibility of private yoga lessons. In her research to figure out how to offer yoga to someone with this condition she connected with Mr. Sanford and studied with him through his workshops. She brought his ideas back to South Carolina and working with ABLE, Columbia (an organization focused on empower those with disabilities) established the first Adaptive Yoga program in the state. She reached out to studios for space and Yoga Masala stepped up to provide space. She turned to friends and the community to develop fund raising to buy the special mats, blocks, and straps that would be needed. She reached into the community that she hoped to serve to convince them that she was not crazy and if they could move just a bit into their disbelief they would discover something remarkable in themselves. And she reached out to her students to be “yoga aides”.

When we came to training we had no idea what to expect. We read Sanford’s book to challenge our normed ways of looking at those we call “disabled”. We learned about cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, traumatic brain injury, and of course the breadth of spinal cord injuries. We finished our training working with two of her adaptive yoga students to learn how to transport them from wheel chair to floor. But most importantly we had to teach ourselves to interact with our volunteers, and so those with whom we would be working as we would anyone else. And we great humor and patience our volunteers guided us through. We also learned that everything we had taken for granted in how we use our bodies and how we use our bodies in yoga no longer applied. We had to learn to not only rethink, but also to re-feel what an asana (a yoga pose) could be. Downward dog, “headstands”, forward bends, triangle pose, side angle pose could be done in a wheel chair. What did it mean or feel when those we worked with

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“softened their heart”, to expanded their chest in movements that were too subtle to see? And when we helped them with hip openers, hamstring openers, and full stretches did their smile on their face really mean that they could feel what they could not “physically feel”?

I had to work through my own tentativeness, to learn how to engage with someone so different from myself. I had to regain my mindfulness that I tend to lose as an administrator and connect personally, one-on-one, with someone that cared to share with me a moment when they show the breadth of their spirit. And through this, I was able to experience again what our students experience. I realized anew that in creating the opportunities we do for our students we help them connect with the heart of servant leadership – that as we serve we ourselves are being served in the sharing. After each weekly session, I leave with an internal re-direction deepening my sense of self. But I also carry away a feeling of involvement with something greater than me and a sense of personal efficacy that I have actually done something. And, my personal sense of value is deepened by simply helping someone experience what they thought they could not.

After each weekly session I realize that I envy my students.

--Ned Scott Laff--

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