RESEARCH ARTICLE

Partnership values: An evaluation of student-staff collaborative research

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ABSTRACT

This research study contributes to understandings of partnership approaches through an evaluation of student-staff research partnership projects that took place within a higher education institution. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with both the staff and students involved in the twenty research projects, our data were analysed to surface the underpinning values that informed the partnership process. As a result, this article offers an opportunity to evaluate partnership projects in context, as well as to explore how partnership may serve as force for potential disruption and innovation in higher education. We conclude with a consideration of how investigating the ways in which students and staff conceptualise student-staff partnership can be valuable and with recommendations for others considering similar partnership projects.

The Student-Staff Research Partnership Project (SSRPP) was an initiative established by the University of Surrey's Department of Higher Education in 2019. It involved 20 different student-staff partnership projects taking place across all faculties of the university, with each partnership focussing on projects that ranged from "3D printers in engineering education" to "Building knowledge and learning communities using LEGO in nursing" (see Table 1 for the full list of partnership projects). Students and staff then reflected upon their experiences of their project in collaboratively written chapters, which were collated and published in the book *Enhancing Student-Centred Teaching* (Gravett et al., 2020). This article aims to review the SSRPP initiative, examine the values that underpinned and informed the partnership projects, and finally to question how partnership may serve as a disruptive force in higher education.

Initially, the overarching project sought to understand what it meant for students and staff to work collaboratively on smaller research projects that would constitute the focus of their book chapters and to evaluate whether such partnerships could promote a sense of equality. By adopting a context-specific, institution-centred approach, the SSRPP evaluated the potential for the University of Surrey to foster a culture of partnership, while

also demonstrating the range of shapes that partnership could take (see Table 1 for examples of the breadth of partnership projects included). The research partnerships in this project were diverse and spanned a period beginning in April 2018, following an initial call out, and closed upon the final publication of the book in March 2020. Partnership teams met regularly throughout this period in different ways to plan, conduct, and write up the research. For many students, the opportunity to co-write a book chapter and achieve a publication was appealing, while for staff, the chance to work outside of their comfort zone provided a space to review the way they taught and interacted with students. This project sought to challenge cultural and structural barriers between students and staff and explore how power might be distributed among the co-researchers. In the final stage, both parties (staff and student partners) contributed to authoring a reflective chapter for the SSRPP book (Gravett et al., 2020; see Table 1 for a list of chapters).

In this research study, through a series of interviews looking at both student and staff perspectives, we gathered opinions on the success and experiences of working in partnership. As a theoretical framework we chose to adopt Healey, Flint, and Harrington's (2014) model for conceptualising partnership in order to explore the underpinning values surfaced through partnership work. As a result, we examine our findings through a series of eight interwoven themes: authenticity, inclusivity, responsibility, trust, empowerment, challenge, community, and reciprocity. Ultimately, our data suggest a variation between students, who often voiced that partnership enabled them to feel empowered, and members of staff, who felt that while partnership disrupted the traditional teacher-student dynamic, power relations were more complex. Reflecting on these findings, we draw out conclusions as to why opinions may have been divided, consider how successful the project was at achieving its aims, and also suggest implications for others considering similar projects.

Table 1. Title of partnership projects included in the SSRPP (Gravett et al., 2020)

TITLE OF PARTNERSHIP PROJECT
The Emerging Landscape of Student–Staff Partnerships in Higher Education
Student Experience: Perspectives on Learning in the University and the Conservatoire
Exploring the Actor–Director Relationship in the Drama School Through a Student–Tutor Dialogue
Escaping the Norm of Student–Staff Partnerships
Building Knowledge and Learning Communities Using LEGO® in Nursing
3D Printers in Engineering Education
Captured Content and Lecture Recordings: Perceptions and Experiences of Students and Lecturers
Captured Content: Captured Attention?
A Comparison of Student Perceptions of Physical and Virtual Engineering Laboratory Classes
Skills Developed by Economics Students During Their Professional Training Year
Exploring the Benefits of Project-Based Pilot Plant Experience for Chemical Engineering Undergraduates

Student Perspectives on a Nutrition Curriculum
Learner Engagement on a Blended Ethics Education Programme: Perspectives of Students and Teachers
Student Nurses' Experiences of Receiving Verbal Feedback Within the Clinical Learning Environment: To What Extent Does This Promote Sustainable Feedback Practices?
Facilitating Students' Proactive Recipience of Feedback with Feedback Portfolios
An Innovative Presentation Tool as an Alternative to Traditional Methods for Student Assessments
Maximising Student Participation: Factors That Facilitate Dialogue
Using Mindfulness Meditation Techniques to Support Peer-to-Peer Dialogue in Seminars
Creating Space for New Expertise: Considerations for Setting-Up Student–Staff Partnerships
Student–Staff Partnerships in Higher Education as Process and Approach

PARTNERSHIP WITHIN THE LITERATURE

The University of Surrey's SSRPP drew upon existing research in the field of student-staff partnerships (e.g., Bovill et al., 2016; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014). Students as partners (SaP) practices are emerging within higher education as an exciting route to disrupt and transform institutional cultures within an increasingly economically driven higher education context (Gravett et al., 2019). Healey et al. (2014) also contend that partnership can be transformative and suggest that partnerships can be established by breaking down barriers—both structural and cultural—between students and staff, so that both parties can see each other more as equals. This was a particular goal of the research projects in this study and involved distributing power appropriately and ensuring that the student/s felt involved and responsible for the direction of the project.

The literature also suggests that student-staff partnerships can improve relationships between staff and students, as both are offered the opportunity to exchange viewpoints (e.g., Gravett et al., 2019). A dialogic sharing of expertise is a goal not usually considered in traditional teaching methods, where teachers have more often been conceptualised as the expert with students playing a more passive role. This reimagined dynamic between teaching and learning is "popular because it is student-centred and promotes more active engagement of both students and staff in the learning and teaching experience" (Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018, p. 48). Partnership also builds on existing research concerning self-directed learning and theories surrounding student engagement; for example, Lubicz-Nawrocka (2018) suggests that "student involvement and engagement can contribute to student empowerment and agency" (2018, p. 48). However, the experiences of students and staff of working in partnership is still only just beginning to be explored, and while the benefits may be numerous, there is a need for further examination of the values that underpin partnership work. Further, we contend that there is also a need for greater insight into some of the more challenging aspects of partnership practices in context.

In this instance, partnerships were established with the aim to break down barriers between students and staff and to foster a sense of community. However, we were interested to explore whether partnership practices can ever be equal and the role of power within partnership; we also were interested to unpack some of the values that underpin partnership processes more deeply. Even if most criteria that create a partnership are met appropriately, can power between collaborators ever be distributed equally? As Marquis et

al. (2017) comment, "the issue of power was positioned as a prevalent challenge for many participants. There is a hierarchy within the university setting, especially between staff and students" (p. 726). Similarly, questions remain as to whether partnerships really do offer the opportunity to exchange viewpoints or whether staff "doubt the experience and abilities of students in this context" (Murphy et al., 2017, p. 1). Following Kehler et al., (2017) we were also interested in the "sites of harmony and dissonance between the Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) model (theory) and our reflections (practice)" (p. 1). In this article, we therefore grapple with some of these questions, building upon the developing literature on student-staff partnerships through an evaluation of a breadth of recent, situated experiences of partnership.

METHOD

The idea of writing an evaluation article arose as a result of reflecting upon the book co-authored by students and staff who had jointly worked on the research projects, with the aim of exploring the similarities and contradictions in the experiences of staff and students. The study sought to consider whether student-staff partnerships could be a disruptive force within higher education, unsettling entrenched ways of working and fostering a greater sense of community. Notably, this research study is itself a student-staff research project conducted in partnership, which involved collaboration in its conception, data collection, and analysis and which has resulted in a co-authored output—this article.

Our research study received institutional ethical approval. Our method included conducting semi-structured interviews with student and staff participants who had been involved in the original SSRPP. A call for interviews was sent to all those involved in the original book (51 students and staff in total). Twelve staff members and 8 students responded and agreed to be interviewed. In order to allow participants to fully express their views, we used a semi-structured interview design with open-ended questions that enabled space for a more detailed discussion of the participants' experiences. Both staff and students were asked the same set of questions to facilitate comparisons. Interviews were conducted wherever the participants preferred, in order to establish a comfortable environment. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, although this timing was not meant to be restrictive and interviewees were encouraged to talk for as long or as little as they wished.

The interviews were then professionally transcribed by a third party. We familiarised ourselves with the data by reading through the transcripts and then used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to categorise the data into key themes. This approach allowed for flexibility when interpreting data and identifying patterns. The thematic analysis centred on a deductive approach as we had agreed to apply preconceived themes from the conceptual model derived by Healey et al. (2014). This model was chosen in order to adopt a values-based approach to understanding partnership projects. After reviewing all transcripts once, we read through them again and highlighted sections of the text that supported or opposed any of the given themes. After this analysis, quotations illustrating a specific theme were grouped into separate documents to help identify patterns between each transcript. We then focused again on the ideas within the interview transcripts and summarised the links between key points as concept maps (Kinchin et al., 2010). Concept maps help to visualise complex ideas and show how the elements of these ideas are linked to form a coherent whole (Kinchin, 2014; Machado & Carvalho, 2020). This has been shown to be particularly

valuable within the field of student-staff projects where the concept of partnership calls for the relation of various other ideas in order to make sense of the idea in context (Gravett et al., 2019). After gathering all of our concepts and probing to elicit new information from the data, a final collaborative concept map (Figure 1) was created by the authors to help identify the overarching themes within the interviews. Within this figure, we can see that the idea of partnership as a disruptive force is central to much of the subsequent discussion. Partnership disrupts the dominant student discourse of strategic learning (summarized by the phrase, "is it on the exam?") and the research-led discourse of many academics (summarized by the phrase, "is it REFable?"). It was also seen that students were better able to cope with this disruptive force than the staff, while conceptions of "empowerment" and "inclusion" were highly variable.

Figure 1. Concept map to summarise key concepts raised during the interviews
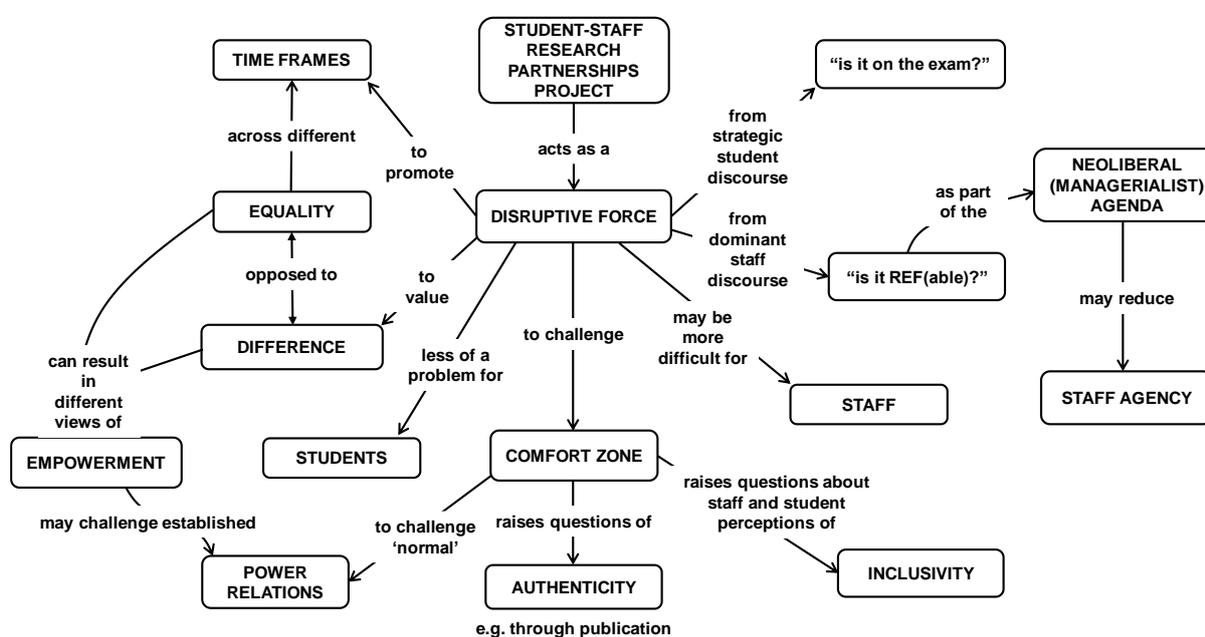
FINDINGS

The following section details our findings which are explored against the themes of community, empowerment and inclusivity, trust, challenge, authenticity, reciprocity, and responsibility.

Community

Our data suggest that when participants experienced a sense of community, parties often felt a sense of belonging and value for the contributions they made to the project. Notably, staff and students had contrasting experiences of how well the partnership succeeded in establishing a sense of community. While staff appreciated the space to become learners again and welcomed the opportunity to receive critique from students, a recurrent response was that an equal sense of community—with equal value on both sides—was not an achievable goal since staff members are typically seen to have more valued opinions. The nature of this balance was called into question by Staff Member A

saying, "It didn't feel balanced, it felt like I was very much saying, okay you do this, you do that, so it didn't feel like an equal partnership in any way." Staff Member B corroborated this view; however, they also commented: "the roles don't have to be completely equal, but you can still be equal in the way that you work together."

The students involved in the research projects often had a differing view. Student A reported a positive experience of collaboration: "even emails that didn't involve me even remotely, I was still cc'd into them all, which I liked. And we also had…between the four of us…a drive on the OneDrive where we uploaded everything."

Another student also felt similarly, stating that they felt "very much like a member of the team" and had previously "been in scenarios and situations where there is a clear divide" (Student B). Both Student A and B's views reflected the wider student opinion—that there was an established and positive presence of community in the partnership. This is a view that resonates with literature reporting the benefits of partnership working in terms of fostering a sense of community and enabling students to develop positive relationships (e.g., Healey et al., 2014; Gravett et al., 2019).

Empowerment and inclusivity

Some academics thought that the partnership would not be able to empower the student collaborators because the students still viewed the staff as superior, while others thought that the research projects succeeded in empowering students and equalising the distribution of power. Many academics thought that empowerment presented an unachievable goal that served as a disruptive force between student-staff dynamics. Staff Member A thought that "the power dynamic is always going to be there," but noted that partnership achieved "the closest thing to equality." Some staff thought that working on a "first-name basis" was beneficial in allowing students and staff to see each other as partners and work on "as equal a basis as possible" (Staff Member A). Others worried about the division of the workload, stating that they did not want to "overburden" their student partner (Staff Member E). While staff disagreed over how equal a partnership could feasibly be, Staff Member B acknowledged the steps taken by partnership in "breaking down barriers between staff and students." Staff Member B stated that in order for any sort of empowerment to take place, the partnership would require "a kind of a third party, to talk to us both and say, these are the sorts of things you could do and this is how you might want to establish things." Without this third party to structure the partnership, Staff Member B believed it would be difficult for their student to "know how to manage [the staff partner] or to know whether [the student partner] should question certain things." Similar challenges of disrupting power relations have also been explored in the literature. For example, Mercer-Mapstone and Abbot (2020) discuss how identities and traditional power hierarchies obstruct attempts to develop equality within relationships but nonetheless uphold partnership as a "radically transformative space" where intersections and connections are made possible (p. 9).

Interestingly, students' experiences offered a different perspective, with students largely agreeing that partnership did enable them to experience a sense of empowerment. Student A encapsulated the overarching student opinion by stating that "it's like the hierarchies are broken." Partnership included students' voices and allowed Student A to discuss "the university, what's missing from it." Student A added: "It was good to get an insight into their opinion and for me to be heard." In terms of the actual dynamic, Student B

became "very much an equal member of the team" and stated that her staff collaborator "very much wanted to make you feel included." Student C thought that partnership was different to traditional relations they might have with other academics since "[my discipline] is so different to education" and thought that embarking in partnership in this new territory "has meant that [they are] able to speak up on [their] opinions a bit more." Student D echoed these sentiments, stating that partnership was the key to "change the sense of hierarchy" and make "the university a lot more productive, a lot more fair and just a nicer place to learn and work." "In terms of benefits," Student A said, "it's like the hierarchies are broken—you can see people and not levels."

This breakdown of conventional hierarchies—"you can see people not levels"—is powerful and "emboldened students to feel comfortable to communicate with staff or, as Student A put it, "with people that I never think I would have." Staff Member C also described partnership as potentially inclusive: offering "an insight into the student point of view from (a student) perspective," and thus a chance for staff to include a student voice in academic work students are typically left out from. However, it is worth noting that some students also worked in partnership with "a member of staff [they] knew quite well, so in that respect [they weren't] worried about power dynamics" (Student C). This could potentially result in bias if partnerships only succeed in empowering students when students already know and trust the academics they are partnered with. This potential challenge of partnership working has also been identified in recent research; for example, Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill (2019) explore how issues of equity, diversity, and authenticity in partnership may be constrained through recruitment practices that are not able to reach a diversity of students.

Trust

Overall, our data suggest that the partnerships succeeded in establishing trust, as students and staff took the time to get to know each other, developed good communication, and often shared openly their personal reasons for entering the partnership. Staff Member A said that the dynamic was like "we were friends. She (the student) was very personable, easy, and we met quite frequently." When asked what her advice was for other academics venturing into similar partnerships, Staff Member A recommended to "sit down with your student and try to get to know them as well as you can from the beginning." Other staff echoed this sentiment, saying that, "where there were any negatives or any problems, we managed to overcome them, either between ourselves or the group did between themselves" (Staff Member D). The consensus among staff was that trust was the most important factor in ensuring the partnership distributed power and responsibility.

Students shared this consensus, believing that partnerships allowed for a greater level of trust between staff and students than conventional academic relationships. However, for many students, this newfound trust with an academic was a gradual process. Student A said, "in the beginning I didn't feel like an equal partner, that's because I didn't feel like a partner because of my preconceived notions of how the academic dynamic was." From the data, we can conclude the process of building trust in a staff-student partnership is therefore a process of unsettling pre-existing power relations and allowing for a more open reciprocal dynamic: a transformative space where intersections and connections are made possible (Mercer-Mapstone & Abbot, 2020). Over time, Staff Member E said that

partnerships "built the trust and rapport" as students got more confident at working closely with their academics, creating a "really nice comradery and quite warm relationship."

Challenge

Both partners were encouraged to challenge themselves and to take risks to develop new ways of working and learning. However, this did not always occur. Often there was a predisposed idea of a hierarchal relationship on both sides that seemed to hinder the development of a more transformative partnership. Rather, students seemed to view staff members as superior to them and were less likely to challenge their contributions or practices. This could be seen in statements made throughout the interviews by student participants. For example, Student A commented: "again, it just comes back to the fact that you know they're a member of staff, so in your head, you always feel a little bit less superior than them." Student A added:

> the challenge is to break that hierarchy. At the beginning, you're not sure how to do it, like, can I speak? Am I allowed to talk? Do I need to just follow the rules? Do I need to just be a puppet in a way? Or do I actually go there and say, that's my opinion?

Students stated that "even though the workload was delegated quite evenly, there's still that persona that they're the academic partner. That's just the way it is" (Student A).

Staff seemed to agree with this point of view, which was seen through statements such as, "I don't really feel that he got much of a say, I think it was almost like I'd worked it out and I said, how about this?" (Staff Member A). Similarly, another staff member stated:

> but I still think it was an element of we were members of staff and they were students even though they were come to know us. I think they still deferred to us for advice…I still think there was an element of experience versus inexperience between the two. (Staff Member B)

And staff member H commented:

> There's absolutely nothing stopping them from walking away but if the staff member…They're the one that's going to be accountable ultimately for it. So, yes, it's shared but the accountability for a book project is never going to be shared. It's just not possible.

Staff Member C agreed, stating that

> to call it an equal partnership would be wrong because it can never be. I mean, an equal partnership in my mind is they are really truly contributing equally in all aspects of the work and I think that's an unrealistic expectation given the massive difference in experience on these things.

Perhaps inevitably, it seems that at times partnership practices could only pose a limited challenge to hierarchical and durable power relations.

Authenticity

All students had a meaningful reason to take part in this partnership, although their rationales differed from one student to another. Student E explained: "I enjoyed it, it was good insight," whilst Student B commented: "I just think it's valuable, especially if you want to go into that area of work, which is the main reason my supervisor selected me because he knew that I wanted to go down that route." Student C said, "I think that's very useful especially if I, one day, think about doing something in research or even a PhD or Master's…It's a basis to build on in the future in case you're interested in doing something in this direction." Student A also commented on how staff took into account that they had other things to worry about other than this project: "The team of people that I worked with definitely took into account how much work I'd have to do." Similarly, Student D commented, "I told the supervisor, at the beginning, when my exams were, when the deadlines, assignments, were due in. So, they could see around stuff," suggesting that the academic partner was genuinely responsive to the needs and priorities of the student collaborator.

Staff often did not articulate their rationale behind taking up this project, which may be due to the fact that they viewed this as just another piece of research they wanted to complete; however, when it came to contribution and parameters of partnership, they were more vocal. As mentioned previously, they were quite vigilant of the fact that students' contributions would be affected by external academic factors. Staff Member A reflected:

> again he was very busy and I had to recognise that, and that's where perhaps our…positionality as me the lecturer and him the student, and I had to be like, now, you need to concentrate on your dissertation, it's important!

Likewise, Staff Member H explained: "because she was in her final year of uni [and] so really busy, we wanted to see how much time we each have to do that." It was very evident from the staff interviews that they put a lot more emphasis on establishing parameters and ground rules, as Staff Member A suggested: "not necessarily setting the ground rules, but jointly, almost like drawing up an agreement about how you want to work, and how you want to do it, and what you want to get out of it, will be really valuable." Staff Member D advised "setting out expectations at the beginning, so everyone needs to know what they're doing, what's expected of them." Again, this signified a genuine responsiveness to the student and a desire to establish an authentic relationship with clear and transparent expectations.

Reciprocity

Staff seemed to agree that there were reciprocal benefits to working in student-staff partnership, particularly regarding the opportunity to include students' perspectives into their research. This was a recurring theme across almost all of the staff dataset. Staff Member A explained: "just getting her perception as a student was really useful." This was corroborated by a number of other staff members, including Staff Member B who reported that they "wanted the student's perspective" and Staff Member C who explained: "it was the fresh kind of ideas that perhaps I wouldn't have thought about." Similarly, Staff Member D commented: "I think it was interesting because the student definitely brought a different

viewpoint about things." All staff members appreciated the new perspectives provided by students that they would not have usually included in their research. However, they also questioned whether the benefits of this partnership were reciprocal, as Staff Member A explained:

> But I'm working as an academic so therefore, a chapter is useful for me to have. If he doesn't go into anything like that, what use is it to him? Do you see what I mean? It was a nice experience for him hopefully, but it doesn't lead to something that is actually measurable, that's useful to him.

This highlights the gap between the perceptions of staff and students as they do not seem cognisant of the mutual benefits for each individual when working in partnership.

The students saw many benefits from participating in this type of partnership. For example, Student A commented: "especially because I want to go into research and academia, it's provided me a bit of insight into what goes into good teaching methods and things like that, which is quite important." Student B explained: "those are some of the things I took from it. Personal growth, in terms of my education, I think it's contributed [to both] massively." And Student C added, "you can still put [it] on your CV as relevant but slightly out there, which was really nice actually." Evidently, partnership often offered a space for reciprocal benefits for both staff and students to experience.

Responsibility

Responsibility in this context would mean that all participants share collective responsibility for the partnership and their individual contribution to it. It was evident that each individual took responsibility for their personal contributions, constantly pointing out the parts they undertook for the research project. For example, Student C stated, "but when we started the project I was like, okay, so I've got this to do, this to do, so I bought myself a diary and I allocated everything." Student D commented on the management of this responsibility alongside other work commitments: "I was having to manage the preparation for the focus groups at the same time as I was still finalising my initial draft of the literature review, while also revising for two of the most important exams in my second year."

In contrast, staff members often felt accountable for the overall responsibility of the project, rather than it being a shared responsibility with their student counterpart. Staff Member A explained: "so I had to take responsibility because ultimately, I was accountable, not her. So, yes, we were equal, but accountability was not equal." Similarly, Staff Member B explained:

> I think I hadn't realised that the buck really fell with me and I think that's going to be true of all the partnerships. Because at the end of the day if you are committed to giving a chapter for a book, if a student says, you know what, I'm not doing this anymore. There's absolutely nothing to stop them from walking away…they're not the one that's going to be accountable ultimately for it.

For this staff member, feeling that "the buck really fell with me" meant that accountability could not be shared equitably.

DISCUSSION

From the data, we can see variances between student and staff perspectives on the process and values underpinning partnership. We can also see that some of the partnerships that achieved the most trust, empowerment, and inclusivity were ones in which the staff and student already knew each other. In one student's case, the staff members and student were already acquainted as the student had previously been taught by the members of staff in the project, while Staff Member E recruited her student partner "because her writing skills are very good" and Staff Member B explained her choice was because "I knew that she was very bright, very keen and all of those things that were necessary." This presents a bias, seeing that the trust between both parties existed long before the partnership began. This is a challenge that has been identified elsewhere in the literature (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2019) and which may require careful consideration of the planning and recruitment of student participants if greater equity and diversity is to be achieved.

All other partnerships—those where the student and staff did not have a pre-established bond—highlighted a divide between the experiences of staff and students, with almost all of the former discussing the continuing challenges of partnership. For some staff, partnership was a disruptive force that altered the balance between traditional student-staff power dynamics, but for others power hierarchies remained. Staff Member D said, "there's always that power relationship — at the end of the day they are undergraduate students who have limited experience in doing such research." Here, we can see that the staff believe that student input in the partnership can only go so far before the staff must act a mentor-figure, assisting students to refocus on the work of the partnership. This presents some obvious questions regarding the reach of partnership, as, to some staff, expertise may be an inevitable barrier to equality.

However, most students had a differing view, believing that a new working relationship with staff and redefined student-staff dynamics created a collaborative partnership. Student C confirmed by saying, "I think it definitely felt like a collaborative project between me and my supervisor," and stated that they felt comfortable giving their ideas and opinions to their academic partner. Student A noted that partnership offered a unique opportunity to build a "really nice comradery and quite a warm relationship." While some members of staff thought that the power dynamics would always remain, most students thought that partnership broke down barriers and succeeded at creating a sense of community. It is possible that the students mistook the partnership process for an artificial sense of community, without realising that this was something the partnership would later develop. This would explain why most students thought that the partnership helped empower them, while staff saw it as unbalanced and unrealistic in its attempts to divide power.

Some of the staff members shared the view that a third-party moderator—possibly an educational developer—should be required to help balance and manage the power dynamics. This support network would help coordinate the output of the research. From the data, we can see that staff largely thought that partnership blurred the boundaries around power dynamics and project control. By using a third party, the staff might possibly have had more direction and guidance. However, this would also restrict partnership as it meant that staff and student working relationships would have to be filtered through a third party,

with implications for the overarching student perspective that the partnership process had succeeded at including them as an equal collaborator.

Overall, from the data, we can see notable differences between the experiences of the staff and student researchers that took part in these projects. The partnership can be viewed as successful or unsuccessful depending on the target audience. Problematically, those partnerships with the most success at establishing trust and community may be already founded on a pre-existing bias of the member of staff and student having known each other before the partnership project had begun. For many staff, partnership was at times experienced as a challenging, if generative, experience, while for students, partnership was often both uplifting and empowering. Evidently, power dynamics are very important when considering the advantages and disadvantages of partnership and, as displayed in these data, are also very hard to overcome.

For other institutions considering implementing similar partnership projects, we would recommend establishing clear and open communication between partners. This might include discussions about some of these challenges at the outset. We would also recommend careful consideration of how students will be recruited, how responsibilities will be shared between partners, and how dialogue will be maintained. We would also advise being mindful of the challenges that exist and perhaps being pragmatic about the durability of power relations within working relationships of all kinds. As Staff Member B advises, acknowledging that hierarchies remain within relationships does not mean that that partnership cannot be underpinned by core values: "the roles don't have to be completely equal, but you can still be equal in the way that you work together." Going forward, it may also be worthwhile seeking opportunities to scale up partnership initiatives, including looking to establish curricular, whole-class partnership models, potentially enabling educators to widen the reach of partnership projects.

CONCLUSION

This article explores the values that underpin partnership practices and the complexity of evaluating such projects: some dimensions of partnerships can succeed, while others may be more problematic. However, this begs the following question: how do you define success? For example, if partnership has shown an alternative way for staff to interact with students and a new model for teaching and learning—and if students were overwhelmingly supportive of it—then it is indicative that partnership *can* work, despite challenges that remain. Overall, this project succeeded in facilitating 20 different student-staff research partnerships, and we can see that these learning and teaching partnerships were underpinned by a number of key values. Our evaluation of the student and staff reflections of the project suggest that for others wishing to adopt a similar initiative, there is much to be gained, with many reported benefits for both staff and students involved. In this article, we offer these insights for other colleagues looking to explore the disruptive and generative value of partnership working, as well as to contribute to this significant and growing area of the higher education literature.

This research was successfully reviewed according to institutional research ethics committee guidelines.

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