

## BOOK REVIEW

**Co-creating learning and teaching: Towards relational pedagogy in higher education** by Catherine Bovill, edited by Joy Jarvis and Karen Smith**UK: Critical Publishing, 2020****ISBN: 9781913063818****Meng Zhang**, The University of Queensland, AustraliaContact: [m.zhang5@uqconnect.edu.au](mailto:m.zhang5@uqconnect.edu.au)

Catherine Bovill's book, *Co-Creating Learning and Teaching: Towards Relational Pedagogy in Higher Education*, explores some alternatives to the prevalent consumer model in higher education by highlighting relational pedagogy and whole class co-creation. The text will be of great interest to Students-as-Partners (SaP) practitioners and scholars because partnership refers to the relational approach of students and staff collaborating on learning and teaching. Bovill impressively brings relational pedagogy and co-creation together to argue that they are mutually reinforcing processes of establishing positive relationships and co-creating learning and teaching. She does this through exploring the literature and providing practical examples of learning and teaching, and in doing so, expands our understanding by reconciling theories of relational pedagogy and co-creation with teaching practices in higher education.

I found Bovill's book inspiring, informative, and easy to read. She has a clear voice and vision that she brings into conversation with theorists, researchers, and practitioners. The real examples bring to life the ethos of relational pedagogies that Bovill asserts is essential to any co-creation process. For example, in discussing how positive relationships between students and teachers are at the foundation of co-creation, Bovill evokes Nodding's (1992) theorisations about dialogue as a search for understanding and illustrates the concept with a real example from the University of Edinburgh.

While university teachers and staff felt like the main focus of the text, as a student, I enjoyed the book and the reflection it prompted about my role in positive student-teacher interactions and relationships. As an international student from China enrolled in a post-graduate research degree program at an Australian university, I have not spent much time considering the relational factors that shape classroom dynamics. Having undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications (from China and Australia, respectively) in pedagogy, I find it worrisome that relational pedagogies have not been at the forefront of my thinking. This speaks to the need for Bovill's book and wider scholarship on the role and practices of relational pedagogies in education-based degrees and university teaching preparation programs. Has our focus become too narrow, too tightly bound to learning objectives and outcomes?

Foregrounding trust and participation in meaningful learning processes, Bovill (2020) asserts that teachers need to “demonstrate that they care about students through effective communication of an interest in, respect for, and belief in students and their capabilities” (p. 3). From my experience, relational factors are compelling in learning and teaching. I was more active and engaged in classes when I perceived the lecturers were supportive, open to dialogue, and tolerant of imperfect English. These lecturers created an environment that gave me more confidence to share my perspectives and participate in the discussion because I knew they would be supportive and open to my opinions. I do not have memories of the types of co-creation practices Bovill shares throughout her book. Focusing on the quality of learner-teacher relationships in the classroom is a key starting point.

Partnerships are relational by nature, that is, they are fundamentally about meaningful relationships between students and staff (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2018). Bovill’s book resonates with a form of partnership that is a relational process of students and staff co-creating learning and teaching. Reading this book has encouraged me to reflect on the presently overlooked learning process in higher education and how student-staff partnership can be an exciting alternative to neoliberal agendas in universities.

As an international student studying in another language, I was hoping for attention on cross-cultural partnerships and processes of learner-teacher co-creation. Intercultural communication—dialogue between people who hold different cultural beliefs, norms and values and grew up speaking different languages—is clearly a different form of dialogue to the intracultural communications in co-creation practices. The network of power inherent in theorisations found in SaP literature (Matthews et al., 2019) is different for international students who often possess cultural capital that is under-appreciated. I would argue that international students’ perspectives and practices of learning are shaped by culture, which means they often have different perceptions of student-teacher relationships and learning. The process of student-staff co-creation and partnerships creates a liminal space for diverse participants to exchange perspectives, negotiate expertise, and share power in learning and teaching. In the meantime, I would suggest partnership practitioners and teachers pay more attention to processes of co-creation and partnerships, particularly the mutually reinforcing connection between developing positive relationships and co-creation. While co-creation and partnerships cannot simply be translated across cultures, future research is required to extend our understanding of power dynamics in co-creation and how students and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds navigate partnership.

In conclusion, this book would be an inspiring and informative resource for staff and students in higher education. It is one of many texts in an ongoing conversation deepening our understanding of relational pedagogies.

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## NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

**Meng Zhang** is a PhD student at the University of Queensland who is researching cross-cultural partnerships, specifically intercultural dialogue and power dynamics in partnerships.

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