CASE STUDY

Living a student-faculty partnership

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ABSTRACT

Student and faculty collaborations are gaining recognition in higher education as an approach to optimise learning and the relationships embedded within education. However, existing hierarchies and power structures in academia often limit the nature of student-faculty partnerships. The student and faculty authors of this paper have an ongoing partnership within a project to address bullying in nursing education. The CRAB project (Cognitive Rehearsal to Address Bullying), is an initiative that is not only relevant for, and partnered with, students, but also initiated by them. The authors of this paper were interested in understanding what determined the success of the partnership. As a group, we reflect on the processes of collaboration, from creating innovative educational resources to co-authoring scholarly publications. Using verbatim quotes from the authors, we also explore the nature of the partnership along with the benefits and challenges from both student and faculty authors' perspectives.

KEYWORDS

Student-faculty partnerships, bullying, nursing education, arts-based pedagogy, reciprocity

Pedagogical collaborations between students and faculty are becoming widely adopted in higher education (Bovill, 2019; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Snelling et al., 2019), with opportunities ranging from research co-inquiry to curriculum consultancy and development (Healey et al., 2014). There are several benefits for students and faculty who engage in collaborative partnerships. They foster mutuality, widen perspectives, and promote higher engagement in learning and teaching (Curran, 2017; Duda & Danielson, 2018; Jensen & Bennett, 2016). Many institutions are partnering with students with aims to reconceptualize and renegotiate traditional relationships in education where students are positioned in a consumer role for learning (Jensen & Bennett, 2016; Matthews et al., 2018). These collaborations encourage a reciprocal process where all participants offer unique

expertise, thus fostering a shared commitment to, and responsibility for, learning and education (Freire, 2018; hooks, 1994; Rozendo et al., 2017). Further, Dunne and Zandstra (2011) emphasise the importance for institutions to position students as "change agents" who are active decision makers, as opposed to "listening to the student voice," where the latter assumes students as passive consumers in their learning experience.

Positioning partnerships as "a process of balanced give-and-take not of commodities but rather of contributions: perspectives, insights, [and] forms of participation" (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2018, p. 181) has brought many benefits to the student-faculty partnership we describe in this paper. Our partnership is located within a project—the Cognitive Rehearsal to Address Bullying (CRAB) project, which is designed to support students to address bullying in nursing education. The healthcare setting can be a daunting work environment, and the heightened vulnerability of nursing students (Birks et al., 2018; Clarke et al., 2012) and new graduates (Krut et al., 2021) to experience bullying can cause significant harm to their emotional wellbeing (Baker, 2012). Given that the prevalence of bullying is well documented in the literature (Bowllan, 2015; Budden et al., 2017; Clarke et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2017; Hartin et al., 2020; Jack et al., 2018; Seibel & Fehr, 2018), we focused our work on strategies to address bullying in nursing education.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Our student-faculty partnership was guided primarily by the work of Paulo Freire (1970/2018) and bell hooks (1994), as well as scholars who have drawn on Freire's work to explore student-faculty partnerships (see, for example, Peters, 2018; Peters & Mathias, 2018). Freire, a Brazilian critical educator and activist, is well known for his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he describes his goal to shift the then current education model from one of "banking" (where students are passive recipients of information) to one of increased consciousness in the context of oppressive practises in Brazil. Freire (1970/2018) identified the importance for educators to have "profound trust in people and their creative power, and to achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (p. 75). Bringing a fierce passion to the notion of student partnerships, hooks (1994) believed that participation in education was an "act of freedom" and emphasised the importance of making space for everyone's voice in the classroom by having a "pedagogy of engagement."

Power

Student-faculty partnerships cannot be explored without paying attention to power, a concept that is viewed by varying theorists in different ways. Despite positive outcomes that result from partnerships (described earlier), stepping away from existing power dynamics that are deeply embedded in traditional educational norms remains a challenge. Faculty in higher education can acknowledge the value of incorporating students' perspectives but may be hesitant to work as equal partners with students (Martens et al., 2020). Working with students as partners can elicit a power struggle, making some faculty reluctant to engage in such partnerships (Murphy et al., 2017). Uncovering and undermining the biases within power structures is a crucial step to maintaining education as an equitable space (hooks, 1994). Education, as argued by Peters and Mathias (2018), should follow Freirean principles in being an "act of liberation," where students and teachers collectively question, challenge, and learn together. As described by hooks (1994), "the classroom should be a space where we're all in power in different ways" (p. 152).

The authors of this paper view bullying in nursing education as an oppressive practice and highlight the importance of attending to what is happening within individuals, between individuals, and around individuals (Hartrick Doane & Varcoe, 2015). In recognition of the barriers to student-faculty collaborations, our partnership adopted the concept of relational power, which Qin (2018) proposes as power that occurs within a relational space, making it shareable, exchangeable, and mutually empowering. We understand power as shareable between students and teachers to alleviate the effects of oppression, foster "conscientization," and promote human agency and action for social change (Freire, 1970/2018). Partnerships need more than engagement and collaboration; they must be enacted in the context of environments that value students as equal participants and change agents (hooks, 1994; Peters, 2018; Peters & Mathias, 2018). Rather than valuing students as equal participants, we strived for equal valuing of every member's participation. One student author described our partnership as having a "shared sense of ownership and no 'power-over' feelings, but rather 'power-with' in unity all toward the same goal, . . . where a sense of community was built, . . . where everyone felt like they belonged."

OUR COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The CRAB project was created by a student-faculty partnership at the University of British Columbia's (UBC) School of Nursing. It began with a request from students to the School of Nursing's leadership team to create a policy to guide students who witnessed or experienced bullying during their program of study. Students had surveyed their peers to explore their experiences of bullying as nursing students, and the results were in line with the high prevalence of bullying described in the literature (Bowllan, 2015; Budden et al., 2017; Clarke et al., 2012; Gillespie et al., 2017; Hartin et al., 2020; Jack et al., 2018; Seibel & Fehr, 2018). Honouring the students' request resulted in the creation of our partnership. Since its inception in 2016, the project has welcomed 14 undergraduate students and one graduate student. Students were recruited annually within the School of Nursing to join the project as part-time research assistants during the school year or through full-time summer internships. Due to significant interest in the positions, students were recruited via formal interview, with one occasion where students were approached by the faculty lead. On average, there were three students working with four faculty members each year. The team strongly believed that a project designed for students ought to also be designed with students, which was expressed by one student author:

> As a student, it's rare to be given not only the opportunity to voice concerns about the greater learning environment but then an additional opportunity to shift that very environment alongside faculty. How often does curricula *for* students get written, built, and executed *by* students themselves? I cherished the moments we shared as a group, listening to one another, providing feedback, and shaping the workshop together—as equals.

OUR WORKS

The team first created an ethical and relational action framework (O'Flynn-Magee et al., 2020a, Appendix A) that guided and grounded the projects' work in addressing bullying in nursing education. To create educational resources, the project used arts-based learning (ABL), a pedagogical strategy that integrates art forms into nursing education (Rieger & Chernomas, 2013). For example, we partnered with a colleague from UBC Department of

Theatre and Film to engage in forum theatre (Boal, 1985; Diamond, 2007) we drew on cognitive rehearsal (Griffin, 2004; Griffin & Clarke, 2014) to design a CRAB workshop (O'Flynn-Magee et al., 2021a) where participants practised responding to bullying scenarios between nurses and students. Our goal to create ABL experiences further led us to collaborate with a graphic artist to design a graphic novella (O'Flynn-Magee et al., 2020b; O'Flynn-Magee et al., 2021b, Appendix B) about a student nurse who is bullied during their clinical rotation.

Our next initiative was in collaboration with UBC's Department of Theatre and Film, UBC Studios, and professional actors to produce a series of vignettes in the style of "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure," a virtual, interactive experience of reacting and responding to bullying situations in a clinical context. Rather than focusing solely on the individuals engaged in a bullying interaction, the vignettes were designed to reflect the systemic and structural conditions that influence and are influenced by bullying in the workplace.

In our experience, engaging in ABL invited the team to develop, draw on, and apply their creative skills outside of the context of nursing. These skills included scriptwriting, graphic drawing and design, acting, and use of the creative imagination. Students and faculty members took active roles in literature annotations and reviews, qualitative data collection and analysis, and design of curricular materials. The process of co-writing promoted ongoing collaborations with student team members post-graduation, with opportunities for students to co-author manuscripts as first or second author for publications (see, for example, Daly et al., 2020; O'Flynn-Magee et al., 2021b).

BUILDING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Bullying is a sensitive and often emotional topic that manifests in various forms and contexts. Thus, it was important for our team meetings to always be held in a safe(r) space (Deller, 2019; Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], 2019), so that each member's voice was heard and respected, not merely as "student" or "faculty" but as individuals who are experts in their own experiences related to bullying and beyond. We use the term "safer" rather than "safe" to emphasise the challenge in creating fully safe spaces and the importance of instead striving for spaces that are as safe as possible for all concerned (Deller, 2019; MHCC, 2019). Faculty authors commented on how they were encouraged to see students "take ownership of their ideas and thoughts," which provided "authenticity" and "strengthened the project significantly." One student author commented:

> I always felt that the faculty in the partnership valued my thoughts and experiences and focused on how to ensure students were leading the direction of the research. It was empowering to be able to contribute to research that is focusing on changing the culture within nursing.

Embracing students as partners allowed faculty to engage with the "expertise of students," as voiced by one faculty author, to foster relational capacity, and to learn new concepts. The notion of a safe(r) space compared to a safe space, for example, was first discussed by a student co-author during the design of the CRAB workshop (O'Flynn-Magee et al., 2021a). A second example—a "privilege walk,"[1] an opening activity in the CRAB workshop where participants moved in particular directions based on their experiences related to pre-designed questions about bullying—was also a suggestion made by a student

team member that was previously unknown to faculty but was well-received and incorporated into the workshop.

LESSONS LEARNED

Drawing on verbatim quotes and reflections from student and faculty authors, we expand on some of the lessons learned throughout the partnership. While time and unclear expectations were sometimes viewed as constraining, we focus on learnings related to empowering practice, the development of hope, cognitive dissonance, and balancing roles.

Student engagement as co-partners in the project from beginning to end was described by students as being an "exciting, empowering, and inspirational" experience that encouraged personal, relational, and professional development. For example, providing constructive feedback to interdisciplinary collaborators gave students the opportunity to use their communication, teamwork, and leadership skills. Engaging in research processes encouraged one student author to "not shy away from problems just because they were big and unsolved," and instead exercise critical thinking to evaluate current bullying education and embrace challenges that arise when pushing for change.

Working with faculty who are taking the lead to change nursing culture and education to address bullying "provide[d] students with hope," as voiced by one student author, and "set the stage for [them], helping [them] decide early on in [their] career that [they] would be a nurse who pushes for change, treats people with respect and kindness, and leads by example." One faculty author also explained that "having students engage in the work of addressing bullying in such thoughtful and passionate ways brought hope that a new generation of graduates will make a difference in the quest to eradicate bullying in nursing."

While a positive partnership experience gave students and faculty hope, one student author felt "swallowed by the stressful healthcare environment" and expressed "being fully aware of the bullying acts [they] experience at work, and yet, accepting them because [they] simply felt overwhelmed and intimidated." Dissonant cognitions are commonly experienced by nursing students who struggle to carry their academic ideals into clinical practice (Meyer, 2005). Faculty authors who encourage implementation of anti-bullying education in nursing curricula likewise experienced dissonance. On one hand, faculty members advocate for evidence-based change, but they do so in the context of potential tensions between their scholarship goals and active faculty roles. Although a thorough discussion of cognitive dissonance is beyond the scope of this paper, it would be interesting for future studies to explore the tensions that may be experienced by students and faculty when they encounter obstacles to living their values related to addressing bullying in nursing education and practice.

Another potential challenge noted was the balancing of roles outside of the partnership. This required mindfulness, whether it was in the matter of respecting professional boundaries or ways of communication. Faculty members with roles of course instructor or student advisor needed to be aware of potential biases or preferences towards students who participated in the project. As one faculty author voiced, "it was crucial to consider the possibility that biases might exist and that they could play out in ways that benefited or hindered individual members, group dynamics, or the project itself." From students' perspectives, they may set higher expectations for themselves to be more engaged or perform better in courses taught by faculty members involved in the project. Exploring the strategies used by students and faculty to maintain professional boundaries

may provide a better understanding of how to manage the nuances embedded in building successful partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS
Literature describes a broad range of collaborations between students and faculty. In conjunction with the reflections of our co-authors who participated in the CRAB project, we highlight several recommendations to support future student-faculty partnerships.

Students and faculty must believe that partnerships are valuable
Overcoming the resistance to students and faculty working collaboratively, as discussed by Bovill et al. (2016), requires a two-way cooperation between students and faculty to step outside of traditional roles in education; both parties need to regard partnerships as meaningful and believe in the transformative potential of co-creation. Working with faculty who valued student opinion resulted in students feeling empowered and gaining confidence in their role in the project. Deep engagement from students spontaneously encourages faculty, thus creating positive reinforcement that strengthens each member's commitment to the project. We thus encourage educators and students to embrace partnerships that foster co-creation and co-learning in education. For this to take place, a culture of partnerships must be supported by academic institutions. As Cook-Sather et al. (2014) remind us, partnerships are not only beneficial for students and faculty but also for institutions, "helping all of us to achieve our aspirations for higher education" (p. 11).

Higher education must support student-faculty partnerships
Faculty team members believed that having students as co-partners is both valuable and imperative when it comes to creating resources that directly affect students, their learning, their experiences during their program of study, and beyond. While student engagement may take form in different approaches across institutions (Dunne, 2016; LeBihan et al., 2018), what is most important is for these partnerships to become a culture (Peters & Mathias, 2018; Martens et al., 2020) that enhances both teaching and learning outcomes. One way to enact this vision is funding for curricular partnerships (Bovill, 2019) and integrating the collaborative efforts of students and faculty into curricula.

A team with diverse/interdisciplinary team members
We welcomed diversity across the team, through varying perspectives, backgrounds, and values of students and faculty members. Having at least three students on the team avoided an individual student being asked to speak for all students. Further diversity included partnerships with faculty and artists outside the School of Nursing, which enriched and brought further dimension to our projects. We thus encourage future initiatives to seek collaborations with other disciplines that may inspire innovative pedagogical approaches.

Clear expectations set from the beginning of the partnership
Mutually agreeing and committing to team expectations, whether it may be for assignment completion timelines, quality of work, or team values, is vital for a successful partnership. Communication serves as key to articulating the goals and the meaning of co-creation (Bovill et al., 2016). Although expectations were not always clear for some members, we found that grounding ourselves in the goals and values that we set at the beginning of each meeting and/or project was essential for maintaining progress. The

faculty lead played a pivotal role to ensure expectations were clear within an environment that was open to feedback and suggestions.

CONCLUSION

Our project has indicated that collaborative partnerships where students' and faculty's voices are heard and all members contribute equitably foster mutual growth and meaningful creations for education. For the CRAB project, having faculty who led respectful and open dialogue with students throughout processes of co-creation cultivated a team with strong commitment and motivation. With no evidence of "power-over" dynamics, the partnership was described as a positive experience, drawing student members to engage in collaborations post-graduation. More importantly, the partnership inspired team members to carry their learning experience forward and be champions for change in their workplaces. This commitment to action is at the core of Freire's (1970/2018) work. As one student author expressed, "student-faculty partnerships that are truly partnerships are essential for nursing school because they set a precedent for how one can be." As student-faculty collaborations gain attention in higher education (Bovill, 2019), we hope to encourage more nurse educators to welcome students as partners, to embrace the processes of co-creation, and to address challenges together with students.

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NOTES

1. A privilege walk is an activity to heighten awareness of differences of privilege and power (Layne & Chiu, 2016; McIntosh, 1989/2010).

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APPENDIX A. AN ETHICAL AND RELATIONAL ACTION FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING
BULLYING IN NURSING EDUCATION
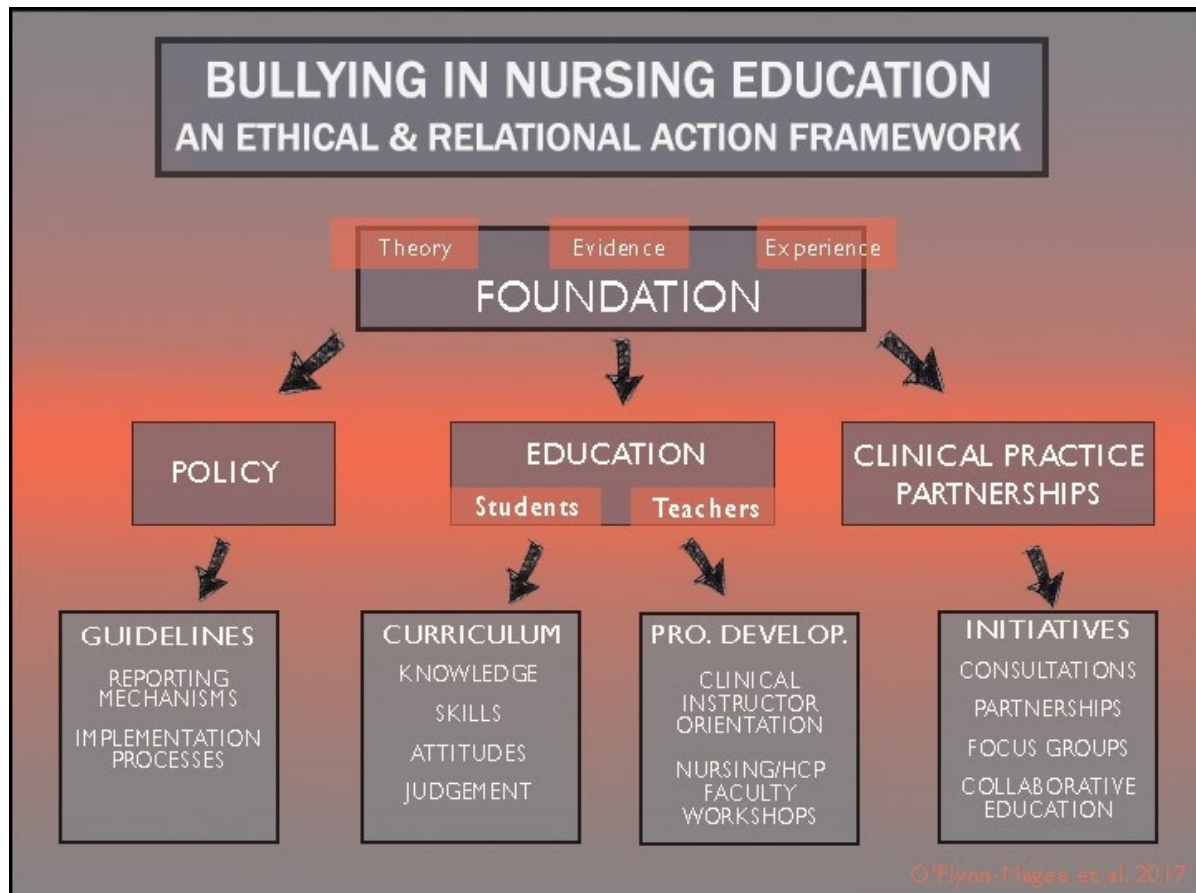
O'Flynn-Magee et al. (2020a)

APPENDIX B. A STUDENT NURSE EXPERIENCES BULLYING AT THE NURSING STATION

O'Flynn-Magee et al. (2020b)
Graphic artist: Rene Rebora

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