

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Co-designing an equity, diversity, and inclusion (un)conference by and for staff and students

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ABSTRACT

We describe the critical-digital approach and co-design of a bespoke unconference on inclusion, diversity, and equity for staff and students. We offer a critical digital pedagogy framework that engages and promotes student-led equity, diversity, and inclusion in what we refer to as the fourth wave of students as partners (SaP) conferences. The SaP unconference was unique in several ways. The unconference was aimed at both staff and students and was designed and delivered in a cross-disciplinary students-as-partners project. This forum was transformative as it was supported by a critical digital partnership and pedagogical framework. Further, the unconference positioned the audience as participants on equal footing with panellists in critical dialogue and conversation. As such, the unconference offered a counter-narrative to traditional conference culture. Reinventing the academic conference space for SaP is critical to ensure conferences are authentic, contextualised instantiations of partnership.

KEYWORDS

student as partners, student-staff conferences, critical-digital partnership, values-based partnership, equity, diversity, inclusion, cultural and linguistic diversity

While many student, professional, and academic staff are active in the equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) space, a shared, integrated approach for staff and students has been rare both in practice and within the literature (Rakrouki et al., 2017). While student-organised conferences are not new, this conceptual paper extends Abbot and Kupertadze's (2018), Abbot's (2021), and Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill's (2020) arguments that these student-led conferences are not transformative or emancipative towards authentic student action, representation, and dialogue. An unconference is a participant-driven meeting with an informal program where participants drive the dialogue and topics rather than formal speakers (Adamson et al., 2022, Budd et al. 2015), hence "un-doing" traditional power structures within conferences. The unconference format upended the hierarchical, active speaker/passive listener dynamic and provided students and staff the choice to engage as

they wished on equal footing. Using this open unconference format was deliberate in building a sustainable, critical, and transformative space.

Our research is grounded in the principles of authenticity, inclusivity, power dynamics mediation, process-oriented focus, and ethical engagement, as outlined by Matthews (2017). These principles, further supported by the 3-R ethos of 'respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility' as advocated by Cook-Sather et al. (2014), served as the foundational framework guiding the inception and evolution of our conference.

STUDENTS AS PARTNERS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The student-led conference space is often aimed at other students, with staff acting as moderators and facilitators to the broader design of the conference. There is a paucity of research on student and staff-led conferences that serve the interests of both staff and students (Abbot, 2021). There is even less research into conferences in the EDI space (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2020), especially those that go beyond cosmetic diversity (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). However, student-led conferences have been growing in the last two decades. The earliest known student-led conference proceedings was the British Conference for Undergraduate Research, which was developed at the University of Central Lancashire and officially launched in 2011 (Hampton-Reeves, 2014). During the same time, another student-led conference, the Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) conference (Bryson, 2014), was growing in the UK with formal proceedings being published a few years later (Owens, 2017). Both conferences are now well established and provide an outlet for student-led research to be supported, promoted, and respected.

In the Australian context, the Student as Partners Network out of the University of Queensland, pioneered by Matthews (2015), developed "The Student as Partners Roundtable" in 2015 and has been hosted annually across five different institutions across the country. However, within the same period, the International Summer Institute on SaP, hosted by McMaster University (Ontario, Canada), established its co-design conference in 2016 (International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning [ISSOTL], 2015). The most recent research on large-scale student-led and student-run environments outside of Australia has been within the University College London Centre for Teaching and Learning Economics (CTaLE). Here, "students led on session curation, presentation reflections and discussion through the student perspective, managing the live event and engaging with international presenters in materials dissemination" (Adamson et al., 2022, p. 1).

In this section, we aim to clarify the context and scope of our discussion regarding student-led and participant-led conferences in various disciplines, with a particular focus on EDI and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The third incarnation of student and participant led conferences within any discipline, and perhaps the oldest, is where conferences are tied to the curriculum, either bolted onto courses either as summative end-of-semester projects or as extra-curricular activities within the unit (Fluckiger et al., 2010; Stiggins, 2001). For example, In the UK, Northumbria University organised a student-led conference for their final dissertation capstone course on inclusivity for their undergraduate students across three faculties. Northumbria University's unique distinction was a student-designed e-learning learning management system that served as an organisational site for the conference allowing students and staff to upload resources via co-creation (Veuger & Racey, 2019). However, curriculum-oriented student partnerships are often contingent upon an academic coordinating the course with pre-established course objectives (Rakrouki

et al., 2017). Other student-involved conference spaces work as ambassador schemes for undergraduate students for teaching colloquiums (Peseta et al., 2016) or in postgraduate contexts to develop graduate research connections (Mitchell et al., 2017). However, in these examples, students were involved in administering the conference without explicitly presenting within them. Within such structures, there is always potential for academic staff to confine, limit, and control the structure and organisation of the conference.

Similarly, current developments of students as partners as “conference support” associates are quite limiting and perhaps a missed opportunity for the University of Nottingham (Obadare et al., 2022). In this case, perceived and actual benefits are reserved for the academic in professional development and future conference presentations, with little attention on student representation and action for and within conferences. As Abbot (2021) argues, academic ignorance in relation to students as co-presenters stems from a lack of understanding and appreciation of students as researchers and their own lived subjectivities. As a student partner remarked: “the extent to which I was able to fully participate in communities such as professional conferences often depended on faculty members other than my partners taking me seriously as a scholar” (Meacham et al., 2013, p. 9). This echoes Mercer-Mapstone et al.’s (2017) and Abbot’s (2021) thoughts that students need to justify their presence within a conference environment to gain legitimacy for their contribution. Hence, a known power hierarchy is developed within the conference space that needs to be acknowledged in the first instance and explicitly stated and dismantled within conferences in the second.

One such approach that mitigated power relations (outside the field of SaP) was a conference developed in partnership with students—the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) in 2017 (ISSOTL, 2017). In many respects, the ISSOTL conference on the pedagogy of co-design premediated a sense of the disestablishment of a power hierarchy that is ingrained in the academy. In response, there was a call for students and staff to think of each other as trainees learning from each other (Ostrowski, 2018). In this example, the relationship between the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and SaP was inextricably linked. No discussion regarding SoTL can exist without discussions on how students learn, engage, share, interact, collaborate, research, and partner with academics (Poole & Chick, 2016).

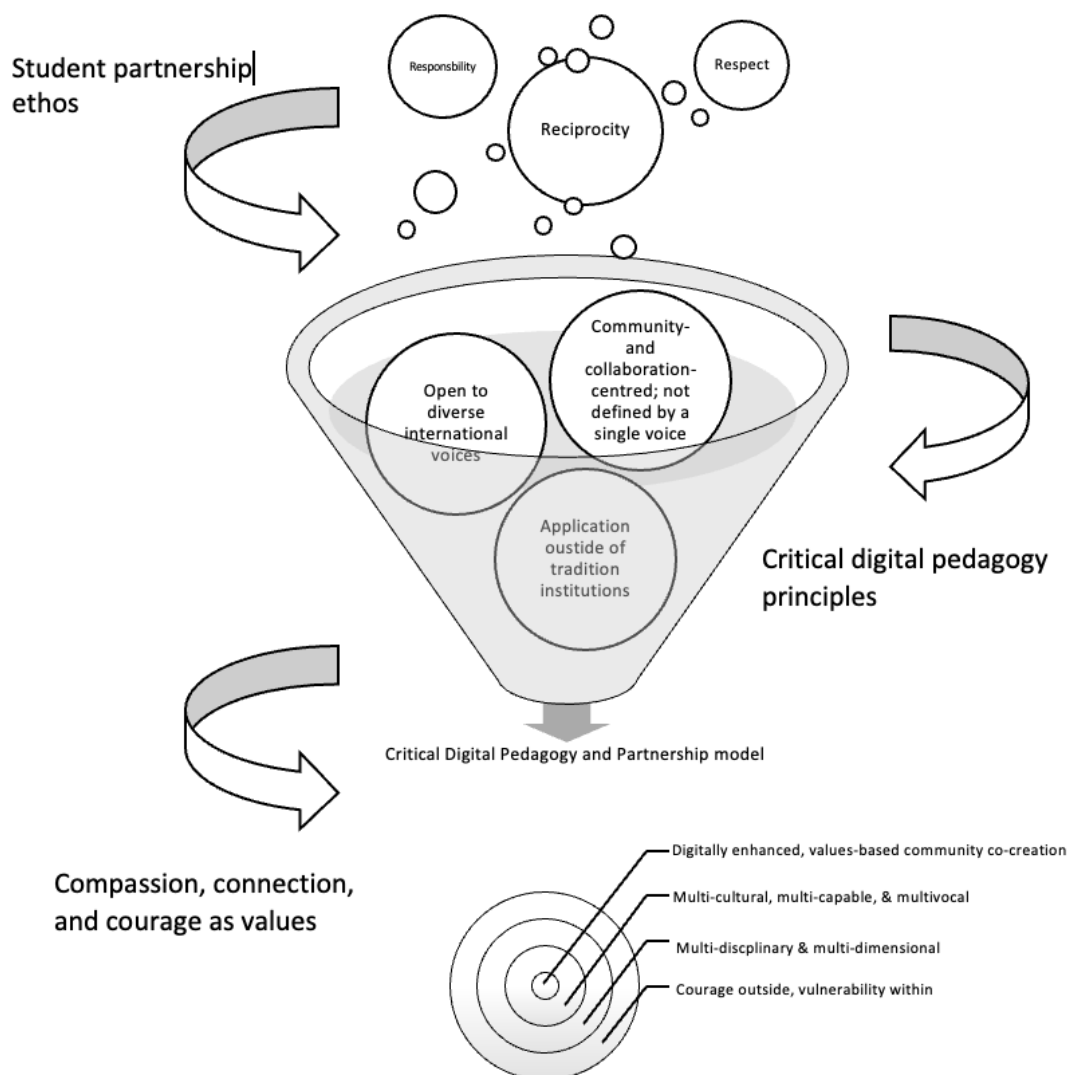
In the spirit of true co-design, we present our model that sits within the fourth incarnation of student-led conference. The *unconference* initiative being presented was not connected to or contingent on any course design. Student partners who volunteered and those who attended did so purely based on the conference’s purpose regarding a student-led and presented EDI unconference. Our literature review suggests that there is limited research, practice, and scholarship on co-led and co-presented SaP conferences. For the SaP model to reach its potential, any activity within this model should reflect a co-design process and authentic partnership where SaP’s learn to lead and academics are led to learn. Our example will expand the existing knowledge in this area and provide an example that supports the idea that SaP unconference outcomes are intentionally transformative. Here, students use their lived experiences and knowledge to address institutional power structures, aiming to both inform and reform these structures through the expression of student voices and collective actions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Building upon Stommel's (2014) articulation of critical digital pedagogy (CDP), Dianati (2022) and Dianati, & Oberhollenzer (2020) developed a framework for CDP for use within university classroom spaces to enact transformative teaching and learning through the SaP model. Our work here further develops and applies CDP to conference settings. As conferences are adjacent to and thus inform education, research, and action, CDP applied through SaP is an ideal context to challenge university processes and centre authentic EDI processes and outcomes.

Our bespoke, student-led unconference instantiates CDP to engage the transformative potential of SaP throughout the planning, delivery, and outcomes of the unconference. Our model demonstrates how CDP can create authentic, inclusive partnerships that are multi-vocal, multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural, multi-dimensional, as well as being digitally enhanced.

Our analysis applies CDP principles to unpack how SaP supported transformative change within the structure of an unconference. According to Stommel (2014), critical digital pedagogy is defined by four fundamental principles. CDP is centred on community and collaboration in practice. It must remain open to diverse, international voices, reimagining ways that communication and collaboration happen across cultural and political boundaries. It must not be defined by a single voice but gather together a cacophony of voices and must have a use and application outside of traditional institutions of education (Stommel, 2014). These principles framed our model and were the fundamental principles we enacted to support the development of the unconference; they are visualised in Figure 1, inside the funnel. The discussion section below outlines how the students as partners fostered these principles in practice.

Figure 1: Critical digital pedagogy and partnership framework**METHODOLOGY: THE UNCONFERENCE CO-DESIGN PROCESS**

The 2nd Annual Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Unconference was a full day program held in hybrid mode at the University of Queensland (UQ) in August 2022. It leveraged insights and feedback from the first EDI Unconference held at UQ in 2021. In 2021, fifty students and staff participated in an exclusive online space in honest and open dialogue about their lived experiences of EDI in their contexts. The overarching objective for the 2022 EDI Unconference was to establish a supportive network across the university to better support EDI initiatives and student experiences. Therefore, the unconference outputs facilitated collaboration and knowledge sharing across the university. This was accomplished through engaging multiple digital and social media platforms to promote the unconference to both students and staff. We also created a durable digital space to share insights by using the online software program Adobe Spark.

Meeting fortnightly, student and staff partners (four students and two academic staff members) collaboratively shaped the process of co-designing the unconference and developed communication materials in the 6 months prior to the 2022 unconference.

Students chose tasks that aligned with their interests and skill sets and rotated administrative roles such as facilitating bi-weekly meetings, minute-taking, and moderating check-ins each fortnight. Using rotating roles, designated meeting times, and communication through software and social media applications such as Trello and WhatsApp, the team ensured that everyone could give their input and share their ideas in a safe and accessible space. Our ethos of responsibility was documented by our meeting notes for review and discussion. Our team's use of Trello supported task management and communication and helped to visualise what had been accomplished. In addition, students and staff partners would Zoom in weekly to ensure the project was on track. Specific outputs of our process are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: An overview of the specific tasks and outputs of the student partnership

| METHOD | OUTPUT | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------|---|---|
| 1. Analysis | Semi-structured interviews with previous participants of the unconference | Two focus groups with three previous participants/presenters from the earlier conference were conducted to help develop a more informed unconference. |
| 2. Design | The architecture of the 2022 EDI Unconference | The Student Staff Partnership (SSP) team co-developed a structure for the 2022 EDI Unconference by establishing the time, place, format, and duration of the unconference. |
| 3. Development | Feedforward evaluations from 2021 to planning 2022 unconference | Using feedback from the previous year's unconference, the SSP team discussed ways to build on that feedback to meet the coming year's unconference goals. The SaP members reviewed input and offered suggestions as a group. |
| 4. Implementation | The unconference schedule | The SSP team determined a time in the academic calendar that would be ideal for holding the unconference. Students had a different perspective than staff about a time that worked (e.g., staff might be busier during certain teaching weeks, but to maximise student involvement the team chose students' preferred date). Other options that were considered was having the unconference over multiple days. Once presenters were sourced, the team created a schedule that accommodated the needs of the presenters and organisers of the event. For the day of the unconference, the SSP team used a Word document and an Excel spreadsheet to organise presenters, breaks, and breakout sessions on Zoom. |

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| 5. Promotion | Promotional video and flyers for dissemination across media platforms at UQ | Student/staff partners co-designed promotion material and liaised with faculty-based marketing and communications to help develop promotional materials. Staff and students promoted the event across student unions, faculty staff newsletters, and other promotional social media outlets within the university. |
| 6. Evaluation | Post-unconference evaluation on Survey Monkey or another platform | A QR code was placed at the end of the unconference, and participants were sent an email to fill out a post-survey response. This involved SSP members evaluating how the unconference performed and what improvements can be made for next year. |

This project was informed by essential stakeholder consultation. We ran two focus groups with previous 2021 attendees, which gave the team insight into what was successful and what we could improve upon. These focus groups led to a team brainstorming session in which we created a theme for the 2022 unconference.

The two focus groups consisted of three participants each, with the student partners identifying and outlining areas of improvement. Two themes emerged from our analysis of the focus groups which were conducted separately. First, there was an identified need for a hybrid format so staff and students who were on campus could fully attend. Secondly, there was a need for greater student representation and voice. This was due to the fact that the first unconference attracted EDI, human resources, library, and student support staff as participants promoting their EDI services. While these voices and services are important, we wanted to ensure a more authentic, student-driven and student-led conference in our next iteration. With this, we could focus on the project's goal and give it an identity that reflected our SaP process of working together that underpinned the conference theme of: Exploring Vulnerabilities Through Courage, Compassion, and Connection. Narrowing down the theme and buzzwords gave us a more straightforward avenue to pitch the unconference to other groups, such as the School of Public Health EDI committee, the Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) working party, and Workplace Diversity and Inclusion committee members. We recruited conversation starters (e.g., panellists) to provide needed structure. These panelists were student participants from the 2021 unconference, as well as students and staff from across the university who demonstrated interest in our theme. Two staff partners acted as facilitators to support open and safe conversation. We also disseminated guidelines for respectful interaction. We identified sites for conversation based on our student/staff interests and goals, and these framed the morning and afternoon sessions. Student and staff interests became the session focus on intersectionality, accessibility, and universal design respectively.

Table 2: Format of the Unconference

| TIME AND OBJECTIVE | ACTIVITY |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Welcome 9:00 am | Creating brave spaces. Acknowledgment of country. |
| Morning Introduction 9:10 am | Introduction to the first panel. |
| Panel 1 9:15 am | Intersectionality panel. |
| Talk Corners 11:15 am | Extending conversations and starting new ones. |
| Lunch 12:15 pm | Light lunch (provided). |
| Afternoon Intro 1 pm | Introduction to the second panel. |
| Panel 2 1:10 pm | Accessibility and universal design panel. |
| Next Steps 3:15 pm | Interactive, collaborative sessions. |
| Continuity Plan 3:45 pm | Feedback survey. Acknowledgements. |
| Close 4:00 pm | Formal closure of unconference . |

RETROSPECTIVE OUTCOMES

To meet our objectives of promoting EDI within the community, our partnership resulted in building a stable, inclusive communication platform to support the EDI network and therefore raise the visibility of EDI at the university. We partnered with the CALD Lab to produce an interactive digital platform to demonstrate the specific outputs of our conversations at the unconference (see <https://express.adobe.com/page/YA283JX8v1uXy/>).

A key outcome of this project was a more nuanced and inclusive unconference delivered in a hybrid mode to centre the voices and concerns of those students and staff active across the university's equity and diversity networks. Our co-designed conference format is presented in Table 2. An important outcome was the dissemination of insights from the 2022 EDI Unconference that built awareness and ongoing communication beyond the event, as key insights were reported in faculty EDI meetings and gatherings and the Student Staff Partnership Showcase. The latter was a cross-university event for both students and staff. In these ways, the unconference strengthened the spirit of community within these networks, building bridges for more ideas to flow through.

DISCUSSION

Digitally enhanced, values-based community co-creation

Underpinned by the values of mutual respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, the student and staff partners worked in partnership to revitalise and develop a new unconference. The team worked in collaboration with each other to create supporting materials that assisted the unconference in providing a more holistic, digitally enhanced experience. This included the design and promotional materials needed to launch the EDI Unconference scheduled for Semester 2, 2022, the co-development of an EDI Adobe Spark

page, and the co-development of online EDI resources to support the student-staff experience. To overcome any potential power imbalance between students and staff partners, online discussions on platforms (e.g., Trello and online meetings) were organised as media to share opinions, brainstorm, and, finally, co-create sets of valuable materials. In addition, student partners' voices were critical as they reflected on their experiences as former participants of the previous year's unconference. This community-based model went far beyond the mere consultation and involvement of students; student partners identified areas for conference improvement and then implemented those improvements towards student action.

The division of roles and labour for student partners was shared with staff. This meant that students chose which roles to undertake, and students allocated staff tasks for authentic and genuine power-sharing with each other. Although the anticipated outputs were constructed in collaboration, each team member played a lead role in one or two tasks. All student partners participated in the brainstorming discussions, and staff partners modelled how to allow space for everyone's voices to be heard, periodically asking each student about their thoughts. As the partnership matured with time student partners began to facilitate discussions as well in the same manner. Fortnightly meetings, chaired by student partners, were the exchange point for ideas, whereby staff and students reported on the process while at the same time making plans for the next step. Both student and staff partners contributed to the outcomes, peer feedback, and support of each other throughout the project and in each meeting.

One of the critical aspects of our approach was our engagement and attention to the process. In our initial meeting, we discussed what shape our partnership would take and what an effective partnership looks like for each of us. In that same meeting, we explicitly talked about power dynamics between students and staff and decided together how decision-making would occur. We spoke of the fluidity of power and how power needs to be dynamically shared. We enacted our values and ethos of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity in our weekly meetings. This set the scene for each session, whereby we developed a method and practice of "check-ins" to ensure that we all felt comfortable, respected, acknowledged, cared for, and uniquely understood. For staff, it meant understanding students' social, professional, personal, and academic lives and how we could all support each other towards a unified goal. Staff partners engaged in critical reflexivity (Hickman et al., 2022; Tretheway et al., 2015; Wigginton et al., 2019) to hold themselves accountable to their social, cultural, and disciplinary privileges and engaged in feedback from students to ensure that students felt safe to participate in the project. For example, Amy Hickman named her standpoint as a white cisgender woman with dual nationalities as an American and an Australian and reflected on the impact of this standpoint in interactions and decision-making to ensure culturally safe environments for all participants. Staff also acknowledged their implicit bias and listened actively to students' ideas and needs. This was central to the CDP model as the first guiding step to establish authentic, transformative participation (See Figure 1).

However, it was not without challenges. Some unforeseeable challenges included the state-wide flooding that decreased participation rates, the sickness of student partners, and a panellist who thought the unconference was on a different day. However, we ensured that we developed an ethic of care (MacGill, 2016; Matthews et al., 2018). We reimaged what the group process could look like in virtual meetings held on Zoom and through regular check-ins where partners each had time to share how they were feeling at each

meeting point. This ethic of care mediated inherent power differentials (Matthews, 2017) as we brought our whole selves to the task at hand, allowing trust to develop.

Multicultural, multi-capable, and multivocal

At the heart of our student partnership model was the ability to include diverse local and international voices. First, we engaged various students of various ages to represent a diversity of student voices at differing points of their learning experience. Two student partners were below the age of 20. One was between 20–30, and the other was over the age of 30. Student partners and staff identified with cultural groups from various regions and countries, including South Asia, the United States, Australia, and Iran. Hence, our partnership not only fostered but enacted inclusive practices.

The student partners were selected based on their depth and breadth of their responses to the selection criteria for the student as partner position that was advertised internally on the Student Hub Portal. A total of ten participants applied for the role and the four that were selected were based on their depth and breadth of response to the selection criteria; faculty diversity; their previous experience in equity diversity and inclusion activities or student partnership; and their cultural, linguistic, and neurodiverse backgrounds. The selection criteria posed three questions: (a) why they would be suited for this role, (b) what they could contribute to the role, and (c) any other considerations that may like to include in support of their application. The two researchers then ranked each of the participants and met online to weigh which four student partners should be chosen. Both researchers identified three of the four as suitable for the role, with each having a different fourth person. At the end of the meeting the fourth student partner was chosen who best met not only the selection criteria but also represented the largest cultural, faculty, linguistic, and neurodiverse spread of applicants. It should be noted that there was only one male student who applied for the EDI SaP position, which was an identified issue in Steckley's (2022) work who noticed the lack of male representation in the student EDI space.

Our student staff partnership was enhanced by our culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We encouraged students to lead not just in the planning, but also as conversation starters at the unconference itself. One student partner spoke from their lived experience of studying at a large Australian university as an Indian National and as second-language speaker navigating a new culture and university systems during a pandemic. Another student partner spoke to their lived experience of being a student with an invisible disability whilst engaging in programs that did not always ensure inclusive teaching and learning.

Multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional

The diversity of our student-staff partnership was mirrored in the unconference itself. Participants came from the Faculties of Business, Economics and Law; Humanities and Social Sciences; the Faculty of Medicine; School of Education; School of Languages and Cultures; Workplace Diversity and Inclusion, and the Student Union. While we had two sessions that featured panel discussions, we structured these sessions as conversations and positioned panellists as conversation starters. That meant that while the panellists responded to open-ended questions, the participants were encouraged to contribute, ask questions, deliberate, and plan on equal footing with panellists and unconference facilitators. We deliberately held this unconference in a hybrid mode for equal access to all and captured comments and ideas from Zoom and face-to-face participant contributions via

Zoom chat and whiteboard and post-it notes. Using multiple ways to access and participate in the unconference developed inclusive, authentic engagement in the unconference itself.

Courage outside and vulnerability within

Our student partnership developed a new space for critical conversations relating to EDI to surface between staff and students. To enable this space, this partnership was intentionally shaped by relational praxis cultivated through practising interdependency and critical listening to the lived experiences of our student partners (Cahill, 2007; Hickman, 2016). Our practice of weekly check-ins allowed partners to listen in solidarity with each other as we managed our learning and teaching commitments, family, and relationships during the extreme flooding events in Queensland. Listening to partners' narration of lived experiences of precarity allowed for a mutual vulnerability and trust to emerge, enabling courage to name our limitations and strengths. This vulnerability led to a creative agency supporting one another and working as an integrated team. Relational praxis is central to genuine participation oriented to transformative political and social change (Cahill, 2007). Reflecting on this process led to articulating the theme of the unconference: to explore the power of vulnerability through courage, compassion, and connection through a dialogue on student and staff lived experiences of intersectionality and accessibility at the university.

Challenges to authentic partnership

In university spaces, there are very few activities of equity and diversity that students and staff genuinely share as one community. An unconference bridges these barriers as it operates adjacent to learning and teaching and student life, research, and professional structures at the university in bringing students and staff together in radical conversation and action. One of the limiting factors in our context is the "silo effect," as universities reward EDI within faculties and systems and not across them. EDI is also medicalised, where students are assigned a disability advisor that manages the interface between students and teaching staff. Students and staff at the unconference called out this colonising practice as conversations emerged around structural elements that reified exclusion, normalisation of ability, and inaccessible digital and physical structures that govern university life.

As the purpose of this event was to bring together students and staff to critically engage issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion and brainstorm solutions to these issues together, we learned that faculty needed to be learners and that students needed to be empowered to lead and centre their voices and experience. To create a multivocal, multi-dimensional and vulnerable space, it was critical to our process that that marketing and promotions targetted faculty to overcome barriers for academic staff to co-participate with authenticity with students in a forum. This speaks directly to unsolicited feedback that was posted on the Disability Collective (an online public forum) regarding the unconference:

So, recently I attended the university Unconference. I know we in the Disability Collective tend to be a bit sceptical about this university's own diversity and inclusion events because we've seen them poorly done before with tokenistic approaches to student involvement. Well, I am delighted to report that this event was one of the best I've seen. It was organised by an enthusiastic academic from the school of public health and employed a co-design process that amplified student voices.

However, the public forum also speaks to those who should have been there, noting:

Unfortunately, many of the people who most needed to hear the conversation were not there; people like the vice-chancellor, heads of schools, and others who would have benefited most from being privy to these conversations were not in attendance. Despite this, I think it's really important for us, in the [Student] Union and in the Disability Collective, to acknowledge and support efforts by others at the university to highlight the issues that staff and students with disability are facing and to support the development of solutions to these issues.

LESSONS LEARNT

We have learned several lessons through our SaP process. Firstly, staff and student partners needed to work to establish a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion by ensuring diversity in the students-as-partners team and engaging in critical reflexivity by negotiating contested third spaces (Hawley et al., 2019). Staff partners chose students across disciplines with diverse cultural, social, and academic standpoints to ensure that our student partners reflected the diversity of the university.

In order to effect transformative action, we learned from our participants that engagement with executive leadership is essential. This insight has been fed forward to the 3rd Annual Unconference in 2023. However, engagement with executive leadership is potentially fraught, as there is always the potential for the centring of powerful voices. Further, staff and students may be incentivised to attend precisely because executive leadership is in attendance. To promote EDI through the unconference, it will be essential to moderate power dynamics between academic staff and students in the process and planning of the unconference to enable multivocality and multi-capability (Cahill, 2015; Ritterbusch, 2012). We found that the intentional focus on moderating power not only supports the SaP process but informs the outputs of the unconference as well.

A suggestion for the SaP community in the (un)conference space is the application and use of an online collaboration and organisation tool to ensure "responsibility" as an ethos is met. An Atlassian online product, Trello, is free to use and was the preferred online organisational template at the university based on student and staff experiences across a 3-year period (Dianati, 2022; Dianati & Oberhollenzer 2020). Secondly, to ensure "respect," we propose that staff and students organise weekly check-ins with staff and students and genuinely share what is occurring in our daily and weekly lives. Check-ins allowed for students and staff to develop mutual respect of understanding each other's professional, social, family, and academic lives. Third, ensuring "reciprocity" means staff and students shared an equal role in all the work assigned. This was no easy task, as students needed to also take an extra role as they were panellists in the unconference, developing a triple edge sword of organisers, leaders, and panellists for the unconference. Staff partners made additional efforts in the organisation of the day due to these competing roles for students.

Students expect and have grown accustomed to the role of learner and intern when working with academic staff. To disrupt this colonising dynamic, we intentionally developed relational practices to develop a felt connection with one another, both on a professional level and a personal level. Because COVID was still around us during that time, it meant connecting in person was difficult. However, we made time earlier in the semester to go have a social "coffee catch up" on two occasions. We cannot stress the power of socialisation and connection as, without this, barriers cannot be broken, and power

hierarchies will remain (Matthews, 2017). At times, the process was difficult. Managing students' workloads and assessment deadlines, alongside two large personal events for the students, made it difficult for them to attend to the weekly check-in sessions. This is where the value of compassion was so critical, not only as a theme of the unconference, but in the way in which staff deeply cared and were compassionate of the students' lives. For this to be embodied in the fullest sense, as we believe we did, the staff partners must put themselves in the shoes of the student, as if it were them being a student in the partnership.

Lastly, the unconference was based on the value of courage that steered our thoughts and actions individually and collectively. However, the caveat here is that it was only possible based on our positionality of vulnerability and critical reflexivity that provoked trust with our students, not as only as partners and colleagues, but also as friends. For staff, courage was needed to try something new, to let go of expectations of what was done before and empower students to lead with their vision for the unconference. Staff then were able to reflect this vision and amplify it to the broader university community.

But it is, in fact, courage, more than any other value or ethos, that is needed to practice and live student partnership as a central liberatory force within higher education today, for the sake of a more empowered, more diverse, more inclusive teaching and learning experience for us all.

CONCLUSION

Our approach provides grounds for the fourth wave of student staff partnership through the incarnation of the student-as-partner Unconferences opening a new space in SaP literature and praxis. To accomplish this, meeting the criteria for critical digital pedagogy within SaP was critical, which helped shape outputs from mere involvement to targeted and strategic micro-emancipation, or small scale educational change. Through this approach, student partners gained the ability to make meaningful and positive changes within the institutional framework. Here, students and their expertise were centered, not only as organisers, but as panellists and facilitators. This was critical to ensure that both staff and students were the target audiences, not one or the other.

SaP in course contexts may often be constrained as students are rarely in the role of developing bespoke curricula and are often put in the role as user rather than expert. In developing and leading the unconference, students partners exercised their agency and authority to create something new with transformative potential. We argue that SaP can support transformative change when not connected or contingent to any staff-driven course. With inclusivity as the focus, students were empowered to offer their unique skillsets to develop, promote, and speak in the unconference space. We were driven by the ethos of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity that met our values of courage, compassion, and connection, or what we are calling the 3R-3C approach. We offer this methodology as an exemplar for future work in SaP praxis and research.

Our research sparks excitement and the possibility for others to apply our methodological frame. SaP offers new ways to partner and deliver traditional activities within the scholarship of teaching and learning. Whether it be a forum, a teaching and learning week, or a symposium, this fourth wave of the student-as-partners unconference design aims to offer an intersectional lens that is multi-cultural, multi-capable, and multivocal, that is in and of itself digitally enhanced and values-based, that ensures multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional perspectives, and above all is done with a courageous

outlook that recognises vulnerability as central to positive change on the personal, interpersonal, and organisational level. In the spirit of digital-critical partnership, all the details of the unconference can be found at:

<https://express.adobe.com/page/YA283JX8v1uXy/>

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR/S

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