RESEARCH ARTICLE

The power of naming students-as-partners practices

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ABSTRACT

Involving students in the design of their educational experience is increasingly being understood by higher education institutions to enhance learning, to build a better culture, and to foster inclusivity, amongst a host of other benefits. Accordingly, institutions are trialling a range of students-as-partners practices. There is currently huge variation in the nature and scale of these practices. This paper charts the process of putting names to various characteristics of students-as-partners practices in order to consistently describe, and therefore compare and map, them. The taxonomy that results is of immediate utility, but adapting the taxonomy to a specific context is also recommended as a profitable exercise. The processes described in this paper are vital next steps in the development and widespread adoption of this transformational set of practices.

KEYWORDS

students as partners, student voice, characterisation, taxonomy

The concept of students being engaged in the construction of their own learning goes back to educational theorists of previous centuries (e.g., Dewey, 1916), but it is not a concept that has been built into the structure of education design at institutes of higher education. In recent years, possibly to counteract the increasingly transactional nature of higher education (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017), institutions, particularly in English-speaking countries (Peart et al., 2023), have started to harness the transformative potential of including students as partners in the design of education. For examples, see the Students as Partners Initiative at the University of Texas (University of Texas, n.d.) in the U.S., Students as Partners at the Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching (Bristol University, n.d.) in the U.K., and Student and Staff Partnerships at Western Sydney University (Western Sydney University, n.d.) in Australia. A vast array of individual initiatives has been trialled, and gradually institutions are beginning to put in place policies and strategies to support such initiatives (Mercer-Mapstone & Marie, 2019).

Recognising the need to start seating these initiatives in scholarly practice, attempts have been made to derive theory from the range of practice. However, this has so far been unsuccessful due to the current heterogeneity of practice (Matthews et., al 2019; Curtis & Anderson, 2021). An intermediate approach is proposed in this paper to bridge the gap between developing and reporting on partnership processes and documenting and theorising them as a set of practices. This paper describes the development and application of a classification system,

a taxonomy, that will allow students-as-partners (SaP) practices to be meaningfully collected, compared, and reported on. Established frameworks are drawn upon to encompass the range of student involvement that is possible in their educational experience. The typology of participation first proposed by Sherry Arnstein (Arnstein, 1969/2019) and later used by Bovill and Bulley (2011) in the SaP context, is used to develop a taxonomy that can both place existing initiatives in comparison and evaluate opportunities for change in partnership practice. The taxonomy is then applied to a set of SaP initiatives embarked upon by the author's institution to demonstrate the immediate utility of the approach. The process of choosing which characteristics to privilege in the taxonomy can in itself guide practitioners in more strategic and purposeful use of SaP practices, so this is also recommended. Use of this taxonomy structure will also provide an essential step in the journey from reflecting on lessons learned from a collection of practices to deliberately integrating SaP practice into the design and development of students' educational experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is growing enthusiasm for including students in the design of their educational experience across the higher education sector. The AdvanceHE guide to working with students as partners first came out in 2014 (Healey et al., 2014), making a pedagogical case for involving students in the design of their learning and proposing a model from which to operate. In the same year, *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty* (Cook-Sather et al., 2014) was released, containing one of the most prevalent definitions of a partnership between student and faculty, that it is a:

> collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis. (pp. 41–42)

Since that time, interest and involvement in the practice has grown enormously, but as such practice currently almost always exists outside existing institutional structures, instances have been necessarily ad hoc.

A recent review (Peart et al., 2023) of over 400 articles offering primary data on SaP practice foregrounds practices that are primarily active in the UK, Australia, the USA, and Canada. The reviewers offer the caveat that literature published in languages other than English was not identified, but also that some literature indicates that there may be cultural barriers to the practice outside Western-centric institutions. An impassioned paper by Bindra et al. (2018) supports that finding and suggests that even within Western-centric institutions, affluent students with Western backgrounds are overrepresented in student partnerships and gives some guidance on improving representation. Reviews such as these necessarily rely on literature searches on practices described in a certain way, so will omit related practices that spring from different traditions, like Freire's pedagogy of liberation, in which collaboration between students and educators is central (Cortina & Winter, 2021). Even so, interest in SaP as it is described in Western scholarly literature is burgeoning in such regions as Asia (Liang & Matthews, 2021),

Saudi Arabia (Alkhannani, 2021), and India (Rajiah et al., 2022). All three of those cited publications see great promise for SaP in their contexts, noting the cultural nuances that will need to be considered for widespread adoption.

The broader literature on SaP practice still overwhelmingly consists of case studies, or reflections on experiences, with a strong focus on the processes involved (see, e.g., Ishkova et al., 2021 [flipped classroom]; Pereira et al., 2020 [curriculum reform]; and Luke & Evans, 2021 [lecture capture]). Initiatives are extremely varied, even within an institution. Coombe et al. (2018) set up 11 pilot SaP programs at the University of Queensland in 2017 in order to inform future implementation of such programs on a broader scale. Given the evaluative nature of the study, the focus was on the experience of the 29 students and 22 staff involved, rather than the nature of the projects themselves, which were proposed by individual staff members. Apart from the number of projects involved, this approach is characteristic of the case study literature—individuals propose small projects that they can manage alone that involve a handful of students. Allusion is generally made to the transformational experience for the students and staff directly involved, but the focus of the literature is very much on how to improve the experience itself rather than how to start choosing projects in anything other than an ad hoc way, or describing wider impact.

A further illustration of the juvenility of the literature is shown by the histogram in Figure 1. The histogram represents the number of publications on SaP practice in a given year, drawn from the comprehensive bibliography (over one thousand papers) of the area found on the Healey HE Consultants website (Healey & Healey, 2021).

Figure 1. Publications trend of students-as-partners research
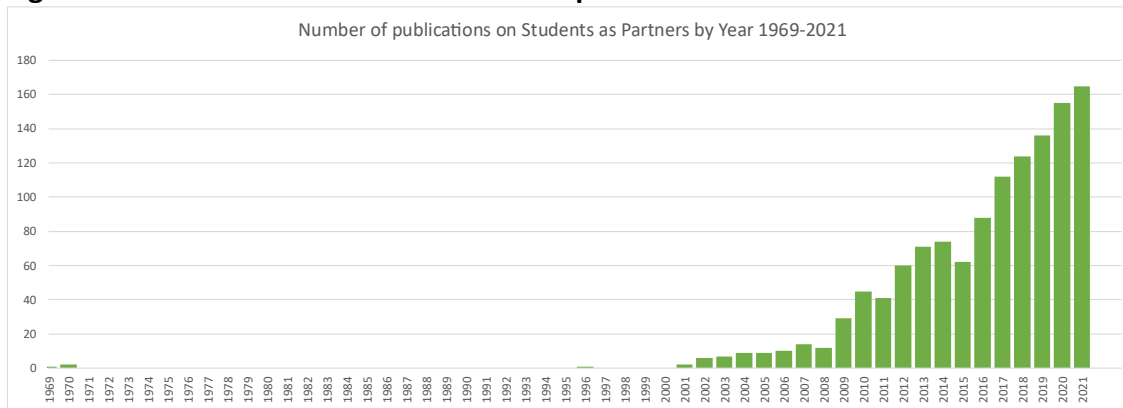
Histogram of publication years of the comprehensive Students as Partners bibliography maintained by Healey HE Consultants (https://www.healeyheconsultants.co.uk/resources).

Existing ways of describing SaP practice

A definition of the practice has been firmly established, so identifying a practice as falling into the category of students as partners should be relatively straightforward. But how have SaP practices been collectively described in the literature?

Matthews et al. (2019) use interpretive framing to begin finding commonalities in practice, arguing that these developmental processes "move us toward formulating theories of partnership praxis" (p. 290). That paper suggests that because SaP practices are so diverse and involve complex interactions, "no definite or firm language to name these experiences . . . has

emerged" (p. 288). The implication is that developing such language will be helpful in maturing our understanding and use of the practices.

Dollinger and Lodge (2020) closely examined a set of case studies in order to understand the key elements of supporting co-creation with students. They derived a model that could guide design and evaluation of co-creation activities (so more of a focus on the processes of SaP), but they also call for further exploration of the types and forms of SaP co-creation practice.

The most well-established descriptive model is the AdvanceHE Partnership Learning Communities framework (Healey et al., 2014, revised by Healey & Healey, 2019), which shall be referred to as the AdvanceHE model in this paper. This model describes four overlapping areas of focus in which students-as-partners initiatives might operate: *learning, teaching and assessment; curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy; subject-based research and inquiry*; and *scholarship of teaching and learning*. The revised model (Healey & Healey, 2019) adds an *integrated* category, with examples of use, which includes practices that fall outside the accepted definition to include institutional governance and student experience, or community building, which we will address further in the section on the development of the taxonomy.

A reflective paper on the above model (Healey et al., 2016) also considers student roles in SaP practices, listing co-creating, co-producing, co-learning, co-designing, co-developing, co-researching, and co-inquiring as potential ways that students might be involved.

The recent literature review referred to above (Peart et al., 2023) looked for the effects of engagement through partnership on student outcomes. That paper develops a system of characterisation of practices based on impact in order to compare the impact of various types of initiatives. The authors use each characterisation in turn to simply illustrate the number of papers in their review that fell into that characterisation. They also used the AdvanceHE model's (Healey & Healey, 2019) areas of focus. Characterisations were not combined or used in any way other than descriptively. The outcome of the review, like many of the case studies alluded to above, was to generate recommendations for stakeholders in developing processes, rather than to provide an overview of the landscape of students-as-partners practices. They note the subjectivity of the reported outcomes in the literature and that information such as student role and the purpose of the partnership were often difficult to locate in reported studies.

Depth of student participation as a way of characterising SaP practice was addressed in early SaP literature by Bovill and Bulley (2011). They adapted Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019) to describe increasingly involved ways in which students could participate in curriculum design. The ladder of participation has also been used by Student Voice Australasia (Student Voice Australasia, n.d.) to develop a descriptive continuum of engagement.

Healey and Healey (2018) underscore the difficulties in generalising anything about such contextualised practice as students-as-partners. They promote the use of conceptual frameworks to clarify the nature of a partnership and to support understanding and the planning process to all participants of a new partnership. They suggest that the aim, scale, and timescale of initiatives are all important aspects to consider.

There have been growing calls to engage traditionally underrepresented students in students-as-partners practice (Bindra et. al., 2018; Baxter, 2019). This can involve targeting specific groups or engaging full cohorts of students (Green, 2019). Collecting demographic descriptors of a full cohort of students involved in students-as-partners practice such as cultural

identity, gender, age, geographic location, etc., ensures that educators can be explicit about the diversity of students they are engaging with.

In summary, authors in this field have considered many ways of characterising students-as-partners practices: by areas of focus, by depth of student participation, by student roles, by a variety of scales (e.g., number of courses, number of students involved, number of disciplines, number of staff, etc.), by student demographics, and by time periods.

Moving forwards

Clearly the way forward in SaP practice cannot continue to be the proposal of ad hoc projects by university staff, or even departments, involving a small number of students. The pedagogical justifications have been made, but for SaP practice to become a part of the everyday work of a university, to take it out of the liminal space in which it often exists (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017), and to make it more inclusive, there needs to be ways of identifying where it can usefully be used, a common language for describing aspects of it, and ways of aligning it with existing strategies or incorporating it into new strategies. We need to be able to document, describe, and map the practices and outcomes with a level of consistency and reliability.

The work described in this paper traces such a sense-making exercise. Given a set of potential SaP initiatives, the author's journey into developing a method of usefully mapping and comparing them is shared in the hope of driving the next step in the field—generalisability. This paper, therefore, details both the method developed (a classification system, or taxonomy) and a case study in using the method. The process of developing the method was in itself a fruitful journey, so is also gone into in detail.

The next section will describe how the author attempted to use the characterisations described above to compare and map an existing set of students-as-partners practices in order to allow the faculty in which they work to be more strategic in planning and delivering such practices. Both the synthesis of sets of characteristics into a taxonomy, and illustration of its utility by applying it to the case study that initiated this whole process, will be described.

THE PROBLEM

The author is a member of a multidisciplinary educational innovation team located in a large faculty in which teaching and learning in large courses is transformed through co-design processes that involve not only academics and professional staff, but also students (Wilson et. al., 2021, Bryant, 2022). The impetus for the work presented in this paper was a desire to collect together all such students-as-partners initiatives that our team had been involved in over the past 3 years in order to see what work in this area aligned with a new institutional long-term guiding strategy that elevates the role of students in their education. It was immediately clear that even in our team, our initiatives in the students-as-partners area reflected the heterogeneity highlighted in the literature review above. The author was responsible for reporting on this set of practices and quickly realised that a simple list of initiatives was not a form of data presentation that could aggregate or compare practices, that could map initiatives to an institutional strategy, or could inform directions for future practice within our discipline.

The following section sets out the steps the author took to represent the set of initiatives in a more useable way, in effect combining the development of the taxonomy with a case study that demonstrates its use and utility.

Students were not involved in this undertaking, as it was the work of an individual academic finding a way to describe and report on a set of practices. Students will be consulted and invited to give feedback as part of any new initiative undertaken by users of the taxonomy at the author's faculty.

DESCRIBING OUR STUDENTS-AS-PARTNERS INITIATIVES

It was immediately clear to the author that some of the SaP initiatives on our list did not fall under the Cook-Sather et al. (2014) definition, as while definitely collaborative, they lacked reciprocity. Others, while collaborative and reciprocal, did not involve curriculum or pedagogical development. Rather, they were in areas of governance or community building (i.e., general student engagement) included in the *integrated* area of focus in the revised AdvanceHE model (Healey & Healey, 2019). As these are clearly partnership practices between students and academics and contribute to the broader educational experience of students, they needed to be included in the report that was the impetus for this work. The author proposes therefore to avoid slippage in the well-established definition while still including them in the mapping exercise. These practices will therefore be referred to as integrated students-as-partners practices, or ISaP.

Developing the taxonomy
The process described in the above paragraph narrowed the list down to 20 initiatives. The next step was to try to describe them as a set in a meaningful way, in a way that would group similar practices, point out gaps in practice, and align with institutional strategy. For clarity, in this section, **characteristics** (i.e., selected features of the practices chosen to best identify them) of students-as-partners practices will be indicated with bold font, and the *descriptors* of those characteristics will be indicated by italic font. In developing the taxonomy, it became apparent that application of any characteristics to a practice was subjective, as most of them had been developed in order to guide behaviour rather than for categorisation purposes. Therefore, some thought and contextual justification needs to apply to consistency in choices made for any practice, which in the author's view adds to the utility of the characterisation.

Characteristic: Areas of focus
The AdvanceHE model (Healey & Healey, 2019) is an excellent starting point for this kind of descriptive work. To reiterate, it describes four **areas of focus***: learning, teaching, and assessment*; *curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy*; *subject-based research and inquiry*; and *scholarship of teaching and learning*. The authors of the AdvanceHE model acknowledge some overlap between these areas.

Learning, teaching, and assessment covers active learning practices that students may engage in within a course, such as designing feedback practices, generating data for an assessment, co-teaching, co-designing assessment rubrics. It can also include such things as mentoring or peer support practices outside of a course.

Curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy is a less common form of students-as-partners practice, as it includes students in the group of stakeholders developing or redesigning courses or programs. Students have been engaged as pedagogic consultants to teachers in the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program initiated by Alison Cook-Sather (Cook-Sather et al., 2014) and in the Students as Colleagues initiative at Edinburgh Napier (Huxham et al., 2017). Part of the student role in those examples is to act as reviewers of teaching practice.

Subject-based research and inquiry is most commonly undertaken by postgraduate research students; however, it is making its way into undergraduate courses that utilise research-based pedagogy.

Scholarship of teaching and learning projects involve students trying to improve the learning experience for themselves and their peers by partnering with academics to interrogate education practices within courses or programs.

The authors of the AdvanceHE model also acknowledges that there are some initiatives that either "cover more than one of these partnership areas and sometimes include others as well, such as governance" (Healey & Healey, 2019, p. 7), which that work describes as *integrated.* Three of our initiatives fell under this description—they will be collected together under a related heading of integrated students as partners (Figure 3, below) to retain the integrity of the original definition. This left 17 initiatives, most of which fell under the *learning, teaching, and assessment* or *curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy* areas of focus. This meant that the author needed to further characterise the initiatives to effectively differentiate them.

Characteristic: Levels of student participation
Drawing from the work outlined in the Existing Ways of Describing SaP Practices section, above, the author contemplated which characteristics would foreground the aspects of partnership work that the author's team most wanted to report on. The obvious candidate was **levels of student participation**. Bovill and Bulley (2011) demonstrated the use of levels of participation in curriculum design, however their descriptors were specific to that context. The author drew, instead, from the more general Student Engagement Continuum (Student Voice Australasia, n.d.), but feels that the lowest level, "inform," does not meet the Cook-Sather et al. (2014) definition, so will omit it. This gives the following **levels of student participation** (in increasing level of involvement): *consult, involve, partner,* and *control*. The Student Voice Australasia definitions of these terms are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Levels of student participation (Student Voice Australasia, n.d.)

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	PARTNER	CONTROL
GOAL	To provide students with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and solutions.	To obtain student feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with students throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood.	To partner with students in each aspect of the initiative from identification to solution.	Students design and lead initiatives that matter to them and are in control of final decision-making.
STYLE	"Here's what's happening."	"Here are some options, what do you think?"	"Here's a problem, what ideas do you have?"	"Let's identify the issues and work together to develop a plan and implement a solution."	"You care about this issue and are leading an initative, how can we support you?"

Adapted by Student Voice Australia from © International Association for Public Participation Spectrum of Public Participation www.iap2.org

Characteristic: Student role

The author also wanted to recognise the **role** that students played in each initiative. Some of the roles that Healey et al. (2016) enumerates were drawn upon: *co-researchers, co-developers,* and *co-designers.* The *co-designers* role applied to students who were included in projects that designed an artefact, such as a curriculum document, an assessment, or a form of active learning. *Co-developers* took on a more prolonged role in bringing such artefacts into existence and modifying them in response to feedback. These roles did not quite cover the full student experience the author was trying to map, so *subject, teacher* and *creator* were added to the descriptors. The *subject* role usually accompanied a low level of student participation, as students gave their opinion, but were not actively involved in what use is made of that opinion. Practices involving students in this role should be closely monitored as they fall on the border of true partnership practice according to the definition. Feedback on how students' opinion has been made use of with an option of further input allows some reciprocity to a practice at this level. Students may sometimes assume the role of *teacher* within a course for a variety of reasons, but this is usually not a long-lived role. They may also assume this role during peer support sessions. Students may also act as a *creator* when given control of part of a project.

Bringing the characteristics together

The descriptors each initiative was characterised by are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptors of SaP initiative characteristics (integrated SaP areas of focus indicated by italics and different colour)

Area of focus	Student Participation Level (decreasing from Control to Consult)	Student Role
Learning, teaching & assessment	Control	Co-researcher
Curriculum design & pedagogic consultancy	Partner	Co-developer
Subject-based research	Involve	Co-designer
Scholarship of teaching and learning	Consult	Creator
Community building		Teacher
Governance		Subject

Note that the characteristics of **area of focus** and **student role** are scalar values; they have simple descriptors. The **student participation level**, on the other hand, does represent a descending level of involvement and is therefore fundamental to mapping the agency of students in partnership initiatives, whatever other characteristics one might choose to use.

Using the taxonomy

There are other characteristics one could add to this taxonomy, such as **reach**, **timescale, student cohort, student demographic, number of students involved** and so on, as described in the Existing Ways of Describing SaP Practices section, above. However, the author decided that these three characteristics were sufficient to describe the initiatives we were examining so that current practice could be interrogated. Using just **area of focus** and **student participation level** did provide enough differentiation to start drawing useful conclusions, but the author found that also using **student role** helped to tease out nuances of the student experience. An example of this is the observation that when the **student role** was *subject*, the **student participation level** was always *consult* (see Figure 3), suggesting that more effort needs to go into encouraging active student input where they act as the subjects of an initiative. Adding more characteristics had the effect of separating most of the initiatives into groups of one or two, reducing the group to a list again, so for this particular set of initiatives, three characteristics was the sweet spot. The author had also initially included two other characteristics: **cohort** (*undergraduate, postgraduate, alumni, all*) and **reach** (*micro, meso, and macro*), but these did not end up being useful in the mapping exercise, as "cohort" was too broadly characterised, and "reach" was very difficult to define for any particular initiative. The author notes that the choice of characteristics used also had a pragmatic aspect, in that they could only work with available information. Information such as student demographics had not been collected, for instance.

The next step was to apply these characteristics and descriptors to the list of initiatives that the team had identified. This was a somewhat subjective process; as Healey notes (2019), the **areas of focus** have some overlap, and this is also true for other characteristics.

The exercise up to this point—deciding on characteristics and descriptors and applying them to a set of initiatives—was in and of itself useful. It brought focus to what was important and drew attention to variation between practices. Even deciding which characteristics not to

use (for example, because there was not enough information on that characteristic) was useful, as it highlighted the kinds of information that had been gathered about the practices and exposed gaps. Even if readers do not use this particular taxonomy, following the steps taken up to this point to develop one's own can help to organise any existing set of SaP initiatives. It can also inform what kinds of information should be regularly collected in the planning stages. For instance, collecting and using student demographic descriptors (Green, 2019) would immediately reveal gaps in student representation in SaP initiatives.

Visualisation

The set of initiatives with allocated characteristics and descriptors was initially organised into a table. Without careful sorting or conditional formatting, the table layout still did not immediately reveal patterns or gaps. Our team is in the fortunate position of having access to a graphic designer, so the author worked with him to better visually represent the data. He grouped the initiatives under the **area of focus** descriptors. He then applied colours to the descriptors of **student participation level**. He assigned icons to the descriptors of **student role**. This was the breakthrough that the author had been looking for; it immediately revealed our strongest and weakest partnership practices and mapped out student participation.

Figure 3 is a simplified, deidentified version of the initial infographic, and was produced in Microsoft PowerPoint. Increasing levels of **student participation** are in this infographic identified by increasing font size. **Student role** is differentiated by colour/shade. The descriptions of the initiatives themselves (in grey) are of no additional value in the diagram, as they were used by the author to identify the practices for the purpose of the mapping and are only left in the diagram for illustrative purposes.

Figure 3. Students-as-partners initiatives mapped using the characteristics and descriptors of the taxonomy
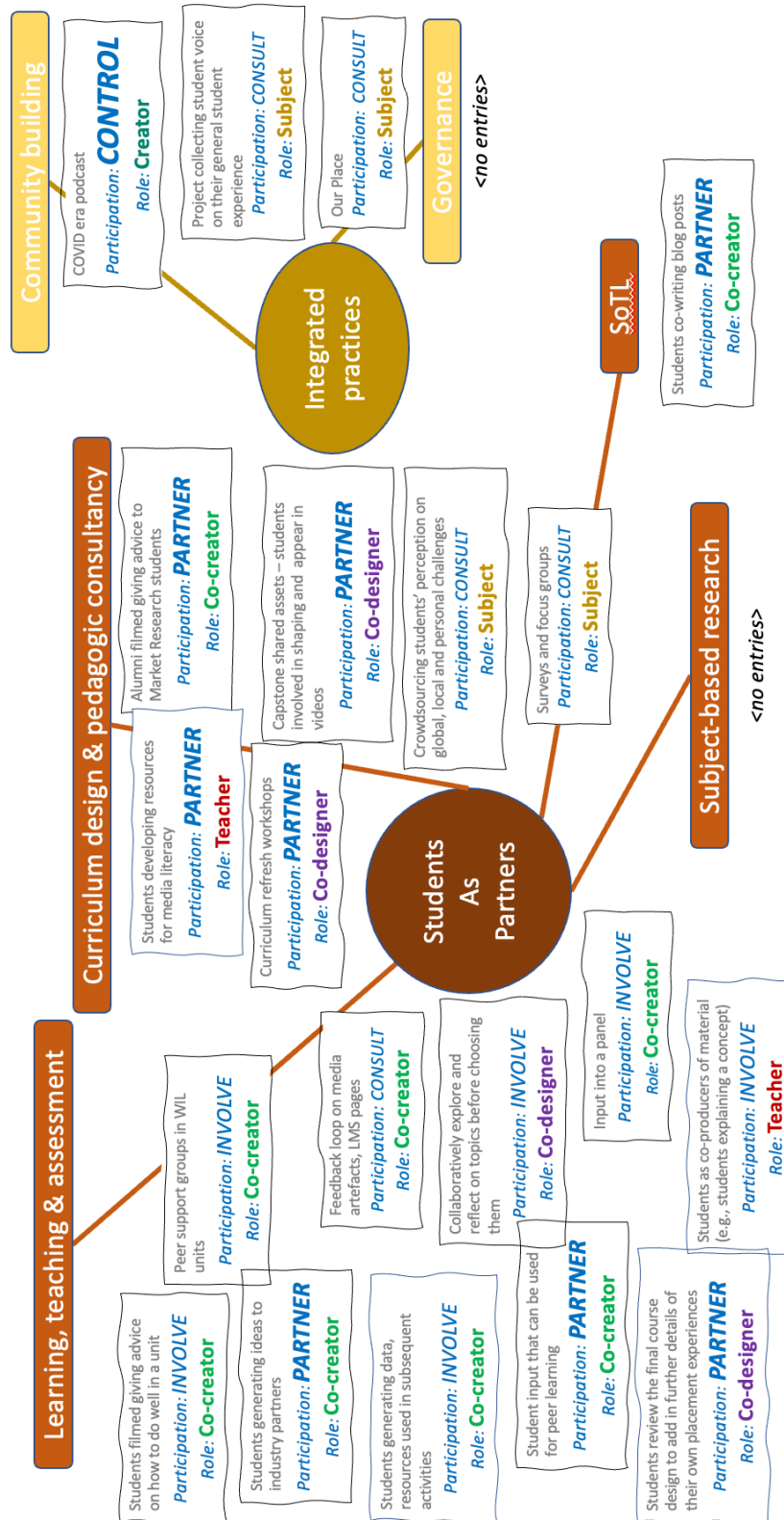
RESULTS

Visualisation turned out to be as important as the descriptors in using the taxonomy for seeing patterns and reporting on strategic alignment. In fact, it was not until the author saw the initial visualisation prepared by the graphic designer that the potential of a taxonomy such as this became apparent.

Our team had clearly been most successful in pursuing SaP initiatives with the descriptor of *learning, teaching, and assessment.* Working with students to augment their experiences while in the learning environment is a fruitful avenue through which to pursue SaP practices. We are now working on how we can incorporate some of the in-class initiatives into the rhythm of the semester so that they become standard practice.

We thought we had been successful in using integrated students-as-partners practices in *community building* amongst students, but this visualisation shows us that while we sought out and listened to the student voice, we have more work to do in giving them agency over what happens next. We shall therefore build in options for students to be more heavily engaged in our next round of community building projects, as well as inviting them to make their own proposals.

Curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy is one of the more challenging forms of SaP practice, perhaps the least developed according to Healey & Healey (2019). It occurs outside the semester rhythm. It is difficult to identify, never mind recruit, a representative range of students to be involved (Cook-Sather et al., 2021). It requires experienced educators to mentor students through the process so that they can contribute meaningfully despite not having a pedagogical background, to value their input, to ensure their input is acted upon, and to involve them in the feedback cycle. Students must be recompensed for their contribution in some form—not a simple proposition given the arcane state of many universities' human resources systems. Care must be taken in the compensation process to not change the student role to that of institution employee, but to recognise and take seriously the contribution of their time and expertise. However, this is a form of practice that our team is very keen to support and were pleased to see that more of our initiatives than not involved students at the *partner* level of involvement. We have begun the process of identifying the processes that will need to be put in place to meaningfully involve students in the design of their curriculum more regularly.

As a faculty-wide co-design team we do not get involved in *subject-based research*, but to encourage this practice in our colleagues we will develop a set of resources based on our own experiences and those detailed in the literature. These will also be useful in including students in our *scholarship of teaching and learning projects*, which this map shows to be an area of weakness.

Finally, we are putting together a community of practice within the faculty. This will serve not only to share experiences, support good practice, and share resources, but it will also deliver a much larger set of initiatives upon which the taxonomy may be applied. Faculty-wide patterns of practice can then be mapped, and strategies developed, accordingly.

APPLICATIONS

The goals for SaP practice may be different from institution to institution. However, as the characteristics themselves have been derived from existing frameworks, and the taxonomy has

been designed to allow comparison of practices, amongst other things, these descriptors should be generally applicable. Additionally, as illustrated in the section on developing the taxonomy, deliberating on the characteristics and descriptors one will use to map one's own practices can be a useful exercise in itself, so consider starting there. A taxonomy will be most useful in designing and reporting on SaP practices but also supports the implementation phase as described below.

Design
When planning a students-as-partners initiative, taxonomy characteristics can be used to align the initiative against existing strategy and to develop measurable objectives. For example, the author's institution has a 10-year strategic plan which includes a strategy of "make partnership key to our education offerings" (University of Sydney, n.d., p.12). This might be addressed by designing an initiative with the **area of focus** *curriculum design & pedagogic consultancy,* **student level of participation** of *partner* and **student role** of *co-designer.* Explicitly combining these characteristics means that from the outset not only is the objective clear, but also that processes must be put in place to ensure students can act as a partner in every stage of the initiative—their input must be sought, supported, and acted upon—and that they are involved in all design activities. Including a **demographic** characteristic would draw focus to equity considerations and ensure that appropriate data collection was put into place from the outset. Not only this, but the characteristics can be used to search the literature for similar initiatives (with similarity confirmed by applying the taxonomy to the identified initiative in the literature) that in this early stage of practice development will contain valuable advice on how to design the initiative for success for both students and staff.

Implementation
In the implementation stage, the **student level of participation** becomes the characteristic that is most important, followed by the **student role**. The Healey model (Healey et al., 2014) identifies five issues that need to be explicitly considered when engaging students as partners in any of the four areas of focus in their model. Specifically addressing these issues in the implementation phase of students-as-partners initiatives has been shown to contribute to the success of such initiatives, (see, e.g., Healey et al.,2016; see also Ahmad et al., 2017).

Evaluation and reporting
Students-as-partners initiatives often continue to be projects in the liminal space between business-as-usual practices (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017); they are not usually yet integrated into academic processes. Even when situated in-class they can require substantial course re-design. They therefore usually follow a project structure that includes a discrete evaluation phase; however, this often focuses on lessons learned rather than impact (see, e.g., Coombe et al., 2018; Peart et al., 2023). As an initiative designed utilising the taxonomy will already have been aligned against strategic objectives, reporting should be simplified and be instead able to focus on wider impact and achievement of project objectives.

CONCLUSION

Being able to systematically characterise students-as-partners initiatives is an important development in corralling the multifarious examples of practice in the sector. In the author's experience of developing and applying the taxonomy as described in this paper, both the choosing of characteristics and the visualisation worked together to provide a clear picture of a complex set of practices. The characteristics that have been chosen to represent students-as-partners practices in the taxonomy presented in this paper are drawn from well-established principles, making them likely to be generalisable to the practices of other teams. The set of characteristics presented allows for flexibility in the classification process. Visualisation allows this kind of complex information to be presented in a way that facilitates recognition of patterns, increasing the utility of the taxonomy. Lastly, it forms a foundation for consistent documentation of practices allowing comparable descriptions using common language to be generated. These characteristics are already being used at the author's institution, under the author's guidance, in writing education grant proposals that incorporate students-as-partners practices.

Agreed upon descriptors such as those used in this taxonomy are also necessary to the generation of grounded theory, the next step in the maturity of the field. Grounded theory can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the practice as a whole, leveraging the collection of individual experiences and lessons learned so that new practitioners do not have to start from scratch.

Further work could address consistency in assigning characteristics, but the bigger challenge is in dealing with the results of mapping one's practice in this way. A practice map organised with this taxonomy can illustrate the gulf between a university's students-as-partners framework and practice on the ground. The real challenge then is to develop institution-wide processes, strategies, and compensation schemes that will allow students-as-partners practices to integrate meaningfully and equitably into all aspects of higher educational development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

Alison Casey *is an educational development lecturer who supports academics in the School of Business to create transformational student learning experiences through co-design practices. Her research interests include authentic assessment, academic integrity, student engagement, and students-as-partners practices.*

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