RESEARCH ARTICLE

Building pedagogical partnerships: Exploring an innovative work-integrated learning initiative

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ABSTRACT

Engaging students as pedagogical partners in teaching and learning in higher education is becoming increasingly prevalent. However, developing and sustaining such partnerships can be challenging. The present study highlights the potential of utilizing work-integrated learning (WIL) students as partners. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 university instructors to explore how access to an online learning assistant (OLA) program helped them navigate remote instruction challenges. The OLA program was a novel WIL initiative providing co-operative (co-op) education students with full-time, paid work to assist instructors transitioning to remote learning. Unexpectedly, our findings demonstrate that pedagogical partnerships emerged in the context of this WIL program, leading to teaching and learning benefits. Online learning assistants were able to assist instructors with many of the difficulties they faced, although some program challenges also emerged. Our findings suggest that full-time, paid co-op student positions offer a unique program structure that make them ideal for the development and ongoing success of pedagogical partnerships.

KEYWORDS

work-integrated learning, co-operative education, pedagogical partnership, students as partners

In the face of unprecedented global challenges, the higher education landscape is evolving. One area of growth is the students as partners (SaP) movement (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2022). This movement reconceptualizes the standard hierarchical relationship between students and educators, having them work as collaborative partners in the teaching and learning process. SaP has shown great promise and has been linked to beneficial outcomes for students and faculty, as well as improvements in the quality of teaching and learning (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). However, establishing and sustaining successful partnerships can be challenging (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, 2019). Engaging students and faculty in effective partnerships is one of the most important issues currently facing higher education (Healey et al., 2014). Given this, research must continue to explore different avenues for establishing and sustaining successful partnerships. In

the present study, we sought to explore instructor perspectives on the impact of an innovative work-integrated learning (WIL) co-operative education (co-op) program. Specifically, we were interested in examining how such a program might help instructors with the challenges they encountered in the transition to remote teaching. Unexpectedly, we found the emergence of pedagogical partnerships between the instructors and students involved in the program. We argue that paid co-op programs offer a unique structure that is ideal for the development of pedagogical partnerships.

Pedagogical partnerships
Pedagogical partnerships, also known as student-faculty partnerships or SaP, have been defined as "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" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6–7). Pedagogical partnerships involve mutual trust and respect, are reciprocal in nature, and are characterized by shared responsibility (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2018).

Pedagogical partnerships have a wide range of positive outcomes for both students and faculty (Bovill et al., 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2019; Könings et al., 2021; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). However, in addition to the many benefits of partnerships, several significant challenges have been identified in the literature (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, 2019; Könings et al., 2021). From a logistical standpoint, available resources, such as time and funding, can serve as barriers to the establishment of pedagogical partnerships. Finding the time to commit to partnerships is difficult for faculty who are already juggling high workloads (Bovill et al., 2011, 2016; Cook-Sather et al., 2019; Dollinger & Lodge, 2020). Time also becomes a challenge when trying to coordinate multiple schedules. Finding suitable times for faculty and students to meet is the most difficult logistical challenge facing pedagogical partnerships (Cook-Sather et al., 2019). Tight time constraints are also likely to serve as a challenge to partnership creation (Bovill, 2017; Bovill et al., 2009; Könings et al., 2021; Marquis et al., 2017). Developing the trust, reciprocity, and responsibility that characterize pedagogical partnerships is not something that can be accomplished quickly. It takes time for students to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and for faculty to establish an open and welcoming space for them to do so.

The availability of funding can also serve as a challenge to the establishment of pedagogical partnerships (Curtis & Anderson, 2021; Könings et al., 2021; Marquis et al., 2017). While students are sometimes compensated for their partnership contributions through course credit, scholarships, or a campus job with hourly pay (Cook-Sather et al., 2019), many pedagogical partnerships are unpaid (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). This raises issues of accessibility and equity (De Bie et al., 2022; Dwyer, 2018; Marquis et al., 2018, 2022). Faculty are paid for their contributions to the partnership; thus, to ensure an equal partnership, student contributions should also be paid (Zaff et al., 2021). Given the important benefits of pedagogical partnerships to the quality of teaching and learning, overcoming these challenges is vital. We suggest WIL as a model for pedagogical partnerships that would address many of these barriers.

Work-integrated learning as a promising context for pedagogical partnership development

WIL is a curricular-based educational approach that integrates academic studies with authentic work experiences. WIL involves the partnership of an educational institution, a student, and an employer (Zegwaard et al., 2023). To increase employability, many governments are calling for the creation of additional WIL opportunities and are providing funding to improve access to WIL in higher education (Government of Canada, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2019). Post-secondary institutions have also increased their investments in and focus on WIL as a means of skills development (Ng, 2021). This increased focus on WIL has the potential to create future funding opportunities for pedagogical partnership development.

Co-op is one type of WIL that allows students to develop experience in a workplace setting that is related to their program of study. The University of Waterloo offers the largest co-op program of its kind in the world, with over 26,000 students taking part. Over the course of their degree, students complete a series of work terms that alternate with terms of academic study (Fannon, 2023). Work terms are full-time, paid employment opportunities of 4 months duration. This full-time, paid structure would help to address many of the challenges linked to the establishment of pedagogical partnerships. Under these circumstances, students would have fewer competing priorities, scheduling issues would ease, and students would be able to devote the time necessary for trusting partnerships to develop and flourish.

In addition to the potential funding and time benefits, WIL offers a unique context for establishing partnerships because the guiding principles of pedagogical partnerships (i.e., respect, reciprocity, and responsibility [Cook-Sather et al., 2014]) are also established during WIL experiences. Respect and trust are key factors in the development of sustainable WIL relationships (Fleming et al., 2018). Students bring new perspectives into the workplace, and workplace supervisors value those contributions (Fleming & Pretti, 2019), which builds trust between the student and supervisor (Kemp et al., 2021). Similarly, the principle of reciprocity is also an important component of WIL (Fleming et al., 2018; Fleming & Haigh, 2017; Fleming & Hickey, 2013; Martin et al., 2019; Sachs et al., 2016; Waters et al., 2018). As with pedagogical partnerships, everyone involved benefits from the WIL experience (Fleming & Haigh, 2017; Martin et al., 2019). Finally, WIL relationships also involve shared responsibility, with a shared culture of responsibility leading to beneficial outcomes for both students and employers (Jackson et al., 2022).

WIL presents itself as a useful avenue for establishing pedagogical partnerships. Early research in this area supports the idea that student partnerships can be helpful in curriculum design and content creation for WIL programs (Bilous et al., 2018; Monico & Kupatadze, 2020; Mukuria, 2022; O'Connor et al., 2023; Rowland, 2020; Ruskin et al., 2018; Ruskin & Bilous, 2020; Zaff et al., 2021). However, these opportunities often involve student volunteers who are unpaid (Rowland, 2020; Zaff et al., 2021) or for whom their partnership contributions are a component of the WIL course they are completing (Monico & Kupatadze, 2020; Mukuria, 2022). There is less research exploring the mobilization of WIL students for partnership opportunities outside of the courses they are completing, as part of their work terms. Such research is needed given the potential of this group of students to contribute to teaching and learning in higher education more widely. This research project describes the mobilization of over 1,000 co-op students completing full-time, paid work terms assisting instructors in the transition to remote teaching. We explore the emergence of pedagogical partnerships in the context of this innovative WIL

program and provide recommendations for future initiatives to capitalize on the talent that WIL students have to offer.

The online learning assistant (OLA) program
On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was classified as a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). In response, higher education institutions around the world rapidly transitioned to remote instruction. Instructors were given the daunting task of moving their course materials and teaching online, and they found themselves facing a range of unprecedented challenges (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Colclasure et al., 2021; McDaniel et al., 2020). Pedagogical challenges were paramount, with teaching activities and assessments needing to be redesigned to work in the remote format (Colclasure et al., 2021; McDaniel et al., 2020). As instructors were grappling with these novel challenges, WIL students were facing challenges of their own. At the University of Waterloo, 20% of co-op students had their work terms cut short, and employment rates for subsequent work terms dropped by over 25% (Kay et al., 2020). This situation generated uncertainty amongst students who found themselves unable to find work and concerned about their future graduation prospects.

In response, the University of Waterloo developed the Online Learning Assistant (OLA) program. The program rapidly hired and trained co-op students to assist course instructors with the challenges they were facing in the transition to online teaching (Drewery et al., 2022; Kay et al., 2020). The OLA program provided co-op students with much needed employment and helped instructors in a time of great challenge. The OLA program launched in spring 2020, with 319 co-op students hired to assist instructors with their courses. The program continued for the next 2 years, employing over 1,000 WIL students before it concluded in spring 2022.

This research project set out to explore the impact of the OLA program by exploring instructor perspectives and experiences and was guided by the following research question: how did the OLA program help instructors navigate the remote instruction challenges they faced? While the OLA program was not originally conceptualized using a SaP approach, our results demonstrate the emergence of pedagogical partnerships in the context of this innovative WIL initiative.

METHODS

Participants
Eighteen course instructors at the University of Waterloo who had supervised an OLA participated in interviews conducted between December 2021 and January 2022. To meet eligibility criteria, participants had to have previous in-person teaching experience and no more than one semester of online teaching experience before the transition to remote instruction.

Data collection
Semi-structured interviews were completed using video conferencing technology (WebEx). Interviews were an average of 40 minutes and were transcribed using the closed captioning function provided by the video conferencing software. A series of open-ended questions allowed for a detailed discussion of instructor experiences with the OLA program. Questions addressed

the remote instruction challenges instructors faced, their experiences working with OLAs during the program, and the impact that the program had on their perspective of teaching and learning.

Data analysis
Data analysis focused on interview transcripts and was guided by a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Sebastian, 2019). The goal was to develop an understanding of how the transition to remote instruction and access to the OLA program were perceived by instructors. Initial line-by-line coding was used as the first step in the data analysis (Saldana, 2013). This involved the assignment of a descriptive label to each piece of text, generating hundreds of codes. Focused coding was then used to examine patterns in the data, leading to the categorization of initial codes into themes and subthemes (Saldana, 2013). Four researchers participated in the qualitative analysis, with at least two researchers independently coding each transcript. The research team concluded their analysis when saturation was reached and no new themes emerged from the coded interviews.

RESULTS

The research team identified four themes in the interview transcripts. The first theme was that collaborative, pedagogical partnerships developed in the context of the OLA program. The second theme was that the OLAs helped instructors. The third theme was that particular elements of this WIL program contributed to its success, and the final theme was that instructors encountered a number of challenges with the OLA program. Within these themes, subthemes were identified and will be explored.

Development of pedagogical partnerships
The first theme identified from the instructor interviews was that the OLA program led to the development of pedagogical partnerships for many instructors involved. This theme was comprised of two main subthemes: embracing the student perspective and the development of a reciprocity mindset for many instructors.

Embracing the student perspective
One element of partnerships that emerged was mutual trust and respect, with instructors embracing and valuing the perspectives of the online learning assistants they were working with. Most of the instructors interviewed (83%) discussed how OLAs provided a unique student perspective on teaching and learning. OLAs were able to do so because, as one instructor (P18) mentioned, they "have lived experience" engaging with tertiary courses both in-person and remotely, allowing them to offer insights and ideas that would otherwise not be available to instructors. Another instructor (P14) explained that "since they were students themselves, they definitely gave a perspective that we don't always have as instructors when we're working on our own." The OLAs provided instructors with input on course design, content, delivery, and curriculum. They worked collaboratively with instructors to create components of the course, and they provided input on pedagogical approaches, with one instructor (P7) noting, "the role was more of like a professor role where they were making content with me."

Acknowledging and utilizing that student perspective demonstrates that instructors respected the ideas that OLAs put forth and appreciated their insights on the teaching and learning process:

> That student perspective is so valuable, and often we don't take the time or have the time, to really talk to our classes. But, to have that extra person edit, look at, have access to, bounce ideas off of, or even create something that the students could connect directly with. . . . I find that really valuable. (P13)

The ideas put forth by the OLAs often led to new ways of thinking and new approaches to course design and delivery. One instructor (P8) described the significant OLA contributions, noting that "a lot of innovation was brought by students [OLAs]. . . . sometimes, it was like, 'oh, well we can't do X or Y for whatever reason,' and students [the OLAs] would sometimes challenge me like, 'no, I think we can figure it out.'"

Taking on and trusting the student perspective led to beneficial outcomes for teaching and learning, influencing the content of the courses and the decisions instructors were making. One instructor (P2) commented that they would have no hesitation in hiring an OLA for future terms "because I think it makes the students' experience better." Another instructor provided an example of the important impact their partnership had on their teaching materials:

> This semester I started having students back in the lab for my engineering labs, and one of them just very candidly noted like 'oh, I don't know who designed those interactive lessons, but I think they're fantastic' and I provided that feedback to my former OLAs who helped me build that because I think it's kind of proof that our ideas were valuable and helped students. (P8)

Reciprocal mindset

Half of the instructors demonstrated what we are referring to as a reciprocity mindset. These instructors expressed the sentiment that given that they were benefiting from the contributions of the OLA, they had a desire for students to also gain from the OLA experience. One instructor (P3) explained, "the one thing I was sort of concerned about, was that it was a meaningful term for the student [OLA], that they felt like they were gaining some experience."

Instructors hoped that students would benefit from the experience, making the program mutually beneficial. OLAs provided instructors with support and offered them a unique perspective on their work, and the instructors developed and learned from the insights that the OLAs provided. At the same time, instructors with a reciprocity mindset invested in their students. They provided tasks and learning opportunities to make the experience meaningful and valuable to the OLA. One instructor (P15) described this experience: "I sort of started creating for them, those little, tiny learning opportunities where they can get together, work on something as a team, and also feel that there's something tangible that they can put on their resume." These instructors realized that the investment in WIL students is well worth it, with one instructor (P5) noting that "when you provide that investment in the co-op students, it really does increase the caliber of the products that are produced at the end of the experience."

The program involved a sharing of perspectives. Instructors benefited from having access to the student perspective, and they felt that the OLAs were also benefiting as they were given new insights into the teaching and learning process:

> What I know from them, because I did speak to a few of them, and they all said the same thing. They said, 'I had no idea how much work . . . goes into developing courses. I now realize that this is like, you know, this is a lot of work', which I thought was kind of, well, yeah. Also, like a good position for them to be able to see things on the other side. (P15)

Many instructors brought OLAs onto the other side of the teaching and learning process. Some instructors began to view the OLAs differently, with one instructor (P18) noting that the OLAs "are now sitting on the same side of the table." This suggests a shift in the power dynamics and a move away from formalized traditional hierarchies that often exist between instructors and students.

OLAs helped with remote instruction challenges

Instructors faced a range of unprecedented challenges when teaching during the pandemic and the OLAs were essential in helping instructors mitigate many of those challenges. These challenges largely fell into four sub-themes.

Course management and design

OLAs helped to mitigate many challenges around course design and delivery by supporting instructors with course preparation and the conversion of content to an online format. They recreated elements of in-person learning for an online environment by creating new materials, helping set up assessments, and ensuring that course materials met accessibility needs. One instructor (P9) noted, "I think that ultimately, I got good suggestions about helping to make sure that the material is more clear and that it was structured more clearly and more accessibly." Many instructors noted that the efforts of the OLAs made course design and delivery much more manageable for them; one (P6) mentioned "I don't know how I would have done online teaching without them."

Technology

Instructors faced a range of technology issues, sometimes lacking technical competence, and many were uncertain of available technology options and which were optimal. OLAs were critical in providing technical support to instructors and helping them troubleshoot problems that they faced in delivering their courses online. Instructors noted that OLAs possessed the technical competence that instructors may lack. One instructor (P6) noted that given their age, the OLAs were more likely to think electronically, "they were good at . . . all the electronic administration, which saves a huge amount of time." OLAs assisted both students and instructors in this capacity. They supported students enrolled in the courses by providing technology support and they assisted instructors by researching the technology options that were available to them.

Student engagement

Instructors noted decreased student engagement and motivation and declining attendance throughout the remote terms along with a lack of connection with the students. OLAs played an important role in mitigating these challenges by communicating directly with students and answering their questions and concerns. One instructor (P13) noted that the OLAs "really connected with the students." Another (P1) described how the OLAs were vital in developing student engagement activities which led to the emergence of "a sense of community that they [the OLAs] were helping to create."

Increases in workload

A final challenge that instructors reported was around increased workload. Instructors indicated that teaching their courses online took twice as much time as when they were teaching them in person. The frequency of student emails also increased dramatically. OLAs stepped in to address this challenge in a range of ways. They offered support and took on tasks, with one instructor (P6) noting that having the OLAs' assistance "saved me a lot of time." Ultimately, that saved time allowed instructors to better focus on instruction. One instructor (P17) described how overwhelming the situation was and how OLAs helped, noting that it was "really tough for instructors. It was just the workload and the mental capacity of just everything that had to happen. It was so much and so, just to be able to offload tasks and things, and they [OLAs] did great."

The structure of the OLA program contributed to its success

The structure of the OLA program, including the fact that these were paid, full-time positions with relatively low administrative burden for the instructors, contributed to the establishment of partnerships and the success of the program.

Full-time, paid employees

Several instructors highlighted that the full-time nature of the position contributed to the impacts that the OLAs were able to have, with one instructor (P18) noting "the TAs [teaching assistants], their hours are quite limited. They couldn't have pulled off what they [the OLAs] did." Having that extra time to commit to assisting with teaching and learning activities is likely to enhance the outputs of the partnerships that developed. Another benefit of the full-time nature of the work is that it provided more time for stronger relationships to be established: "the thing about a co-op student is that they're working for you every day, not just, you know, 10 hours a week on average, right, so you get to know them well" (P1).

Some instructors viewed the co-op students as colleagues rather than students. These instructors saw the OLAs as staff members with the requisite trust and collegiality that such a designation affords. Instructors spoke of the professionalism displayed by the OLAs, with one instructor (P1) noting the OLAs "are taking their jobs seriously." In many ways, due to the structure of the program, and their position as staff, OLAs were in an ideal position to provide the student perspective, with one instructor (P18) indicating that OLAs "don't have any strings attached or grades attached, so they will tell you, you know, their own unbiased feedback on those things you want to do." Because OLAs are not enrolled in the courses, they can contribute their thoughts more openly and honestly. Given their designation as colleagues, a certain level of trust was

established with the co-op students, with one instructor (P4) stating, "I could sort of have it both ways. I could get the student perspective on stuff but through the mechanisms of a confidential conversation with a staff person . . . I can't do that when somebody's an undergrad."

One instructor shared a unique perspective, feeling that the paid, full-time nature of the co-op program made them feel better about engaging the students as partners in an equitable manner. This instructor (P8) "always saw students as potential partners in course development," but given the high workload of their students, they did not feel that it was fair to ask them for course contributions. However, with the OLAs, the instructor (P8) noted that

> we are paying them to do some work. . . . it feels a lot more appropriate in that case because they, they're spending, you know, full time hours on my particular courses. . . . so, I'm better able to engage with students as partners, learning this way.

The partnerships that emerged felt more equitable because the co-op students were employed in full-time, paid work.

Administrative burden kept low
Another element of the OLA program that instructors found useful was the fact that the program was centrally administered. A group hiring approach was used, with large groups of students being hired and trained centrally before being deployed to instructors. Instructors found this helpful. One instructor (P11) mentioned previous experiences in which they had to take a role in the hiring process as having been somewhat onerous, but with the OLA program, "bureaucracy surrounding it is pretty low and that's good." Several instructors mentioned the training that OLAs received before beginning their role, with the central administration of this training being helpful and relieving some burden from instructors, with one instructor (P1) noting, "it helped when they were in charge of the onboarding."

Challenges with the OLA program
While the OLA program had beneficial effects for instructors including positive impacts on teaching and learning, it was not without its challenges. One challenge that stood out was around role clarity and boundaries, as one instructor (P16) explained: "I would say the biggest challenge would be knowing what I can and cannot ask the OLAs to do." There was confusion and uncertainty about what tasks OLAs should do and which tasks were best reserved for teaching assistants. A side effect of this is that OLAs may not have been used to their full potential. For many instructors, figuring out how to best use the OLA took time. One participant (P11) noted, "I would say the first month was a bit of a waiting game, or at least me trying to decide how best to use that student [the OLA]." These role clarity issues may have limited co-op student contributions to partnerships.

Although many instructors indicated that OLAs assisted with workload issues, others explained that participation in the program also added to their workload. Coordinating tasks for the OLAs and assisting them with issues they encountered took more time than the instructors realized, and many felt that participating in the program added to their already hectic schedule. One instructor (P3) described this challenge: "it's great to have her [the OLA] doing all of these tasks, and that really helps me throughout the term. But, it's also a big time commitment on my

end." While the full-time nature of the role likely helped with the establishment of partnerships, some instructors also reported that it could be onerous, with one instructor (P1) noting that "it's quite a lot of work actually, of a supervisor, to come up with daily tasks for OLAs." Many indicated that it was worth the extra workload, but this challenge is important to acknowledge.

DISCUSSION

Our results demonstrate that pedagogical partnerships between instructors and students can emerge in the context of a novel WIL program, leading to beneficial outcomes for teaching and learning. Full-time, paid co-op work terms offer a unique and ideal structure for encouraging the development of such partnerships in higher education.

The three key principles of pedagogical partnerships—respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Cook-Sather et al., 2014)—emerged in the context of this novel WIL program. Instructors trusted and respected the OLAs, embracing their perspective and taking them seriously. Embracing that outside perspective allowed instructors to gain unique insights that they used in their pedagogy, a common theme in pedagogical partnerships (Cook-Sather, 2014; Matthews et al., 2018). Many instructors indicated the existence of a reciprocal element to their relationship with the OLAs. These instructors demonstrated a reciprocity mindset, showing concern and putting forth effort to ensure that their relationship with the OLA was mutually beneficial. This kind of reciprocity is an important component of both WIL (Fleming et al., 2018; Fleming & Haigh, 2017; Fleming & Hickey, 2013; Martin et al., 2019; Sachs et al., 2016; Waters et al., 2018) and SaP relationships (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

The OLA program led to positive outcomes for instructors and teaching and learning. The OLAs were able to help instructors with many of the challenges they faced in the transition to remote instruction. They made significant contributions to course management, design, and delivery. They assisted instructors with technology challenges and helped to encourage student engagement, ultimately saving instructors time. Insights from the OLAs influenced many of the teaching and learning decisions that instructors were making. Both engagement and enhancement, two of the common outcomes of pedagogical partnerships (Cook-Sather et al., 2014), were demonstrated in these WIL relationships.

Several features of this WIL program set it apart and likely contributed to the successful outcomes of the program. Unlike many partnership programs, the OLA program involved full-time, paid work for students (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The full-time nature of this position helped to address many of the time related challenges linked to partnership development (Bovill, 2017; Bovill et al., 2009; Cook-Sather et al., 2019; Curran, 2017; Könings et al., 2021; Marquis et al., 2017). No scheduling issues were reported, and OLAs were not required to juggle their partnership responsibilities with academic commitments, allowing them to focus solely on their OLA roles during work hours. Having to balance the partnership role with other commitments often deters students from getting involved in pedagogical partnerships (Marquis et al., 2018; Seale et al., 2015), so using a full-time structure can create a more inclusive opportunity. Sufficient time is also important for relationships to develop (Chenery-Morris, 2015), for trust to build (Gros & López, 2016), and for students to feel comfortable sharing their ideas about pedagogy (Bovill et al., 2009). The full-time nature of these opportunities provided that necessary time.

Our findings point to the emergence of partnerships outside of courses that the students were enrolled in, which is common in pedagogical partnerships, but certainly not universal (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Our results suggest that this approach may be optimal for partnership development. While all supervisor/student relationships have power dynamics (Dobbins & Fell, 2020), engaging in partnerships with students outside of the class may help to mitigate some of the power differential. In the present study, due to their role as paid staff members not enrolled in the classes they were assisting in, OLAs were able to share unbiased opinions without repercussions, providing instructors with an uncensored student perspective. Instructors were also able to seek feedback on confidential information in the trusting relationship that had been established with the OLAs. It is likely that the unique elements of this WIL program contributed to the development of these successful relationships. Similar partnerships with teaching assistants or research assistants who have a different pay structure, fewer hours, or other investments in the course would likely elicit different power dynamics. Such dynamics are important as they can influence the quality and success of the pedagogical partnership (Felten et al., 2013).

OLAs were also paid, making the partnerships that emerged feel more equitable. Paying student partners places them on a more even footing with paid faculty (Zaff et al., 2021), and it makes partnership programs more accessible as unpaid partnerships prioritize those with financial stability (Bindra et al., 2018; Dwyer, 2018). While paying partners may be desirable, funding challenges are common in pedagogical partnerships (Curtis & Anderson, 2021; Könings et al., 2021; Marquis et al., 2017) and we hope that WIL may be an avenue for addressing such challenges.

We suggest that WIL programs offer a rich resource of students ready to learn and take on full-time roles as partners. With increased government and institutional investments in WIL (Ng, 2021), we hope that future funding opportunities will target WIL as an avenue for pedagogical partnership development. The growth of WIL and pedagogical partnerships are two key changes that have emerged in the higher education landscape over the last decade (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2022). Combining these higher education initiatives by using WIL students as pedagogical partners is likely to lead to significant benefits to teaching and learning. The results of our study provide early evidence of this.

Overall, many instructors described the OLA program as a success; however, it was not without its challenges. Several instructors cited issues with role clarity and boundaries. The need for clear role descriptions has been highlighted as an important component of successful pedagogical partnerships (Martens et al., 2019). An important first step in both WIL and partnership relationships is a discussion around expectations and the roles that each member will take (Acai et al., 2017; Fleming et al., 2018; Pelnar et al., 2020; Rowe et al., 2012). It is important that partnerships start with goal-setting discussions so that instructors can learn about their students' interests, abilities, and goals (Dahl, 2011), and students can learn about what is important to their instructor (Nevison, 2018). Such goal setting can provide direction to both the instructor and student and can have a positive impact on the students' performance in the role (West & Stirling, 2021). It is recommended that future iterations of similar programs take the time to have faculty and students sit down and discuss goal setting and what their roles will involve. A co-creation of these role descriptions would be beneficial as students would be able to share their

specific skill sets with instructors, allowing instructors to capitalize on each student's talents. Several instructors commented in the interviews that they weren't sure what their OLA's background or skillsets were, so they were unsure how to use them. Having these upfront conversations at inception could help to address this challenge. At this initial meeting, it will also be important for faculty to create a space in which students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Establishing such an environment early is likely to help facilitate partnership development going forward.

Some instructors indicated that participation in the program added to their workload, a common sentiment in the pedagogical partnership literature (Bovill et al., 2011, 2016; Cook-Sather et al., 2019). Participating in the OLA program meant that instructors were also now supervisors, representing an additional time commitment. They had to coordinate the OLAs' tasks and ensure they had enough to do. Providing training for faculty on their new role as supervisors may mitigate some of this burden. The desire for such training was noted by one instructor. Even with training and support, it should be noted that for both the development of pedagogical partnerships and strong WIL relationships, time investments on the part of the instructor or supervisor are important and necessary. However, it is important to reframe this required time commitment. Involvement in these partnerships is likely to save time later, and ultimately the benefits will outweigh the initial time investment (Bovill et al., 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2019; Fleming & Pretti, 2019). Similar sentiments were shared in this study with one instructor acknowledging that the more you invest in these relationships, the better the outcomes. It will be important for similar initiatives to ensure instructors are aware of the initial time investment and of the potential benefits that can come from that investment.

One important limitation of the OLA program is that it was not conceptualized as a SaP program at inception. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that such partnerships emerged for many of the instructors involved. It would be useful for future initiatives to enact a SaP approach from the beginning. This was not possible with the OLA program, given the rapid, emergency nature of its introduction. However, OLAs may have been able to have even more of an impact if they were involved from the beginning of the program. We recommend that future partnership initiatives capitalize on the talent that WIL students have to offer. These partnerships should engage full-time, paid WIL students at the inception of the program to work with instructors on pedagogy. It is a great opportunity for instructors who will benefit from the student insights and for WIL students with interests in education and pedagogy. It will be important for expectations about the partnerships, time commitments, and role responsibilities to be made clear at the beginning of the program.

CONCLUSION

Our research findings suggest that full-time, paid co-op student positions in higher education offer a unique program structure for the development of pedagogical partnerships. Features of this program that made it particularly helpful for the generation of pedagogical partnerships are institutional support for the program and the fact that it involved full-time, paid positions for students. WIL initiatives like the one explored here are a useful avenue for accessing the student perspective which, as our results demonstrate, can ultimately benefit teaching and learning. WIL

programs offer an excellent resource of students available to engage in pedagogical partnerships in higher education.

This research was reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board (REB 42952).

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