# International Journal for
# Students as Partners

*IJSaP* is a journal about learning and teaching together in higher education. *IJSaP* explores new perspectives, practices, and policies regarding how students and staff (used here and subsequently to refer to academic staff/faculty, professional staff, and other stakeholders) are working in partnership to enhance learning and teaching in higher education. Shared responsibility for teaching and learning is the underlying premise of students as partners, and IJSaP is produced using a student-staff partnership approach.

*IJSaP* is designed to appeal to a wide audience of readers and potential authors in the higher education community. It aims to publish high quality research articles, case studies, reflective essays, opinion pieces, reviews, and other pieces from around the world. Contributions written collaboratively by students and staff are particularly encouraged, although single and other co-authored pieces are also acceptable. All submissions go through a rigorous review process involving both staff and students.

# Contents

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## Case Studies

## Reflective Essays

## Reviews

## Notices

SPECIAL SECTION EDITORIAL

# Students as Partners in Third Spaces

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In this special section, IJSaP's established lines of enquiry into partnership and co-creation converge with the concept of the "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, 2008). The editors and contributors are operationalizing the Third Space as a physical, metaphorical, or digital/virtual space, or a combination of all of these. Such a space can exist in an extra-curricular setting, a virtual learning environment, the community, a social media platform, or through a different way of working together in the classroom. The locations can therefore be understood as both material and virtual. What matters is that Third Spaces require a negotiation and flattening of hierarchies and the validation and acknowledgment of different forms of knowledge. (Potter & McDougall, 2017).

Students' and teachers' ways of being in Third Spaces, as well as the pedagogies required by them, are qualitatively different to orthodox teaching spaces because they demand that the values and cultural capital of participants be featured. In significant ways, Third Spaces are therefore contested, negotiated, and political spaces in which students are positioned in a kind of partnership with educators. The co-production and exchange of what Potter and McDougall (2017: 83) describe as a more "porous" idea of expertise is an essential characteristic of these spaces.

The Third Space has its origins in the work of Bhabha (1994) and has been of interest for designing pedagogy in pursuit of equity and social justice. Gutiérrez (2008) offered the Third Space as a way to think about the social actors in a given setting, their autobiographical and temporal specificities, and how these could be accounted for in the design of an emancipatory form of educational experience. If Third Spaces in higher education have the potential to foster co-creation through "porosity", because they feature the values and cultural capital of participants or because they demand that the values and cultural capital of participants be featured, this suggests that ways must be found to account for whose knowledge counts and how boundaries of expertise can be negotiated formally and informally across and between various knowledge domains. This is achieved through more curational, negotiated, reflexive, and inter-disciplinary forms of pedagogy in a fruitful relationship between Third Space and socio-cultural and liminal partnership contexts (see Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011; Jensen & Bennett, 2015; and Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017).

Seeing student partnership in higher education as a Third Space clearly resonates with IJSaP's core lines of enquiry and its publication of recent research on how students and academics have worked as partners to generate knowledge together outside of conventional hierarchies (see Marquis et al., 2018; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2016). However, as the establishment of this journal demonstrates, these partnership initiatives are progressing to maturation in higher education (see Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), and it is important to reflect on their transformative and redistributive impacts. We think that the concept of the Third Space enables this and offers a framing for existing, progressively disruptive work of this kind. For example, see Werder et al.'s (2010) work on dialogic "parlor talk," a space of structured informality where co-enquiry not only happens in conversation, as a way of being in learning, rather than simply in a physical space. Werder et al conceive of this kind of interaction as a literal and metaphorical privileging of dialogue between equals. In this way, the threshold concept of student partnership (see Cook-Sather, 2014) can be developed to include the idea of the Third Space in order to investigate (a) the meaning, nature, and possibilities of facilitating partnership in Third Spaces; (b) educational strategies for working collaboratively in such spaces; (c) suitable methodologies for investigating Third Space partnerships; and (d) the associated ethical and representational issues arising from the "writing up" of Third Space partnerships.

These lines of enquiry converge to address the ways in which the notion of the Third Space might enrich, expand, or complicate thinking about Students as Partners. Working in the Third Space involves traversals across the threshold of the established order, challenging and subverting existing practices and hierarchies. To this extent, it is hard either to find or devise rubrics which detail strategies for those interested in giving it a go. In practice, as several of the articles in this volume attest to, it is often easier to experiment and work outside the box when both staff and students are trying something new. Transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary work or even work across universities seem like good places to start.

Activities such as co-creating curricula, conducting joint research, or developing reflexive modules about learning and teaching have the potential to allow students to exert agency and have their voices genuinely heard.

Third Spaces offer huge potential for social justice. However, working in the Third Space involves taking risks and valuing process over outcomes. Staff need to be comfortable with flux and fluidity and accept that they are in new territory and that their roles are reconfigured to encompass their own learning in the situation. While this may be liberating, it exposes all participants to greater ambiguity and a diminished sense of security. Staff need to be aware that an invisible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975), or one in which students have more control, may be more accessible for some students than others. It may feel risky for any student to step out of their comfort zone and assert themselves when not knowing exactly what is expected of them. Such heightened ambiguity (and often increased workload) may have the exact opposite effect of what is intended, putting additional pressures on those whom the space is meant to empower—those from non-traditional backgrounds and under-represented constituencies.

To counter this, teachers and academics must go beyond a surface awareness of the importance of inclusion and diversity. They must be sure to seek out and value what students bring to the space from the wider community. They must also recognize the importance and encourage the development of peer networks, which can function as new tethers once the traditional student-teacher nexus has been broken. Most importantly, working in the Third Space involves issues of subjectivity, positionality, and shifting

identities. As traditional binaries, dualisms, and dichotomies are broken down between student and teacher, it is possible for all parties to be involved in something transformative.

However, a rebalancing of the power dynamic between staff and learners is no easy task.  It is only really possible where a culture of reflexivity is developed, that is, where students and staff are forced to reflect on their own position in relation to dominant norms. At its most successful, Gutiérrez (2008) empowered her students in the Third Space by getting them to write a "syncretic testimonio" in which they at once reflected on and celebrated their heritages and produced a text "situated in the subjective particularity and global and historical reality in which people co-construct their understanding of the social world and of themselves" (p. 149). This may be a vital starting point when trying to refashion the classroom into "a site where no cultural discourses are secondary" (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995, p. 447).

Methodologies which allow for an unpacking of affect and intention may be crucial for truly understanding what goes on in Third Space partnerships. The articles in this special section all respond to these challenges in different ways and to different ends, but the commonalities which they exhibit coalesce around how the notion of Third Space adds our understanding of students as partners by addressing the pedagogic and interactive conditions and arrangements, whether physically or metaphorically *spatial* – ways of being in partnership - that need to be in place to go beyond superficial experiments in co-creation to address issues of social justice, participatory pedagogy, and the valuing of the social and cultural capital of all learners in educational settings.

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ARTICLE

# "Stepping in and Stepping out": Enabling Creative Third Spaces Through Transdisciplinary Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how transformative higher education approaches can be fostered through an integration of the concepts of third space, Students as Partners (SaP), and transdisciplinarity in practical contexts. We describe a collaborative enquiry that engaged staff and students in a reflexive dialogue centred on the concepts of mutual learning, liminality, emergence, and creativity as enacted in the curriculum of a transdisciplinary undergraduate degree, the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation (BCII) at the University of Technology Sydney in Australia. The key insights that emerged through this enquiry were: third spaces in curriculum can be enabled but not constructed, all parties need to embrace uncertainty and a mutual learning mindset, and that "stepping in and out" of such fluid liminal spaces can stimulate creativity. Based on our experience and exploration, we offer some practical recommendations to those seeking to create similar enabling conditions for third spaces in their own undergraduate programs.

KEYWORDS

liminality, students as partners, third space, transdisciplinary, creativity

This article explores how synergies between the concepts of third space, Students as Partners (SaP), and transdisciplinarity can lead to transformative higher education practices (see Figure 1). Originating from different theoretical and practical domains, these three perspectives have been applied in a variety of contexts to address diverse ethical, political, or societal concerns. These concepts and their associated practices share a common focus on bringing together stakeholders as equals in non-hierarchical interactions, with the purpose of mutual learning from diverse knowledges and perspectives.

**Figure 1. Features of the concepts of third space, SaP, and transdisciplinarity**



**Students as Partners:**
- Co-teachers
- Co-inquirers
- Curriculum co-creators
- Co-learners
(Healey et al. 2014)

**Third Space** (in educational development):
- Transcends institutional boundaries
- Brings together people with diverse roles
- Holistic notion of academic practice
(McAlpine & Hopwood, 2009)

**Transdisciplinarity:**
- Complexity
- Real-world challenges
- Multiple knowledges
- Collaboration
- Mutual learning
(Scholz & Steiner, 2015)

SaP approaches have gained prominence over the past decade in higher education research and practice (Matthews, Dwyer, Hine, & Turner, 2018). This growing interest in SaP is partly driven by the desire to frame learning in higher education in more relational terms, challenging the "student as consumer" discourse (Matthews, 2016; Matthews, Cook-Sather, & Healey, 2018; Matthews, Dwyer, et al., 2018). In this paper, we explore the ways that scholarly work on third spaces (e.g., Gutiérrez, 2008; Soja & Hooper, 1993; Whitchurch, 2012), in conversation with the SaP literature, could strengthen the argument about the transformative potential held in SaP approaches. As we will demonstrate, higher education curriculum can accommodate "a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened" Gutiérrez (2008, p. 152). Such third spaces are not at the centre of power, nor are they in the margins. This in-betweenness allows third spaces to become sites of "radical openness" that can challenge either/or dichotomies of the dominant culture (Soja & Hooper, 1993, p. 195), such as self/other, expert/non-expert, male/female, white/black, and teacher/student. An emphasis on fluidity and openness aligns third space with SaP, as they both share a focus on enabling new relations and knowledges to emerge. The importance of emergence is also important in the third conceptual lens we apply—transdisciplinarity—which allows us to further enrich the possibilities entailed in SaP and third space approaches

Our use of the term "transdisciplinarity" follows Manderson's (1998) proposition that "transdisciplinarity examines a particular site or sites of interest without a particular disciplinary strategy in mind" (p. 66). In contrast to interdisciplinarity, where methods are shared across disciplines, transdisciplinarity strives to move beyond disciplinary frameworks (Klein 2010).[1] It involves: (a) addressing complex real-world challenges, (b) valuing multiple knowledge types, (c) collaborating with diverse stakeholders, and (d) mutual learning (Polk & Knutsson, 2008; Scholz & Steiner, 2015). By attaching importance to local, practical, and contextual knowledges alongside disciplinary expertise, transdisciplinary practices challenge existing power structures. For example, Scholz and Steiner (2015) argue that people who act

within a system on a daily basis (e.g., students in a learning system) are experts on the contexts in which they operate. Integrating transdisciplinary and SaP approaches allows us to further question power relationships implicit in traditional educational contexts.

In this article, we explore how third spaces have emerged through our attempts to engage students as partners in educational practices in the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation (BCII) degree program, a recently introduced transdisciplinary undergraduate degree at the University of Technology Sydney in Australia. Transdisciplinary principles are incorporated into the BCII's double-degree design, whereby students undertake short intensive BCII subjects concurrently with their "core degree" (e.g., in business, science, communications, design, etc.) each summer and winter for three years. Their fourth and final year is spent entirely on the BCII with a dedicated studio space to work on projects set by industry partners and related to the students' own passions.

This paper uses the three conceptual lenses of third space, SaP, and transdisciplinarity to examine the learning and teaching strategies within the BCII final-year curriculum. Our experimentation ranged from an open-ended assessment task in which students were invited to contribute to the BCII community, to providing students with opportunities to co-design the curriculum, to an invitation to set rules for their own studio space. Through the confluence of the three abovementioned conceptual domains, and a process of mutual learning involving staff and students, we have come to better understand the educational, personal, and societal benefits of spaces in curriculum that are open rather than institutionally pre-determined.

BACKGROUND

SaP approaches aim to position students as active rather than passive participants in their learning. Partnerships create opportunities for transformative learning for students, staff, and whole institutions, which is achieved through process- rather than outcome-orientation and authentic engagement among all parties (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). Thus, reciprocity has been identified as one of the key characteristics of SaP approaches (Healey et al., 2014). Participants in reciprocal partnerships may play different roles and derive different benefits provided that there is equity in the relationship (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017).

Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) highlight some of the dominant ways in which SaP has been explored to date. This includes a tendency for SaP studies to focus on student-teacher rather than student-student or student-industry partnerships, and for positive outcomes such as trust-building and enrichment of learning opportunities to be reported more often than negative outcomes such as increased vulnerability or power imbalances. However, it is unknown whether this reflects broader experiences with student partnerships in higher education or just what authors have elected to write about (see Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). While SaP initiatives can challenge unequal power relationships and hierarchies implicit in educational contexts, they can also be hampered by institutional or societal structural issues. For example, SaP initiatives tend to be small-scale and extra-curricular (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), potentially excluding students who are not able to dedicate time to these initiatives due to caring or other commitments (Healey et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

Despite these shortcomings, it is well-documented that SaP practices can allow students, staff, and other partners to cross boundaries and step outside traditional roles

(Matthews, Dwyer, et al., 2018). As such, they lend themselves to be examined through the conceptual lens of third spaces. A key dichotomy in higher education is that of teacher/student (Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011; Cook-Sather, Matthews, Ntem, & Leathwick, 2018). Thinking about SaP practices through third spaces can allow new interactions and possibilities to emerge unconstrained by these established roles.

While third spaces may allow for conventional hierarchies to be diminished, it should be noted that they are contested rather than neutral spaces and are inevitably affected by the power dynamics that surround them (Solomon, Boud, & Rooney, 2006). Authors writing about third spaces in education highlight the challenges that such heterogeneous contexts pose to educators, including around purpose, inclusivity, and reciprocity. For example, Gutiérrez (2008) emphasises the difficulties of creating a shared vision of education in third spaces that recognises the diverse and unequal experiences of different stakeholders. Transdisciplinary approaches can allow for these factors to be considered through a reflexive process of mutual learning between multiple stakeholders (Scholz & Steiner, 2015).

Liminality emerges as another important property of third spaces, as zones between culturally defined phases or states (Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011) that can facilitate creativity and personal growth. Anthropologist Victor Turner describes the journey of initiations in tribal society as an immersion in liminality where those undergoing transition enter "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner, 1967, p. 97). Similarly, Campbell's (1993) conceptualization of the hero's journey of discovery highlights the importance of liminality to individual transition and maturation. Drawing on anthropological framing, Cook-Sather & Alter (2011) discuss the powerful transformative effects of educational encounters that take place in indeterminate states between otherwise defined roles.

A key challenge arising from conceptualising educational encounters through the lens of third space is the uncertainty that it entails. While mainstream educational discourses emphasise clarity, curriculum alignment, and measurable outcomes, third spaces invite educational experiences that resist such definitions. By posing emancipatory goals, third spaces raise challenging questions about the ownership or division of responsibility over "delivering" educational outcomes. Although not writing in the context of SaP, Biesta (2013) highlights the radical uncertainty that educators face by inviting students to take responsibility for their own learning. Drawing on Levinas' philosophy, Biesta (2013) argues that we cannot force responsibility upon others and that education must necessarily be thought of as a slow, frustrating, unpredictable, risky, and uncertain process. He invites educators to be open to emergence and indeterminate possibilities in which a mutuality of responsibility may emerge, instead of shying away from the frustrations and uncertainty implicit in educational encounters (Biesta, 2013).

The importance of mutuality in risk-taking is highlighted by Healey et al.'s (2014) proposition that student partnership is "both risky and enables taking risks" (p. 20). Similarly, Soja and Hooper (1993) describe the third space as a "risky place on the edge . . . but also with new possibilities" (p. 190). It is interesting to consider the generative importance of risk highlighted by these authors in the context of Mercer-Mapstone et al.'s (2017) findings that the majority of published research on SaP approaches reports on positive outcomes. Transdisciplinary approaches can help to understand the interplay between risk and opportunity in educational third spaces through a focus on complex systems in which uncertainty is pervasive, relationships are often non-linear in nature, and

links between cause and effect may be unclear (Max-Neef, 2005; Scholz & Steiner, 2015). Viewed through a transdisciplinary lens, educational encounters in third spaces can thus be understood as opportunities for adaptation, self-organisation, and emergence within the complex adaptive system that is higher education (Zepke, 2017).

METHOD

To consider how the concepts of SaP, third space, and transdisciplinarity can shed light on our practices within the BCII, we formed a team consisting of six teaching staff and three fourth-year students. The teaching staff included the BCII Course Director, Fourth-Year Coordinator and coordinators of subjects across all four years of the program. The team did not include any industry partners, but did include one staff member with a background in the food industry who coordinated the fourth-year subject where students work on challenges set by industry partners.

We wanted to ensure that the process of co-authorship did not disadvantage team members who were less familiar with the conventions of academic research and writing. Therefore, we created a process of enquiry that incorporated what Werder, Thomas, Ware, and Skogsberg (2010) term "parlor talk," which positions co-authors as equals in a reflexive dialogue. To enable team members to contribute their experiences and insights more equitably, we drew on Labonté's (2011) work on "story groups." We began by taking turns to share examples of where we thought third spaces had emerged in the BCII. We then built on and extended these stories through several iterations, enacting a "reflection circle," in Labonté's terms. To ensure that all team members had equal opportunity to speak, we used a "talking object" (a roll of paper) that was passed from person to person to indicate that it was their "talking turn" (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). The dialogue was structured according to five generative themes, within which group members shared stories of BCII third spaces. Each theme was allocated 10-15 minutes. These themes were:

- What are third spaces in the BCII?
- Relationships (between who? defined or emergent? reciprocal?)
- Purpose (why are we doing this? what is the purpose of education?)
- Betwixt and between (including liminality, uncertainty and risk)
- Emergence and creativity (what emerges in third spaces?)

The selection of generative themes was influenced by the following readings circulated prior to the dialogue session: the review of SaP literature by Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017), Whitchurch's (2012) explanation of the third space concept in higher education, Biesta's (2015) paper on "good education," Cook-Sather and Alter (2011) on liminality in higher education, and Gutiérrez (2008) on the evolution of the third space concept.

By framing our enquiry as an open-ended dialogue between equals, we sought to create the conditions for a third space to emerge within the very process of writing this paper. In other words, we anticipated that our insights would unfold through this collaborative process rather than being pre-determined from the outset. Lastly, by taking a more conversational approach to our writing, we hoped that our contribution to this special issue would be more accessible to a diverse readership.

The following section of this article presents an edited version of our dialogue, as recorded by a note-taker while participants spoke. After the dialogue session, the transcript was edited by each team member to ensure it captured the meaning of what they said and

to remove repetition. One team member absent due to illness added his thoughts during the editing stage.

The authors of this article were the participants in the dialogue and though we challenge the traditional teacher-student roles in our thinking and practice, we feel it is important to acknowledge the positions from which the following insights are spoken:  Bem Le Hunte, Mieke van der Bijl-Brouwer, Alex Baumber, Giedre Kligyte, and Nick Hazell are staff within the BCII and Marcus Newton, Cameron Dowd, and Dominica Roebuck are students.

The concluding stages of writing this paper were particularly enlightening to the team, as they brought to the fore the unequal positionings of staff and students inherent to the academic authoring process. As highlighted in our literature review, we see the tendency for SaP research to represent a positive picture of partnerships that glosses over vulnerabilities and discontinuities as problematic. In our case, despite staff attempts to create a dialogic third space through a relatively contrived formal methodology, student co-authors independently organised their own meetings that were intentionally more casual and exploratory. Students met up to follow up on interesting points from our "formal" conversations, but then felt that staff would be interested in these "tangential" thoughts too. They put their insights into a framework they have been taught: an Ignorance Map. One of the students reflected that they never intended for this map to become part of the paper: "it was more about connecting with the staff in a way that was encouraged—even though it did make us feel slightly vulnerable. We felt we had a platform to speak, and be heard."

While staff asserted their expertise by taking responsibility for editing the final version of the draft for consistency, we felt that it was important to include the section produced by students without substantial editing as an instance of students claiming their voice through a dialogic process. This section appears at the end of this paper titled "Future Questions and Unknowns Posed by Students." We do not see this emergent trajectory of insights created by students as a failure of managing the power dynamics or an inability to create a truly inclusive space for dialogue in our partnership. To us, this is evidence of sufficient openness within our enquiry process for unexpected outcomes to emerge—precisely the type of self-authorship that we aspire to animate in BCII students through our efforts to challenge power imbalances in education.

THIRD SPACE REFLEXIVE DIALOGUE

**Bem:** For me, third space in BCII is a journey that begins in first year and continues throughout the whole four-year degree. Because it is transdisciplinary, our type of third space is a confluence between disciplines—25 different core degrees. It is not static. It is always emergent as we don't know what will happen when those disciplines come together. On top of this, we have individuals and their journeys. It is a conceptual space—the liminality between epistemologies and ontologies, disciplines and individuals.

**Marcus:** Third space emerges from our transdisciplinary approach.

**Giedre:** Are we saying that third spaces aren't possible without transdisciplinarity?

**Bem:** I don't think so. What we and others are doing that is liminal is working at the bleeding edge. The space that we're hoping to evolve hasn't been created yet. We are pushing the boundaries and looking to create third spaces that are "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1967). We create the enabling conditions—for example, we continually engage with the view that knowledge is contestable. From the first year onwards we explore

"mistake-ism"—mistakes that have driven innovation across the disciplines. And we introduce students to ignorance-mapping to explore unknowns.

**Dominica:** What Bem said about carrying your centre to the edge stuck with me.

**Nick:** When we get good at BCII we get bad at it. It's a bit like start-ups. They start as amateurs and then they become professionals and then innovation seems to peter out. The moment we think we know what we're doing, we lose BCII or it becomes problematic.

**Giedre:** I'm curious about how we socialise students into the tradition of breaking the tradition by innovating, and enact these principles in teaching. According to Biesta (2015), it is not only what you say but how you say it that forms the curriculum.

**Bem:** It's also about modelling that it's okay to be in an uncertain space yourself—we're doing something so new that we're all learning from each other.

**Alex:** Being comfortable with uncertainty is a key theme. The capstone subjects were designed to allow for emergence, but this also creates uncertainty around what projects students could do and whether they were making the "right" choices. As a teacher I also had to embrace uncertainty. How was I going to organise all of this? How would I find resources and support students when I didn't know what the projects would be or the size of the teams?

**Cameron:** Looking at it from a much higher level—what will the degree look like in five years' time? How can you keep the essence of BCII if we're dabbling in liminality and ambiguity for too long? But also, what happens if we professionalise it?

**Marcus:** The nature of this new degree has ambiguity built in. How can you write ambiguity into the structure of a degree?

**Mieke:** There is always a part that is structured, and then there is a part that is emergent. Someone I interviewed last week said that working in a complex space is like a dance between looking for patterns and structures, and looking for surprises and emergence.

**Giedre:** So, third space can be bits of the curriculum that are not pre-determined by the institution or teaching staff. In the fourth-year we experimented with open assessments that allowed students to create initiatives of any type and format. Students were invited to contribute to their cohort community, leave a legacy to future students, or bring their own assessment briefs. As a result, we have witnessed some amazing creations—games, art installations, nights of music and inspiration, fireside talks—these exceeded our wildest expectations, all crafted with much care and commitment. Could such assessments be thought about as third space if they are open to the unexpected?

**Cameron:** I completely agree—because they're so open-ended, and because they invite students to bring their own briefs (and their own selves), I've been able to carry my own "passion project" through BCII which has gone far beyond the educational setting.

**Mieke:** I also think third space in the BCII is about interaction between people who don't usually work together—industry partners, staff, and students—in different ways creating novel interactions.

**Nick:** The unlearning of the first three years prepares students' minds, attitudes, and relationships when students get thrown random problems, partners, and teammates in fourth year. It also takes industry partners out of their environment into this liminal space. They react to problems in a different way. The power imbalance goes away.

**Alex:** Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) found most SaP studies look at relationships between students and teachers, but in BCII it's also very much student-student and student-industry partners as well.

**Mieke:** Also, teacher to teacher relationships. In BCII they feel very different from other teacher interactions I have had before. We each bring such different perspectives and knowledges, and learn a lot together and from one another.

**Alex:** If teachers take on mutual learning—which is integral to transdisciplinarity—do we become students as well in a sense for the purposes of SaP?

**Cameron:** I've never really known what to call the staff. I don't see them as "teachers" or "lecturers" or even "mentors" in the traditional sense. When we're in our third space, our roles quickly melt away. We're placed in this environment where we must work together—as partners—to get the most out of the experience and be our best selves.

**Dominica:** For me a classic example of third space—you're in the middle of a conversation and a tutor comes in and asks the right question. The conversation feels lifted. There is something about the quality of the questioning. There is vulnerability in their curiosity. They are able to step into the space with us. The curiosity and willingness to ask questions is important. Your roles fall away.

**Giedre:** We tend to think about relationships as give and take, a transaction. Yet thinking about what happens in the BCII through the lens of third space, it is less about the individuals who come together and more about what emerges between us all. Through third space we are all affected by everyone else—we are not separate beings anymore.

**Dominica:** In the teacher-student relationship, I feel as if I lose a sense of self and my role, but then the interaction ends and I return to the assessment and become a student again. I still need to be a student.

**Mieke:** I love the idea of losing a sense of self—social systems theory is about the whole being different than the sum of its parts. I feel that in this space the idea of losing a sense of self is very strong, also for me as a teacher. I have my own individual research projects I work on, and then I have this collective educational space, and I go back and forth between these "spaces." In this third space, it's much less about individuals.

**Nick:** Last semester I found it hard being a tutor and subject coordinator at the same time. I wasn't able to be in this third space the way I normally can as a tutor. I was getting stressed about coordination and you cannot immerse yourself in the problem space as you'd like to.

**Marcus:** There are many teachers or mentors available, not just one. This plays a role. We are inviting teachers into our problems and our learning. During industry projects, we were hesitant to approach you, Nick. We worked with others, though we would have liked to engage you more.

**Nick:** This is an interesting framing—I'm coming into your problem, so you're inviting me in. I'm a guest. It's not my problem that you are working on and it has never been.

**Mieke:** But as teachers we have an important facilitation role. It does not always work. I ran a session last week, but there did not seem to be the right energy in the room, and a lot of students were not engaged. Maybe because I was fully in a facilitation role and not a learning role. I wonder if third space requires specific expertise or attitude to facilitate and learn at the same time.

**Bem:** For me, being "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1967) isn't static, but a process or a journey. You have to get to this third space, you can't be in it permanently. Drawing on

Van Gennep (2060), it's a type of ritual—a process of gaining trust with students and taking the willing on a journey. A metaphor from my meditation teacher is having a saffron cloth (meditation) that loses its colour when you go into the world. You need to come back to these spaces to re-invigorate the colour—to get that nurturing. For me, liminality and creative process are about being able to go back and forth between the conventional, ordinary world and this liminal creative immersive process—or third space—where you are continually finding your way and making discoveries.

      **Mieke:** I love the idea of dipping the cloth in dye. Being in complexity is like being in the middle of the ocean, yet you reach another shore. Students go back to their core disciplines. We go back to our core work, as do our casuals and industry partners. You need a balance. You need to go back. Like inhaling and exhaling. You need both for breathing. This relates to the idea of being. What type of people do we want our students to become? Being mindful that each student is unique, we're also looking for attitudes such as humility or risk-taking.

      **Marcus:** If you identified these attributes how would this negatively or positively affect the degree? Is the fact that they haven't been prescribed what allows them to emerge?

      **Giedre:** Following Biesta's (2015) idea of subjectification, I'd say that it does not really matter what shape or type graduates become, but it is important that they take on the responsibility of becoming *this* person.

      **Bem:** You have to trust that you're going to get somewhere in this process, like trying to keep a kite up in the air over four years. Somehow, I always knew it would happen, because I had trust in the process—however unknown it was at the outset.

      **Giedre:** I agree. In many of our teaching experiments we also had to trust that students would rise to the occasion and they did. Biesta (2013) coins the term "the beautiful risk of education"—you don't know that students will step up to take responsibility over their learning but you have to trust that they will.

      **Dominica:** It's refreshing to hear about the risks that teachers are taking. It makes me understand staff more. We are taking risks with you, not just completing assessments.

      **Alex:** We probably don't do this enough. Sharing our vulnerabilities and the risks we're taking is part of being genuine partners. I would like to do it more but sometimes feel I need to look like I know what I'm doing.

      **Giedre:** There is an art to it. Bem does it really well by maintaining a narrative of overall stability while at the same time destabilising aspects of thinking.

      **Nick:** Risk and safety—the two things together. You need to have conditions that are nurturing and challenging at the same time because then people take bigger risks.

      **Alex:** An idea from systems thinking is fast variables and slow variables. Slow variables build resilience, like the way a university system supports us and how Bem creates continuity and a sense of calm. Fast variables change quickly, like our industry challenges and short intensive subjects.

      **Giedre:** Interesting, so for third spaces in education we must also think about the points of stability, it is not just about the unstable spaces. It is about stepping in and stepping out.

INSIGHTS ARISING FROM THE REFLEXIVE DIALOGUE
### Value of third spaces in education

Our dialogue revealed insights into how third spaces can contribute to the emergence of student agency and creativity in education and can reframe relationships between staff and students. The development of novel and creative responses to complex challenges is a key goal of the BCII, enabled by our deliberate attention to conditions that support emergence. This has been enhanced by the porous boundaries we have attempted to create between disciplines and fields, as well as between the curriculum and the broader environment in which industry partners, students, and staff interact. This permeability and liminality between different knowledges and realities is influenced by transdisciplinary thinking (Max-Neef, 2005), but also capitalises on the "degrees of freedom" that third spaces can offer outside established modes of working (McAlpine & Hopwood, 2009, p. 159). Thus, we argue that transdisciplinary spaces in educational programs can bring together various tribes (or disciplines) in an atmosphere that Durkheim, Cosman, and Cladis (2001, p. 218) would describe as "collective effervescence"—a gathering with a profound exuberance that is generative, yet somehow inexplicable.

Throughout the BCII, students are encouraged to embrace the opportunities inherent in uncertain and liminal spaces to "progress a learning project in the face of uncertainty" (Kahn, 2014, p. 1009). The metaphor of a sea voyage is introduced in the first year and the destabilizing nature of a voyage into the unknown plays out through the degree. Through educational encounters, students are given ways to frame and understand liminal spaces so that this uncertainty becomes familiar. For example, students are encouraged to develop a taxonomy of unknowns and use ignorance as a "muse" (Kerwin, 1993, p. 176). They are introduced to over a hundred methods for tackling complex real-word challenges from across the disciplines and learn to be comfortable with the cognitive dissonance of not knowing the answers they seek. This habit of visiting liminal spaces, we argue, is something that could be more broadly embraced across all educational contexts to enable students to engage creatively with uncertainty.

From our dialogue, it was clear that third space learning experiences in the BCII have challenged the traditional student-teacher dichotomy in higher education. This blurring of the boundaries between teachers, students, and industry partners can lead to mutual learning, which we see as another important outcome of third space-like educational arrangements. A transdisciplinary perspective on mutual learning (Polk & Knutsson, 2015) also presents an opportunity to create a more expansive notion of partnership, one that includes student-student and student-industry partnerships, which is relatively infrequent in SaP studies (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Furthermore, Cook-Sather et al.'s (2018) recent discussion of the SaP term itself highlights that naming only student participants in SaP may imply that staff retain the power in partnerships. The reciprocity encapsulated in transdisciplinary approaches, we argue, has the potential to decentre power relationships implicit in education and reframe the SaP concept to incorporate notions of "teachers as learners" and, as expressed by some of the student participants in our dialogue, "teachers as partners."

What does it mean for staff who wish to embrace a role as genuine partners and as mutual learners? In our experience, operating in the space "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1967) disciplines and fields has enabled us to be comfortable with dwelling on a groundless ground of liminality. In our dialogue, we discussed our efforts to maintain a sense of

wonderment in our teaching and to avoid developing a formula for it, which risks closing off opportunities for emergent outcomes. For staff, this openness can be a perpetual source of inspiration and rejuvenation, as students produce previously unimagined responses to complex challenges. However, this requires staff, as well as students, to embrace uncertainty and be prepared to show vulnerability—revealing what you don't know rather than just what you do know. The relationships that emerge through such educational encounters, based on openness, vulnerability, trust, and shared responsibility, are an important outcome in their own right.

### Enabling and resisting conditions for the emergence of third spaces

Following Gutiérrez's (2008) view that third spaces emerge, as well as Biesta's (2013) notion of radical uncertainty in the ways educational outcomes unfold and the influence of complexity thinking within transdisciplinarity (Max-Neef, 2005), we argue that transdisciplinary third spaces cannot be constructed or forced into being. Instead, we propose that they can emerge when the enabling practices and conditions are present. Such processes can be encouraged, tended to, and guided, but are usually spoilt if attempts are made to control them (Hasan, 2014). With this in mind, Figure 2 maps some of the enabling conditions for the emergence of third spaces that we have identified through our practice, reading, and dialogue.

**Figure 2. Enabling conditions and practices for educational third spaces in the BCII**
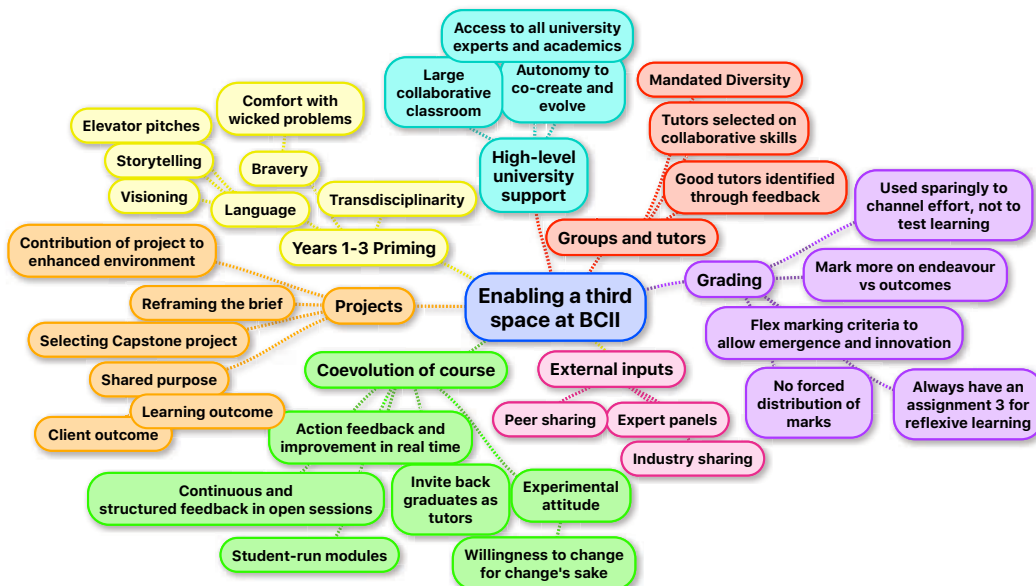


Many of the components in Figure 2 represent deliberate elements of curriculum design, such as the allocation of students into transdisciplinary teams based on their different core degrees, the use of reflexive learning assessment tasks, and the requirement that student teams engage with industry partners in reframing project briefs. However, other elements have emerged along the way, particularly through student feedback and involvement in co-design sessions, which have resulted in student-run sessions within the

curriculum, peer sharing, and student-led decisions on how the studio space is used (i.e., with semi-permanent workspaces for each team and workshops rather than lectures).

It is important to highlight that the BCII enjoys high-level support within the university, which helps to overcome the institutional inertia that Whitchurch (2012) warns can hamper third spaces. This high-level support gives staff a mandate and the autonomy to co-create and evolve the degree in a novel and experimental way that is markedly different from other degrees. Furthermore, the early years of the degree prime students to become comfortable with uncertainty and liminality, develop reflexive practices, and work on shared projects across different disciplines. Principles of shared responsibility and mutual risk-taking adopted by staff and students have created the conditions for trusting and reciprocal relationships to emerge. In particular, BCII staff approach tutoring as a partnership with students, drawing on collaborative and facilitation skills rather than dispensing expertise. The focus on shared objects, such as team challenges, allows for a multiplicity of perspectives that stimulate fresh thinking and an openness to difference. Assessments are designed to encourage emergent rather than prescribed outcomes, in particular through reflexive knowledge-synthesis tasks and a contribution to the enhancement of the transdisciplinary community to which students, staff, and industry partners belong.

The resistances encountered in the BCII are mainly related to structural and logistical aspects of organizing transformational educational experiences, including the necessity for some students to do paid work, lack of time, interruptions related to the rigidity of the institutional systems and processes, and the limitations posed by the physical spaces. Another area of contention and discomfort identified through our dialogue was the grading of assessments, with both staff and students feeling that the importance placed upon grades within the university system diminished the potential for the emergence of third spaces. We also saw that the ability of teaching staff to take risks and embrace uncertainty was undermined by institutional cultures of measurement and evaluation. Issues of inclusivity and equity were also raised and are explored further in the following section, which, as explained earlier, was written by student co-authors.

FUTURE QUESTIONS AND UNKNOWNS POSED BY STUDENTS

The transdisciplinary aspect of the BCII degree relies on a diverse ecosystem of students, teachers, industry partners, and institutional support. However, the selection process for this degree is very traditional and competitive by higher education standards, which could potentially prioritise "voices that are already privileged and engaged" (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017, p. 17). As student authors, we questioned how more socio-economic and cultural diversity could be introduced into a typical BCII cohort. We explored the idea of regular, student-hosted workshops and co-design sessions for university groups, high school students, and the general public.

We also reflected on the predictable nature of recent projects, and the relationships with industry partners that prescribe them. We brainstormed decisive steps that could be taken to engage the cohort in a more diverse range of problem spaces and projects that challenge assumptions and enable new knowledge and experiences to emerge. For example, we agreed that there was a concentration of corporate projects, compared to the weaker presence of not-for-profit partners. We were interested in how investment in developing long-term relationships with such partners could introduce a mutually-beneficial learning experience, potentially triggering a deeper immersion into third space. We

proposed inviting future partners (such as not-for-profits) into the BCII space to regularly participate in workshops, activities, and hackathons. We were interested in how this emphasis on relationship-forming could transform and enable the potentiality of third space. We also explored how this newfound emphasis on diversity could influence our perception and experience of a supposed third space. We continue to ask provocative questions in Figure 3, which is based on the Ignorance-Map model developed by the University of Arizona College of Medicine (Kerwin, 1993).

**Figure 3. Ignorance map developed by student authors**
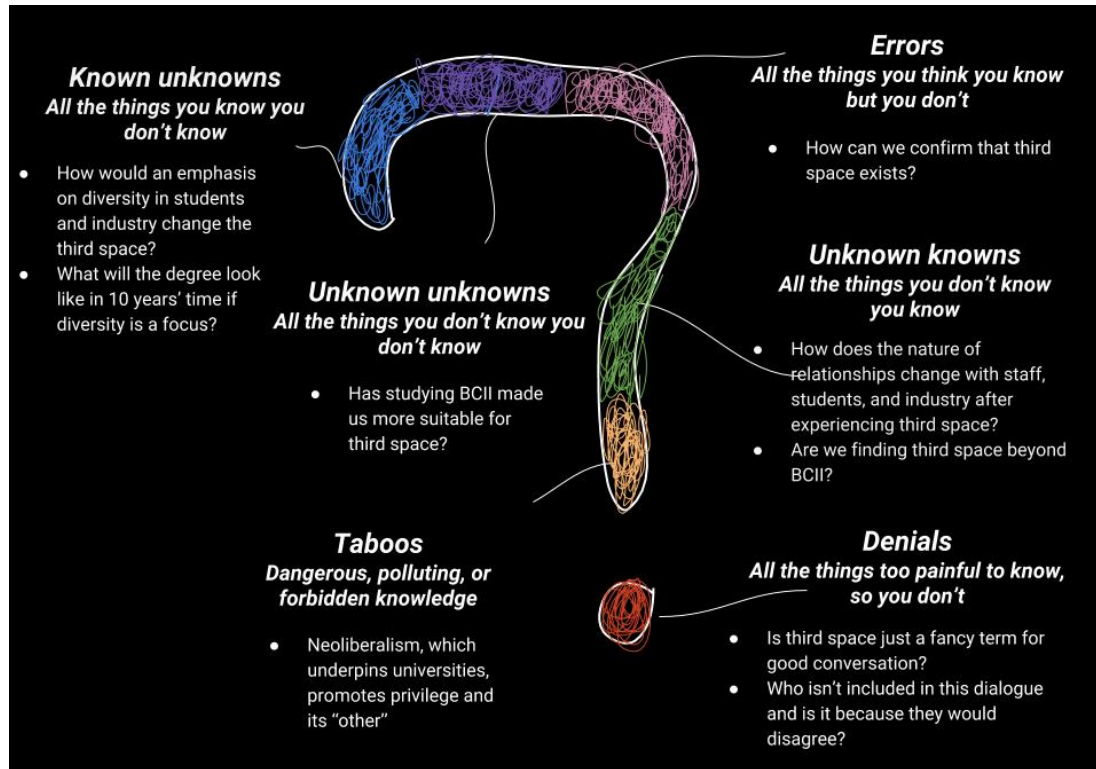


CONCLUDING REMARKS

The emergence of the independent student perspective, described above, during the final phase of our open-ended dialogical enquiry, highlights the changeable and adaptive nature of third spaces and the futility of trying to contain them, as we attempted to do with our carefully-designed dialogue methodology. It also demonstrates the benefits of "stepping in and stepping out" of such spaces, as these students did to develop an Ignorance Map and bring it back into a partnership space to enrich the dialogue. The third spaces that have emerged within the BCII and in our writing have enabled students to exercise agency, but staff did not attempt to control where that agency took them. We, staff and students collectively, may have become adept at creating enabling conditions for third spaces to emerge within the BCII; however, as our student co-authors pointed out, we still have work

to do in creating third spaces that include students from diverse backgrounds and industry partners (especially partners from the not-for-profit sector).

As we continue our mutual learning journey in our scholarship and practice, we would encourage other practitioners seeking to create enabling conditions for third spaces in their own undergraduate programs to experiment with these key elements:

- seek high-level institutional support for curriculum innovation;
- prime both students and staff to become comfortable with uncertainty (which tends to be well-supported in transdisciplinary contexts);
- encourage a pattern of "stepping into" conditions of liminality and "stepping out" into reflexive spaces where new insights can be consolidated;
- design assessment for emergent rather than pre-determined outcomes;
- incorporate real-world challenges that are reframed by students together with external stakeholders;
- encourage shared responsibilities, for example, through peer learning and student input into curriculum design; and
- include students in reflexive processes for interrogating educational practice.

In our view, these insights, and the way they came about through our dialogical partnership, speak to the transformative potential residing in a mutual learning process informed by the concepts of third space, SaP, and transdisciplinarity.

NOTES
1. Transdisciplinarity has various lineages and competing definitions which are beyond the scope of this article to fully explicate (see Gibbs, 2015; Klein, 2008, 2010; Nicolescu, 2010).

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ARTICLE

# Opportunities Presented by the Forced Occupation of Liminal Space: Underrepresented Faculty Experiences and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In this article I employ the notion of the Third Space as a point of departure in order to expand and complicate our thinking about student-faculty partnerships, with the goal of enquiring into the acceptability of and comfort with such space for faculty who self-identify as underrepresented. I consider the practical and real repercussions for these faculty members of engaging in partnership in the context of a reality that is very much shaped by dominant cultural practices, and racial, social, and cultural hierarchies and divisions, and look at how the concept of the liminal space plays out in their professional lives. The findings presented in the article come out of a qualitative analysis of oral semi-structured interviews with underrepresented faculty.

KEYWORDS

student-faculty partnerships, under-represented faculty, liminal space, third space;

INTRODUCTION

**Faculty perspectives on and experiences of respect, equity, inclusiveness and belonging**

Student-faculty partnership has been characterized as a pedagogy that is based on and promotes respect (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014), equity and inclusiveness (Cook-Sather, 2015), and belonging (Colón García, 2017; Matthews et al., 2018). Cook-Sather et al. (2014) consider respect to be one of the founding principles of partnership, next to responsibility and reciprocity. They define respect as an attitude that "entails taking seriously and valuing what someone else or multiple others bring to the encounter. It demands openness and receptivity, it calls for willingness to consider experiences or perspectives that are different from our own, and it often requires a withholding of judgment" (p. 2). Student-faculty partnerships offer both faculty and students an opportunity to exercise such an attitude, cultivating a relationship that is guided by the principle of respect. In fact, researchers have highlighted a heightened sense of respect as one of the outcomes of partnership that students value most (Cook-Sather et al.,

2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

Along with a heightened sense of respect, partnership has been shown to lead to more equity and inclusiveness, especially when it comes to accepting and understanding difference and diversity. In her article titled "Dialogue Across Differences of Position, Perspective, and Identity: Reflective Practice in/on a Student-Faculty Pedagogical Partnership Program," Cook-Sather (2015) has argued that the implementation of collaborative and partnership-based projects in teaching and learning has the potential to develop a more equitable and inclusive environment in which both students and faculty who identify themselves as minorities feel that they belong. Cook-Sather explores the effects of student-faculty partnership on students' and faculty's perception of their own differences and whether this collaboration or partnership could inspire more openness, deeper connection, and empathy (p. 1). In the analysis of faculty and student experiences and voices participating in the SaLT (Students as Learners and Teachers) program at Bryn Mawr College, Cook-Sather notes that the "themes of discerning or recognizing differences, and striving to embrace and learn from differences, rather than reifying them as only divisive, have emerged repeatedly" (p. 6). SaLT had created a space in which difference and diversity became the norm.

Such normalization of difference creates an environment that nurtures an increased sense of belonging and helps build a community. Student-faculty partnerships, through their cultivation of respectful relationships and appreciation of difference and diversity, empower underrepresented students (Colón Garcia, 2017; Cook-Sather, 2015; Curran & Millard, 2016; Healey et al., 2014; Lesnick & Cook-Sather, 2010; Matthews et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). According to Barnett and Felten (2016), students from underrepresented backgrounds can feel "a profound sense of both social and academic non-belonging when they arrive on campus" (pp. 9-10). Engaging in partnership with faculty can counter this sense of non-belonging, as students come to feel valued and needed (Colón García, 2017). Hence, successful partnership has the potential to reduce feelings of *belonging uncertainty*, i.e., "doubt as to whether one will be accepted or rejected by key figures in the social environment" (Cohen & Garcia, 2008, p. 365).

### Pedagogical partnerships initiated from the position of liminality

By valuing such aspects of academic and social life as respect, equity, inclusivity, and belonging, partnership-based pedagogy invites participants to occupy a liminal space, "a space that is reciprocal, where teaching and learning is co-conceptualized and co-constructed" (Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011, p. 51). Cook-Sather and Felten (2017) view partnerships as ideal opportunities to construct liminal spaces in higher education. In refusing to adhere to "classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (p. 181), they allow participants to embrace ambiguity, marginality, and in-betweenness. When someone occupies a liminal space, they are "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of pure possibility" (p. 181).

Such notions of liminal space are reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space, which he uses to articulate cultural difference, and which refers to a type of hybrid identity that is enacted in-between and at the intersections of cultures (p. 56). However, it is also important to note here the major difference between Third Spaces and liminal spaces,

particularly because of its relevance to the partnership experiences of underrepresented faculty. Where liminal spaces are conceptualized as the Third Space, they disrupt and negate the "primordial unity or fixity" of the moment of origin of an identity, pointing out its falsity, the deceptiveness of cultural homogeneity and of its static nature (p. 55). Bhabha would suggest that any space that is not liminal is false, fabricated for the purpose of asserting superiority. Hence, liminality, as I understand Bhabha's argument, is everyone's ideal space. Cook-Sather and Felten (2017), while in agreement with Bhabha, take a much more realistic approach, recognizing the strength of dominant cultural narratives. They propose that student-faculty partnerships challenge assumptions that have turned into undisputed and prevailing truths though time and instead cultivate identities that are hybrid, interconnected, interdependent, and changeable (p. 181). They assert that acting on this recognition should be the imperative of teaching and learning, and that faculty and university leadership should foster a liminal space that goes against hegemonic cultural (macro) narratives, as well as institutional (micro) narratives, in order to cultivate more dialogic, egalitarian, and open-ended relationships, as well as to recognize that identities are genuinely fluid, uncertain, and interconnected.

One way of doing this is encouraging underrepresented faculty members to engage in student-faculty partnerships. Studies have documented the benefits, such as increased perceptions of belonging and equity, of involving underrepresented students in pedagogical partnerships (Colón Garcia, 2017; Cook-Sather, 2015; Curran & Millard, 2016; Lesnick & Cook-Sather, 2010; Healey et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The same may be true of teaching faculty who engage in partnership. Once we open up to a hybrid, dialogic identity, the process will become ongoing and the dialogue itself will become transformative (Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011).

The goal of this paper is to inquire into how the faculty who self-identify or are identified as underrepresented experience liminal space created through partnership-based pedagogy. What role does pedagogical partnership play in the development of their social and academic identities? How do they navigate through the relationships that, on the one hand, are born out of the honorable and honest desire for equality and respect for difference and, on the other, have to exist within the current reality of inequality and marginalization? How do the dynamics of equity and inclusion change when faculty self-identify or are identified by the student body as a minority and when a sense of belonging uncertainty (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Cohen & Garcia, 2008) is experienced by faculty members, in a situation in which students are being seen as representatives of dominant identity? And finally, are there support systems in place, or could we develop support systems, that would help underrepresented faculty engage in successful pedagogical partnerships?

METHODS

To address these research questions, I conducted interviews with ten faculty members who taught in the humanities, sciences, communication, and business at a mid-size private liberal arts university in the southeastern United States that places a high emphasis on engaged learning that helps students develop into global citizens who have experience working with diverse populations and are capable of working in transnational environments. Although the

university strives to achieve more diversity, its student body is predominantly white, middle- to upper-class (annual tuition is approximately $35000), and American. Approximately 20% of the students are people of color, and 7% of students are international.

Interviewees were men and women of varying ages, diverse career paths, and different statuses at the university. All self-identified as underrepresented due to various identity traits. One common denominator was that they all self-described as "non-US born" or "international"; some also self-identified as a racial minority and/or non-dominant ethnicity. Because many of the faculty members I interviewed self-identified as underrepresented for multiple reasons (for example, they were simultaneously "non-US born," from a racial and/or ethnic minority, and female), it was impossible for them to pinpoint which particular aspect of their identity prompted which type of response from students. Hence, the perspectives they offer and the experiences they describe cannot be unequivocally classified based on one or another aspect of their identity. Rather, these are shared or common perspectives and experiences of underrepresented teaching faculty.

The interviews were predominantly oral, semi-structured, and, in some cases, with the consent of the participants, audio recorded. Interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. Faculty members gave free and informed consent to participate in the interviews and were assured anonymity following Institutional Review Board standards. I used an inductive approach to analyzing the qualitative data in order to summarize the findings, find major trends in and between the interviews, and to establish clear connections between the research questions and focus and interview results.

### Interview questions

Interview questions focused on faculty members' teaching experiences, as well as their experiences with and/or willingness to engage in pedagogical partnerships with students. Because the university doesn't have an established Students as Partners program, but rather encourages faculty and students to engage in collaborative teaching, as well as promoting pedagogies that encourage students to view themselves as active co-creators or co-developers of their own learning, I interviewed both faculty who have experimented individually with partnership and who have refrained from this pedagogy so far. Among the participants, two faculty members had deliberately partnered with students on teaching and learning projects; two stated that while they were not familiar with students-as-partners pedagogy, they had frequently collaborated with students on developing elements of their courses; and the others had no experience engaging in partnership with students. My aim was to inquire into faculty members' perceptions of the opportunities and constraints of working in partnership for underrepresented faculty. My interview questions (see Appendix) were intended to explore the experiences and perspectives of underrepresented teaching faculty, specifically, to understand the extent to which these faculty members saw academia as a societal model for creating hybrid space building on inclusive and equitable relationships; the role that their identity played in the development of such relationships; and whether they viewed pedagogical partnerships with students as a liminal space that nurtured such relationships.

FINDINGS

**Struggle to establish respect and trust and to belong**

As I discussed in the introduction, besides reciprocity and responsibility, respect is one of the guiding principles that ground student-faculty partnerships (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). It is, to a large extent, a precondition for developing a trusting and egalitarian relationship between students and faculty members. Furthermore, in order to develop a sense of belonging, one needs to feel respected and trusted. Yet one common thread in all my interviews with the faculty members was their continuous struggle to establish the kind of cultural authority that would evoke and nurture their students' respect and trust. For this reason, some of the faculty I interviewed were apprehensive of engaging in partnership. Others experimented with partnership despite the difficulty of securing respect from students, in the hope of developing deeper and more meaningful relationships in the process.

Many of my interviewees commented that it has been a continuous challenge for them to be viewed as respected members of the hegemonic culture, both macro (national) and micro (institutional) and, as a result, they have had to constantly try to prove themselves as worthy individuals, as well as professionals. Talking about their experience with partnership, one interviewee noted that when they invited students into partnership, students immediately jumped to the conclusion that the invitation was prompted by the faculty member's inability to teach, that is, by their lack of competence. Such an assumption seemed to threaten their position at the university, jeopardize their career, and further students' perception of their inadequacy due to their cultural, ethnic, and gender identity.

Faculty who were born outside the US and taught either their own native language or culture noticed that students had unquestioned trust in their ability to teach the material, but their credibility as professionals and as authority figures was immediately shaken if and when they spoke in English or tried to have a conversation about American culture. Some even noted that they not only felt they immediately lost students' trust, but also perceived resentment and animosity from students. For example, when one interviewee asked students to critically consider some of their own cultural practices, they felt that this antagonized students. "When I try to do this, I notice that I become a threat," they said.

Many of the interviewed faculty members felt that it was very difficult for minority faculty to reach students and invite them to share the liminal space in which they could all accept and nurture diversity. They perceived this was caused by the difficulty in trying to overcome cultural biases. "Students that come and don't have any diversity exposure, they are harder to reach," said one, "especially, for me as a woman, minority of color—there is certain level of distress." This distress, she elaborated, was experienced by both sides: by her in the way students looked at her with distrust, as an outsider; and by students, as they perceived her as a threat. In her perception, students saw her identity as a threat to their sense of Americanness: to their cultural identity, their language, and their whiteness.

Interviewees indicated that the authority of the faculty vis-à-vis the students, which is frequently assumed to be unquestioned, was in fact continuously under scrutiny. For a number of the interviewees, these emotions hindered the development of trust among faculty and students that would form the basis for a successful partnership. For example, the assumed hierarchical relationship between faculty and students was inverted when students exercised

their cultural superiority by commenting on faculty members' accents. Faculty teaching their native language pointed out that their accent gave them an advantage in the classroom: They noticed that their accent gave them credibility when teaching a foreign language, but this very accent would become a source of disadvantage when they wished to discuss anything with students other than their native culture, or if they taught a different subject. Several interviewees commented that their perception was that their worth and competency as professionals was frequently questioned by students, although it was not clear to them which aspect of their identity (their gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, etc.) prompted such lack of respect and trust. "I noticed male students coming up to me and patting me on my shoulder," said a faculty member. "I hate it when this happens. To me it is an assumption of [cultural] superiority from the students' part." While some can understand patting on one's shoulder as a sign of endearment, it was clear that in this particular faculty member's perception, this behavior was a sign of student showing their superiority. Consequently, this developed further mistrust between the faculty member and students.

In general, there was a sense that underrepresented faculty had to make changes to their identity, patterns of behavior, cultural norms, etc. in order to feel some sense of belonging as well as respect. The feeling of belonging uncertainty (Cohen & Garcia, 2018; Walton & Cohen, 2007) that has been discussed in the literature as a concern for underrepresented students as they engage in their communities was similarly present in my conversations with the faculty. One quote especially stood out: "The system is there and it is owned by those who have good grasp of how the system operates, what its rules are and how to be successful within it. I feel that we are invited to this space [to the university, to academia], but only as observers or someone who could 'fit in,' but not integrate. We are told that we are here to contribute, but not to transform." The interviews clearly demonstrated that underrepresented faculty members also continuously struggled with this sense of non-belonging and constantly had to assert the right to belong, while simultaneously recognizing the pushback from the students as they did so.

Whether they tried to adjust their identities to the dominant norms and expectations, or refused to do so and instead maintained their difference, faculty members had to continuously negotiate their place in their relationships with students. Hence, in-betweenness and belonging uncertainty seemed to be the norm for underrepresented faculty members, and quite frequently they involuntarily found themselves in and operated from a position of inferiority. It is important to note here that this position might very well be true for all faculty, or faculty who do not identify as equity seeking and/or underrepresented. But it was the perception of the underrepresented faculty members that their experiences of non-belonging and the lack of respect coming from students were exacerbated by their identities. All of this made partnership a more challenging experiment for underrepresented faculty members, increasing their sense of already being in a more vulnerable and disadvantageous position both in society and in academia. Many of my interviewees were concerned about their future careers and positions in the university if they were to engage in partnership. Their apprehension was caused by the lack of respect that they perceived as coming from students and, as a consequence, the impression students had of their professional incompetence. As a consequence, there was a perception of non-belonging caused by underrepresented faculty

being viewed as the other who is invited to contribute but not allowed to transform, whose identity can be viewed as threatening to the dominant cultural (ethnic, racial, linguistic, etc.) norms and practices.

### Teaching from the liminal space as an opportunity to invite change

Despite the aforementioned struggles to establish respect and trust and to belong, many of the interviewees were open to and welcoming of the opportunity to partner with students as they saw the position of liminality—non-belonging and in-betweenness—as potentially advantageous and beneficial for the entire university community. The most attractive element of partnership for these faculty members was its promise to nurture the position of liminality as discussed by Cook-Sather and Felten (2017). Faculty members I interviewed either were engaging or were willing to engage in partnership with students despite their vulnerability in order to have an opportunity to invite them to occupy the liminal space with them. In this space, by developing a respectful, reciprocal, and egalitarian relationship with each other, faculty members and students could negotiate, celebrate, and ultimately turn the diversity in their identities and positions into a norm. "This [our identity as *the other*] places us in a vulnerable position. But, this vulnerability is our strength," said one interviewee. While, according to some, engaging in a dialogue through pedagogical partnerships challenged "all the emotions of students," the fact that the students had to experience the difference through their encounter and collaboration with their professor was a huge advantage. It exposed students, in one faculty member's words, to difference even before the professor did anything.

> "The imbalance for me is the advantage," they said, "[because they see me as different] I can teach things without even opening my mouth. Then when I open my mouth, with my accent you can already guess my foreignness. [I disagree with] the idea that I have to adjust myself to the environment in order to survive. If we keep on adjusting to the environment, we are just surviving. We are not thriving. This is transcending: moving away from tolerance to acceptance and really working together as partners and allies. . . We should not ask them to understand, we should ask them to change."

My findings, based on the feedback from the interviewees, coincide with Cook-Sather's observations and research: Even when faculty express their frustration with the way students, and at times colleagues and administration, have forced them into a space of non-belonging, they emphasize that their strength lies in remaining in that very position and inviting students to experience the same kind of vulnerability by stepping into the space of uncertain or ambivalent belonging. Making diversity normal, in their words, is accepting that our identities are genuinely hybrid and interconnected.

My interviewees saw partnership initiated from the position of liminality as transcendental. Normally, the partnership dynamic between the faculty member, who has traditionally occupied the position of authority vis-à-vis students in higher education, and underrepresented students creates a more equitable space for education, one that honors underrepresented students' voice and agency. In the case of partnership between

underrepresented faculty members, who already perceive their position as liminal, and the student who identifies or is identified as a member of the dominant culture, this dynamic changes. The faculty members I interviewed suggest that the invitation for partnership comes from the liminal space. It is the so-called outsider who offers to share their space rather than asking for an invitation to belong. In a reality in which the spaces of belonging and non-belonging and of dominant and non-dominant identities are clearly, albeit artificially, defined, underrepresented faculty members frequently find themselves fighting for equality. Nonetheless, they embrace the power the liminality gives them and, in the spirit of reconciliation, invite students to partner from this space. So, what does this look like in practice? A faculty member who perceives themselves as underrepresented, who frequently struggles to establish respectful, trusting relationship with students, and who has to continuously prove their worth as a professional, invites one or more students to partner with them on a teaching and learning project. The partnership could entail co-designing or co-redesigning course materials, assignments, content, etc.; attending classes and offering continuous feedback on the process of teaching and learning; co-engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning; etc. All of this occurs through a process of sustained dialogue on and negotiation of perspectives, needs, interests, and ideas between faculty and students, a process that would encourage mutual respect and trust, acknowledging and working through the differences.

RECOMMENDATIONS
### Need for a change in institutional culture: exploring new ways to belong

If student-faculty partnership emphasized belonging as one of its main outcomes, we need to explore further the ways to ensure that underrepresented faculty members, and not only students, develop a better sense of belonging. Speaking about students' sense of belonging, Strayhorn (2012) writes that "[s]atisfying the need to belong leads to positive student outcomes including engagement, achievement, and well-being" (p. 4). He further argues that "[a] sense of belonging is a basic human need that takes on heightened importance in certain social contexts where some individuals are prone to feel unsupported or unwelcome" (p. 4). Also speaking for students, Thomas (2012) notes that "[t]he academic sphere is the most important site for nurturing a student's sense of belonging. The Institution, department, programme and module should all nurture a culture of belonging" (p. 6). Undoubtedly, underrepresented faculty have lived and worked in an environment in which in-betweenness, hybridity, and uncertainty of belonging have been the norms for them. In this research I have only started to explore the voices of those teaching faculty who have experienced, perhaps more acutely, what it means to stand in a liminal space, to be marginalized, to feel apprehensive of voluntarily taking that position and, at times, to go against the hegemonic systems of thought and practices. My intention was to inquire into the meaning and the value of belonging for underrepresented faculty in having positive teaching experiences.

What I discovered is that even when my interviewees said that they could use their involuntary positioning in liminal space to their advantage, they urged that the higher education system and the administration of their university recognize and value their standpoints more, in order for them to be able to engage in more fruitful partnerships. The

faculty members I interviewed spoke of the urgency to be acknowledged and even protected more by the university, for their liminality to be recognized and valued. They felt that their position in liminal space was undervalued by society and by academia to the degree that recognizing it was a matter of protecting their rights, of justice. One faculty member noted: "Sometimes it feels that I am doing what I do for the moral imperative, but I am not supported by the university structures." They thought that although underrepresented students were offered certain protections and guarantees by the administrations of their institution, this was not always the case for underrepresented faculty members. For example, when faculty members take pedagogical risks such as partnering with students, if the partnership proves unsuccessful or problematic and student feedback on teaching is consequently negative, their careers could be jeopardized. According to this interviewee's perception, the administration promoted diversity as a value, but when the diversity of the faculty member was undervalued or implicitly criticized by students, the administration didn't inquire into the reasons behind students' negative feedback, allowing it to negatively affect the faculty member's career. Hence, even when underrepresented faculty thought that being in liminal space gave them an advantage as educators, mentors, and partners, it was not necessarily an advantageous position for their professional careers. Faculty felt vulnerable and worried about their future and professional advancement.

The tension between these two experiences—finding strength in occupying liminal space while simultaneously wanting more recognition and protection from the university in order to have a better sense of belonging—points to a powerful reality: In an ideal world, the liminal space is one where everybody belongs through non-belonging. However, the reality of the higher education system today is that there are still powerful hegemonic discourses, identities, and norms that stand in opposition to and hinder the development of mutual respect and trust among faculty and students, as well as create environments in which some have to continuously struggle to belong while many, willingly or unwillingly, exclude them.

To address this tension, many interviewees suggested that higher education institutions develop better and more structures that would support underrepresented faculty members' involvement in partnership-based pedagogy, challenging the traditionally accepted hierarchies between faculty and students and creating a community that promotes difference and diversity, including spaces on campus that foster interactions based on equality, mutual respect, and reciprocity. One such recommended structure was that of Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges' Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program, which is offered by the Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) and through which both students and faculty seemed to be supported by the institutional culture to pursue pedagogical partnerships (Lesnick & Cook-Sather, 2010). My interviewees felt that it was important for such experimental pedagogy as student-faculty partnerships to become one of the integral parts of institutional practices, since it would help all involved position themselves in the liminal space, addressing some of the challenges faced by underrepresented faculty.

Student-faculty partnerships, as an experimental pedagogy, bring up questions around career advancement and the tenure and promotion process. When they are not part of the shared system of values and objectives, they will work against faculty when attempts are unsuccessful. Even when successful, partnership projects require considerable time

commitment that will take away time from other projects and, once again, put careers in jeopardy. Therefore, if we believe in the potential of student-faculty partnerships to position not only traditionally underrepresented but also dominant cultural identities in a liminal space, and if occupying such space is agreed to be beneficial for our society due to its genuineness, then we need to find ways to more actively and systematically support underrepresented faculty members in their work as they continue to (in)voluntarily occupy the liminal space and invite students to do the same.

CONCLUSION

While their sense of belonging is constantly under question, underrepresented faculty members find power in occupying the liminal space. They believe that due to its openness to hybridity and for its in-betweenness and indeterminate nature, the liminal space is an authentic one. While my interviewees did not wish to change their positions, they did wish that broader community within the higher education system, especially colleagues and administrators, would acknowledge the difficulties and vulnerabilities in occupying such a position and create systems that would protect and support them. In order to have a more complex and complete picture, we had to incorporate more and diverse voices in this ongoing conversation about the power of student-faculty partnership as an experimental and transformative pedagogical practice to foster the liminal space and, consequently, cultivate a more dialogic, open-ended, and non-hierarchical education. Underrepresented faculty wished to see their position in the liminal space not as one of exclusion, but rather as one shared by a wider community, hoping that turning student-faculty partnerships into a more commonly accepted if not mainstream institutional practice, would be beneficial for all involved.

*This research has been successfully reviewed according to Elon University's research ethics committee guidelines (The Institutional Review Board).*

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ARTICLE

# "More than Just a Student": How Curriculum Co-Creation Fosters Third Spaces in Ways of Working, Identity, and Impact

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ABSTRACT
The Third Space (Bhabha, 2004) represents non-traditional roles, processes, relationships, and spaces in which individuals work and have impact. This article presents qualitative research into 13 different curriculum co-creation initiatives at five Scottish universities and analyses the forms of Third Space that emerge. The findings highlight that curriculum co-creation can foster Third Spaces that include: new ways of working in learning and teaching, student development in a space between traditional student and teacher roles and identities, and impact in civic engagement within and beyond the university. The respect and reciprocity that characterise curriculum co-creation can greatly benefit students' personal and professional development as individuals. In addition, I suggest that the Third Space of civic engagement can advance the Third Mission of universities (beyond impact in the first two missions of teaching and research) when students and teachers work in partnership to have a positive effect on the wider society.

KEYWORDS
third space, co-creation of the curriculum, identity, student development, civic engagement

Student-staff partnerships in curriculum development have increased in recent years, resulting in many benefits to their participants (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2017, 2018, in press; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Drawing on this work, I define curriculum co-creation as the values-based principles that guide the ongoing, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial process of staff (e.g., academic staff including tutors and lecturers, academic developers, and professional services staff) and students working in partnership to negotiate and share decision-making regarding aspects of curriculum development. I make the assumption that both staff and students are highly capable individuals who bring a wide range of different and valuable cultural, social, academic, and/or professional experience that should be drawn on in higher education to enhance the

learning and teaching experience. In this article, I explore the wider benefits of co-creation of the curriculum in the different forms of Third Space that emerge through partnership that represent new ways of viewing the non-traditional roles, processes, relationships, and spaces in which students and staff work and have impact (Bhabha, 2004; Gutierrez, 2008; Potter & McDougall, 2017).

The concepts of student-centred, self-directed, and autonomous learning and student involvement and engagement have become established aspects of learning and teaching (Astin, 1984, 1993; Brooks & Grundy, 1988; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Shernoff, 2013). They are also foundational aspects of curriculum co-creation, which is a distinct form of student engagement because it promotes different attitudes and ways of working with students as partners in learning and teaching (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Cook-Sather et al. describe this type of "partnership 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 conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (2014, pp. 6-7). Curriculum co-creation differs from other forms of learning and teaching in that the values of respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility are central principles (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Although students and staff may share ownership for students' learning in traditional forms of learning and teaching, co-creation of the curriculum offers the opportunity for students and staff to share ownership over aspects of not only learning but also teaching.

Like curriculum co-creation, the Third Space can facilitate what others have referred to as a *zone of proximal development.* For example, Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) used this term to describe the distance between an individual's actual development and their potential development when learning with guidance from others in problem-solving. Later, Gutierrez (2008, pp. 148-149) used this term to highlight the intentionality of creating a particular social environment for pedagogy that fosters development, equity, social justice, and cosmopolitanism that draws out individuals' sense of shared humanity whilst celebrating difference through meaningful exchanges within a learning community. The intentional nature of collaborative, interactive, respectful, and reciprocal processes of co-creating the curriculum can also promote equity while challenging the status quo of traditional structures, processes, and ways of working in higher education (Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2017). Similarly, in the work of Bhabha (2004), who originally conceptualised the Third Space, new forms of postcolonial discourse and communication can challenge traditional forms of power to foster equity and social justice. Bhabha describes how the Third Space can represent "'in-between' spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity" (2004, p. 2). Potter and McDougall also suggest that the Third Space can push against traditional hierarchies when there is an exchange of "porous expertise…between students' mediated cultures and the culture of the classroom…[when] the epistemological frames of reference for 'what counts' as knowledge are genuinely co-constructed" (2017, p. 85).

In this article, I explore how the concept of Third Space can provide a new lens for examining the benefits of curricular co-creation. Many benefits for students have been widely documented (Bovill & Bulley, 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2017, 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Here, I examine the benefits for not only individuals but also their universities and wider communities. In this respect, the notion of universities' Third Mission is relevant since it goes beyond the primary and secondary missions of

teaching and research to highlight the important mission of contributing to social progress through civic engagement (Pinheiro, Langa, & Pausits, 2015b; Predazzi, 2012). In describing the Third Mission, Pinheiro, Langa, and Pausits state, "In the last decade or so, calls for a re-engagement of the university in helping to tackle the great challenges facing societies and local communities have propelled the Third Mission to the forefront of policy discussions—this time under the mantra of 'relevance' and 'social impact'" (2015a, p. 227).

METHODOLOGY

This research formed part of a larger doctoral research study in which I employed qualitative methods to learn about the nuanced nature of curriculum co-creation at Scottish universities. Through criterion sampling, I identified staff members who facilitate co-creation-of-the-curriculum projects at universities in Scotland by using publications, conference presentations, and word-of-mouth since I am an active member of the University of Edinburgh community as both a PhD student and an employee. I have drawn on the work of Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard, and Moore-Cherry (2016) to identify curriculum co-creation projects since they classify student roles in co-creation of learning and teaching as including consultants, co-researchers, pedagogical co-designers, and representatives. I identified 13 curricular co-creation projects led by 16 staff members from five Scottish universities who had previously worked with student co-creators who were pedagogical co-designers, co-researchers, or consultants. I had previously met six of the potential participants at events prior to interviewing them, and I introduced myself via email to the other potential participants. They were therefore aware of my interests in student engagement and co-creating the curriculum. Thirteen of the 16 agreed to participate in interviews. It was apparent from the staff response rate that they were proud to share and be recognised for their innovative teaching. I used snowball sampling with these staff members to identify 14 student co-creators, none of whom I had previously met, as potential participants. Eleven students agreed to participate. Student participants often shared how grateful they felt for the opportunity to co-create the curriculum with staff, and many saw participating in this research as a way of giving back to their teacher while also advancing understanding about co-creation of the curriculum.

The 13 curriculum co-creation projects within the Scottish higher education sector that formed the context of my study varied widely and took place across various subject areas. These ranged from medicine and veterinary studies to science (geoscience and biology) to social sciences (political science, sociology, social work, and education). Some of the projects were extracurricular and students were specially selected to participate; these included students serving as external consultants helping staff improve teaching and learning, and student-staff partners co-creating educational resources. Other projects included the whole class in graded courses, through co-creation of grading criteria, co-creation of aspects of assessment such as exam questions, negotiated peer teaching embedded into graded courses, and co-creation of a variety of community projects. In particular, staff at different universities supported students to prepare for and implement teaching projects at local primary schools, service learning projects, and science outreach projects with community partners.

I made the aims of the study and the voluntary nature of participation transparent through using participant information sheets and consent forms. In most cases, I conducted semi-structured interviews on a one-to-one basis with participants. However, at one university, it was deemed most appropriate to hold a focus group discussion with four

participants, since three staff members and one student had worked together closely on a project. During the interviews and focus group with co-creation practitioners—both staff and students—I explored topics that included their experiences of working in partnership and their beliefs concerning the benefits and challenges of curriculum co-creation. Interviews tended to last around an hour, with some staff interviews and the focus group discussion extending longer. With permission from each participant, I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews and focus group discussion.

Drawing on a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006, 2014), I analysed the extensive qualitative data, identifying themes using the constant comparative method and NVivo software. I engaged in reflective journaling following many of the interviews which I used to help validate the trustworthiness of the data. I also used triangulation since, across the majority of the 13 co-creation initiatives,
 I interviewed both staff co-creators and corresponding student co-creators. Although the Third Space was not central to the focus of this study and participants did not mention the Third Space concept by name, the theme did arise from the data, with participants highlighting how their work as co-creators was distinct from traditional teaching and learning. Based on my inductive analysis, the findings highlight that co-creating the curriculum can foster three different types of Third Spaces including new ways of working in learning and teaching, student development in a space between traditional student and teacher roles and identities, and impact through civic engagement within and beyond the university. I will now explore each of these themes.

RESULTS

**The Third Space "zone of proximal development" of new ways of working in learning and teaching**

A key aspect of curriculum co-creation is staff intentionally sharing responsibility with students for some forms of teaching decision-making, often with the aim of promoting student development and equity. This pedagogy of co-creating the curriculum can be seen as a zone of proximal development (Bhabha, 2004, p. 86; Gutierrez, 2008, p. 148) that develops a cosmopolitan learning environment in which students and staff bring different forms of expertise to the development-focused experience that brings them together. For example, participants in this study who worked together to co-create the curriculum at one university (including Staff 11, 12, 13, and Student 11) describe co-creation as "Where you don't know who is the teacher and who is the student," since they share responsibility. Student 11 expands on this definition:

> It was about how everybody would come with some skills or some knowledge and it would all go towards one goal. We tried to get that as much as possible. …I think it's where you know that you can learn from each other and you can move forward in creating something good for both of you, more than just your own individual use… I think it is about openness on both sides.

The process of developing both individual and collective responsibility as well as the reciprocal nature of learning from each other are key aspects of sharing ownership in curriculum co-creation.

Participants describe the processes and dialogue that come from sharing ownership over aspects of course design. Staff 4 (who works with fourth-year students to teach

second-year students by embedding peer teaching into parts of the credit-bearing curriculum) says:

> Teaching is like an iceberg because students don't usually see the nine tenths that are underwater with all the preparations. We throw the whole thing over to them and give them the tools.

This teacher highlights how the co-creation experience of supporting peer teaching helps fourth-year students learn about the workload involved in preparing for teaching. Similarly, Staff 8 describes the challenges that students learned to overcome when each group designed and led a two-hour seminar within their co-created course:

> Course design is a complicated thing. We tried as much as possible to let them see the nuts and bolts of the process, and how these things get devised…They could do whatever they wanted with it [their seminar], but then what was interesting is things like time management and structuring often became very problematic. My view is you have got to figure it out yourself, because that is what we do [as teachers]. I think a lot of them found that very useful in the sense that I don't think they have ever had that kind of experience where they had to take ownership…We could go back and say "well these are the kinds of things that we grapple with when we design courses."

As also highlighted in other studies, curricular co-creation helps students learn about the course design process (Bovill & Bulley, 2011; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Cook-Sather et al., 2014) and develop empathy for teachers (Hermsen, Kuiper, Roelofs, & van Wijchen, 2017; Lubicz-Nawrocka, in press). Similarly, this participant reflects on the benefits of students cultivating transferrable skills and attributes throughout the co-creation experience. By gaining experience of planning and teaching a seminar, student co-creators acquire rich learning experiences in a supportive learning environment whilst also developing resilience and empathy for the challenges that staff face.

Different curriculum co-creation projects facilitate sharing different amounts of ownership and power with students. However, the openness and willingness of both students and teachers who participate in co-created projects demonstrates the reciprocity of co-creation of the curriculum. This is often a new way of working that students need to adjust to as they become more confident in their contributions. For example, Staff 6 reflects:

> I do think they find it difficult at first because it is more democratic and it's them taking responsibility.

In addition to students taking ownership over course development and their own learning, curriculum co-creation can also promote different ways of working when students become more confident in valuing their contributions. Several participants focus on how, during co-created projects, students share their expertise on how they learn best which helps staff improve their teaching. Student 11 describes the process of recognising the expertise that she brings to co-creation:

> I remember feeling very afraid of why I was supposed to be there, because I felt like I was speaking to people with a lot more knowledge and a lot more titles than me. But it was about realising that you were not supposed to have that kind of knowledge or that kind of expertise; that was not your role. Your role was as the student, so you were expert in being a student and nobody could take that away from you. It was about discussing different perspectives, and what comes out of all those different perspectives is something amazing that is going to bring you forward in so many different ways.

This significant quotation shows how student participants adapt to a co-creation experience that values their viewpoints and brings together different forms of expertise to facilitate a reciprocal learning experience in which staff can learn more from students.

Other participants emphasise that breaking down barriers between traditional student and staff roles helps contribute to strong working relationships during curriculum co-creation. Student 4 speaks about working collaboratively as a student consultant in learning and teaching:

> The first time I did the project, it was completely new and the staff were also learning at the same time. That was positive, I think, because it helped to know everyone was in the same boat. Even although they were the specialists in this area, it was nice to know there wasn't an "us and them" divide.

This student describes the respect and trust that is built within co-creation of the curriculum projects when both staff and students are in new learning environments. This can make working relationships more equitable, since not only students but also staff are seen as learners. Similarly, Staff 11 speaks about how co-creation can help move teachers and students away from hierarchical relations:

> It was the first time a lecturer has ever asked them for their view and basically said "well how would *you* do it?"…Not being the famous "sage on the stage," if you like, just breaking down barriers…It is a problem, you solve the problem. Your solutions are equally as important…Partnerships work because people are bringing different things to them.

These participants show how co-creation can bridge the gap between student and staff roles while they engage in new experiences and solve complex problems together, which I will explore further in the next section. This helps students to gain a better understanding that knowledge is not fixed and to feel they have valuable viewpoints to contribute to its development. Although students and teachers bring different knowledge, expertise, and skills which should each be valued, participants emphasise that partnerships are most successful when individuals bring different attributes and perspectives. Therefore, co-creating the curriculum can develop a Third Space where staff and students challenge traditional hierarchies in higher education by promoting new ways of working that intentionally create particular learning environments that foster shared responsibility, equity, reciprocity, and empathy.

**The Third Space for students' identities "in-between" traditional student and teacher roles**

For some students, co-creating the curriculum has a transformative effect, particularly with respect to their increased confidence, as well as personal and professional development. In this respect, the Third Space of co-creating the curriculum can develop what Bhabha calls "'in-between' spaces…that initiate new signs of identity" (2004, p. 2). Almost all student participants in this study emphasise that co-creating the curriculum was the most influential and positive aspect of their university experience since, at times, sharing responsibility led to an intermediate role between those of traditional students and staff. Despite this challenge, all student participants taking co-created courses unanimously highlighted these as the best courses throughout their entire degree programme.

Staff 8 shares how students' development of skills throughout their university degree may be an important aspect of the success of co-creation projects:

> You need to have a certain degree of buy-in from the people who are doing it… I think it also requires a certain level of experience, being able to deal with faculty and various different people, navigate different power relationships, be able to take on feedback and criticism constructively.

This teacher highlights students' high levels of motivation, engagement, commitment, and maturity which are important aspects that facilitate sharing ownership of the curriculum. Other participants highlight the opportunity—and the challenge—of entering a Third Space in which students' expertise is valued by staff. For example, Student 3 reflects broadly on resistance from some staff members to curriculum co-creation, and how she developed stronger communication skills in her role as a student consultant to work effectively with staff partners to improve teaching and learning:

> It's really hard to do and… to have reached a level of partnership and skill for that to happen… It's quite a sophisticated conversation to talk about their impact on a group of fellow students.

This student describes the higher-order skills and attributes required for students to work effectively in successful partnerships with staff, who also need to be open to and respectful of students' input. It can be difficult at times for students to give staff constructive feedback, and for staff to receive this feedback positively. However, the development of trust and a shared vision helps student partners enter a new kind of space that is less hierarchical and where they can feel that their expertise is valued.

Many staff members reflect on the transformative nature of co-creation for students. For example, Staff 9 describes:

> I think it's been a great course, and we've really seen a transformational effect on the students involved. That's certainly what they're telling us that there's a lot of value added…It really made them *incredibly* active and reflexive.

Students' development as reflective and active learners who can articulate their leadership skills and other transferrable skills are powerful benefits of curriculum co-creation that can be transformative for students. Other staff participants share that co-

creating the curriculum helps students consolidate and recognise the value of their wider higher education experience. Staff 8 says:

> A lot of them started to see for the first time the value of their degree, which was always there but it was making explicit some things that are probably a bit more implicit in their degree. A lot of them were having interviews at the time and…they could talk more coherently about what it was that they were doing that translated into other areas of life.

The process of reflecting on their skills throughout curriculum co-creation helps many students recognise more clearly and articulate the skills they develop throughout their undergraduate degree, which can also benefit them beyond university.

Furthermore, although Student 8 works on a separate curriculum co-creation project with different staff partners, his reflections echo those above:

> Although lots of courses over the course of four years at university have helped me develop, I'd say this course has actually given me probably the most applicable skills in terms of applying it to jobs outwith the university. It's actually taking responsibility for a project and having to just go and do it outwith the university, with minimal assistance. It's very different to anything else I've done at uni... I think in terms of engaging with the lecturers and the client as well, it made you feel a bit more than just a student which was nice: it made you feel almost on an equal playing field.

This student shares how co-creating the curriculum is a very different learning experience that helped him recognise his transferrable skills. It is striking that he identifies this learning opportunity as the one most beneficial in his employability and job applications. This statement also highlights important aspects of students feeling as though they are entering a Third Space which is "almost on an equal playing field" as staff members in taking responsibility for a project. Student 8, like others above, shares how co-creating the curriculum can contribute to students' development when they embrace responsibility as confident contributors who enter a Third Space in-between traditional student and staff roles and identities as both learners and teachers.

### The Third Space of "porous expertise" and civic impact within and beyond the university

Many participants share how co-creating the curriculum is transformative not only for individual students but also for the wider student body and even the wider community. Potter and McDougall (2017, p. 85) describe how excellent teachers can embrace students' *porous expertise* in a Third Space where the co-construction of knowledge gained inside and outside the classroom can be combined to generate authentic, meaningful new ways of knowing. I would like to take this concept further to suggest that porous expertise can also encompass students and staff working with community partners and applying their knowledge to solve problems that have civic impact within and/or beyond the university. For example, Staff 11 describes the benefits of sharing responsibility with students during curriculum co-creation:

> You see major changes when you work closely with them, but you also see that reverberating around the student body. The context of leadership is a really important one because you do see people taking ownership and control and also encouraging others to do the same… I think that is the legacy of that ownership: It is not just about learning partnership, it is about developing autonomous learning skills, and the ability and the willingness to take on challenges and not balk at them… [student co-creators] are not willing to just sit there and be told things anymore. They want to do things.

This participant highlights the impact of co-creating the curriculum on developing students' leadership skills, independent and critical thinking skills, resilience, and willingness to embrace challenges by contributing actively to the university community. In this same vein, Student 10 who participated in a partnership project at a different university reflects:

> I think it taught me to challenge authority a bit more… It meant that now, going into the workplace and the wider world, I know just because someone has a higher status than me, it doesn't mean I'm unimportant. I can still challenge them and I should still have the confidence to question things and not just take things because I'm on a lower level than them. When I got my job…I had the power to negotiate and have the authority to say what I want…[Previously] I definitely put myself in a box and accepted that I am this level therefore I can't do this. We always say we can't do this but actually they're just imposed rules.

In addition to developing communication and negotiation skills, this student emphasises the self-respect and confidence she gained to become more assertive and independent without feeling intimidated by power. She acknowledges the transformative nature of the co-creation experience which helped her contribute actively and challenge authority where necessary.

Other students describe how co-creation of the curriculum transformed their perception of their abilities as a student. Student 8, who co-created a project for a local community partner, describes:

> It felt like you were able to take responsibility and actually have an impact and the work you were doing was making a bit of a difference basically… It genuinely was one of the best courses I've done in the university. It's nice to do something a bit different and to get out of the very small academic sphere and actually give back to the community.

This participant highlights not only her enjoyment of this co-created project but also the rewarding nature of applying her knowledge and skills to contribute to the wider community. Furthermore, Student 7 adds:

> In the very beginning, [our teacher] said, "We have students who are studying something. They're a resource, why doesn't the community use it?" I think that's a great way of looking at it, and it teaches us that we have something to offer. You think you're a student: You're just paying to understand the world a bit better, but now you actually realise that what you know is something valuable and the world can benefit from it.

These student co-creators speak about how sharing decision-making responsibilities with staff helps students to feel more motivated to learn and engage, and they recognise what they can contribute to the wider community.

Furthermore, Student 11 shares reflections on the effect of co-creation as a transformative experience for her:

> It makes you grow as an individual beyond the university skills and beyond everything you can learn in the classroom… because projects can actually go towards developing the institution and programmes in the community.

Many student co-creators describe the rewarding nature of their co-creation-of the-curriculum projects from which they personally benefitted, using words such as "lucky" and "grateful" to speak about these rare experiences in higher education, from which many of their peers do not have the opportunity to benefit. In addition, students speak about the value of their projects, which contribute to the rest of the university and the wider society. For example, Student 10 states:

> I feel really lucky to be part of that actually… I guess you feel like what you're learning is really relevant to your life rather than just something you can put in your short-term memory and forget about once the exam is over or an essay is over which happens quite a lot [elsewhere in traditional teaching]…[But with co-creation of the curriculum] everything I've learned, that's for the rest of my life and I know that people will be benefiting from it in years to come.

These students appreciate the fulfilling opportunities to co-create the curriculum as they think about the long-lasting impact of these experiences on their own development. They also highlight how these opportunities have allowed them to have a wider, positive impact through sharing their work with the community.

Both student and staff participants in this section highlight the skills and attributes that have contributed to making curriculum co-creation a transformative experience for students. However, many of the students speak about the benefits of a wider impact, which helps them demonstrate that they are responsible and professional contributors to wider society. Staff 3 sums up well the characteristics that students often come to embody while co-creating the curriculum. She reflects:

> There's a recognition of professionalism, and that it is a sensitive relationship that comes with responsibility. They also need to realise that their work goes beyond themselves and they're having an impact on the institution.

Therefore, co-creation of the curriculum can facilitate a Third Space of porous expertise (Potter & McDougall, 2017) that helps students recognise the value of their professional contributions and how they can transform their student engagement into civic engagement that benefits their wider community.
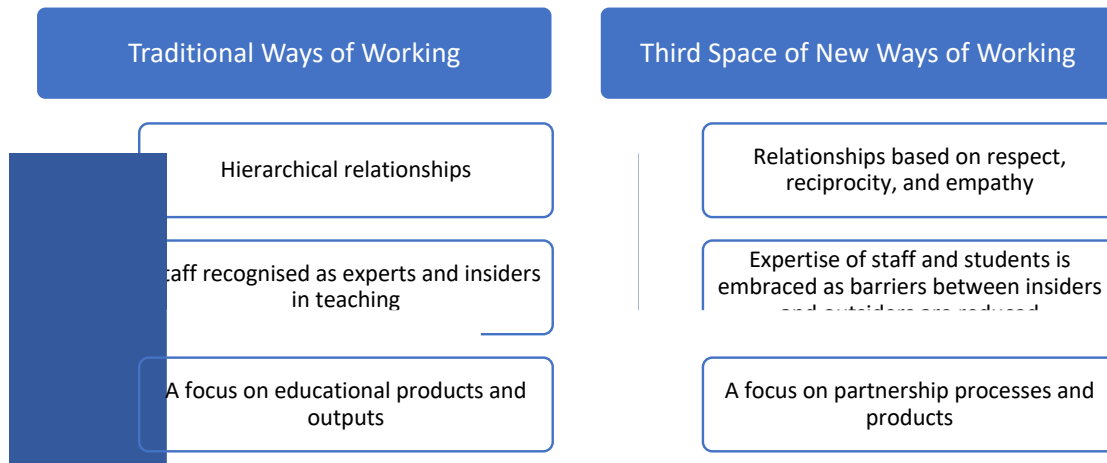
DISCUSSION

The findings presented above indicate how respect, reciprocity, and empathy between students and teachers can facilitate a new way of working in a Third Space characterised by what Gutierrez (2008), drawing on Vygotsky's terminology, calls a zone of proximal development. Shared responsibility and reciprocity are themes that are prevalent throughout the students-as-partners literature, and they are noted for fostering student development, equity, and social justice. For example, Cook-Sather et al. (2014) highlight how the values of respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, which are central to partnerships in learning and teaching, have transformational potential for individuals and institutions. This is echoed in other literature showing how partnerships can advance a more socially just, inclusive, and democratic pedagogy (Bovill, Morss, & Bulley, 2009; Bron, Bovill, & Veugelers, 2016; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018, in press; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

Curriculum co-creation can foster new ways of working that focus not just on the product of academic success but also on the rich processes of learning and teaching (Boomer, 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Lubicz-Nawrocka, in press; Matthews, 2016). The Third Space can represent a different way of working in learning and teaching, based on professional relationships that are created in new spaces that are more democratic and reciprocal. For instance, Bhabha highlights the uncertainty resulting from changing cultural power dynamics and suggests that the development of hybridity within the Third Space "breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside" (2004, p. 165). In the current study, we have also seen how co-creation of the curriculum promotes new ways of working in which "there wasn't an 'us and them' divide" and how "Not being the famous 'sage on the stage'. . . [led to] breaking down barriers." However, sharing responsibility can be a "complicated," "difficult," and perhaps an intimidating experience which may be new for both students as well as for staff. Co-creation can not only pose the aforementioned challenges and risks but, similarly to the Third Space of hybridity of cultures, also destabilise academic hierarchies (Bryson & Furlonger, 2018; Hancock & Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2017; Marquis, 2018; Woolmer, 2018). However, these challenges are often mitigated by the benefits that come from strong working relationships, recognition of different forms of expertise, and the focus not just on educational products and outcomes but also on the process of the partnership journey. Figure 1 shows how curriculum co-creation facilitates a collaborative learning environment that promotes new ways of working in higher education in a Third Space that is distinct from traditional structures and processes.

This leads us to the second theme of the current study: student transformation to become "more than just a student." The resulting effect of co-creation of the curriculum is that it can break down hierarchical barriers to balance reciprocal student/teacher relationships (Dyer & Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2019). Students' personal and professional development during curriculum co-creation can be striking in many cases (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017) and can facilitate student and staff partners learning from each other whilst developing self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018).
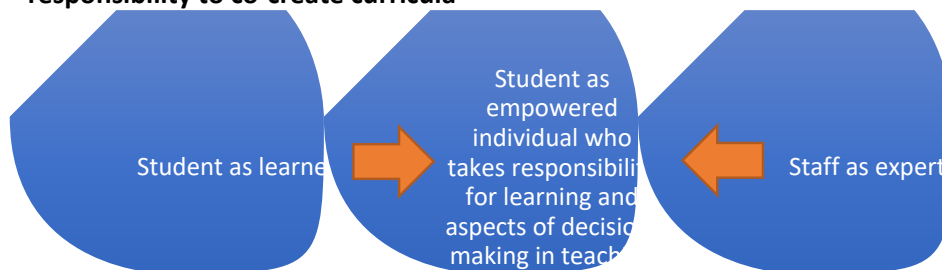
**Figure 1: A Third Space of new ways of working in curriculum co-creation**

| Traditional Ways of Working | Third Space of New Ways of Working |
|---|---|
| Hierarchical relationships | Relationships based on respect, reciprocity, and empathy |
| taff recognised as experts and insiders in teaching | Expertise of staff and students is embraced as barriers between insiders ~~and outsiders are reduced~~ |
| A focus on educational products and outputs | A focus on partnership processes and products |

As we have seen in this study, many student co-creators develop attributes such as confidence and resilience, as well as a number of transferrable skills such as critical thinking, communication, negotiation, teamwork, and leadership. This can foster rewarding, creative learning and teaching experiences that are enjoyable for both students and teachers as they reflect on students' transformation as individuals (Bovill, 2017; Bovill, Bulley, & Morss, 2011; Gee, 2003; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2017, 2018, in press; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). As a result, students' identities can develop in a Third Space in between traditional student and staff roles. Figure 2 shows how respect, reciprocity, and more equitable working relationships in curriculum co-creation help students become empowered as they take on responsibilities that are in between traditional student and staff roles and identities in higher education.

**Figure 2: A Third Space of new student roles as empowered individuals who take responsibility to co-create curricula**

Student as learner → Student as empowered individual who takes responsibility for learning and aspects of decision making in teaching ← Staff as expert

What is most striking, perhaps, is the effect of curriculum co-creation not only on advancing students' development but also on their positive impact in their communities. Co-creation of the curriculum welcomes students' porous expertise (Potter & McDougall, 2017) from their lived experience into the classroom, and it also facilitates opportunities for students to work on projects that benefit their communities within and beyond the university campus. The rich qualitative data suggests that students' empowerment in a role between student and staff responsibilities can support their contributions as leaders who engage democratically to have civic impact. The findings presented here suggest an impact of curriculum co-creation on the wider community beyond the "ivory towers" of higher

education institutions (Lempert, 1996). This suggests contributions to a Third Mission of universities in addition to their primary and secondary missions of teaching and research.

During co-created projects, when students and staff realise that students have something to offer to help solve local and/or global challenges, they recognise how, as one participant suggests, "their work goes beyond themselves." Students and staff can bring their different perspectives and expertise while working together towards solving these challenges facing their communities. Co-creation of the curriculum has been found to foster critical and democratic engagement by focusing on the processes of curriculum negotiation within co-created academic communities (Boomer, 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018). Furthermore, Scandrett et al. (2010) and Crowther, Hemmi, and Scandrett (2012) have shown how a co-created course had a positive impact on community activists' engagement in the wider society as they effected social change. Curriculum co-creation can foster a Third Space of civic engagement that facilitates the exchange of porous expertise (Potter & McDougall, 2017) to benefit not only individuals but also their university and wider communities. Therefore, I suggest that curriculum co-creation of the curriculum can facilitate three different types of Third Space that have a positive impact on individuals' identities through their development, on higher education institutions through offering new ways of working, and on communities beyond the university through contributions to their Third Mission (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Curriculum co-creation can impact positively on three types of Third Space**
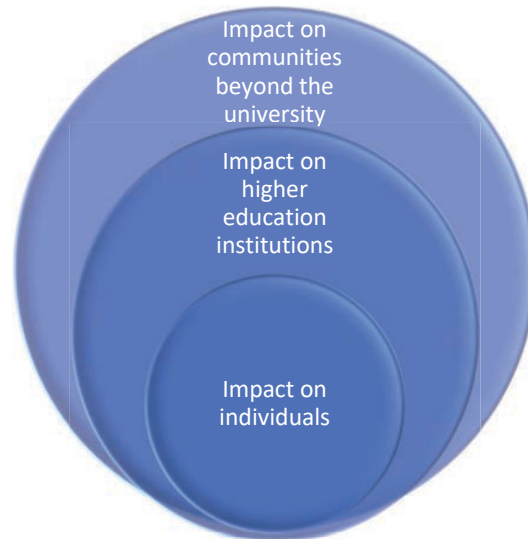


CONCLUSION

The research findings presented above highlight that curriculum co-creation can foster development of three different types of Third Spaces including: a zone of proximal development of new ways of working in learning and teaching, students' identities "in-between" traditional student and teacher roles, and porous expertise of civic impact within and beyond the university. While focusing in this article on the impact of curriculum co-creation on students, the transformational potential for staff is a fascinating theme which I have begun to address (see e.g., Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018) but it is widely acknowledged that this area needs considerable further research (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

The three different forms of Third Space stemming from curriculum co-creation work can be transformational when students demonstrate professionalism, expertise, and ownership. This finding has implications not only for students' employability, but also for their capacity to have a positive impact on society. In addition, the Third Space of civic engagement in co-creating the curriculum is significant for advancing the Third Mission of universities when students and staff recognise that students' work has the capacity to benefit not only themselves or those in academia, but also their wider communities.

*This research was reviewed according to the Moray House School of Education (University of Edinburgh) research ethics committee guidelines and received Level 1 ethical approval.*

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

**Tanya Lubicz-Nawrocka** *is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. Her doctoral research focuses on student empowerment through student-staff partnerships in co-creating the curriculum and analysing the impact of these partnerships on individuals and their communities.*

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ARTICLE

# Multi-Dimensional Trust Between Partners for International Online Collaborative Learning in the Third Space

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ABSTRACT

The International Network for Chemistry Language Development is a community of faculty and students that employ video conferencing technologies in collaborative learning experiences. Learners partner with an international peer at another university to complete online collaborative assignments (OCAs). OCAs focus on shared learning and professional experience rather than assessment of knowledge to practice chemistry communication in the oral, written, and symbolic domains. We present OCAs as an example of the Third Space, where control over interactions and learning is negotiated between unfamiliar remote students, empowering students as emerging experts. This digital Third Space results in the formation of trust (a) between student partners to prepare for—and contribute during—the OCAs, and (b) between students and faculty as partners in teaching and learning. Additionally, we report how revisions to the OCA design are achieved with current students as consultants and partners, and former students as co-researchers and co-designers.

Efforts to promote student participation in educational decision-making have recently garnered increased attention (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Bovill & Felten, 2016; Cliffe et al., 2017). The contribution of students as consultants on the redesign of learning activities can be considered an introductory level of engagement, or may scale up to a Students-as-Partners (SaP) level of engagement when students and faculty have joint ownership and decision-making authority (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014).

Empowering students to be co-learners does not come without challenges from the faculty perspective (Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard, & Moore-Cherry, 2016; Sundberg,

Josephson, Reeves, & Nordquist, 2017; Murphy, Nixon, Brooman, & Fearon, 2017) or student perspective (Bovill et al., 2016; Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Faculty and students may have different motivations for partnership (Acai et al., 2017). Additionally, students—like faculty—are individuals, and as a collective may not agree on a strategy to improve the educational experience (McCollum, Fleming, Plotnikoff, & Skagen, 2017; McCollum, Morsch, Skagen, & Shokoples, in press).

Given the various dynamics at play in SaP structures, the Third Space in higher education (Bhabha, 1994) provides valuable opportunities for partnerships as well as an interesting lens for examining these partnerships. Soja and Chouinard (1999) conceptualized Third Space as the lived space that coexists with the material and the representational. Gutiérrez (2008) describes the Third Space as a social environment of development "in which students begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond" (p. 148), providing a conceptualization of Third Spaces as physical, such as field work, or virtual, such as a shared web space. Third Spaces empower students to explore the boundaries of expertise outside of conventional hierarchies (Wegner, 2011), and can include digital spaces, constructed through digital technologies such as video conferencing, text messaging, and social media (Potter & McDougall, 2017). Drawing upon the conceptualizations of Gutiérrez and Potter and McDougall, a digital Third Space can refer to a space between the classroom (i.e., first space) and workplace (i.e., second space), in which the boundaries of learner and professional are blurred through online communication.

We present a case study of a semester-long international collaborative learning experience in a digital Third Space that actively engages students in multiple ways. First, current students contribute as consultants with faculty on the design of the experience. Second, current students partner with faculty and an international peer as co-learners that choose which professional skills they will prioritize during the experience, and determine how they will conduct the learning process based on their mutual needs. Third, former students partner with faculty as co-researchers, investigating the learning experience and impact. Fourth, former students partner with faculty as co-designers of the revised assignments to improve the experience and accentuate the impact. This case study will demonstrate the importance of trust in the Third Space. Specifically, it demonstrates that learners engage in a Third Space when they: (a) understand that deviation from traditional hierarchies is encouraged, (b) have confidence that their partner has the necessary ability and willingness to likewise prepare and contribute to meetings, and (c) trust that the assessment practice for a Third Space permits or even encourages failure as part of learning. We will reveal that students are initially hesitant to accept the role of co-learner but quickly transform through partnerships with faculty and with international peers as they embrace agency over their collaborative learning. We will examine how trust between partners in a Third Space is a foundation for the emergence of student ownership over learning. Ethical approval for this research was granted at each participating university.

CASE DESCRIPTION: ONLINE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Undergraduate organic chemistry students in Canada ($n_{MRU, 2016} = 57$; $n_{MRU, 2017} = 70$) were connected with learners at two universities in the United States ($n_{UIS,2016} = 65$; $n_{UIS,2017} = 37$;

$n_{AU,2017}$ = 38) for a series of online collaborative learning experiences in a second-year course. Students were grouped into teams of two or three so that at least one American student was paired with a Canadian student. Demographics on the student populations has been reported previously (Skagen, McCollum, Morsch, & Shokoples, 2018).

These online collaborative learning interactions are a Third Space where learners participate in realistic professional experiences. Students engage with a stranger in their field and conduct professional conversations using the internationally accepted terminology of the field (International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry [IUPAC], n.d.). The impact of the online collaborations includes improved chemistry communication confidence and proficiency (Skagen et al., 2018; McCollum et al., in press), improved reading habits (McCollum & Morsch, 2019), emergence of professional identity (Skagen et al., 2018), and exposure to global aspects of scientific professions (Skagen, McCollum, Morsch, & Wentzel, 2019). Chemistry students are accustomed to a traditional lecture-based learning environment. There is period of adjustment as learners explore their roles in a Third Space, collaboratively negotiating shared expectations for the learning experience. For example, one student stated:

> *Beginning the semester, I was a little uneasy about the online collaborative process. … As my partner and I began to trust one another, it became much more comfortable for me to reach out to my partner… This experience also serves another function of providing me with essential professional skills to be used in the future.*

The faculty role in this Third Space changed over time, with three significant contributions in the initial implementation. First, faculty collaborated to align their course curriculum and semester schedules (Skagen et al., 2018) to ensure that students could engage with each other as equal partners and that the courses still met departmental expectations. Second, faculty collaborated on the initial assignment design. Third, faculty connected international student pairs, and connected students with a new international peer if their partner dropped the course. Although faculty provided solutions for the course content questions, they did not assess student submissions for accuracy. Instead, students were encouraged to engage in a meaningful shared learning experience as a professional-in-training and to document the interactions. Faculty then provided feedback on the documentation as evidence of meaningful professional interactions.

These online collaborative assignments (OCAs) involved weekly web-based video chat with an international partner. The assignments were designed with the vision of stimulating team-based learning in a digital space that could connect learners that did not share a common classroom experience. In this way, students drew upon their developing content knowledge without relying on shared memories of what the instructor had done or said in the classroom. Learners were invited and challenged to explore connections between their expertise in chemistry, communications technology, and inter-personal professional interactions. This created a learning environment in which students were empowered to make decisions about how and when they would connect with their partner; how they would conduct their interactions; how they share the roles of learner, teacher, and expert with their partner; and which professional skills they would prioritize for development during the experience. For

example, some students reported learning how to conduct a meeting over video chat and how to facilitate the meeting effectively and efficiently. Others described learning how to move between roles of teacher and learner, sharing their understanding of course material and then pausing to patiently listen and constructively critique an explanation from their partner. Although there were similarities in how different partnerships functioned, the journey that each partnership went through to mutually negotiate their interactions in this digital Third Space was distinct. Faculty did not give direction on how partnerships were intended to function. They only identified a general means of communication (i.e., online video chat), provided shared tasks in accordance with the principles of collaborative learning (Barkley, Major, & Cross, 2014), and chose an assessment practice that would encourage learners to explore the possibilities inherent in collaborative learning as opposed to the outcome (Skagen et al., 2018).

If the design of the experience had stopped here, faculty would have maintained significant authority over the experience. An authentic faculty-student partnership was organized to co-investigate, co-research, and co-design future implementations of the experience. Since the first implementation, students have engaged in redesign of the experience as consultants and partners and informed the redesign as co-researchers. Over time, the online collaborative learning experience has evolved into a Third Space where students and faculty collaborate as partners.

### Current students in the third space

Although faculty support students through the experience by connecting them and providing a course-content purpose to initially stimulate their interactions, student partners take ownership over their shared experience. They co-create the social interactions and conversational boundaries, navigating and negotiating their relative expertise. In this way, student partners determine whose knowledge counts, and what personal experiences are valued in the professional interaction.

Through interviews and reflection assignments, students commonly discussed nervousness and the awkwardness of working with remote colleagues for the first time. Many of the students reported how these feelings pushed them to put more effort into preparation before the online meetings, which then made the collaborative work more successful. This instance of Social Comparison Concern (Festinger, 1954) appeared to yield a positive outcome of increased effort due to participants feeling accountable to their partners.

As the OCAs progressed, most student pairs realized that the different styles of their professors added value to their learning. The process of negotiating together towards a shared understanding was worth the initial discomfort. Additionally, the students reported dual roles as teachers and learners where they would alternate who would explain a specific concept and draw upon their classroom experiences. The partners had to determine together how to best develop shared understanding of the content. This consensus building allowed the students to take ownership of the learning process (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2016).

The peer dynamic (rather than an instructor-student dynamic) made it easier for students to ask for help or clarification when needed. This allowed some students to think differently

about who they are or what they might be able to achieve. Consider the following example reflection from a student:

> *The skill that they [my two partners] both have is actually a skill that I had to learn during the term because I was kind of hesitant to say when I thought something was wrong and why... So I actually had to learn how to do that and be confident sharing my ideas and giving and sharing criticism.*

Student participants have contributed as consultants in redesigning the collaborative activity. One example comes from the first year of the project. Students at one campus were required to record and submit the video chat to their instructor. When the researchers reviewed the reflections and interviews, it became apparent that this seemingly small addition added significant stress to the activity and distracted students from the main focus of disciplinary communication. This video recording requirement was removed from all subsequent iterations of the activity.

Although students experienced barriers of being unfamiliar with each other and the process used in the OCAs, they soon took ownership of conducting the learning process and determining the learning outcomes achieved. Their feedback to the faculty throughout the process directly influenced future iterations of the OCAs.

### Former students in the Third Space

Redesign of the OCAs over several years involved partnership with undergraduate research students. All of these co-researchers had previously completed the course, and many had also experienced the OCAs as learners and brought their experience to the research. Student research partners collaborated on experimental design, conducted all research interviews, collaborated over video chat with the international research team for data analysis, and co-authored manuscripts. Their perspective as near-peers of students in the course improved the data collection, as learners openly shared their opinions about the benefits and barriers of online collaborative learning (McCollum et al., in press).

Student research partners also worked with faculty to identify several problem areas of the OCAs and helped design the revisions. Perhaps the most significant redesign involved the student reflections. In the first iteration, reflections were completed collaboratively during the online meeting. Students and faculty agreed that submitted reflections were not meeting the learning goals. Student researchers who had experienced the OCAs as learners provided a deeper perspective on the challenges of reflecting on content knowledge acquisition with their partner during the online meeting. As a result, the faculty and student researchers redesigned the reflection components of the OCAs to be done individually after the online meetings. Furthermore, the focus of the reflections was changed to promote contemplation on skills development and experiences of online learning with a remote partner. This improved the quality of introspection and appreciation of the experience. Student partner engagement with the instructors at three universities directly influenced future iterations of the OCAs. The contributions of these student partners were integral to each of these improvements.

**Emergence of trust**

Developing a pedagogy that employs a constant feedback loop through consultations and partnerships among current students, former students, and faculty allowed for the emergence of trust between parties. Student reflections after each OCA revealed that they recognized the value of this digital Third Space and provided on-going input on the redesign of the assignments. Furthermore, a "Letter from a Mentor" reflection is being used to guide current students on how they can interact with their OCA partner to co-create a shared learning environment.

Rather than being overly restrictive, the OCAs maintained flexibility in regards to how students employ the verbal, written, and symbolic modes of communication during their collaborative meetings. Thus, faculty trusted students to decide what technologies to use to organize and conduct their video conferencing meetings and for communication of content (i.e., oral, written, and symbolic communication), further putting an emphasis on students creating their own success in the assignments. For this reason, OCAs were not assessed for accuracy. Rather, the assignments were graded for evidence of collaborative effort and skill development.

Each year, a segment of students is initially unconvinced that organic chemistry should include assignments that stimulate professional skills rather than solely focusing on content knowledge. As a result of our SaP redesign efforts for the OCAs, faculty now invite students to engage in a classroom discussion and personalized contemplation about the purpose of OCAs. Students report becoming more aware of how these assignments increase their professional skills and that they have assumed ownership over which professional skills they prioritize.

Finally, one of the benefits of the OCAs was to have students develop trust in an unfamiliar professional colleague within the Third Space. In our experience, assignments requiring group work are often viewed as tedious and annoying to students, a perspective supported in the literature (Paterson, 2011). In contrast, by emphasizing the collaborative process and skill development rather than content accuracy alone, our students were able to work as co-learners and co-teachers and further experience the values of each role. Alternating between roles was an intentional design element of the OCAs. Though course content was the same across the three universities, faculty explanations in class and textbooks varied. The collaborative process that encouraged students to teach and learn from each other empowered them to share their varied descriptions of chemical phenomena.

Students reported needing to be more prepared for the experience than other collaborative projects. Specifically, they needed to know the content well enough to teach it to a remote peer who had not shared their classroom experience. Through this process, students learned professional skills such as preparation and promptness and how to trust an unfamiliar peer and earn trust in return, and they developed skills as a supportive peer collaborator. The emergence of trust between student partners is illustrated in the quote below from a student reflection:

*Working with someone in a different country is not like working with study groups at the same school. You will benefit from a new point of view, a way of thinking coming from a different teaching style, and classes going at varying rates. My partner and I often*

> *collaborate outside of these video chats as well, which I highly suggest. Through these connections one may become a better teacher, and a better listener.*

This student did not know their partner prior to the experience, and yet they forged a mutual trust wherein they willingly worked together beyond the OCAs, benefitting from each other's ways of thinking and embracing the roles of co-teachers and co-learners. They trusted their partner's ability to comprehend the material, to prepare for meetings, and to contribute to their own learning in a meaningful way.

IMPACT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

OCAs impacted current and former students as partners and collaborators with their professors. Trust within and between these groups was the foundation for the shared learning and occupation of the Third Space. Following this shared experience students realized benefits of trusting each other to facilitate their learning. Numerous students began using video conferencing to study with their partners or locally with fellow classmates. The shared trust was not a common starting point with students having preconceived notions of group work. However, after the OCAs and upon multiple reflections, most students valued the ability to learn on their own terms and in a space of their choosing, as shown in the student comment below:

> *Doing the exercises together can help you pinpoint common mistakes and misconceptions. I hate working in groups, and I had never studied with someone else before, but it still had benefits for me, and my partner and I learnt a lot from each other.*

Our experience in designing and redesigning a series of collaborative learning assignments with student consultants and partners has revealed some of the challenges and benefits of this type of initiative. Beyond the course content, students report increases in ownership over their learning and trust in others to support their learning in a digital learning environment. Students describe new understanding of themselves as emerging professionals. It is these aspects of the learning—ownership over the learning, trust in others, and student input on design—that transform the learning environment into a Third Space. Additional research is needed that explores how "space" shapes trust and human interactions, and how hierarchies evolve or dissolve in digital spaces as expertise is redefined. We plan to explore additional avenues for providing students further control over the professional skills they develop through the Third Space of online collaborative learning.

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CASE STUDY

# Third Space Partnerships with Students: Becoming Educational Together

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ABSTRACT

This case study discusses how we harnessed a University Teaching Fellowship to open a collective third space partnership with "non-traditional" students to enable them to draw on their experiences of transition into higher education and to produce resources designed to help other students find their place, voice, and power at university. We discuss first the "in-between" opportunities of learning development as a "third space profession" that enables us to work in creative partnership with students. We further set the scene by exploring the third space potential of learning development per se and then examine the successful development and administration of a learning development module, *Becoming an Educationist*, at a medium-sized university in the United Kingdom. We conclude by arguing for third space partnerships not just alongside the curriculum, but in and through the curriculum as well.

KEYWORDS

third space, partnership, students as partners, learning development, higher education

We work in the United Kingdom in what is called a widening participation institution, that is, we reach out to and recruit those that do not normally experience a university education. This case study discusses how we utilised the "in-between" opportunities of learning development to work with students as partners in a collective third space (Gutiérrez, 2008). We set the scene by exploring the third space potential of learning development per se (Whitchurch, 2008), teasing out the additional benefits when given the opportunity to develop and run a learning development module, *Becoming* an Educationist (which we will refer to as *Becoming* in this case study). Our final focus will be on the collective third space created when five of our *Becoming* students produced resources to enhance the learning experience of other students.

In *Becoming,* we employed creative and ludic practice (Winnicott, 1971) to create a third space akin to that created by Gutiérrez (2008) with the same emphasis on "redesigning what counts as teaching and learning of literacy" (p. 148) that honoured our non-traditional students for the people they already were as they engaged in the process of becoming the academics that they wanted to be. We posit that it is this approach that enables students to find their own voices in the exclusionary, competitive, and often hostile higher education environment (viz. Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2014; Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2015).

This case study discusses what happened when we recruited students who had successfully completed *Becoming* to take part in our University Teaching Fellowship (UTF) funded project to produce empowering resources for other students like themselves. There was an explicit social justice agenda to the project overall, one where the particular experiences and voices of our students would be valued and where they would work in partnership with each other and with us. We outline the pressure placed upon those students who generously committed to such extracurricular third space activity on top of all the academic work with which they had to engage. We conclude by critically discussing such endeavours while strongly supporting the idea of third space learning that creates "true partnerships" within and through—as well as alongside—the curriculum.

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT AND THIRD SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

Learning development sits in the space between academic and professional practice, between staff and students, and between educational institutions and employers (Whitchurch, 2008). This liminal work involves "teaching, tutoring, research, and the design and production of learning materials, as well as involvement in staff development, policy-making, and other consultative activities (Hilsdon, 2011, p. 14). Thus, learning development is a "third space" profession (Whitchurch, 2008) in the way that it "works in partnership" with students (Association for Learning Development in Higher Education, 2018; Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014) where students and staff actively engage in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2014).

The five values of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) (2018) particularly place learning development professionals in "partnership" and in "emancipatory relationships" with students (para. 4). The connection between learning developers (LDers) and students are bottom up and not top down. That is, the relationship is not defined by the tutor and their curriculum or other goals; rather, LDers start with where the student is and not where the professional sees a "need" or where management see a "gap." Thus, a student appearing in a typical one-to-one session has not arrived to be "fixed" but will bring an assignment to discuss. The LDer is not there to tell the student how to do the work "properly," but to listen, to discuss, and to work with the student to decode the assignment and decide how to tackle it with understanding and power. This dialogic encounter (Bakhtin, 1981) "flattens" the hierarchies of the relationship, creating something much more porous and much more welcoming: a space of opportunities. This co-created space has third space potential— the potential for something to happen that is other than the traditional top-down hierarchical lecturer-student relationship or the add-on learning support provided by other education stakeholders.

Soja's (1996) theorization of third space and Shields' (2004) analysis of Henri Lefebvre's work (2003; 1991) reveal the liberatory potential of the space occupied by LDers and students. It is a space where the negative striations of normal academic power relations can be swept away (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)—together, student and LDer can (re)define the space and can inhabit it more powerfully. Webster (2018) describes this as a space where boundaries are fuzzy and malleable, and hence a space that can expand and morph to accommodate the needs of those involved as well as those of the broader environment. It is a space occupied with students and, at its best, it is defined by joint goals and outcomes. In that sense our *Becoming* module and the UTF third space partnership project both operated as physical but also as more metaphorical spaces for action (Freire, 1970) fostering "real" partnerships (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), partnerships that re-envision students and staff as active collaborators in teaching and learning.

## BECOMING THIRD SPACE PARTNERS: THE MODULE AS THIRD SPACE

A transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened. (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152)

All the students that we invited to participate in the UTF project had taken our module, *Becoming an Educationist,* which we had created as far as possible to be a third space opportunity even bounded as it was by curricular constraints. *Becoming* was a compulsory first-year undergraduate module that had assessed work; however, there was much fluidity and choice with respect to the assignments offered within that module (Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2016). Students could devise their own projects and qualitative research study, and their final meta-reflection could take as radical a form as they wished. Indeed, one of the UTF participants had produced her final "essay" as a newsletter designed to help other students make sense of university study. Thus, B*ecoming* was, similar to the residential program designed by Gutiérrez (2008), "a collective Third Space, in which students begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond" (p. 148).

We wanted the students to enjoy their *Becoming* projects and tasks, and engage in peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher learning while using the opportunities these partnerships created for their own learning and development, as well as for that of others. We also invited students to engage in wider university projects and initiatives, including the UTF project covered in this case study and described in more detail below.

## THE UTF PROJECT: STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN THIRD SPACE

The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation and representation of meaning. (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211)

Five students who had been part of our *Becoming* module were invited to take part in the UTF project to produce resources designed to help other students transition successfully into the university. Four of the students, two male and two female, were second- year (Level 5) students at the time of engaging in the project. The fifth was a third-year (Level 6) student. The

latter had taken the administrative lead in organising Get Ahead, our annual student conference (see https://www.facebook.com/GetAheadCon/) the previous year, with the other four as his team. These five students were all non-traditional students, students who had work and care commitments beside their study. Their time in and for the university was limited. Despite this, the students were keen to take part in the project to support others with their learning. For example, one student commented that "it is always a privilege to be asked to produce something that other students could look at and use," and another remarked that "the project became very enjoyable, particularly once I had managed to submit my assignments."

With UTF, we wanted to create a third space project that promoted equity and social justice. We respected our students as academic actors who "counted" (Potter & McDougall, 2017) and who could draw on their own autobiographical and contextual specificities (Gutiérrez, 2008) to design their own form of emancipatory resources to enable other students to see things differently and to take action in their own learning  (Freire, 1970). Our students typically have experienced educational rebuff and tend to have lower self-efficacy than middle-class students from a traditional university (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). We wanted to work differently with our students (Cairns, Hervey, & Johnson, 2018): in partnership and collaboration. We wanted the students to articulate and to define the project outcomes. Hence, the project success was not defined by a grade point, but by the students and their particular goals. This created a learning and teaching space that fostered co-production and exchange (Potter & McDougall, 2017)—a collective third space and a collaborative learning experience.

Specifically, we asked participating students to consider what the transition into higher education had been like for them as non-traditional students—as mature students, students with a working-class background, students from ethnic minorities, those with specific learning needs, students with substantial commitment in regards to work and care, and students that had little or no prior relationship to higher education and its demands. They were tasked with creating empowering resources that would help other non-traditional students find their feet in academia. We did not define what shape or form these resources should take, just that their end goal was to help other students develop a sense of their own power, voice, and efficacy. We also asked the students to compile journals reflecting on their travels through the project itself, and we invited the students to use our office for monthly meetings to touch base with us and support each other. Their lively meetings and the pleasure that they took in the project was heartening for us, as was the positive way they embraced the challenge:

> I felt elated and excited that I was considered and chosen out of so many students; however, at the same time, I felt apprehensive: I wasn't sure if I could commit to a project and keep up to date with my assessments. When thinking about the project, my initial thoughts were - can I come up with an idea that would be useful for other students to use on their journey through university? (UTF student)

> For me that was a very good experience. In the sense that I had the opportunity to attend the Learning and Teaching Conference to showcase our work. To me, that was perfect. I will never forget that. (UTF student)

This partnership model was not students merely developing resources and ensuring "student voice" in goal- and outcome-oriented higher education institutions. Such models of partnership are critiqued by Healey and Healey (2018) because although the power shifts from academics to students, it still resides with the higher education institution and its curricular or learning outcome goals. Rather, in the UTF project, we were adopting a "shared responsibility for teaching and learning" (International Journal for Students as Partners, n. d.) with the students driving the process, in partnership with other students and us, their lecturers. That is, the students were asked to harness their own particular knowledge and experience bases and apply them to new concepts and contexts to produce learning and teaching resources for social justice outcomes.

The UTF came with a small grant and we dedicated all of those funds to create bursaries for the students participating. Although the sums were small, we wanted to acknowledge the students as colleagues and honour the labour they were providing—knowing that our students had limited time and funds for their study:

> When I agreed to be part of the Project, I did not know that there was a bursary involved; but it was just nice that you valued our work that much, to the point where you decided that we should get something out of it. (UTF student)

PROJECT OUTCOMES: ERUPTIONS AND DISRUPTIONS

Over a period of one academic year, the five participating students produced a series of digital resources that could be shared inside and outside the university, including at our own Learning and Teaching Conference.

These resources ranged from video diary entries produced by the participants, to video interviews with other students in the university, to small digital artefacts covering everything from mental health to how to prepare a presentation or how to study more creatively. All resources produced are open access and were uploaded on a specifically created video platform: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnYK-1wvs1MwgzIQ408OVSw/videos.

Feedback has been very positive from both academic staff and other students. The resources have been used in teaching across the university in various disciplines and settings, by staff and our Success Coaches.

All the participating students themselves were proud to have been part of the UTF project: "This really felt like being a proper student," commented one participant. At the same time, it was apparent that the project itself had taken a toll:

> After committing to this project, I found that it was extremely difficult to commit to a task that will last until the end of the academic year. Although while participating in this project was greatly educational, I found that to be able to consistently contribute ideas and to be reflective throughout, to be challenging. This was due to the pressures of submitting assignments, keeping up to date with reading and also to maintain other commitments e.g. family. (UTF student)

> I felt extremely anxious and pressured about attending group meetings and presenting legitimate ideas/suggestions. Moreover, the pressure of the assignments alongside the project deadlines had given me immense anxiety. I felt overwhelmed, and somewhat embarrassed of my inability to thrive in something I am so passionate about. It was only until the deadline for this project was extended that I managed to produce my artefact. (UTF student)

> I was overwhelmed—I struggled to keep my head above water. I had numerous assessments and family commitments that were taking all my time. Time was running out, and I felt that I was not contributing as I would have liked to. However, my plan was never give up. I said that I would be part of the project, and I intended to continue until the end. (UTF student)

These were students with family and work commitments, alongside the pressure caused by their initial lack of familiarity with university teaching and learning. As they engaged with the UTF, we saw joy turning to pressure and guilt; we saw them torn by conflicting pressures: should they undertake their study work, work for a wage, or finish the resources for this project? As time passed and academic pressures mounted, our students worried that the time given to this project would negatively impact on their coursework and on their grades as well as their part-time job and family. Indeed, two out of the five involved in the UTF project intermitted the following year, formally dropping out of university, with the intention of returning after a break.

This highlights a tension between the project goals, outcomes, and personal experience. There was a strong feeling of success, which came at a high personal cost. Speaking with participating students—and looking at the journals and diaries they have produced—we question whether it is right to put so much additional extra-curricular pressure on non-traditional students especially when considering the challenging study-life situations they experience, even if these projects are set up with the best of intentions and give students as much agency as possible. We therefore wonder if we need instead to build more third space modules, as we attempted with *Becoming,* in order to create more holistic—and humanistic (Rogers, 1969)—learning and teaching experiences that are fully integrated into the curriculum.

CONCLUSION
> Mix tape: caution: this tape contains mixed feelings. (UTF student)

We attempted to create third space partnerships within our first-year undergraduate *Becoming an Educationist* module. We hoped that this module would foster students' self-confidence and extend and enhance what they thought about themselves and what they could achieve at university. We also hoped that the module would give them the courage to value themselves and their experiences and to actively participate in the academic community. Hence, when given the opportunity, we used UTF funding to create a project in which some of these students could expand on their skills and knowledge and work in partnership with us as third space professionals to create resources to help other students. However, two out the five

students we recruited for the UTF project subsequently intermitted their studies, unable to continue to balance the complex demands of university, paid employment, and family life.

Given that the third space is the space of potentiality, of the liminal and the unmapped; given that it is the street fighting and nomadic space (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of education, we would argue that it is essential that all students are given the sorts of third space opportunities that we have described here in our case study and that are doubtless discussed elsewhere in this Journal. Moreover, we argue that it is especially essential for the so-called "non-traditional" student to have the opportunity to take up these opportunities. These students are the ones who persistently experience educational rebuff, who are labelled as deficit and stereotyped as "less than"; these are the students for whom we attempted to create third space opportunities both within our *Becoming* module and the UTF project.  However, these are the very students who whilst they make the time for projects such as these—and they do—pay the highest price for taking that time away from their formal academic studies.

We therefore argue for a paradigm shift in UK higher education teaching and learning. What non-traditional students—and all students—deserve and need is a form of *Becoming* module at every level of their university study: third spaces within the curriculum; socio-political spaces that challenge, extend and explore the very nature of knowledge itself; spaces that nurture those more creative and life-enhancing activities; spaces that continue to value the people our students are as well as the academics they are becoming.

Those of us "in-between professionals"  (Whitchurch, 2008) are well placed to offer and create such spaces and we should grab the opportunity to utilise third space, alongside, but importantly within the curriculum, to work in partnership with our students, with other staff and other third space professionals to stretch the boundaries of what is possible.

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ARTICLE

# Challenging Spaces: Liminal Positions and Knowledge Relations in Dynamic Research Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

This article draws upon concepts of liminality and Third Space to explore what happens when undergraduate students become research partners and illustrates how various positions emerge, change, and fluctuate within the educational space of an interdisciplinary course. Based on perspective dialogues with student groups who have worked on research projects concerned with learning environments in higher education, we discuss which experiences from various academic spaces the students make relevant and use as resources in their group work. Furthermore, we highlight how the act of challenging traditional knowledge hierarchies and well-established roles also involves a revision of students' relations to each other.

KEYWORDS

third space, liminal positions, undergraduate research experiences, dynamic student relations, higher education research

Contemporary debates on higher education reveal an interesting ambition to base approaches to teaching and learning on empirical evidence (Perry & Smart, 2007). With this in mind, one main concern is to consider *how* research on higher education is conducted, *who* influences its direction, and *what* questions are being raised. While students traditionally are involved in academic development efforts as informants (Lizzio, Wilson, & Simons, 2002), they are much less involved in conducting research on higher education during their time as students. In the present article, we will use a qualitative research approach to explore what happens when undergraduate students become researchers within the educational space of an interdisciplinary course.

The involvement of students in research has been discussed in broad terms and various settings, and Healey (2005) has introduced a framework to pinpoint different ways of linking and integrating teaching and research. One particular approach that is widely used in this regard involves undergraduate research experiences (UREs), where the students are the researchers (Brew, 2013; Lopatto, 2003). There is a growing body of literature focusing

on this type of inquiry, demonstrating that it facilitates the students' intellectual development and increases their higher-order thinking skills (Brew, 2003; Hodge, Magolda, & Haynes, 2009; Levy, 2011; Wallin, Adawi, & Gold, 2017). UREs are, however, predominantly offered in the science, technology, and engineering fields, and with few exceptions situated within one or closely related disciplines (Brew, 2013). Furthermore, there is often little space for either pedagogical negotiations concerned with the positions and roles that teachers and students have within UREs, or for critical discussions between students and teachers of the epistemological and methodological groundings of the research activities.

Bearing this in mind, there is an apparent need to undertake careful and critical empirical research that may contribute to this field. One way to address and emphasise the importance of pedagogical negotiations and discussions, as well as critical engagement with research and research methods, is to focus on student-teacher partnership or Students-as-Partners (Cook-Sather, Matthews, Ntem, & Leathwick, 2018; Cook-Sather, 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). Here, a partnership is based on a reciprocal relationship between the student and the teacher, where both benefit and accept certain risks by engaging in something that is not fully predicable (Healey et al., 2014; Marquis et al., 2016). A partnership positions students as knowledgeable partners who contribute to and shape their learning experiences (Healey, O'Connor, & Broadfoot, 2010; Jensen & Bennett, 2016). Neary and Winn (2009) have taken this even further by introducing the term *Student as Producer,* which emphasises "undergraduate students working in collaboration with academics to create work of social importance that is full of academic content and value, while at the same time reinvigorating the university beyond the logic of market economics" (p. 193). By re-considering the relationship between undergraduate teaching and academic research, the concept of Student as Producer offers opportunities to re-establish the university as a place for collaboration between students and academics with the common purpose to produce knowledge and meaning (Neary, 2010, 2012, 2016).

Moreover, Jensen and Bennett (2016) argue that "the way that this occurs is through the use of dialogue to develop mutual understanding" (p. 42). Dialogue should, however, not be understood as a mere technique, but as part of the developmental process in becoming knowledgeable partners and human beings—"a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 13). Such a definition of partnership reflects the principles and values of authenticity, reciprocity, being more, hope, and responsibility. The link between Freirean pedagogy and Students as Partners is important as it provides foundational values that can counteract neoliberal, domesticating, and technocratic threats to meaningful partnership (Peters & Mathias, 2018).

In addition to the potential of Students as Partners and Students as Producers to stimulate dialogue, discussions, and negotiations, Jensen and Bennett (2016) highlight the importance of "repositioning the way that students can contribute to teaching and learning through including and valuing their perspectives and experiences and by students taking a more active role and leading activities in relationship with staff" (p. 42). Creating opportunities for this type of partnership in higher education means acknowledging both students' and teachers' hybrid positions, thereby rejecting such binaries as student and teacher, student and researcher, and research-producer and research-consumer, amongst other potential relations and positions (Cook-Sather, 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Neary, 2010). By challenging traditional positions and encouraging student-teacher partnerships

that explore pedagogical practices, new forms of higher education research and academic development can emerge (King, Kersh, Potter, & Pitts, 2015; Werder, Thibou, & Kaufer, 2012; Neary, 2012).

Positioning students as knowledge producers is an important step that moves beyond research *on* students and research *with* students to research *by* students. As such, students' positions emerge as central rather than additional, which may disrupt traditional forms of knowledge construction. It could be argued that such research is a key issue, not only for new forms of academic development and research, but also in more fundamental ways as it potentially addresses the dynamics of knowledge relations and knowledge hierarchies in negotiating what is held to be valid and "true." By creating a "semi-permeable membrane between students' mediated cultures and the culture of the classroom" (p. 85), a more porous exchange of expertise can be supported, where students may contribute their resources to conduct research on higher education (Potter & McDougall, 2017). In what has been called *Third Space* (McDougall & Potter, 2015), the traditional positions of teachers and students are dissolved and both can occupy liminal positions that challenge assumptions and frames of reference in new ways (Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011). Liminal positions may be described as "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (Turner, 1974, p. 232) and can be used to depict in-betweenness as an important part of creating a Third Space (Barrineau & Anderson, 2018). In this way, the Third Space can be described as "a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152).

With these perspectives serving as our backdrop, in the present article we will draw upon dialogues with students who work in groups on research projects that address how learning environments in higher education may be improved. We will in particular explore what happens when undergraduate students become researchers and illustrate how various positions emerge, change, and fluctuate within the educational space of an interdisciplinary course. A key interest is to highlight how the act of challenging traditional knowledge hierarchies and well-established roles also requires a revision of the students' relations to each other and the emerging dynamics within the students' work groups. By making experiences from inside and outside higher education relevant in their group work and using them as resources for sense-making, the students create a space with the potential to transform relationships between student and student, as well as between student and teacher.

CONTEXT AND CASE

The context for this study is the interdisciplinary course Environments for Learning in Higher Education, a 7.5-ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) course that falls under the Experts in Teamwork (EiT) umbrella at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Norway. Courses under the EiT umbrella share an experience-based interdisciplinary approach with a focus on students' development of collaborative skills and reflective capacity but have different disciplinary groundings and topics that students work with. EiT is mandatory for most Master's level students at NTNU, meaning that students from all disciplines are taking a course under the EiT umbrella. In total at NTNU, around 80 to 90 courses under the EiT umbrella are held each year with over 2500 students (see Wallin, Lyng, Sortland, & Veine, 2017 for further details on EiT).

Environments for Learning in Higher Education has 20 to 30 Master's students from various study programmes working in groups of five over a period of 15 weeks. Student groups have weekly full-day (8:00-16:00) meetings on a self-defined research project coupled to the overall theme of the course. Examples of research projects include: How to Create an Inclusive University Environment; Identity places: Balancing Disciplinary Belonging and Interdisciplinary Collaborations; and Insights into Active Learning and Physical Learning Environments in Higher Education. The aim is that by defining, planning, and running their own research projects, students can raise questions about university learning environments that they deem important and remain in control as to how to conduct and frame their research. During the weekly meetings, students work on their group projects in a self-defined manner and the teacher acts similar to a dialogue partner and critical friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993) to provide additional perspectives to the students' ideas and approaches, as well as reoccurring formative feedback on their project reports.

The resulting final project reports are graded on the group level, but more importantly the reports are a relevant resource for academic development at NTNU and are highly valued by central administration, which is working on developing and planning a new campus for the future. As such, all the projects have meaning beyond the course, which indeed positions students as knowledge producers and makes their work available to the local community, as well as worldwide. Examples of NTNU student research projects on learning environments have been compiled in digital archives (see http://patricwallin.org/student-research/).

METHODS AND DATA

This article was co-authored by two academics who have started from different points of departure when approaching liminal positions and knowledge relations in dynamic research partnerships. Patric Wallin is a post-doctoral fellow in university pedagogy and has taught the course Environments for Learning in Higher Education in 2017 and 2018. Liselott Aarsand is a professor with a particular interest in adult learning, subjectification, and social norms and order in everyday practices.

An integral part of the Environments for Learning in Higher Education course are perspective dialogues that aim to help students gain new perspectives on their individual and group development at the end of the course. The dialogues focus on four themes: group dynamics, doing research, interdisciplinary teamwork, and report writing. Similar to focus-group interviews, the aim is to capitalise on communication between students in order to stimulate memories and reflections on experiences (Bhattacherjee, 2012). At the same time, the teacher (Patric Wallin) offers his thoughts after listening to the students in a more dialogic format to encourage further discussions and reflections. Through this dialogic approach, students may be able to see their own development from new perspectives and gain deeper insights. The perspective dialogues last from around 45 to 90 minutes.

In this research project, the students were asked for their informed consent to audio record the perspective dialogues and to use the dialogues in research. All the students agreed to participate in the research project. The perspective dialogues were held in Norwegian and each dialogue was transcribed soon after the event. Only the passages used in the present paper have been translated into English, where all the students have also been given pseudonyms.

The empirical material was analysed using a qualitative approach with Third Space as a sensitising concept with the aim of generating meaning and developing categories.

Accordingly, the analysis was particularly guided by how various forms of knowledge and knowledge relations were made relevant, negotiated, and acknowledged across the data. The material was read, re-read, and discussed several times by the authors to discover accounts where the students relate their own subjectivity and positioning with respect to themselves, each other, and the teacher. During this phase, one of the author's experiences as a teacher of the course played an important role and were thus integrated with the students' accounts from the perspective dialogues. However, in and through collaboration between the authors, these experiences were also challenged, thus making it possible for the teacher to approach the material as a researcher rather than a teacher. Furthermore, two themes emerged from the analysis that we will address in the upcoming sections: creating space for liminal positions and creating space for interdisciplinary negotiations. Each theme will be illustrated with excerpts from the perspective dialogues.

ANALYSING PERSPECTIVE DIALOGUES: CHALLENGING SPACES

The first phase of the Environments for Learning in Higher Education focus on how to create and establish genuine collaborative work modes. To accomplish this, the students map their competencies and interests within their work groups and discuss how they want to work on their projects. The teacher provides general information about the course, frames the overall theme for the projects, and engages in a dialogue with the students to start the process of establishing partnerships and building trust. Accordingly, a key issue is to encourage a move beyond the more traditional roles of teacher and student, which means allowing for the emergence of liminal positions involved in collaborative knowledge production. However, it can be challenging to initiate, re-shape, and negotiate various positions that are relevant in this context, not least since they not only include the student-teacher relationship, but also involve a revision of the students' relations to each other and the dynamics within the work groups. Hence, highlighting how the students negotiate their identity as students with other students within the realm of creating and establishing Students-as-Partners relationships will be a main approach in the upcoming analysis. It can also be argued that this is complex relational work of key importance that may also have something to say for facilitating the development of new kinds of partnerships with academics.

**Creating space for liminal positions**

The perspective dialogues demonstrate that the students depicted the course as a site where the work group, its relations, and processes are considered to be fundamental. Working in groups within the context of higher education was far from new for the students. However, positioning oneself and each other as pivotal in the emerging process and product, thus highlighting the importance of truly working together, was not necessarily a familiar approach for all the students. As opposed to what the students might have expected, the situation claims a student subjectivity in which dialogue and collaboration are crucial, and where positioning oneself as a resourceful group member and contributing to knowledge production is of great importance. As illustrated by Clara, the students initially felt that this course encounter differs from how they usually dealt with similar situations where group work was part of the agenda:

> ***Clara:*** One thing I've learned a lot from is the importance of this start-up phase that we had in the project. First, I thought it was a bit pointless and frustrating when we just focused on getting to know each other. But now I don't really think, even if we

get along nicely, I don't think we would have had so much fun without this period. And I know for sure that if we had been given project tasks already from the start, even though you would have told us not to focus on them, we would have been focusing on them anyway. So, it was frustrating at the start, and unclear what we should do—"We're on day four and we still have no idea"—but I really think that was smart because there was plenty of time to really get to know each other. And the focus came a little later. (Perspective dialogue, Group 2)

This extract reveals an ambivalent attitude where the work forms and requirements for a slightly changed student position are not immediately appreciated. Clara expresses how she struggled and in fact found the initial phase "pointless" and "frustrating," which led her to more or less question the whole idea. Usually, when faced with group work in higher education, students are expected to be goal-oriented and effective, which accentuates an instrumental focus on the assignments given. Clara describes how this appears to be almost taken for granted and claims that despite whatever instructions teachers may give at the beginning of a project, "we [the students] would have been focusing on them [the project tasks] anyway." Apparently, the attention given to focusing on building relationships and engaging in collaboration that is highly prevalent in this course falls short of such expectations grounded in previous educational experiences. Some of the students, such as Clara, would probably have felt more comfortable within the former more familiar framing, not least so they could have a feeling of being productive. Instead, she saw day after day passing by while the student group was stuck. Hence, the quote illustrates how Clara and her peer students wrestled with how to assume their identities as students within this new context.

As the process progressed, however, the students seemed to change their attitude, which Clara describes by referring to how she slowly took an opposing stance to her initial opinion: "I really think that [the course design] was smart because there was plenty of time to really get to know each other." Drawing upon Clara's reflection, we can see that a shift in focus is revealed where the students have to position themselves as the knowledgeable ones. Hence, the course framing requires that the students assume the role of knowledge producers rather than consumers, which means that they are supposed to bring their personalities, strengths, and probably also weaknesses into this educational space. Even though being a condition for the emerging knowledge production, it nevertheless appears to be a quite self-evident and simple task. It should also be noticed that a majority of the students work in the course with an open mindset about how things might be different here. This pre-disposition to explore, experiment with, and negotiate what appears to be slightly different positions, at least compared to a more traditional student role, is an important resource that the students bring into this space.

Creating an educational space where the students feel they can share their ideas, assume different positions, and discuss their thoughts is a core element in the course. The students focus keenly on how such forms of work embrace a permissive environment, and how that could condition their project. While collaboration is initially described as challenging, it is eventually found to be rewarding, at least when looking at it retrospectively during the perspective dialogues:

*Maria*: So, I think maybe because we—we had so much time during the first four to five project days. There was room for discussions like, "You can discuss your research

question a bit, but you do not need to come to any conclusion." So, we continued to do this throughout the project. Probably we have discussed everything and anything to death. Because we had time for it at the start, it has become a bit of an approach we have continued with.

*Lisa*: So, if everything would have been strict and hard from the start, then that would have set the trend. But then I think this has been important too, because it's important to spend some time discussing—and to have a nice time. . . . So, in a way we needed to just have that approach. At least occasionally, but we maybe could have had a little less discussion sometimes.

*Sven*: The question is if it would have been the same good atmosphere within the group if we had just started directly. Because there has always been a really nice atmosphere.

*Lisa*: All the other group projects I've ever been in never have had a good atmosphere. They were stressful, nagging, scolding, and full of conflicts—people have hated each other. So from that point of view, it is refreshing to have a nice time for once. And there is normally a lot of stress from time pressure that makes it so difficult, because you don't have time to make, to take care of each other, and to use each other's abilities and thoughts as resources. (Perspective dialogue, Group 3)

Maria describes how the collaborative work form, although sometimes both challenging and exhausting, became the preference within the student group throughout the entire process. With a hint of irony, she states that "probably we have discussed everything and anything to death," and in this way depicts how every detail seems to have been characterised by co-creation. Two other members in her group, Lisa and Sven, continue to elaborate on this by highlighting their experience of a friendly atmosphere within the group. According to these students, this is not necessarily always the case when working in groups in higher education. What they have experienced is depicted as an exceptional case where it is "refreshing to have a nice time for once."

What also emerges in the perspective dialogues is how the permissive culture in the group is crucial for further exploring each other's individual qualities. The excerpt shows how Sven emphasises the "same good atmosphere" throughout the whole process, and he also claims that the initial move into the project was decisive. This is further illustrated by Lisa, who agrees and draws upon her extensive experience of group work in higher education and how she usually finds it to be "stressful, nagging, scolding, and full of conflicts," and she even claims that "people have hated each other," which is in sharp contrast to what she feels now. The negative experiences from group work in general, Lisa explains, are due to a lack of time, and she further describes the advantage of how a friendly environment makes it possible to acknowledge the various understandings they all bring into this context.

The perspective dialogues, then, demonstrate that individuality and diversity seem to emerge as part of such collaborative dynamics. It appears possible, and probably even necessary, for the students to position themselves and take responsibility as individuals revealing their own opinions, experiences, and ideas, and to give voice to their values, habits, and preferences. Or, as another student, Edwin, put it: "I feel that I have learnt a lot about myself" (Perspective dialogue, Group 1), which could be argued demonstrates a transcendence of a more traditional student subjectivity and also reveals how learning is usually about other things than oneself.

Taken together, the educational space co-created by the student and the teacher points to partnership and collaboration as being crucial to knowledge production. From the perspective dialogues, it appears that it is challenging to revise and negotiate various positions that are relevant in this context, which highlights the students' relations to each other and the emerging dynamics within the student work groups. By highlighting the group and its members as fundamental to the work process, the students are tied together as partners rather than having a strong focus on the teacher.

**Creating space for interdisciplinary negotiations**
The educational space created in and through the course enables dialogues on the nature of knowledge and research, and these questions then play an important role in the emerging work and shape the learning experiences. Cultivating the idea of inviting the students to take part in research and knowledge production rather than knowledge consumption means stimulating them to take their own decisions along the way, prompting them from time to time with questions, and having perspective dialogues at the end. Accordingly, this pedagogical design also accentuates questions on the nature of research and what counts as valid knowledge. It could be argued that the partnership process allows for interdisciplinary negotiations, which also illustrates the agency, knowledgeability, and authority performed when making sense of and evaluating educational practices and research in higher education.

In focusing the discussions on what may count as valid research and knowledge, an interdisciplinary negotiation emerges among the students where they make particular experiences available, and share and use them as resources to frame opinions and make decisions. Looking into the perspective dialogues, there is no doubt that the students drew upon the various academic traditions to which they belonged, as well as everyday orientations, to claim what holds as "true." Even though the students may lack an advanced frame of reference, they nevertheless took clear stances, which positioned them as co-producers and knowledgeable actors. When invited to reflect upon what kind of work they were engaged in, and if such processes may be considered as valid research, multiple stances arose:

> *Daniel:* I would say yes, we've done that.
> *Sven:* Find out something new.
> *Lisa:* No, we haven't done anything like that. We've just talked to people and found out what they've said. That's, what it's called, social science, no not social science, humanities, maybe. (Perspective dialogue, Group 3)

As illustrated in the excerpt, Daniel claims that the student group has accomplished something that may be conceptualised as research. Another student in his group, Sven, agrees and elaborates on why this is the case by adding that "find[ing] out something new" is a characteristic of research, which according to him is what the student group has been involved in. On the other hand, Lisa takes an opposing stance and argues that research work is in fact something else. Seemingly, Lisa's frame of reference for what counts as valid research prevents her from understanding that the knowledge production she and her peer students have been engaged in is indeed research, which leads her to claim that the group was merely able to capture people's experiences and understandings. In eventually making

a slight shift, Lisa then claims that it may, however, be seen as research when located in disciplines distinct from the one to which she belongs.

A key issue, then, in how the students talked about and examined their processes and projects is to some extent ambiguity, where it becomes apparent that they are not entirely sure how their work is to be considered, what research in fact is, and what counts as valid knowledge. At the same time, the students also take clear stances in reviewing their work by using particular words to explain what may be seen as characteristic for research. For instance, this is expressed by Julia who argues that their work does not reach research standards since it is not "rigorous or systematic enough to call it research" (Perspective dialogue, Group 2). However, even though these words are recurrently used to put up boundaries between research and other activities, when looking closer into this landscape it becomes quite unclear what meanings and understandings the students in fact assign to such concepts.

Furthermore, when the students discussed and try to clarify what it is that makes research, they make various research methods and methodologies relevant and use them as resources in negotiating what forms of knowledge can be acknowledged and validated:

> **Lisa:** I feel it gets a bit diffuse, and I'm like "is this statistically representative"? Is this anything at all?
> **Sven:** Just that it's not presented in tables.
> **Lisa:** Or that it can't be measured.
> **Maria:** I think I felt your frustration about it a little bit throughout the project. That you have a little number-focused way of thinking from time to time. And that I see, I have an approach, where I see both aspects, because I have both qualitative and quantitative methods in my studies. But yes, so it's been a bit like that. Perhaps a little hard to convince you—no, it hasn't been very hard to make you see that the qualitative approach also works.
> **Lisa:** It's been fun in a way. It's been nice to hear someone say something and not just look at numbers. I think. But I'm a little bit confused about it. But the point is that it doesn't feel good enough.
> **Daniel:** I feel, it's just that I haven't done it before. I don't know if this is good enough. It's just that I'm unsure. But I have very, of course I have confidence in it. It's just my own insecurity. (Perspective dialogue, Group 3)

As illustrated in the excerpt, Lisa's rhetorical question—asking if the student groups' work is "anything at all"—points out a struggle to fully know how to adequately examine the quality of this work. In negotiating what counts as valid knowledge and research, many of the students use terms taken from a science research genre by drawing on such language as "representative," "statistics," "numbers," and "tables." Maria, who is familiar with the social sciences, explains that she felt frustration among her engineering and science peer students throughout the project. Separate from them, she positions herself as somebody who has experience with quantitative as well as qualitative research approaches, which she claims to be useful knowledge that makes it easier for her to acknowledge their work process as quite close to research.

It can also be noticed that some of the students point out that their work has been particularly interesting in the sense of trying out new ways to produce knowledge. In this excerpt, for instance, Lisa, enthusiastically says, "it's been fun in a way, it's been nice to hear

someone say something and not just look at numbers" and further adds that she is nevertheless slightly "confused" when confronted with various disciplines and knowledge domains. Daniel agrees with Lisa and expresses how encountering something unfamiliar also raises the question of insecurity: "I don't know if this is good enough," he says. As such, it could be argued that the students are put in a position where they are encouraged to (re)consider their frames of reference and their conceptual understandings of what knowledge and research in fact may be.

Taken together, the educational space provided appears to allow students to relate to their own work in multiple ways. There is no doubt that distinct experiences, approaches, and stances on how to characterise and examine knowledge and research became part of the discussions among the students in the work groups, and that discussion of these topics was also triggered by the perspective dialogues. When working across and between knowledge domains and classifications there is a risk of ending up with rather messy spaces. The dialogues also illustrate that there is probably a need to draw and maintain some boundaries and characteristics that distinguishes research from similar activities, which may facilitate the development of quite "rough" definitions of research. Nevertheless, encouraging such dialogues highlights the students as partners, co-producers, and knowledgeable actors in these types of occasional communities addressing extensive questions on knowledge and research, and such discussions may be seen as relevant for higher education as well as for society in general. Hence, the space created for interdisciplinary negotiations and the liminal positions emerging within this space may have transformative potential.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS
In the discussion we would like to focus on how partnership can contribute to an educational space where students and teachers assume liminal positions and begin to challenge well-established divisions of roles and knowledge hierarchies

In contrast to a majority of efforts present in the partnership literature (Cook-Sather et al., 2018; Barrineau & Anderson, 2018) and the Third Space literature (Han, McDougall, Mott, & Sudbury, 2018; Pitts & Brooks, 2017), the educational space described here was created amongst students from different disciplines within a particular course setting. We argue that it is interesting to explore this type of setting, not least since courses remain the dominant organisational format for the university's formal learning activities.

Furthermore, distinct from extra-curricular activities, courses allow for more inclusive and open forms of partnership by involving students who otherwise would not participate in activities linked to higher education research and academic development. The approach described here has the potential to create a space for transgressive negotiations with a diverse group of students whose voices otherwise might not be heard and to mitigate the risk of a commodification of partnership, where students become involved to improve their formal qualification (Cates, Madigan, & Reitenauer, 2018; Potter & McDougall, 2017).

At the same time, there is still a risk that the authority of the teacher and the epistemological hierarchy are maintained by framing this educational space within a course (Potter & McDougall, 2017; Routledge, 1996). By building on principles from Freirean pedagogy and emphasising dialogue as a central element both between students and between students and teachers, we tried to counteract potential domesticating and technocratic threats (Peters & Mathias, 2018). However, we acknowledge that the course setting creates challenges that are connected to its structural and organisational boundary

conditions, as well as the expectations that participants bring with them to the course and the cultures that are situated within it (Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard, & Moore-Cherry, 2016). In future research, our ambition is to take a closer look at the boundary conditions created by the course and further explore how power relations are established, negotiated, and played out within this space.

The educational space that this article describes demonstrates that partnership and collaboration are crucial to knowledge production, which appears to allow students to relate to their own work in multiple ways. The interdisciplinary nature of the course appears to be an important condition for how it enabled the students to bring a large variety of resources with them from their diverse study backgrounds. Furthermore, the students' different experiences of group work and understandings of research provided contrasts that they drew upon to discuss, negotiate, and (re)consider their frames of reference for how to work together, as well as for understanding the nature of knowledge and research. Through the porous exchange of expertise, the students could position themselves as knowledgeable and take responsibility as individuals revealing their own opinions, experiences, and ideas (Potter & McDougall, 2017). We further argue that by negotiating the nature of knowledge production and the definition of research in their own work, the students started to establish a common ground to reconnect the natural and social sciences. It is through these interdisciplinary negotiations that students experience and contribute to the "creation of one science" (Neary, 2012, p. 3).

We argue that students used their differing perspectives as a starting point to create a strong partnership between each other and to establish their group as a primary social space. The creation of this social partnership enabled them to create an environment which affected and potentially dissolved the teacher's position. It becomes apparent from the perspective dialogues that the dialogues and negotiations that students had with each other were a key part of their development. The role of the teacher in this type of partnership is focused on creating opportunities and supporting students to re-consider their expectations and understandings of higher education (Neary & Winn, 2009). One important aspect for the teacher is to create and co-create an educational space that allows the students to take more liminal positions as research partners by empowering them to work on projects and research questions that are independently developed by the students. As such, this work should be seen as research by students. Another important factor highlighted by the students was that the teacher should create opportunities to interact with stakeholders outside of the course, like academic developers and faculty administration, in order to support them to produce something that is meaningful beyond the course itself.

In contrast to many of the examples described in the partnership literature that focus on a faculty member inviting students into academic development collaboration (Bovill et al., 2016), the approach described here helps students to assume positions as researchers who exercise a high degree of control over their projects. Through students' contribution to research, their voices are elevated in academic development processes that are increasingly based on empirical evidence (Perry & Smart, 2007). The focus on research creates a semi-permeable membrane that allows meaningful interactions and development of expertise across students' mediated cultures, the culture of the classroom, and academic development. From this vantage point, it is probably also easier for the students to engage in discussions and dialogue with the teacher as partners, not as students influenced by a traditional division of roles.

The dynamic and fluctuating nature of their own subjectivity and positioning within the course created some confusion and frustration among the students, which has been illustrated in the perspective dialogues. The ambiguity associated with this repositioning is a key feature of partnerships that challenge traditional roles and predictable paths of education (Bovill et al., 2016; Felder & Brent, 1996). By creating space for liminal positions and for negotiations of research, the potential to transform relationships between teacher and student as well as between student and student is heightened (Barrineau & Anderson, 2018). It is within this educational space that students can have experiences "with unique potential to challenge deep-seated assumptions about how a community or society works" (Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011, p. 37). The rejection of binaries, as suggested by the erosion of the positions of student and researcher, and student and teacher, also creates the need to re-consider the notion of Students as Partners (Cook-Sather et al., 2018) and goes beyond a focus on student-staff partnerships. From our work, it is apparent that the student-student dialogues are central for students' experience and development and act as an important pre-emptive strategy for facilitating Students-as-Partners relationships with academics.

All in all, challenging traditional spaces in course settings and designing opportunities for students to engage in higher education research are important steps in creating educational spaces that enable students to make contributions to the future of higher education and society, as well as negotiate knowledge relations in interdisciplinary contexts.

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OPINION PIECE

# Stretching the Cultural-Linguistic Boundaries of "Students as Partners"

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For the past two years, I have been working in partnership with students and staff from diverse disciplinary, cultural, and national backgrounds on the co-development of rich cross-cultural learning experiences in the formal and informal curriculum. Coming to this work from a background in international education, I was initially drawn to the concept of "Students as Partners" (SaP) because I had become increasingly frustrated by the failure of universities to value, include, and learn from students who have diverse cultural experiences and knowledge (Mestenhauser, 2011). I wondered, could the potentially radical new language of "partnership" disrupt the way internationalisation tends to be understood and practiced in universities and open up more generative ways of learning from each other in cross-cultural spaces ?

My initial survey of the SaP literature suggested that it might be an Anglophone phenomenon. With a few notable exceptions, such as Gärdebo and Wiggberg's (2012) work in Sweden, SaP developed predominantly in the education systems of the United Kingdom, North America, Australia, and New Zealand in response to the particular conditions in those countries. Does this mean that SaP is culturally blind, and/or culturally bounded? Is "SaP" culturally translatable? What sense might those from other (pedagogical) cultures make of the concept, and how might engaging with different cultural perspectives on staff-student partnerships change the way we conceptualise them?

SaP scholars are beginning to engage in a conversation about the culturally constructed nature of partnership, and its implications for building inclusive partnerships. While Kelly Matthews has raised concerns that "SaP may be biased in favour of 'like students' partnering with 'like staff'" (Matthews, 2017, p. 2), some SaP practitioners in Anglophone contexts (for example, Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; Cook-Sather, 2015; O'Shea, 2018) are engaging with students from minority groups in partnership. Kaur, Awang-Hashim, and Kaur (2018) have highlighted how faculty-staff partnerships in the Malaysian context differ from those in Western contexts. Similarly, writers such as Frison and Melacarne (2017) in Italy and Pounder, Ho, and Groves (2015) in Hong Kong have discussed the interpretation and enactment of partnership values and practices in non-Anglophone contexts.

In a recent editorial in the *International Journal for Students as Partners*, Cook-Sather, Matthews, Ntem, and Leathwick (2018) observed that the word "partner" is interpreted differently in cultural-linguistic contexts; for example, in Germany "partner"

connotes a sexual relationship, in France it is likely to be associated with a business relationship, while in post-colonial societies it can "signal disenfranchisement" (p. 5) by evoking the failed promises made by colonising powers. I hope to contribute to this conversation by highlighting the Anglophone origins of SaP and suggesting how we might imagine and practice more inclusive and enriching partnerships in translingual spaces.

PARTNERSHIP AS A CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCT

Students as Partners is a complex cultural construct, and not one that lends itself to easy translation. To elaborate, a cultural construct is a set of ideas, which over time shape the shared identity of those in any community. Love and honour are examples of cultural constructs. While there is some shared meaning across cultures regarding such complex ideas, their significance may vary in many details. Different cultures have their own constructs of teaching and learning (Ryan, 2012), as they do of partnership (Cook-Sather et al., 2018). These varying constructs have implications for the way student-staff partnerships will be interpreted and enacted by people from different cultural backgrounds.

I have sought out opportunities to stretch the cultural boundaries of Students as Partners in many different cultural settings in several countries. During workshops and discussions, I have invited participants to draw on their own backgrounds, life experiences, and language(s) and to share the constructs, stories, and values they might associate with Students as Partners (as it is currently understood). Making space for participants to share their cultural knowledge in languages other than the dominant one in use results in a more inclusive and enriched understanding of what partnership can be.

For example, when I invited this discussion in Ireland, participants suggested that the idea of Students as Partners resonates with the concept of *meitheal*, an Irish Gaelic (Gaeilge) word for the traditional co-operative labour system in Ireland whereby community members help each other in turn with all kinds of tasks, such as house building or harvesting. Being able to speak of SaP as a form of meitheal—as an "expression of the ancient and universal appliance of cooperation to social need" (Mary Robinson Centre, nd) —immediately energised the room, as participants began to imagine how meitheal might be enacted in their own teaching/learning spaces. Similarly, on a couple of occasions, workshop participants from Aotearoa/New Zealand have connected SaP to the Māori concept of *manaakitanga*. Significantly, this is a concept which is already shaping educational practice in that country. As the Secondary School Curriculum Guides (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2011) explain, manaakitanga is about "values of integrity, trust, sincerity, and equity. Through manaakitanga, the teacher and fellow students recognise and affirm the identity of each student in open and trusting relationships" (para. 1). Again, by inviting participants to bring concepts of deep cultural significance into the pedagogical space they became quickly engaged—in this case, in imagining how they might enact the kind of care-full hospitality associated with manaakitanga in the rather inhospitable spaces of higher education.

Meitheal and manaakitanga are two constructs, among many, which have emerged when I have invited participants to explore and share the intersections between SaP and their own culturally embedded experiences of collaborative learning. This process of creating translingual spaces is in itself a profound learning experience.

IMAGINING AND CREATING PARTNERSHIPS IN TRANSLINGUAL SPACES

Creating translingual spaces does not require any particular language ability in either teachers or students. What it does require is an openness to co-learning and to valuing and

respecting the cultural-linguistic gifts of others. In my experience, creating translingual spaces for partnership conversations has not only empowered those in cultural minorities, but also benefited the monolingual majority in Anglophone universities. Because different languages give us access to different histories and ways of thinking, translingual spaces provide opportunities for monolingual English speakers to hear words/constructs from unfamiliar languages and appreciate the points of connection and disconnection between their own and other (pedagogical) cultures.

As Coco (Yitong) Bu (2017), a Chinese international student studying in Australia, explained:

> Although the term "Students as Partners" is quite new, it seems to me that the ideas that underpin it are much older…When I think back on my education in China, I realise that I was always an active participant…Our teacher gave us opportunities to demonstrate how we solved problems on the board in front of the class rather than simply giving us the solutions herself…In becoming involved in SaP practices in Australia, I have understood that my school maths teacher [in China] was actually…giving students the chance to produce knowledge rather than just consume it.

As I have been working in cross-cultural partnerships, I have been reflecting on what it is that enables these partnerships to work ethically and productively. It is worth stressing the danger of cultural appropriation in such spaces. Cultural constructs, which have deep, even sacred meaning in minority cultures, are still all too often exoticised, fetishised, misunderstood, and misused by those in majority cultures. While I have been mindful of this danger, I believe it can be addressed—and has been addressed—by fostering an attitude of "productive ignorance" (Singh, 2010). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacqaunt, 1992), Michael Singh (2010) described productive ignorance as an attitude which enables the co-production of new understanding developed in an ethic of reciprocity.

Productive ignorance flourishes where everyone is willing and able to reflect on the value and the limits of their own and others' cultural capital. When this occurs, ignorance and knowledge are "productively" entwined (Singh, 2010), because ignorance of another's cultural knowledge is what fuels inquiry (Green, 2018). Although recognising ignorance "productively" can be unsettling, particularly perhaps for those in the cultural majority, I know I have been deeply enriched by the many conversations that have flowed from the collective acknowledgement of ignorance in cross-cultural partnerships.

CONCLUSION

What I have presented here are some reflections based on my experience of working—critically and creatively—in cross-cultural learning-teaching partnerships. I began this work excited by the radical potential of "partnership," but I also wondered how the concept of SaP might translate across cultures and languages. At times my experience in these partnerships has seemed much like any other cross-cultural encounter, replete with opportunities for misunderstanding as well as for new ways of seeing. In the process I have come to understand how building partnerships in the spirit of productive ignorance can open up possibilities for deep cross-cultural learning. I encourage others to continue stretching the cultural-linguistic boundaries of "Students as Partners" by inviting, valuing, and respecting different cultural-linguistic interpretations of the concept.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

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ARTICLE

# Becoming Partners: Faculty Come to Appreciate Undergraduates as Teaching Partners in a Service-Learning Teaching Assistant Program

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between faculty and their teaching assistants in an undergraduate teaching assistant program developed at Northeastern University in the US to ease the challenges faculty faced in incorporating Service-Learning into their teaching. Feedback from faculty suggested that the undergraduates trained to assist them with purely logistical tasks were becoming partners in teaching. To explore the relationship between faculty and their teaching assistants and better understand how the faculty may have come to view the teaching assistants as partners, we conducted in-depth interviews with faculty across a range of academic disciplines and experience levels who had worked with one or more undergraduate teaching assistants. The data revealed that while the faculty participants did appreciate receiving logistical assistance with Service-Learning, they also benefited from partnering with students as colleagues who supported their teaching more broadly. We also found that faculty viewed the partnership in different ways depending on their level of experience with Service-Learning pedagogy.

KEYWORDS

partnership development, undergraduate teaching assistants, service-learning, students as co-teachers, students as colleagues

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of working with specially trained undergraduate teaching assistants (TAs) on faculty using Service-Learning (S-L). Service-

Learning is a type of experiential learning in which students engage with community-based organizations and integrate the learning that occurs in the community and the classroom in order to meet both community-identified goals and course learning objectives. The decision to support S-L faculty with teaching assistants reflects specific input from faculty on the barriers and challenges that they perceived in teaching S-L courses, in which additional work is required to establish relationships with community organizations, place students as volunteers with those organizations, and oversee the community service that the students do. Employment of an undergraduate teaching assistant trained to help with these logistical challenges was viewed as a practical means of supporting faculty in implementing S-L.

However, while responses from several years of end-of-semester S-L faculty evaluations indicated that the goal of providing logistical support to faculty through TAs was largely being achieved, comments from faculty further suggested that they were developing rich relationships with their TAs. These comments hinted at a hidden benefit to faculty who might view the TA more as a partner consistent with the growing movement and literature within higher education on the value of Students as Partners (SaP) initiatives (reviewed by Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Low response rates and length limitations to faculty comments did not allow us to clearly identify or deeply understand this phenomenon. We thus pursued the following research question: ***How does working with an undergraduate Service-Learning Teaching Assistant impact faculty?***

We used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore how S-L faculty from a variety of disciplines experienced working with TAs, allowing us to determine if the working relationship was a supervisory and logistical one, as originally intended, or a teaching partnership, as preliminary evidence suggested. Our analysis revealed the development of what the faculty members viewed as collegial relationships that enhanced their teaching and learning and supported faculty innovation in ways that were not originally envisioned. The nature of these partnerships evolved in different ways depending, at least in part, on the level of experience that faculty had with S-L pedagogy. Thus, faculty who had entered into a transactional relationship with a student found that relationship morphing into a more egalitarian partnership.

Importantly, our study focuses exclusively on faculty perceptions of their relationships with undergraduate teaching assistants. In their recent systematic review of the Students as Partners literature, Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) noted that the preponderance of articles reported outcomes for students, rather than staff: "This student-centric reporting of partnership may potentially reflect that SaP can be seen as a strategy to enhance the student experience, thereby prioritizing the student response. This does, however, potentially communicate a deficit mindset derived from a history of student engagement rhetoric, which implies that engagement, and by extension partnership, is something 'done to' rather than 'done with' students" (Matthews, 2016). Interrogating faculty perceptions of how they work with undergraduate teaching assistants, how they value these interactions, and how their relationships develop can begin to address this gap in the literature.

SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Twelve years ago, as the Service-Learning Program at Northeastern University was institutionalized and growing, faculty identified logistical concerns as the biggest barrier to adopting this pedagogical approach, not unlike the barriers identified in incorporating other high-impact practices (Bass, 2012; Kuh, Donnell, & Schneider, 2017). Acting on this feedback, the Service-Learning Teaching Assistant (S-LTA) Program was established to assist faculty with two main responsibilities: placing students in service or project roles and managing community partnerships. Since that time, the Service-Learning Program within the Center of Community Service has recruited, trained, and mentored students (predominantly undergraduates) to serve as teaching assistants for S-L courses.

Any faculty member teaching a course with an S-L component is offered the support of an S-LTA who is hired, trained, compensated, and supported by the Service-Learning Program. While most faculty choose to participate in to working with an S-LTA, several choose not to each semester for various reasons. Faculty members who opt in have several options for hiring a TA: recruit a former student of their own, identify qualities or characteristics they are seeking in an S-LTA who will be recruited by program staff, or allow program staff to assign an S-LTA based on availability.

**S-L teaching assistant recruitment, compensation, training, and responsibilities**

Each semester, approximately 40-45 students serve as S-LTAs with the program. Students are recruited from across the student body, though most apply to the program because they enjoyed their own service-learning course, were recruited directly by their faculty member to work alongside them, or are highly engaged in service and leadership through other avenues. Most S-LTAs support a single course and therefore an individual faculty member, cohort of students, and associated community partnerships.

S-LTAs are offered a variety of compensation options to choose from, including a $1,000 stipend, work-study (if they are eligible), unpaid directed or independent study (which must be for academic credit and arranged through an academic department), an unpaid internship or practicum (which must be for academic credit), or volunteering (typically chosen by students who are required to complete service as part of a scholarship requirement). Approximately 75-85% of candidates choose the stipend, which is funded directly by the Service-Learning Program, though two academic departments fund their own S-LTAs.

S-LTAs complete a full training that includes topics such as foundations of service-learning, asset-based community development, responsibilities and expectations of their role, introducing service-learning to students, and professionalism and communication. They then meet weekly throughout the semester as described below, and continue to train on topics relevant to their role as a S-LTA or their development as a student leader.

Because the goals and partnerships of each service-learning course are unique, the way faculty members work with their S-LTAs varies. S-LTAs are expected to attend nearly every class session, though their other responsibilities can include introducing service-learning to students during the first week of class, facilitating reflection discussions and activities in class, co-designing reflection prompts, managing communication between community partners and students, and providing logistical support for partnerships such as assigning students to

community partners and arranging orientation dates. Faculty members are not required to complete any training to work with an S-LTA, but rather are provided resources such as the program's learning outcomes and S-LTA responsibilities and expectations.

### Establishing community partnerships for S-L courses

In addition to supporting faculty by providing, training, and supporting S-LTAs, the Service-Learning Program has a central, formal structure for community partnership setup. The Service-Learning Program matches community partners with faculty members and courses that are likely able to meet community-identified goals, provides space for partners and faculty members to connect through a Partnership Orientation at the beginning of the semester, and facilitates multiple check-ins and an evaluation process.

Each semester, S-L Program staff circulate a Request for Partnerships application to community partners that they use to make preliminary recommendations to faculty about potential partnerships that will fit both course learning objectives and community goals. After faculty select or confirm the partnerships, they work out additional details with the community partners.

A critical part of the S-LTA's role is to serve as a point person for the community partnership and assign students from the class to community partner organizations for their projects or service roles. The handoff from faculty oversight to S-LTA oversight of course partnerships usually happens as the semester begins, once the S-LTA is trained. At that point, the S-LTA coordinates the partnerships and monitors them throughout the semester to address any issues that come up and ensure their success.

### Program size and scaling

When the S-LTA Program began, there were fewer than 20 S-L course sections each year. The Service-Learning Program now supports approximately 120 S-L course sections each year, which means many facets of the program have evolved and scaled over the last decade. The S-LTA Program was scalable over time due to our peer leadership model, in which small cohorts of TAs are led by Service-Learning Team Managers, who are senior S-LTAs. Team Managers help guide S-LTAs through real-time challenges and celebrate in their successes as they build community among their peers. Team Managers also coach the S-LTAs on integrating reflection into the curriculum, building professional relationships with community partners, evolving their role in the classroom, developing professional communication skills, and working with their faculty members.

## FACULTY DEVELOPMENT – BARRIERS TO TEACHING INNOVATION

A variety of barriers to adopting pedagogical innovations such as service-learning have been identified in the literature, including the absence of clear communication of goals and alignment with faculty values and concerns (Koslowski, 2006), opportunities to gain expertise without an onerous time commitment (Baxley, Probst, Schell, Bogdewic, & Cleghorn, 1999; Dotolo, 1999; Koslowski, 2006), institutional commitment to innovation (Young, Shinnar, Ackerman, Carruthers, & Young, 2007), and incentives for participation (Lazerson, Wagener, & Shumanis, 2000).

In the specific context of S-L as a pedagogical innovation, the barriers related to time commitment are magnified, as faculty not only have an initial outlay of time to learn about a new pedagogy and to redesign their courses, but also need to commit extra time every time they teach the S-L course. Faculty must establish and maintain relationships with community partners, place students with community partners each time they teach the course, oversee student placements, integrate student service experiences into the classroom, and more. A survey of over 500 faculty at 43 institutions in Ohio assessed factors that motivated or deterred faculty from using S-L in their teaching (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002). Four concerns were identified as strong deterrents to faculty who had never used S-L before: logistical challenges associated with community partnership, lack of knowledge of S-L pedagogy, perceived irrelevance to courses taught, and lack of release time to develop an S-L course.

Bringle, Hatcher, and Games (1997) point out that "the task of persuading faculty to become engaged in developing and implementing a service-learning course is distinct from working with those faculty to further their development as instructors and professionals" (p. 46). This was supported by Abes et al.'s study, in which time, logistics, funding, and faculty incentives were most often identified as possible deterrents to continued use of S-L. Understanding of S-L and relevance to their courses were not major impediments to continued use of S-L (Abes et al., 2002). This highlights the challenge that many faculty members face as they must decide whether to pursue meaningful ways to help students achieve learning outcomes, or focus on research, publications, and other time commitments as their performance, promotion, and/or tenure guidelines demand.

UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Owen's (2011) review of the literature on undergraduate teaching assistants (UTAs) noted that although the most obvious benefit for faculty in working with UTAs was help with course management, many other benefits accrued for faculty who were willing to view UTAs as collaborators. For example, Fingerson and Culley's (2001) interviews of 12 Sociology faculty explored whether UTAs can promote the goals of learner-centered pedagogy. Although some faculty focused on the importance of mentoring UTAs and exposing them to the profession, most focused on how they had gained a collaborator in their teaching, which led to both a less isolated teaching experience and a more learner-centered approach.

Related to these relationships between faculty and student teaching assistants are faculty-student partnerships, as defined by the growing Students as Partners movement and body of research within higher education (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Similar benefits for faculty have been found when partnering with undergraduates in roles that go beyond that of a traditional teaching assistant and in ways that uphold "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). Healey et al. (2014) identify two broad ways that students engage with faculty in partnership: learning, teaching, and research; and enhancement of learning and teaching practice and policy. Our S-LTA program was created to engage students in the logistics of teaching and learning associated specifically with service-

learning, but our interviews with faculty revealed that the relationship also developed in ways that enhanced practice and influenced faculty experience in the realm of S-L and beyond.

Cook-Sather and colleagues (2014) explored the benefits of collaboration with undergraduate students to improve teaching and learning in the context of a program that paired faculty with undergraduate student consultants who are not enrolled in the courses that the faculty are teaching. They identified three primary outcomes of these faculty-consultant interactions, writing that faculty "describe how, through working in partnership with students, they develop a greater awareness of their pedagogical goals, an enhanced ability to analyze those goals, and an increased capacity to name what they intend and how they strive to achieve it" (p. 117). In fact, these authors observed that the faculty and students involved in such partnerships often experience similar outcomes in the broad areas of engagement, metacognitive awareness, and enhanced classroom experiences.

At our institution, a structured S-LTA program was intended to promote the continued and expanded use of S-L pedagogies by providing faculty with logistical support, as time commitment and practical challenges have been identified as a deterrent to both initial and continued use of service-learning. Critical components of this program were designed specifically to address the concerns raised in earlier studies regarding recruitment, training, and management of teaching assistants (Eby & Gilbert, 2000; Owen, 2011). Notably, the student consultants described by Cook-Sather and colleagues (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Cook-Sather & Motz-Storey, 2016) prepare for their responsibilities by participating in an initial orientation and subsequent weekly meetings with the program director and other student consultants, a structure similar to that used to prepare and provide ongoing support for our S-LTAs as well. On the other hand, the role of the TA was never envisioned as that of a partner in co-creation of teaching and learning as described by Bovill, Cook-Sather, and Felten (2011), but preliminary data suggested that such partnerships might develop organically.

METHODS

Our study was driven by the research question: ***How does working with an undergraduate Service-Learning Teaching Assistant impact faculty?*** This question arose from formal and informal feedback from S-L faculty that suggested that at least some faculty were developing rich partnerships with their S-LTAs and that the resultant benefits extended beyond easing the burden of managing community placements. Coupled with our own classroom observations and informal discussion with other faculty, our program evaluation data (results of end-of-semester surveys provided to all faculty teaching S-L courses) helped to initiate further research on this topic and informed our interview protocol.

We designed a qualitative, phenomenological interview-based study in order to explore the lived experiences of our S-L faculty members—and their constructed understanding of these experiences—in relation to their S-LTAs. Data were gathered through approximately 45-minute, semi-structured interviews designed to explore more deeply how faculty viewed the impacts of working with an undergraduate TA on their teaching. We also delved further into the nature and development of the faculty member's relationship with the S-LTA. Interviews were conducted by two of the four researchers (a faculty member who teaches an S-L course and an educational developer with the Teaching and Learning Center). In order to limit socially

desirable responses, the two researchers who are S-LTA Program administrators did not conduct interviews.

After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval and the written consent of all participants, we conducted and recorded interviews. An outside transcriber transcribed these recordings, which we then analyzed using the Dedoose software package. In reading through the transcripts, we first developed units of general meaning and then generated patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994) through which we defined themes for our coding process. We refined and calibrated our codebook via an iterative process in which multiple researchers read and coded transcripts three times to ensure inter-coder agreement and reliability (Creswell, 2003).

### Participants

We recruited faculty who had previously worked directly with one or more S-LTAs in teaching a course or courses at Northeastern University for this study. We interviewed 18 faculty members from six different colleges within the university (see Table 1; we have not included participant gender and college in order to minimize risk of subject identification).

**Table 1: Faculty participant descriptors**

| Participant Number | Length of Time with Program[1] | Broad Disciplinary Areas[2] |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Experienced | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 2 | Experienced | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 3 | New | STEM |
| 4 | Experienced | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 5 | Experienced | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 6 | Experienced | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 7 | New | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 8 | Experienced | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 9 | New | STEM |
| 10 | New | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 11 | Experienced | STEM |
| 12 | New | STEM |
| 13 | New | STEM |
| 14 | New | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 15 | New | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 16 | New | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 17 | Experienced | Social Sciences/Humanities |
| 18 | New | Social Sciences/Humanities |

[1]New is defined as 1-3 semesters teaching with S-L and experienced as 4+ semesters.
[2]To protect the identity of participants we categorized disciplinary areas broadly here.

Six of the 18 participants were male; 12 were female. Participants' academic disciplines included a variety of fields across the social sciences, humanities, health sciences, natural

sciences, mathematics, and engineering. Eight faculty members were new to S-L, meaning that they had one to three semesters experience teaching with S-L at the time of the interview, whereas ten faculty members had four or more semesters of experience. Additionally, 11 faculty members had self-selected to teach their S-L courses, whereas seven were required to use S-L based on the course they were assigned to teach by their department or college. Lastly, faculty members had been paired with their S-LTA through the variety of means previously described.

FINDINGS

The two themes that most often emerged from the interview data were relationship-building and course structure. In exploring these themes and the subthemes within them, we examined both the emphasis that faculty gave to themes (code frequency) and the percentage of participants who mentioned a particular theme (code presence or absence). This analysis allowed us to better understand the experience of individual faculty and to determine whether particular themes were universal across all faculty interviewed or were spoken about repeatedly by only some faculty.

### Theme 1: Relationship-building

Several benefits of the S-LTA/faculty relationship emerged as important to faculty when thinking about the S-LTA Program (see Table 2). Nearly three-quarters of the relationship theme comments focused on the faculty-TA connection itself. While on the one hand, this is not surprising when inquiring about the experience of working with a TA, the responses often dealt with the nature of the personal relationship, rather than simply transactional supervisor-assistant interactions.

**Table 2: Types of relationships discussed in faculty interviews**

| Relationship | Frequency[1] |
| --- | --- |
| Faculty-S-LTA | 74% |
| S-LTA-Students | 14% |
| S-LTA-Community Partner | 10% |
| Faculty-Students | 2% |
| Faculty-Community Partner | <1% |

[1] Percent of total codes assigned to relationship development (N = 513) across all interviews.

Although the frequency data in Table 2 show that nearly three-quarters of the total comments made about how relationships developed were focused on the faculty-S-LTA partnership, presence/absence analysis (see Figure 1) indicates that development of relationships between the TA and the faculty member, between the TA and the students, and between the TA and the community partners were mentioned at least once during the interview by more than 80% of the individual participants. So although faculty spoke more frequently about their own partnership with the TA, most faculty also chose to describe the relationships that TAs were establishing with others. Nearly two-thirds of the faculty highlighted ways that interacting with an S-LTA impacted the development of their own relationships with students. In contrast, only 20% of participants mentioned ways in which their

relationships with community partners evolved, which may reflect the extent to which TAs acted as community partner liaisons for faculty.

**Figure 1: Presence of relationship development theme in individual interviews (N = 18 interviews)**
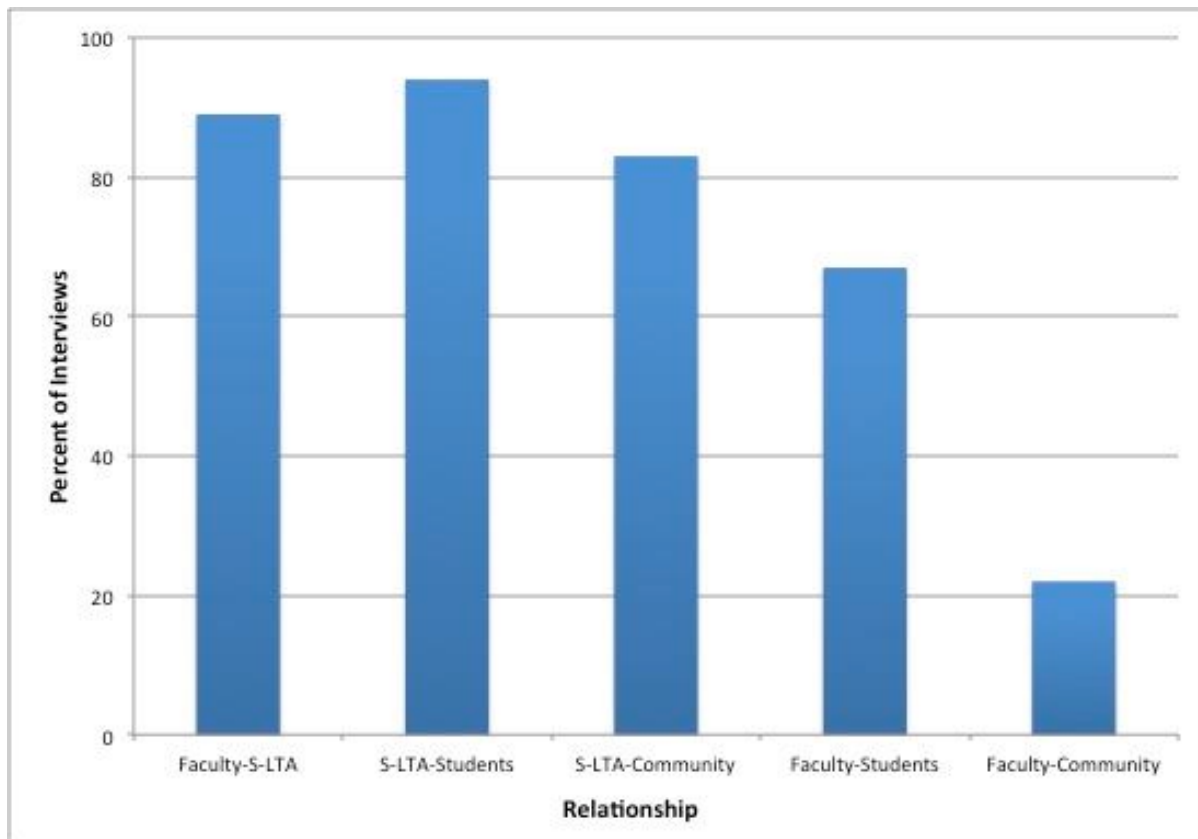


*The nature of the faculty-S-LTA relationship*

Notably, our analysis of the faculty-S-LTA relationship theme revealed a preponderance of comments describing the collegial nature of the relationship. Despite the fact that the TAs were undergraduates, many faculty came to view them as co-teachers or colleagues who helped improve the course and provide essential feedback (see Table 3). In looking at the frequency of secondary code usage within the faculty-S-LTA relationship theme, 75% of the time faculty used the language of a collegial relationship and only 13% of the time spoke in terms of a supervisory relationship.

Begley, G., Berkey, R., Roe, L., & Schuldt, H. (2019). Becoming partners: Faculty come to appreciate     97
undergraduates as teaching partners in a service-learning teaching assistant program. *International Journal for Students as Partners, 3*(1). https://doi.org/ 10.15173/ijsap.v3i1.3669

**Table 3: Subthemes of faculty-S-LTA relationships**

| Nature of Relationship | Frequency[1] |
|---|---|
| Co-teachers or Colleagues | 75% |
| Supervisory | 13% |
| Foundation for Future Collaboration | 5% |

[1] Percent of total codes assigned to Faculty-S-LTA relationships (N = 380) across all interviews

### *Teaching assistant as colleague*

Analysis of the presence or absence of subthemes in individual faculty interviews revealed one relationship code that was found in every interview: benefits that faculty felt that they had gained from interacting with the TA as a colleague or co-teacher. In this subtheme, faculty sometimes described collegial interactions with their TAs specific to the context of teaching with service-learning, for example:

> So [the TA] was very much involved in the process of what the class would look like and in developing the relationship with our service-learning partner (Participant 1).

> I've never had a TA of any kind before. So just to have: A, just to have a TA; but B, to have a TA who's focused on service-learning. You know, that was just a really beautiful combination and a gift really (Participant 7).

> When I originally was designing the course I was at a very different level. And I kept adjusting what I was doing with the course. And I didn't really have a good idea of what the heck service-learning was and the interactions of everything. So [the TA] supplied me with some rubrics. And I talked to her about that sort of thing (Participant 12).

On the other hand, many comments centered on collaborating with the TA in teaching the course more broadly, for example:

> I feel that [the TA] part has been incredibly informative and instructive. It's another set of eyes in the classroom. It's a student perspective on what's happening in the classroom. It's an essential conduit for feedback especially if they have content expertise. . . So affirmation, friendship, and again, the sense of community that we're, we're doing good work together and we're gonna continue to do this good work together (Participant 1).

> [The TA asks:] "Why did you do it that way?" And that forces me to have to share my thinking. . . I love collaborating. And I love thinking out loud and bouncing back and forth. My ideas get richer. My creativity gets heard (Participant 5).

> And so we've done more of the planning together. We've had a couple of meetings where we planned the classes and [the TA] talks about, "You know, these are some

activities that we can bring or I would love to look for something for this particular theme" (Participant 14).

There were at least two or three times during the semester where I felt like the TAs— the culture of our dynamics—were not so hierarchical that they didn't feel like they could call me out, which I really was proud of. And there was at least two or three times in the semester where somebody gave me like advice that was really directional. It really changed my thinking. At least, at least it might have been a very small thing. But it actually felt like I was learning. I learned something about how to approach [my teaching] (Participant 18).

### Theme 2: Service-learning course structure

Not surprisingly, the second primary theme that we observed was the value placed on the TA's practical contributions in terms of supporting the Service-Learning course structure, i.e., providing logistical support to the faculty member to make S-L easier to implement. Some faculty involved their TA in developing a new course, creating or co-creating an additional pedagogical innovation, or modifying some aspect of the course. However, most of the comments within this theme were focused on implementation of the S-L component of the class, for example, placing students in their service roles with community partners, facilitating reflection activities, and providing feedback to students regarding their service. In fact, implementation was the only secondary code other than the benefit of TA as colleague/co-teacher that was found at least once in every faculty interview. Because the S-LTA Program was designed with the intent of providing instructors with logistical assistance in order to make it easier for faculty to adopt and maintain S-L as part of their pedagogy, this result indicates that the program was functioning as intended and that faculty found the support beneficial, for example:

I like working with the TA because of logistics. Because it's a lot of coordinating. I have all these big plans about these relationships with the partner organizations that I just couldn't do, because of time. So anyway, the logistics of having a TA, was really helpful (Participant 14).

For some faculty, logistical support was the primary benefit of having an S-LTA, for example:

If I had voice in requesting [the TA], I would prefer to have someone who was very organized and logistically inclined over somebody who was like maybe really passionate, but not as together on the logistical element (Participant 18).

In contrast, some faculty felt that knowledge of the discipline, and not just of S-L practice, was essential. One faculty member explained why s/he doesn't think that partnering with an S-LTA focused on logistics was as beneficial as selecting a former student who was both trained by the S-LTA program and familiar with the course:

I hope after this next spring semester that I'm in a stretch where I'm not having to use a service-learning TA that isn't a former student of mine. Because while they take care of the logistical aspects of service-learning, I feel like the learning experience for the students is quite honestly compromised. Because it, it feels much more like an add-on. Because their role is an add-on. They haven't taken the course. They don't understand the content. In many cases, they don't understand me (Participant 4).

Regardless of whether or not they emphasized logistics over other TA contributions, most faculty were not sure they would continue using S-L in their courses without this resource, consistent with the earlier feedback from service-learning faculty through program evaluations and informal conversations that informed our research question. Here is how one faculty member explains that choice in terms of balancing overall workload:

So I would be in charge of all the logistics. I think that would be the biggest barrier to moving forward without a TA. If I was just teaching a regular course load and wasn't doing anything else, wasn't engaged in research, then that burden, I think, would probably be manageable. But the way that my teaching and my research load has been lately, I'm feeling like I don't have the capacity to engage in the logistics of the coordination process. I feel like that's such a huge benefit that is off my shoulders that if it were on my shoulders, that would be a challenge (Participant 2).

**Impact of faculty experience on the development of a partnership with the TA**
We also analyzed associations between participant demographics and code usage. The participant descriptors included disciplinary area, whether the faculty member chose to incorporate S-L or was assigned to an S-L course, how involved the faculty member was in selecting the TA, and how long the faculty member had been teaching S-L courses. Only the last descriptor—length of experience with S-L pedagogy—produced a unique pattern of subthemes (Figure 2). Newer S-L faculty, defined as having fewer than four semesters of S-L teaching experience, were more likely to talk about implementation—the logistics of using S-L in the course—and the challenges of navigating a collegial relationship with an undergraduate TA. More experienced S-L faculty focused less on the logistics overall and when discussing the TA as a colleague or co-teacher, these faculty emphasized the benefits and de-emphasized challenges relative to their less experienced colleagues. Experienced S-L faculty also spoke more about feelings of pride in what their TAs accomplished. The latter observation may simply reflect the fact that faculty with a longer history with the TA program had more opportunities to see the longitudinal development of TAs as they maintained these relationships over time.

**Figure 2: Frequencies of codes[1] that differentiate faculty by extent of S-L teaching experience**
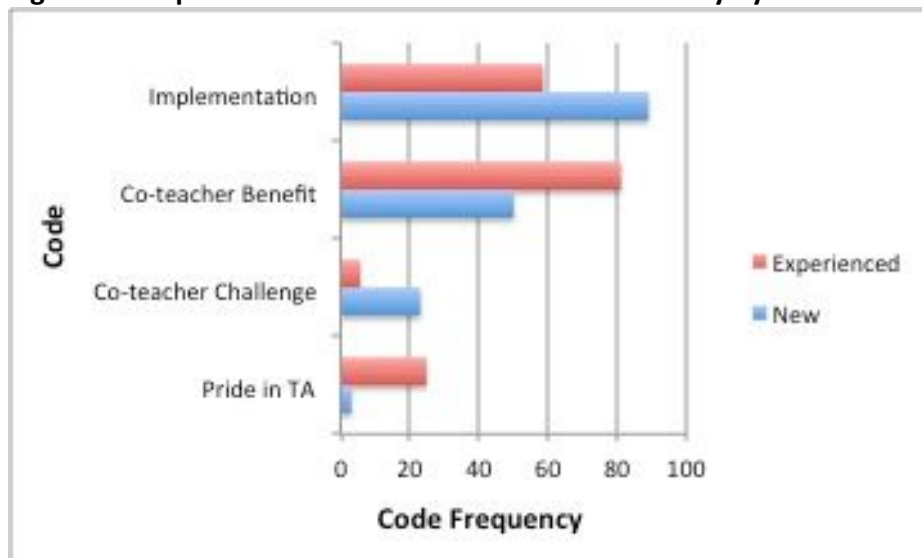


[1] Implementation code N = 772, Co-teacher Benefit code N = 899, Co-teacher Challenge code N = 227, and Pride in TA code N = 194.

DISCUSSION

In addition to affirming the value of the program for its intended purpose, the interview data showed an important and universal advantage. All participants viewed their TAs as colleagues/co-teachers and perceived this to be a benefit. Regardless of previous experience with S-L, academic discipline, length of teaching experience, TA recruitment method, or whether they chose to incorporate or were assigned to S-L, faculty universally found value in partnering with their undergraduate S-LTAs to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms.

It is noteworthy that all faculty participants reported appreciating *both* the logistical support and the collegial partnership with the TA. Our findings are consistent with a number of studies on partnering with undergraduates in courses without service-learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Fingerson & Culley, 2001; Owen, 2011). Our work extends these earlier findings to multiple academic disciplines and to service-learning, which has been identified in US national student surveys as a high-impact practice (Kuh, 2008).

It also provides some insight on how student-faculty partnerships may develop differently depending on specific faculty experiences. Importantly, although some faculty mentioned challenges with finding the right balance of independence or responsibility, we did not observe negative comments related to the time investment necessary for training and supervising undergraduate TAs. This is likely due to the highly structured TA training and semester-long mentoring and support provided by the S-L Program. The program shifts much of the instructional and management load from the faculty as it pertains to the TA, allowing more time and space for development of the collegial relationship with them that our faculty valued. This suggests a hidden benefit to a structured undergraduate teaching assistant program that may be broadly applicable in diverse disciplines both within and outside of the service-learning context.

Previous studies have indicated a need for support for instructors, even senior faculty, who are implementing new pedagogies (Dancy, Henderson, & Turpen, 2016; DiPietro & Norman, 2014). Consistent with this, we saw differences between faculty who had taught three or fewer semesters of S-L courses and those who had taught more S-L courses, regardless of length of overall teaching experience (see Figure 2). For example, although all faculty mentioned benefits of the TA partnership in terms of improved course implementation and gaining a teaching colleague, faculty new to S-L spoke much more frequently about the logistical benefits, while faculty experienced with S-L more often mentioned a beneficial teaching partnership. This likely reflects an increase in confidence in using S-L in the classroom with the shift from novice to experienced S-L practitioner. Newer S-L faculty also commented more on navigating challenges associated with the co-teacher relationships and finding the right balance.

These findings can help to inform faculty development efforts such as workshops, peer mentoring, or other resources provided to faculty new to S-L, or new to working with an undergraduate partner. New faculty might benefit from guidance from their more experienced peers on how to navigate the murky waters between a traditional supervisory relationship and a richer collaborative relationship. Hearing about the benefits from other faculty might help to shorten the time needed to fully develop a collaborative partnership with the TA.

Service-learning, perhaps even more so than many other pedagogical approaches, requires that faculty relinquish control; by introducing work with and for the community into teaching, faculty may experience a whole host of unpredictable challenges that they may not have previously encountered. The S-LTA not only helps the faculty member, students, and community partners navigate these challenges, but also becomes a colleague to the faculty member in the process. The insights offered through this collaborative relationship personally and professionally impacted faculty members who believed that course structure and the teaching endeavor itself were improved *in spite* of the complications that integrating this high-impact practice may involve. However, faculty more versed in the complexities of S-L seemed better positioned to shift to a more collegial partnership with their teaching assistants.

Interestingly, although the program was designed to engage teaching assistants directly in the day-to-day teaching and learning process, we found that faculty experience encompassed both this and an unforeseen enhancement of teaching practice, bringing together the two major (and overlapping) categories of student partnership identified by Healey et al. (2014): engagement in learning, teaching, and/or research itself and engagement in developing learning and teaching practice and policy. Applying the model of student co-creation of teaching and learning put forth by Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard, and Moore-Cherry (2016) to our findings suggests that the TAs served consistently as consultants and, in some cases, as pedagogical co-designers. In describing a formal student consultant program, Cook-Sather (2014) noted that both students and faculty experienced "multiplied perspectives," reporting new insights, increased self-awareness, greater understanding of others' perspectives, and adoption of a more shared approach to teaching and learning. This is consistent with our observations, despite the fact that the S-LTA program was designed specifically to address logistical issues in implementing service-learning, rather than provide consulting on teaching and learning. And while the teaching assistants in our program were not

serving in the role of student representatives, the faculty perceived very similar unexpected benefits to interacting with their assistants as those reported by Curran (2017), who interviewed faculty and students involved in a students-as-representatives program.

Undergraduate teaching assistants are clearly meant to contribute to the instructional work of higher education institutions and ease the burdens on teachers. As such, they may be viewed in a transactional way, as resources that faculty may use or depend upon for completion of particular tasks. However, our findings indicate that they are contributing much more, and that this is not happening by accident, but rather through an intentional support and training infrastructure. The faculty that we interviewed reported developing collaborative partnerships with their teaching assistants, valuing their input and insights broadly. The extent to which the nature of the relationship shifted away from a reliance on the TA primarily for logistical support and towards a more collegial relationship in which the student was viewed as a true partner in teaching and learning varied based on the level of instructor experience in teaching service-learning courses. Experience with this pedagogy may be a proxy indicator of faculty confidence and thus willingness to relinquish control. In future studies it will be important to explore whether faculty confidence plays a major role in the development of collaborative partnerships with students and to what extent students realize that they are making truly valuable contributions to teaching and learning within and beyond the bounds of their roles as teaching assistants.

*This research was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Northeastern University.*

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ARTICLE

# By Any Other Name? The Impacts of Differing Assumptions, Expectations, and Misconceptions in Bringing About Resistance to Student-Staff Partnership

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ABSTRACT
Most of the existing literature on student-staff partnership explores the experiences of people who are keen to be involved and who have already bought into the ethos of Students as Partners. We explore the challenges of conducting student-staff partnership in the context of resistance. Specifically, we focus on the interpretations of partnership by students and staff who were attempting to work in partnership for the first time in a medium-sized geography department in the UK. The views of participants were captured during a six-month project in which four undergraduate students were employed to work with eight academics to redesign the second-year undergraduate curriculum of one programme. Notwithstanding an introductory briefing and ongoing support, some participants showed indications of resistance. Our findings suggest that different perspectives on *partnership* influenced participants' experiences. We argue that assumptions, expectations, and misconceptions around the terminology used to describe Students-as-Partners practice may hinder the process itself, as some people may not buy in to the practice. However, despite the challenges of this project, the experience of being involved in the re-design of the modules has led to reduced resistance and emerging partnership practices throughout the department.

KEYWORDS
students as partners, terminology, language, partnership, curriculum redesign, geography

Partnership offers opportunities to adopt alternative approaches to working with students, new modes of learning, and the potential for transformation of both the partners and institutions involved (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Taylor, 2015). However, inevitably in a field that challenges the traditional hierarchies and boundaries of higher education there is sometimes resistance to disruption of the traditional roles and responsibilities of staff and students (King & Felten, 2012; Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015; Matthews et al., 2018). To date, the majority of literature on partnership explores the

experiences of people who are supportive of the ethos and values of partnership. Yet, resistance is likely to be stronger when working with people who are not already convinced by the notion of *partnership*.

This research explores the challenges of introducing partnership practice to staff and students new to the experience who engaged to achieve a particular outcome (the design of new courses) rather than because they wanted to develop new ways of working together. We analyse these participants' interpretations of partnership and how these interpretations influenced the experience of working together. We argue that assumptions, expectations, and misconceptions around the terminology used to describe Students-as-Partners practice may hinder the process itself. Despite being introduced to the existing literature and models of partnership, individuals may still not buy in to the practice.

Limited buy in has implications for the practice of partnership. In contexts in which participants are not already convinced of the value of partnership, initial partnership practice may have to take different forms than in some established partnership models such as that of pedagogic consultants (Ntem & Cook-Sather 2018). Expectations about the process of developing partnerships may need to be reduced as some contexts are unable to reproduce the more intensive and immersive relationships achieved in some other academic contexts. Building an alternative model involves a balancing act between the time required to develop a partnership relationship and the willingness of people to commit to the experience. The members of new partnerships need to prioritise reflection on participants' preconceptions of *partnership* in the time available, so as to support members' understanding of the values and principles underlying the practice. We also recognise that change takes significant time and note that, despite the challenges involved in this project, the experience of being involved in these partnerships has enabled the participants to reflect on partnership, leading to reduced resistance to the practice and emerging partnership activities throughout the department.

RESISTANCE TO PARTNERSHIP: ASSUMPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The benefits of educational change are often in the eye of the beholder (March, 1991). Whilst the initiator of change sees it as logical and well thought-through, others may see it as illogical and improperly conceived and therefore be more likely to resist such change either implicitly or explicitly (Smit, 2003). Fink and Stoll (1998) argue that "resistance is a natural and predictable response" (299), as people perceive that change will impact them negatively (Sheth & Stellner, 1979), create loss, confusion, and conflict, and/or challenge their competence (Smit, 2003).

Partnership is a process of student engagement "distinguished by the importance placed on the distribution of power" (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014, p. 15). It deliberately challenges the status quo and therefore is perceived by some as a threat to their identity (Ntem & Cook-Sather, 2018). Working to alter the balance of power raises awareness of implicit assumptions different partners have about each other and thus threatens traditional roles and responsibilities that are intrinsically linked to student and staff identities (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015; Mercer-Mapstone, Marquis, & McConnell, 2018). Consequently, in order for partnerships to be effective it would appear there needs to be a willingness to navigate these assumptions and work through the resulting impacts (Marquis, Black, & Healey, 2015; Cook-Sather, 2014).

**Assumptions, expectations, and misconceptions**

Partnerships in higher education challenge and stretch students and staff and may take both parties outside their comfort zones. In partnerships both students and staff take on the role of learners and teachers (Healey et al., 2014). It is important to recognise that both parties bring different, but comparable, experiences to the table (Higher Education Academy [HEA], 2015). Time and institutional support is needed to convince colleagues, and sometimes students themselves, that students have important insights about improving teaching and learning (Doktor, 2016) and that they have the maturity to make important decisions that have the potential to affect a large number of students (National Union of Students [NUS], 2015). Yet, these traditional power structures often affect academics and students in different ways. For example, the perception of tutor expertise may enable academics to dismiss student comments on the basis of their limited knowledge; it may also cause students to defer to the views of the staff and lack confidence in vocalising their own views and concerns (Bovill, 2014).

The belief that students do not possess the required expertise and so can never be equal partners disenfranchises them (NUS, 2015). This simplification dismisses the nature of the expertise that students bring to the partnership and suggests that knowledge of higher education is exclusively the domain of trained academics. Although students may be neither disciplinary nor pedagogic experts, they have significant expertise in being students (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). This is knowledge that academics, either through being atypical students themselves and/or by not having been a student for many years, may not possess. Furthermore, students bring forms of knowledge based on their identities and life experiences, which are particularly important and relevant if either has been under-represented (de Bie, Marquis, Cook-Sather, & Luqueño, in press). Students can bring their experience of what they have found effective and ineffective. Academic staff can bring subject knowledge, teaching expertise, and guidance as to what is realistically possible within institutional structures. Finally, if partnership is considered to be a process (Healey et al.*,* 2014), then whilst partners may not have equal responsibility for the outputs of their partnership, the different members of the partnership may have equal responsibility for ensuring a partnership approach to working together.

Yet even in accepting the potential of student-staff partnerships, some participants may be discouraged from the practice due to limited time and/or resources to engage fully. For students this may relate to needing to prioritize other competing commitments such as part-time work, their studies, and caring responsibilities. For academic staff this may connect to the perception that it is quicker and easier to do the work on their own (Curran & Millard, 2016).

People may bring their own interpretations, assumptions, and sometimes misconceptions about *partnership* as the term evokes a variety of associations and reactions (Cook-Sather, Matthews, Ntem, & Leathwick, 2018). Some of these may lead people to be resistant to the practice. Conversely, some of the literature may lead to pedagogic partnerships being interpreted as an ideal or an aspiration, or a positive process which achieves positive outcomes for partners (Mercer-Mapstone, Dvorakova, Groenendijk, & Matthews, 2017). The lived experience of enacting the process of partnership may be accompanied by feelings of pressure to enact this idealised notion of the practice, missing the importance of recognising and confronting the messiness and conflicts that are the

reality of practicing partnership (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Exploring these interpretations of partnership from the perspective of everyone involved offers an opportunity to confront different partner expectations from the beginning of the project and hence support the development of the partnership process. We now explore these challenges in the context of a case study in which partnership practice was introduced for the first time.

CASE STUDY AND METHOD

The Geography Department in a small university in the UK employed four undergraduate students to work with eight academics in 2016 to redesign the second-year undergraduate geography curriculum. The goal of the redesign was to produce four new year-long courses (on average 40 hours of class contact time between students and staff in each course). The teams aspired to work in partnership by involving students in course design as members of the development team. The project ran over a six-month period from January to June. The courses began delivery the following October.

This was the first project of its kind within the department, in an institution that did not have centralised support for working in partnership. Staff were invited to be involved in the project, but whilst it was by invitation, the supportive culture of the department may have meant that some staff felt they should get involved despite not necessarily being convinced by the notion of partnership between students and staff. The staff members included three junior lecturers, four senior lecturers, and a professor. The staff had no prior experience of working in partnership with students to design courses, although several of them worked with students in partnership in learning and teaching and in research and inquiry. Three of the staff members included in the partnerships were also involved in researching the partnership experience that is outlined within this paper. Whilst interested in and caring about teaching and learning within the context of high workloads and competing pressures on their time most of the staff involved felt unable to prioritise this initiative over their other commitments.

The opportunity for students to join the partnerships was advertised through the university's student job bank to all second- and third-year undergraduate geography students. Second- and third-year students were targeted so that the student partners had some experience of the existing second-year curriculum. Four undergraduate students with no prior experience of working in partnership were appointed: two physical geographers in the second year of their degree, and two human geographers in the third (and final) year of their degree. The appointed students were employed to work for 50 hours each over six months in one of two teams (one focusing on two human geography courses, the other on two physical geography courses). Table 1 provides the pseudonyms for the participants; gender-neutral pseudonyms were chosen to further protect the identity of the participants.

Conscious of the time both the staff and student participants were giving to be involved in the project in addition to already high workloads and a lack of existing support structures within the institution, we designed a light-touch approach to establishing and supporting the developing partnerships. Through a one-hour workshop all participants were introduced to definitions of student-staff partnership (Cook-Sather et al. 2014; Dunne & Zandstra, 2011; Healey et al., 2014; Williamson, 2013), how partnership relates to other types of participation (Bovill & Bulley, 2011), and to the HEA (2015) principles of

partnership. They were also given the opportunity to review and discuss examples of partnership in other learning and teaching contexts. At the end of the meeting the respective partnership teams separated to discuss progressing the development of the modules for which they were responsible.

**Table 1: Partnerships members and positions**

| Pseudonym | Position |
|-----------|----------|
| Alex | Student |
| Brook | Student |
| Chris | Student |
| Drew | Student |
| Adrian | Academic |
| Bobbie | Academic |
| Charlie | Academic |
| Dana | Academic |
| Elliott | Academic* |
| Frankie | Academic* |
| Gray | Academic |
| Hayden | Academic* |

*Participants marked with an asterisk were also members of the research team conducting this study.*

Over the course of the project the students participated in the design of the curriculum by discussing the specific content and order of that content, producing teaching resources, designing learning exercises, and piloting fieldwork ideas. A research assistant (not involved in either of the partnership teams) collected data on participant experiences in four stages. First, before the design of the courses commenced, the student and academic participants took part in separate focus groups exploring their expectations, aspirations, and plans for the courses and partnerships. Second, during the working phase of the project, each student kept a reflective diary of their experiences. Third, towards the end of the project, two focus groups with academics were conducted, one with the research team involved in the project, and one with the academics who had not been involved in the research of the partnerships. Fourth, individual interviews were conducted with each of the student partners. These end-of-project meetings explored participant experiences throughout the project by discussing how the partnerships operated, how this related to participants' interpretation of partnership, and how this related to the HEA principles and values for student-staff partnership (HEA, 2015). The data from each of these methods were coded inductively and key themes identified (Payne, 2007). An interpretive perspective was adopted in which social realities are understood as constructed and individual subjective experiences valued (Merriam, 2009).

During the project the research assistant acted as a mentor to the student participants. When the student partners shared their diary entries, the research assistant discussed their experiences with them and where appropriate offered support and

guidance. Staff support was approached more informally—primarily through responding to direct queries and corridor discussions.

ASSUMPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, AND MISCONCEPTIONS UNDERLYING THE STUDENT-STAFF PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

All of the staff and student participants in this project suggested to us that they recognised the value of working together to develop the new courses. Yet, it appeared that some participants found the label of *partnership* as a description of this working arrangement to be troublesome due to their apparent assumptions or possible misconceptions underlying the term (Cook-Sather, 2014; Marquis et al., 2015). We noticed that all of the students seemed to take it for granted that partnership was achievable at the start of the project. In contrast, some of the staff responses suggested they were more resistant to the term. For example, Dana commented:

> I absolutely see the value of meaningful student input and engagement around the design of new modules (etc.) but I do find framing this as "partnership" immensely problematic. . . . Collaboration, maybe, but partnership, no.

Partnership is "multi-faceted and has a number of different meanings and purposes dependent on context" (Healey et al., 2014, p. 23). Dana's interpretation of the student input may support an understanding of partnership as a process. Yet, the apparent resistance to the term *partnership* here may relate to Dana associating partnership with the output. In this way, the different participants in this research brought their own assumptions and understandings to partnership practice and what they perceived as possible within the broader higher education context. We noticed that these interpretations influenced their level of satisfaction within the partnerships. Broadly speaking, the interpretations that led to dissatisfaction with partnership fell into four different categories: (a) misconceptions about equality within partnership, (b) expectations about the nature of partner contributions, (c) expectations about the process of partnership, and (d) assumptions about authentic engagement in the project. These findings are presented and discussed in relation to the literature.

### Equality in partnership

Equality—the state of being equal—within partnership was brought up in the first focus groups by both students and staff before the project had begun. There are important differences between the adjectives equal, equitable, equivalent, and same. The Oxford Living Dictionary (2018) defines equal as "having the same status, rights, or opportunities;" equitable as "fair and impartial;" equivalent as "equal in value, amount, function, meaning;" and same as "identical; not different." Partnership practice is often critiqued on the basis that it is not possible for all partners to be the same, or do identical work in a partnership (NUS, 2015). However, the term *equal* is sometimes used instead of *the same*. Sameness in partnership is a misconception. We found that both students and staff used the term *equality* to discuss the division of work and responsibility for the course production, though

they appeared to use the term in different ways. In relation to the experience of partnership two of the students referred to being *equal* in different ways:

> you're on equal footing and sort of everything's shared, so it's like shared responsibility, shared like respect, but sharing of ideas and everything. So, it's like an equal contribution for everything really . . . I sort of link it to like business partners, . . . . one person may look at one aspect, . . . they sort of divvy up control, but they sort of both have equal weight. (Brook)

> working together with other people and just making sure you're all kind of on equal grounding, [and] have an equal say in what can happen. (Chris)

The reference to partnership being like business partners reflects one of the classic definitions of partnership where "partners contribute the same amounts of capital and divide the work equally" (Ingels, 2009, p. 531). Brook's comment may therefore appear to verge upon notions of *sameness* within pedagogic partnerships. Overall, however, these interpretations of partnership suggest a sharing of responsibility, respect, and ideas as defined by the notion of equal contributions (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017).

When the students were asked to describe what they anticipated to be the distribution of work between themselves and the staff they indicated that the distribution ranged from staff and students sharing equally in the work, to staff accounting for 60% and students 40%. Drew commented that the balance of work within the partnership was:

> not fifty-fifty because . . . I don't necessarily have to be like… in the deep end of the project. . . . I can add my partnership *to it*, but not like necessarily, be in charge of like a whole section of it.

Drew appears to associate the "deep end" of a partnership project with a measurement of quantity: "a whole section." This dismisses the potential for high-quality contributions that are equivalent to "a whole section"; for example, an original idea which significantly enhances the whole course. This is an example of the conflation of *equal* with *the same*. It also suggests equality in partnership is related to the output rather than the process.

The staff members also brought up the notion of equality. Adrian appeared to believe that partnership meant sameness of those involved, and therefore that partnership was not possible in this context. They explained: "I don't see how that's going to be achieved, sort of, because you've got different knowledge bases of what they can bring and what you can offer." This statement suggests that partnership requires the knowledge that people bring to the discussion be the same (NUS, 2015), and that if they do not bring this same knowledge, then *partnership* is not possible. Some staff participants also appeared to consider equality specifically in relation to responsibility for the output from the partnerships, for example, in relation to the quality of the courses:

> I think part of the issue is probably, culpability. Although we're going to be working together to put the module together, ultimately, it's going to be the staff that deliver it and are held responsible for its success. Whereas the students will be part of the

> project and then, essentially walk away, and I think that makes it very difficult to, to
> feel that the kind of burden is equal to some extent. (Charlie)

Staff experience and expertise underlies quality assurance processes, hence overarching responsibility for delivery and assessment rests with them. As Woolmer et al. (2016) found, students may lack the knowledge of these broader requirements. However, as demonstrated above, this was recognised by the students; indeed, they did not aspire to have that level of responsibility for the output of the project. Rather, equality was possible in the process of partnership, as one academic explained:

> I think it's about, equal but differentiated responsibility, because . . . the differentiated element I think is really, *key*, for me, ensuring that students have *ownership* over *appropriate* parts of the teaching and learning process, but, we as leaders and facilitators of that process are clear about what the boundaries are between our responsibilities and theirs. (Dana)

While seeming to identify differentiated levels of responsibility in this context, Dana assumes that it is the staff who have overarching responsibility for both the process and the outcomes. We read this quotation as suggesting that Dana thinks that staff will therefore be the ones setting the boundaries of student involvement. This perception establishes the staff member as the gatekeeper to what involvement is appropriate for students. Elsewhere it has been argued that partnership is a two-way process in which the staff member(s) may learn from the student(s) (HEA, 2015). Beginning the partnership with discussion and negotiation between the partners as to how they might operate as a team and identifying where the students and staff feel their different expertise would contribute most to the design of the course would offer a more open approach.

In contrast, Hayden commented that partnership was having "different viewpoints on the same topic and the same ways of doing things" but the aim is to find some common ground and reach a consensus. Furthermore, Frankie argued that: "If you're saying, well the buck stops with me, so it can't be a partnership, the *buck* stops with [the Head of Department]. That doesn't mean they *do* everything." This perspective appears to acknowledge that different people have different responsibilities and status within partnership, or that the work is shared equitably (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Frankie's analogy considers how they work with colleagues, recognising that, although responsibility for the successful running of a department is that of the Head of Department, staff still have ownership of the work they do, or differentiated responsibilities for aspects of running the department. Whilst in contrast to Dana's perspective, this assumption also brings challenges to the success of a partnership, as it does not adequately recognise the potential needs or expectations of the different partners in the process of partnership.

### The nature of partner contributions

Staff and students seemed to have particular expectations about the contributions that students might make—the activities in which they might be involved and the knowledge and ideas they might bring to the table. For instance, it appeared that some staff entered into the partnership expecting that students would share ideas that were not

feasible: "I can imagine that they'll make several suggestions, and straight away, it will be sort of a harsh we'll have to say, well no sorry, can't" (Adrian). This follows the NUS (2015) findings that staff perceived students to lack the experience or maturity to make important decisions. Unfortunately, expecting to say "no" establishes a barrier in a discussion before it has begun and suggests some staff members did not anticipate student contributions to be appropriate (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). An alternative approach would be for staff to share their knowledge of structural limitations (e.g. timetable structures and deadlines) with students and for them to reflect together on each idea to see if it could be facilitated and what the implications of that would be. At the end of the project, Adrian did not consider the practice to have been a partnership because "everything that I wanted to go in that module has gone into it." This implies that Adrian expected working in partnership to alter the content of the module. However, this does not mean that the way in which the decisions on content were made, and the detail of the topics covered, were not affected by the input of the student partners. Furthermore, we recognised that the students themselves placed limits on what they could offer to design of the curriculum. For example, Chris stated: "I can't produce a lecture slide to deliver to, because I don't have that knowledge, so I physically can't add that element into it." The perception that Chris cannot contribute to the content of a lecture established parameters to what they could do before the project had started. These reflections suggested to us that the students may not have recognised, or at least did not name, the unique insights that they do bring (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). What both these examples focus on is what the students could *not* contribute to the process rather than the possibilities to go beyond the normative category of "student." For some, the nature of the student involvement in the project appears to have been a foregone conclusion from the beginning.

Some of the comments that students made seemed to suggest that they also had expectations about what the staff might contribute. For example, Brook commented:

> For quite a few of them, it's been a long time since they were a student, in the nicest way possible…. And so, do they *still*... like, do they realise that since they were a student, things may have changed, or have they forgotten that because they've got their lecturer hat on? Do they still sort of relate to the students and know what they want, or do they make it their business to find out?

As a 20-year-old second-year undergraduate student, Brook perceived staff to have forgotten what being a student was like. However, two of the staff members were still formally classed as also being students, as they were new staff who were completing their postgraduate certificate in teaching and learning in higher education. Whilst we recognise that being formally classed as a student may be different from having recent experience as an undergraduate, many students on the postgraduate certificate course have noted how quickly they returned to performing as they did as undergraduate students. The assumption, therefore, that staff had no recent experience of being students suggests a lack of recognition of the nuanced experiences of the individuals involved.

### The process of partnership

In the first focus group both Drew and Chris expressed their perception that the partnerships should be discussion-based: "all sharing ideas, and then working together, to help create one thing" (Drew). This expectation, and the earlier assumptions of Frankie and Dana, appeared to underlie their different interpretations of their experiences of partnership. Earlier it was noted that Frankie planned to approach working with the students in the same way as they would with other staff colleagues—this was based on meetings to discuss and plan what was to be developed with follow-up tasks to produce resources. Frankie stated:

> I feel that, the production of resources and the discussions that we've had, have been two-way, and, have, led to different, outputs and different products on the basis of them producing something themselves, and therefore, I think that; *that* to me feels more like a partnership.

Here Frankie had moved out of the traditional academic role of creating the resources, to critiquing and discussing the materials generated by the students (Woolmer et al., 2016). However, we noticed that the student partners "felt more like… being given a task, and having to do it, and come back and report" (Chris). For Drew this felt "like then Frankie has marked it, and then we're just kind of amending it," causing Drew to go on to question what Frankie was contributing to the production of the course. This parallels Abbot's (2018) findings in which the student partners felt like assistants rather than partners when the staff partner already knew what they wanted and appeared to assign work to the students. In contrast, the students appeared to consider the process to be more of a partnership when they worked with Dana:

> We're the same, because we've just been discussing. . . . And we've literally, all of us sat there and unpicked it. They've treated it like a blank slate as well. So, I feel like that input was basically the same. . . . Which I suppose is more partnershippy. (Drew)

Chris comments: "it felt *more* like a partnership [with Dana] because we were running the ideas together in one session." This comment appears to suggest that they felt that partnership happens when the partners were all together working on and discussing the course. This assumption may have prevented the students from viewing co-produced resources as also being partnership. If so, this goes against the argument that students should be enabled to identify both the areas for enhancement and how that enhancement is achieved (Williamson, 2013). Furthermore, Dana questioned whether their "looser" approach to working with the students had been "a bit of a barrier," as the students had not produced any resources for the course they were working on together. Indeed, one of the students expressed that to one staff partner that "they *preferred* being in the advisory role, rather than *doing* the work" (Elliot). Some of the students enjoyed the discussion, but were resistant to engaging in co-production. Whilst partnership is primarily a process, not an outcome (Healey et al*.,* 2014), the students and staff had the opportunity to work together to co-produce materials for the course.

**Authentic engagement in the project**

The staff and student participants in this project were all invited. However, we learnt at the end of the project that, in the highly collegial department, some of the staff members had felt pressure to participate as they had wanted to support their colleagues and their work. Indeed, for some staff their dominant perception of their involvement was as "a favour": "I'm doing this for a favour to [the research team], more than anything else, so... it's not been my priority" (Dana). In contrast, the instigators of the project had assumed that this would be an opportunity that their colleagues would welcome:

> Frankie: That's really unfortunate because I thought we were offering them [staff] a resource, that they wouldn't have normally have had, and so I saw it as, this is an awesome opportunity.
> Hayden: But they saw it as, and I quote, "more work."

Echoing Curran and Millard's (2016) findings, some of the tutors appeared to find working in partnership a drain on their limited time noting that it is quicker and easier to do the work on their own. The assumption of the research team, that the staff would enthusiastically appreciate this opportunity and see the value in working in partnership, supports March's (1991) view that change in education is in the eye of the beholder, and resistance is to be expected (Fink & Stoll, 1998).

Overall, staff resistance might have been reduced if the funding for the partnership project had been available without being tied to a research project: "I wonder if like the presence of a research team, or the research project [affected the experience]" (Elliott). In a teaching-intensive institution where time for research is at a premium, giving up time for what is perceived as someone else's research appeared to create some resentment: "I'm afraid I'd be unlikely to change how I work for the sake of someone else's project" (Dana). The expectations of both the research team and the staff appear to have limited the success of the project. First, the assumption that staff would want to be involved meant that not enough was done to ensure staff knew that they did not have to be a part of the project in the first place. Second, the perception that this was "someone else's project" suggests that ownership by some staff members was restricted and that therefore they were not authentically engaged.

These perceptions reveal the complexities when using the term partnership and the assumptions and misconceptions that underlie it. These types of views and concerns can inhibit engagement and investment in partnership projects like this one, hindering their chances of success from the start. As discussed earlier in relation to the broader partnership literature, the difference in knowledge, skills, and ability to contribute is not necessarily an issue when working together as a partnership. While partnership does not require a false equivalency, it does mean that all partners have an equivalent opportunity to contribute to the process, but not that all partners have to contribute the same amount or in the same way (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; HEA, 2015; Felten, 2013). In this study, many of the participants, both staff and students, appeared not to share this view, and we noticed that their assumptions and misconceptions of what partnership involved or what partnership could be seemed to be oversimplified. It is therefore desirable to make these meanings

explicit at the beginning of a partnership and provide time during the partnership to unpack them.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have contributed an analysis of how different perspectives on partnership can influence participant experiences. Working in partnership raises awareness of the implicit assumptions different partners have about each other (Healey et al., 2014). However, as this research has demonstrated, raising awareness of such ingrained assumptions or expectations does not in itself overcome the barriers that they create. This project experienced resistance as it attempted to bring in partners who were new to partnership in a context without existing support structures. This meant that the types of support in place at centres of partnership practice, such as the Students as Partners Programme at McMaster University and the Students as Learners and Teachers Program at Bryn Mawr College (Ntem & Cook-Sather, 2018), were not available. Notwithstanding an introductory briefing and ongoing support, some participants expressed reservations that suggested they were not convinced by the ethos of partnership, or at least the language associated with it.

Whilst most of the staff participants identified significant benefits to working with students in a collaborative manner, this did not necessarily mean that they bought in to partnership practice. Despite recognising value in student-staff partnerships, some appeared to be dismissive of the Students as Partners agenda due to their preconceptions or misconceptions of what a partnership entails. They needed more support to take ownership of nuanced views about partnership, but they were reluctant to commit to the extra time that this would have involved. In time-limited contexts, people are often more output rather than process orientated—here the staff wanted to develop a new curriculum, and the students wanted to work with them to do this. They were less concerned about the process of how they were going to work together. Unless the partners are able to reflect on their different interpretations of partnership, then their understanding of partnership will be limited. This requires a trade-off between the amount of time needed to develop effective partnership relationships and the pragmatism of being able to achieve the desired outputs in the context of limited time and resources.

The language we use to describe Students-as-Partners practice has a powerful influence on the perceptions of what the practice involves. To paraphrase Shakespeare (1599), "What's in a name? that which we call [Partnership] by any other name would [still be worthwhile]" (Act II, Scene II, Line 43-44). Whilst the name "partnership" does not determine the nature of the practice, it is imbued with assumptions and expectations (Cook-Sather et al., 2018), which influence the way partnership plays out in particular contexts (Healey & Healey, 2018). For example, it may be down to context as to whether or not teams decide to use the terminology of "partnership" initially, or if they decide to build capacity in the practice of working together using more familiar terms like "collaboration" or "co-design", perhaps bringing in the language of partnership later (Luo, Matthews, & Chunduri, in press). This strategy may be particularly appropriate where teams are able to plan beyond a single project, so as to build confidence and understanding over several projects in a way that allows them to change the terminology as practice and experience are developed. When the term "partnership" is used, we need to ensure that time is included at

the beginning of new partnerships to unpack the language and discuss the assumptions in different interpretations of the term. This provides the opportunity for participants to take ownership of the practice and manage their expectations as to what is possible in their specific context. This necessitates going beyond simply defining the words, and rather teasing out the assumptions and possible misconceptions each individual has, so as to move towards a shared understanding of partnership between the specific partners. This may be led by people who already perceive the benefits of the practice so as to guide and support the team as they learn from one another. Partners may then begin working together with a shared, albeit uncertain, understanding of partnership.

Whilst this paper has focused upon the challenges of undertaking the partnership project, there were also many positive outcomes. These include four new modules that have been popular with successive student cohorts, enhanced understanding and learning about partnership within the department, and the infiltration of partnership approaches into many other areas of the department (e.g. teaching sessions, prospective student visit days, and other enhancement activities across the department). Time to process this experience of partnership and reflect upon the participants' initial perceptions of the language has led to an embedding of at least some of the ethos of partnership across the department including among people who were not involved in the original project. Despite the challenges involved in this first partnership project, the experience of working together in this way has reduced resistance to the practice. We must not underestimate the time and support needed for people to adjust to and adapt to change. Key to this is recognising the emotional responses people experience as they work through new approaches, especially those that challenge their identity (Ntem & Cook-Sather, 2018). As Felten (2017) has argued, further research is needed into the emotional experiences of working in partnership and how these might be supported.

Engaging in partnership can be messy and ambiguous. Yet, initial resistance to this ambiguity provides openings for discussion and critical analysis, and opportunities to learn by working through these tensions. Widening people's perspectives on Students-as-Partners practice by challenging and exploring their assumptions about partnership should help ensure that more future partnerships turn out to be "amazingly affirmative and stimulating experience for all parties" (Healey & Healey, 2018, p. 6).

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ARTICLE

# "Commitment to Collaboration": What Students Have to Say About the Values Underpinning Partnership Practices

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ABSTRACT

Students as Partners (SaP) is about students and staff working together in teaching and learning. It is guided by the values of partnership. Knowing how students understand these values, particularly students new to the ideas and language of SaP, would enrich the scholarly conversation about partnership practices. To that end, our study asked students unfamiliar with SaP, "what values and attitudes do you think are necessary for students and academics to work as collaborative partners on teaching and learning?" We captured 173 written responses from students in a biomedical sciences degree program in an Australian university. Thematic analysis revealed four key values: respect, communication, understanding, and responsibility/commitment. We discuss the results through the lens of reciprocity and power, emergent consumerist culture in higher education, and the disciplinary context of science. In conclusion, we encourage dialogue between staff and students to illuminate and affirm the values of partnership that define SaP.

KEYWORDS

students as partners, student-staff partnerships, values, reciprocity, higher education

Engaging with students as partners (SaP) in learning and teaching is a growing movement in which staff and students develop a working relationship to co-create their educational experiences (Matthews, Cook-Sather, & Healey, 2018). This movement goes against the traditional role of staff and students, where staff generally direct all aspects of students' learning, from curriculum to learning environment, while students merely follow the directions. Partnerships, on the other hand, are commonly described 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 conceptualisation, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten 2014, p. 6-7). This conception of pedagogical partnerships regards both parties—students and staff—as having unique and valuable insights to offer that can enrich the process and

outcomes of learning. Where students have engaged as partners in learning and teaching, a range of desirable outcomes have been documented. For example, a review of 65 papers on SaP (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017) found that 92% of papers reported positive outcomes for students and 79% reported positive outcomes for staff.

These outcomes are similar for both parties and can be roughly grouped into three clusters (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Firstly, SaP increases engagement. For students, this includes being more motivated in their learning and taking more ownership for their education. For staff, this equates to higher motivation for teaching, research, and participation in partnerships. Secondly, SaP increases awareness of learning and teaching habits to both parties. Thirdly, SaP leads to improvements in the overall educational process. Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) claim that by valuing the individual contributions of students, alumni, and staff, partnerships develop a better sense of community within the university: "a shared learning community" (p. 20). Yet, engaging in SaP is not easy or straight-forward. Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard, & Moore-Cherry (2016) discuss common challenges for students and staff, challenges largely due to a clash between SaP values and the cultural norms of our long-standing educational institutions.

Given the potential of SaP, it is useful to examine the values underpinning partnership practices. More than a recipe to follow, SaP has been discussed as the creative embodiment of partnership values (Matthews, 2017). Thus, the ideological framework for SaP is ultimately grounded in a set of values (Matthews, Dwyer, Hine, & Turner, 2018). As explicitly stated by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2012) for UK, "partnership working is based on the values of: openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication between the partners" (p. 5). Key academics in the field also restate the importance of these principles with the addition of others such as reciprocity, respect, and responsibility (Healey et al., 2014; Cook-Sather et al., 2014). We believe this continual reflection of and reference to shared values cultivates genuine SaP praxis (Matthews, 2017). This process of sharing meaning grounds everyone in the mutual goals of improving learning and teaching, and helps define the specific practices of curriculum co-creation (Chemi & Krogh, 2017).

Without these guiding values, the transformative potential of partnerships may be dampened. For example, Dwyer (2018), writing as a student, raises concerns about SaP being appropriated for neoliberal purposes in ways that further exacerbate a culture of competition amongst students. Cook-Sather and Felten (2017) highlight how dehumanising language (e.g., referring to student as customers or staff as service providers) reduces education to a mere transaction of commodities and diminishes the centrality of human relationships to learning. Indeed, recent research highlights that some institutional leaders view SaP from a neoliberal ethic (Matthews, Dwyer, Russell, & Enright, 2018), which hinders the ability of learner-teacher partnerships to move universities toward egalitarian learning communities (Matthews, Cook-Sather, & Healey, 2018). As scholars—including students—articulate values that can or should form the basis of partnership, we want to further the conversation by exploring the values that students with little experience in SaP practices perceive to be important.

We, as a student (Luo) and two academics (Chunduri and Matthews), draw upon a dataset of students' perceptions about SaP gathered from a student-led honours research project (Matthews, Groenendijk, & Chunduri, 2017). Findings from the quantitative data revealed that most students who participated in the survey, but not all of them, wanted to

be more involved in SaP practices. In this current article, we present findings from the qualitative data. Luo, the first author of this article, initially led the analysis through a paid partnership project. Eventually, he took the lead role for this article which included framing and drafting the discussion after reading the literature. This shift in itself, from being a student participating in scholarly inquiry to a student taking a collaborative role in partnership typically reserved for staff (Matthews, 2018), represents an example of the transformative journey toward genuine SaP praxis through knowledge co-creation.

PURPOSE AND CONTRIBUTION

Our purpose is to further the conversation about the values informing partnership practices. In particular, we wanted to investigate how students who are not familiar with SaP perceived these values. Hence, similar to Marquis, Jayaratnam, Mishra, and Rybkina (2018), and extending from the sibling study of this work (Matthews et al., 2017), we explore the perspectives of a large body of students who have mostly not engaged in explicit partnership. A motivating rationale for our study was the acknowledgement that engagement in SaP is limited to a few, select students (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Because the growth of SaP will inevitably engage students who are not familiar with the principles of SaP, we want to ensure the values of partnership remain at the forefront of new practices. Hence, we would like to bring the perspectives of these students into the SaP conversation.

Our intended contribution is to highlight the relationship between how students consider the values of partnership and current discussions of values in the scholarly literature on SaP. By doing so, we can clarify any misconceptions held by those unfamiliar with partnership and identify other key discussion points to further dialogue. This will ensure that as SaP grows, it stays grounded in a mutually agreed-upon set of values.

METHODS

We used an online mixed methods survey to investigate students' attitudes towards SaP. This current study examined the qualitative data, specifically student responses to the following question: What values and attitudes do you think are necessary for students and academics to work as collaborative partners on teaching and learning in degree programs?

Initially, the question was worded to include the term "Students as Partners." However, when the initial survey was piloted with four undergraduate students unfamiliar with the language of SaP, they expressed confusion and uncertainty. The language of "Students as Partners" or "student-academic partnership" or "partnership" alone was too unknown to be effective in a survey. Hence, the wording was revised to express the intended meaning to make sense to students unfamiliar with SaP.

### Participants

The participants of this survey were students at The University of Queensland studying for a degree in either a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Biomedical Science. The overall survey response rate was 24% (289 students out of 1208), but only 14% responded to the open-ended question (172 students out of 1208). Of those that responded to the open-ended question, 70% were women. Furthermore, 13% were first-year students, 33% were second-year, 42% were third-year, 9% were fourth-year, and 2% were others.

These participants had limited exposure to SaP as shown by the quantitative results of our sibling study (Matthews et al., 2017). When asked about how often they participated in a range of different SaP practices (e.g., developing assessment criteria, co-designing course material, being a student representative on a university committee), the vast majority of respondents (over 80%) replied "not at all" or "a little." Hence, their responses would reflect how those without SaP involvement might perceive the values of partnership between students and staff.

### Analysis

We used thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to interpret student responses. Thematic analysis is a widely used technique that seeks out patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). These patterns become the themes, which highlight the important elements of a phenomenon. Specifically, we used an inductive approach whereby data was processed without attempting to fit it within a pre-existing theory (Braun & Clark 2006). Instead, we aimed to derive all themes from the data alone so our results would more accurately reflect the students' sentiments.

Firstly, all the data was de-identified and the quantitative data generated from the survey instrument was removed so that only the answers to the open-ended questions of the survey remained. This was presented to Luo, who familiarised himself with the dataset. Importantly, having not read any papers about engaging students in partnership, his initial analysis and coding were not immediately influenced by the academic literature (he would eventually read the literature and engage in further dialogue with his co-authors once the themes had emerged from the data). After familiarising himself with the dataset, Luo then organised the responses into broad themes. Using these preliminary themes, he coded the responses to test how well the themes mapped on to the dataset.

After two iterative rounds of refining the themes and discussions amongst the co-authors, a working coding framework was produced. It consisted of 6 themes: *respect, initiating communication, the nature of communication, understanding, open-mindedness,* and *responsibility/commitment*. Furthermore, responses were coded based on whether the commentary was directed at students, academics, or both. In other words, were values discussed as something that applied to students and staff separately or together? Data was coded as "non-directed" if the response was not directed at a specific party.

Then, a coding framework was formalised. Together, all three researchers discussed and agreed on the appropriate definition for each theme. This was followed by an independent coding process by Chunduri and Matthews, using the framework, and then further discussion amongst the researchers. Any differences in coding were reviewed and agreed upon. At this point, we combined two themes, "initiating communications" and "nature of communication," to form *communication*. Similarly, we combined "understanding" and "open-mindedness" to form one theme, *understanding*. The resulting final coding framework is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Coding framework derived from student responses**

| THEME | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| Respect | Respecting the other person |
| Communication | Initiating communication with each other<br>Improving some aspect of communication (e.g., clarity, honesty) |
| Understanding | Being more understanding of each other's perspective<br>Being willing to consider different ideas<br>Being willing to change the course structure |
| Responsibility/commitment | Being responsible/committed to the goal of partnership<br>Being responsible/committed to improving the learning process<br>Acknowledging the hard work it will take to achieve partnership<br>Being held accountable |
| Other | Any responses which did not fit into the categories above |

LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge that all studies have limitations. There are four particular limitations that we want to discuss. Firstly, this is a one-off study in one context at a specific point in time. While this is a common approach in exploratory studies, we should take care when generalising the results because context shapes SaP practices (Healey & Healey, 2018). Secondly, at 14%, the response rate was low, again prompting us to caution readers against making broad generalisations. Instead, we urge readers to draw on these findings to guide practice and further research. Thirdly, while we sought to capture student perspectives on a large scale using a one-way survey instrument, we acknowledge that dialogue with students through interviews or focus groups would have enriched the study. Finally, our views as a medical student with a background in psychology (Luo), a biomedical sciences lecturer teaching large classes (Chunduri), and an academic in a centralised teaching and learning unit (Matthews), may have influenced how we interpreted the words of students. While we spent time questioning our assumptions and reflecting on our beliefs through ongoing professional conversations, we acknowledge our bias. To this end, we are making the dataset available for others to draw upon in their own research (Luo, Matthews, & Chunduri, 2018).

RESULTS

Out of the 172 responses, only one said he/she did not believe "academics and students should be working this closely together." This suggests that most respondents were accepting of the idea of SaP but not unanimously—an important reminder to avoid viewing students as a single entity. Of the remaining 171 responses, *respect* was the most common value students viewed as necessary for collaboration, followed by *communication*, *understanding,* and *responsibility/commitment*. Table 2 shows direct quotes from the student responses that exemplify each of the four themes. Figure 1 shows the percentages for each theme. Student responses varied from full sentences to sentence fragments and this is reflected in the quotes below.
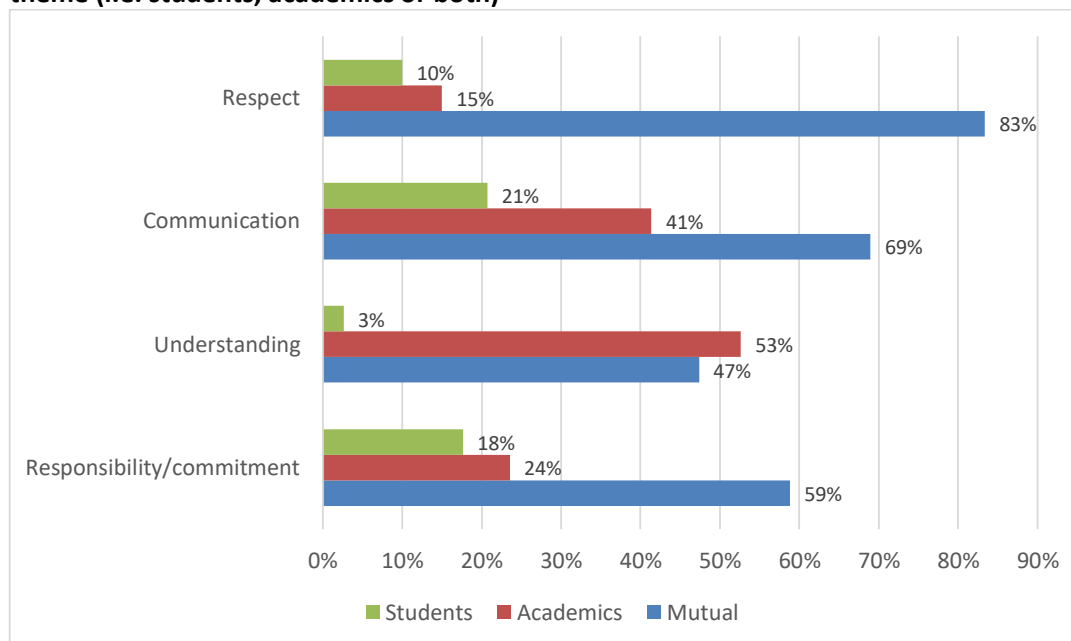
**Table 2. Examples of student responses by theme**

| THEME | EXAMPLES OF QUOTES FROM STUDENTS |
|---|---|
| Respect | For students and academics to work together they must respect one another<br>Mutual respect, especially academics treating students like adults<br>Both students and academics should respect each other's time constraints |
| Communication | Students need to be more willing to talk to academics<br>Academics need to be more welcoming in their approach to talking to students<br>I think not enough students participate in the course evaluation survey |
| Understanding | On the academics' side, they must understand that times have changed and that education is now different<br>Students should also be mindful of the hard work academics have put in<br>Students have many responsibilities outside of a particular course/academic responsibility e.g. work<br>Acceptance that something isn't working - especially for courses that have been running for a long time and need significant changes |
| Responsibility/ commitment | Commitment to collaboration<br>Having a genuine desire to improve course content and student outcomes<br>It will take deep commitment on both sides to change the culture |
| Other | Self-appraisal and critical thinking regarding student well being |

**Figure 1. Responses by theme, shown as percentages of the 172 responses given**
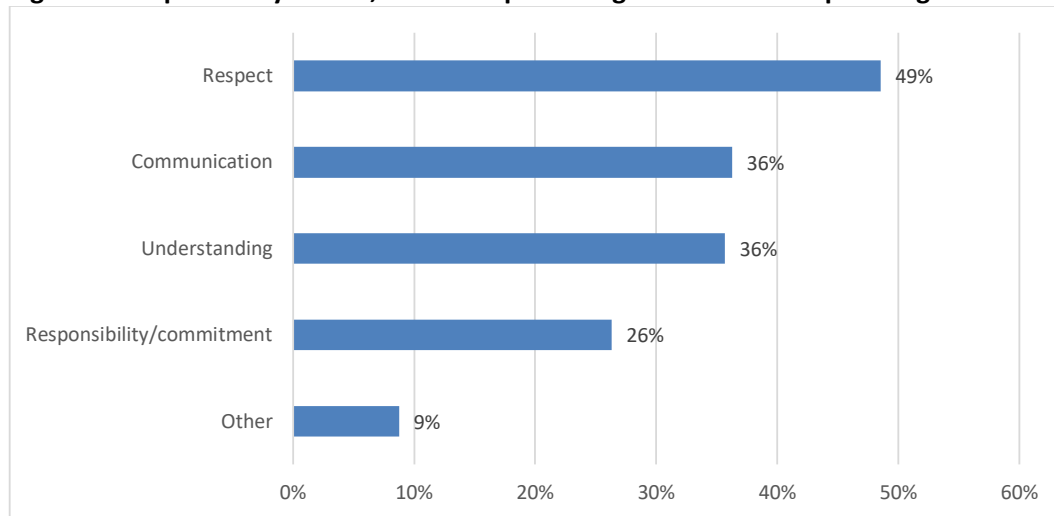


        Following the thematic analysis that generated the main themes, we re-read the student responses, this time to code whether a response/theme was directed towards students, academics, or both parties (see Figure 2). Our analysis excluded responses which were vague or not directed at any party. Also, if a response was explicitly directed to both parties but leaned more heavily towards one party, it was counted under the party (students or academics) as well as under "mutual." An example of one such response, "mutual respect is important but academics need to not belittle students," would be counted as directed at academics and at both parties. This allowed us to capture more nuance in the data and explores a latent sense of reciprocity across the responses.

**Figure 2. Responses by theme, distributed by the focus of responsibility for enacting each theme (i.e. students, academics or both)**

Luo, B., Matthews, K., & Chunduri, P. (2019). "Commitment to collaboration": What students have to say about the values underpinning partnership practices. *International Journal for Students as Partners, 3*(1). https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v3i1.3688

Most students believed that both parties were responsible for upholding these values. Of all the values, *respect* had the highest percentage of students agreeing that it was a mutual value to uphold; 83% of the responses that mentioned *respect* said that both students and academics needed to respect each other. On the other hand, when it came to *understanding*, more students felt that there was a heavier responsibility for academics here compared to students (53% vs. 3% respectively).

Furthermore, there is an indication that students in the study viewed these values differently when enacted by students or by academics. Table 3 and 4 show quotes from students that exemplify this difference.

With regards to respect, participants acknowledged the importance of mutual respect. Yet, there was a sense that respect was earned and how students earned this respect differed from how academics did. Notions of maturity and acting like adults surfaced for students, which had to be met by academics willing to treat students like adults.

In terms of communication, students in the study typically perceived that both students and academics should try to initiate more communication with each other. However, the participants signalled an additional need for academics to be clearer, friendlier, and more approachable in their communication.

**Table 3. Description of how students could enact these themes**

| THEME | HOW STUDENTS COULD ENACT THIS THEME | STUDENT QUOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Respect | Respecting the experience of academics<br>Acting in a way that is deserving of respect (e.g., not talking during lectures) | Students must respect that academics are experts in their respective fields<br>It's important for there to be maturity on the student's behalf |
| Communication | Initiating talks with academics<br>Giving more feedback and asking more questions | Students would need to be proactive in approaching their mentors<br>It is extremely important to receive feedback from students in order to make improvements |
| Understanding | Being more open to criticism | Students in particular should welcome criticism and learn as much as possible from any academic interactions |
| Responsibility/ commitment | Being responsible for filling out *Student Evaluation of Courses and Teacher* (SECaT) evaluations<br>Being willing to put in work for better learning outcomes | SECaTs are great because we can let academics know what we like and don't like. I think these should be compulsory<br>A keen interest in learning from students |

**Table 4. Description of how academics could enact these themes**

| THEME | HOW ACADEMICS COULD ENACT THIS THEME | STUDENT QUOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Respect | Treating students as equals<br>Not being condescending or belittling | Academics should treat students as adults<br>I was very disappointed because many of the lecturers left me feeling stupid and struggling when I would reach out for help |
| Communication | Initiating talks with students<br>Being more approachable<br>Clearer communication | What is necessary is the ability of academics to communicate effectively<br>I think academics should remind students that they are there to help and do not mind being asked |
| Understanding | Understanding that students have other commitments<br>Understanding that students have less experience and knowledge than them<br>Being willing to change their way of teaching | There does not appear to be much leniency for individuals who may have to work to support themselves<br>Academics need to be more open and understand students are not perfect and have less experience |
| Responsibility/ commitment | Being responsible for changing the course according to the students' needs<br>Being committed to student outcomes | Many course co-ordinators are either too lazy/think there is no room for improvement, so the course never undergoes change<br>Academics need to be willing to help grow students' knowledge and skills in the field of collaboration |

For the theme of understanding, there was a stronger focus on academics understanding the challenges of students. Furthermore, students wanted this understanding to translate into actual changes in their ways of teaching. There was less focus on students understanding the challenges academics might face.

The responsibility and commitment of academics and students were also perceived to be different. For students, participants saw a responsibility to give feedback to the academics on how to improve the courses. For academics, there was a corresponding responsibility to change these courses based on student feedback. However, survey respondents believed that both parties should be passionate and committed to improving the educational process.

DISCUSSION

We wanted to understand what values and attitudes students thought were important to student-academic partnerships in learning and teaching. The students who participated in the study had little familiarity or experience with SaP pedagogies. Hence, they provide a new perspective to the literature, which to date has mostly focused on

people who already have experience with SaP (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Understanding the values that matter to students—in their own words—helps conceptualise how students might come to the idea of co-creating education through partnership.

Overall, we found four overlapping yet distinct themes regarding the values that students perceive to be important for partnerships in teaching and learning in degree programs: respect, communication, understanding, and responsibility. These values can be found throughout various key papers in the SaP literature (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014). Guided by Luo's personal experience as a student, Matthews' knowledge of the literature, and Chunduri's practical experience of bringing partnership practices to large classes in the sciences, we discuss three predominant topics within the findings and their implications for SaP theorising and practice.

### Recognising the importance of reciprocity and the role of power

Reciprocity is seen as a fundamental aspect of SaP (Cates, Madigan, & Reitenauer, 2018; Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Matthews, 2017; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). It is defined as the process whereby all involved are equally contributing their unique perspectives, insights, and other forms of participation through partnership. Since academics and students have different perspectives, occupy differing positions of power, and have different skills, what constitutes equal contributions will vary from practice to practice (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). However, at a basic level, reciprocity requires students to take some of the perspectives and responsibilities of staff, and vice versa. For example, if students and academics were co-creating assessments, students might consider the difficulties that staff face when marking hundreds of papers. Likewise, staff might consider the difficulties of students who balance full-time study with a job.

Most students viewed the values of respect, communication, understanding, and responsibility as mutual values for both students and academics. While few students used the word "reciprocity," it was evident in responses that talked about values being enacted by both students and academics and how shared responsibility was beneficial for both. One example that reveals, on a latent level, the primacy of reciprocity is:

> Academics need to be willing to take responsibility for their mistakes made and accommodate the students' needs when this occurs. Students need to respect the academics, listening and participating in class and be more willing to ask questions and discuss topics.

As SaP hopes to engage the broader community of students, it is promising that many of them already agree with the fundamental principle of reciprocity.

Particular words alluded to reciprocity more specifically, including "equal" and "mutual." Different individuals perceive "equal" contributions differently. Thus, it is essential to discuss what is meant by "equal contribution," particularly in classroom SaP practices where power dynamics are always at play. The word "mutual" was typically connected to respect, signalling the importance of shared, two-way respect between students and academics. However, traditional power dynamics and culturally situated understandings of values were evident. For example, some students explained that mutual respect requires students to act in a way that is deserving of respect. In such responses,

there is an inferred onus on students to earn respect, suggesting academics do not need to work as hard to earn the respect of students.

Through these students' responses, our interpretative process of analysis, and our own discussions across student-academic perspectives, we identified the fundamental role of dialogue about the values of partnership, especially two-way conversations that can reveal our assumed understanding of values, which might be endorsed (e.g., respect) but rarely discussed in classroom settings in the context of learning and teaching. This implies that practising partnership in classrooms where students are unfamiliar with SaP should start with unpacking the values central to partnership. Creating space for dialogue in the classroom to explicitly define what is meant by these value terms would be beneficial. Potentially, the value terms, definitions, and illuminating quotes from students presented in the results section of this paper can become a resource enabling students and academics to co-create an understanding of the values that matter to them.

### Deferring responsibility as customers

While most responses suggested that students and academics should be working in a reciprocal manner, this was not universally evident across the data set. A significant minority of students believed that academics should take principal responsibility for directing the educational process, particularly when it came to improving courses. For instance: "academics should design assessment that is designed to enhance learning rather than streamline marking. Students should let academics know when assessment is not benefiting their learning." This infers a passive role for students whereby they give their opinion, often through an anonymous evaluation survey, without the dialogue or reciprocity underpinning genuine SaP practices. However, this preconception of SaP as a one-way transmission of de-personalised feedback is understandable when viewed from a business orientation or neoliberal ethic.

The attitude that academics are primarily responsible for the students' perceived quality of education is characteristic of the "students-as-consumers" model. This model came about as the increased privatisation of universities introduced market forces to education (McMillan & Cheney, 1996; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Baldwin & James, 2000). Universities were consequently redefined as service providers, with education becoming the product and students the consumers. Like a standard business, universities must place the utmost importance on satisfying the demands of the students or risk losing these customers to competing universities (Furedi, 2010). This developed the culture of students expecting universities to take sole responsibility of improving courses, to the point that the idea of a mutual collaboration between students and academics seems foreign to current higher education students (McPherson & Heggie, 2015).

A consequence of this mentality is that students have less empathy for teachers. Empathy is defined by the ability to bridge the gap between one's self experience and others' experience (Hodges & Klein, 2001). In the broader literature of psychology, it has been linked to increased co-operation (Decety, Bartal, Uzefovsky, & Knafo-Noam, 2015) and reduced prejudices (Tarrant, Dazely, & Cottom, 2009), both of which are important to partnerships. Ntem and Cook-Sather (2018) illuminate the role of empathy in engendering trust in pedagogical partnership. Yet, as universities become more dependent on student evaluations as a measure of teaching quality, students have gotten a new form of power. The power of student evaluations over academics tends to reduce empathy as students

become more removed from academics and less motivated to understand their struggles (van Kleef et al., 2008; Hogeveen, Inzlicht, & Obhi, 2014). Some of the responses in our study demonstrate this lack of empathy towards academics. For example, there was an observable emphasis placed on academics needing to understand students with less evidence that students perceived they needed to empathise with academics. This may consequently damage the student-teacher relationship, something which is central to learning and pedagogical partnership.

Ultimately, SaP is responding to the problems of the student-as-consumer model. SaP asks students to take shared responsibility in their education by entering a reciprocal partnership with academics and engaging in power sharing through dialogue (Matthews, 2017). Our results indicate that for some students, this may conflict with the usual, or even unconscious, expectations for academics to do most of the work. It also suggests that we should attempt to get students to empathise more with academics during SaP. In practice, this implies that when academics bring SaP into classrooms they might model empathy by asking about students' lives and sharing information about their own lives. Similarly, approaches that disrupt the one-way evaluative survey system where students complete feedback surveys for staff might be considered. For example, Bovill (2011) outlines a model where students evaluate the class while also evaluating their own involvement in self- and peer-learning, through self-reflection.

### SaP in the context of science

In interpreting our findings, we consider the disciplinary context shaping the perceptions of students in our study. As Healey and Healey (2018) argue, SaP practices are always context-dependent. The implicit cultural norms and values of a discipline influence the educational practices within that discipline (Yaakobi & Sharan, 1985; Trowler & Cooper, 2002; Matthews, 2014). In the sciences, objectivity is privileged along with the search for a universal truth. That epistemological orientation is at odds with theorisations of SaP as human, messy, and a relational praxis (Matthews et al., in press). Therefore, as our responses come from a cohort of science students, we consider the potential implications of SaP's value-based practices being enacted in the sciences and other disciplines.

Science operates within a framework of knowledge derived empirically and detached from subjective experience (Witz, 1996). This influences the pedagogical beliefs of science teachers, with almost 50% of science educators in a study claiming that science education should be "value free" (Wellcome Trust, 2001). Many science curricula omit relevant discussions about the ethical and societal implications of science that reveal the subjectivity of the discipline (Chowdhury, 2016). Furthermore, teachers have anecdotally expressed concerns about introducing subjective discussions out of fear students will bring in personal opinions (Wellcome Trust, 2001). The lack of value-based discussion within science courses juxtaposes the value-based ethos of SaP and our suggestions above for creating space within classrooms for dialogue between academics and students.

Because many science teachers do not have the confidence, skill, or experience to engage in discussions that draw on individual beliefs and different interpretations of reality (Ratcliffe, Harris, & McWhirter, 2004; Harris & Ratcliffe, 2005; Ratcliffe, 2007), classroom pedagogy in the sciences tends to stick to transmitting the canon of scientific knowledge. This privileges knowledge expertise where academics hold more authoritative positions (Bartholomew, Osborne, & Ratcliffe, 2004). In contrast, SaP undermines this traditional

classroom approach by asserting students have expertise to offer in shaping pedagogical practices (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014). The students in our study come from a disciplinary context where the science teaching typically aligns with this traditional stance. Furthermore, they have limited experience of engaging in SaP practices. In this light, the significant minority of students revealing perceptions that academics should take greater responsibility becomes more understandable. Indeed, Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017) found that students in the sciences had higher rates of passive, consumer-orientated approaches in universities compared to other disciplines.

Thus, the nature of SaP practices being grounded in subjective values might be difficult for both academics and students in the sciences to understand or accept. Future research could investigate how values-based SaP practices are being introduced and enacted in the science classrooms. In addition, comparative studies exploring the influence of epistemological orientations across disciplines could enrich our collective understanding of SaP. These could elucidate how to best introduce and include SaP within the varying cultures of different disciplines with implications for enhancing learning and teaching.

CONCLUSION

Enacting the values of partnership defines genuine SaP practices. Together, as student and academic co-authors, we contribute to the SaP conversation by analysing the perceptions of students unfamiliar with SaP to understand what values matter to them. Overall, our findings affirmed that the students in our study identify similar values to those of SaP scholars. However, we found a significant minority who showed a lack of empathy for academics and expressed passive, customer-orientated beliefs. Making sense of our results through the lens of reciprocity, students as customers, empathy, and the disciplinary context of science, we argue that dialogue about partnership values in classrooms are a vital first step toward genuine partnership praxis. We encourage SaP practitioners to employ our findings (e.g., the values that emerged from the students and/or their quotes in their own words) as a conversation prompt for dialogue about learning and teaching relationships in the curriculum. Furthermore, we suggest further research that explores the epistemological role of disciplines in SaP practices. Ultimately, we cannot take our understanding of values for granted as they form the basis for genuine SaP practices.

*We note that ethics approval for this study has been obtained from our institutional human ethics review committee (approval number 2016000441).*

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CASE STUDY

# Digital Studio Tutors as Partners

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines an initiative at a STEM-focused university where a Digital Studio was developed in response to a perceived lack of digital literacies among students. Digital Studio tutors partnered with faculty, students, and the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence to improve instruction and enhance students' communication and digital literacy skills. Digital Studio tutors acted as partners in several ways, including developing training materials, conducting on-campus outreach, and contributing to curriculum development and content delivery in a public speaking course. Ultimately, we observed that Digital Studio tutors operated as partners through making suggestions based on their interactions with students that resulted in constructive improvements to curricula and pedagogy. The tutors' skills, knowledge, and approaches complemented those of the faculty member to help students achieve the course learning outcomes. Tutors and the faculty director also enhanced their own digital literacy skills through their involvement in the Digital Studio.

KEYWORDS

students-as-partners, peer tutoring, digital literacies

This paper presents a project at a STEM-focused university where Digital Studio (DS) peer tutors offer support to students, faculty, and staff in the development of digital literacies with the goal of facilitating STEM communication. The tutors described in this case study are undergraduate students who work as peer tutors and are paid hourly wages as student employees. Digital Studio tutors must demonstrate advanced understanding of digital literacies

and digital design concepts and software, and Digital Studio tutoring is a supplement to, rather than a replacement of, in-class instruction from faculty. The tutors partnered with faculty and the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) to improve instruction and enhance students' communication and digital literacy skills. Throughout this process, tutors were partners of the faculty director of the DS, CTLE, the course instructor, and the students. Figure 1 positions the DS tutors as partners of CTLE, faculty, and students. This paper, co-authored by the DS faculty director, the CTLE director, a faculty member teaching a public speaking class, and six DS tutors, not only examines our work with students as partners and the rich relationships the tutors developed, but also extends our work through the practice of collaborative writing on the scholarship of teaching and learning.

**Figure 1: Tutors as partners with faculty, CTLE, and students**
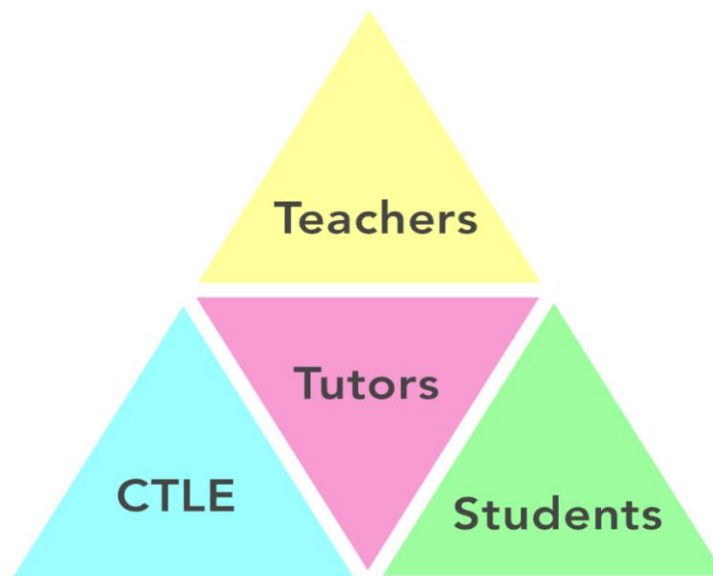


BACKGROUND
        In their 2016 Horizon Report, the New Media Consortium named improving digital literacies as an important challenge for higher education institutions, and research suggests that while students are often comfortable using technology, their knowledge of the technology may lack depth (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Thus, while students possess functional digital literacy skills, and are often both producers and consumers of digital media, they may lack the critical digital literacy skills necessary to produce and consume media in beneficial and responsible ways.[1]
        Our university is one of the world's oldest and largest fully accredited universities specializing in aviation and aerospace. Students are highly motivated with strong technical backgrounds, yet faculty expressed concerns that students lacked the sophisticated digital communication skills necessary for communicating scientific information, both within their disciplines and to the public. Specifically, faculty shared concerns that students in capstone

courses[2] had not mastered the essential digital presentation skills that they would later need in the workforce.

In response, a Digital Literacies Initiative began in 2014, focusing on faculty development, student support, and campus outreach. The student support effort centered on providing a tutoring space where students would have access to digital production technologies and where tutors would help students build digital literacy skills. Moving beyond technology training, tutors would partner with students to build skills that would allow students to make sophisticated choices regarding digital production and the communication of scientific information across genres.

DIGITAL STUDIO TUTORS AS PARTNERS

While DS tutors work with faculty, staff, and various university departments, their primary role is to work with individual students or groups of students, filling many of the roles Kim (2015) associated with peer tutors, including:

- supplementing the main course functions in complex skills areas,
- increasing students' opportunities to succeed at the institution,
- improving students' communication skills transferable to professional success, and
- improving public presentation skills.

When working with students, faculty, and staff, tutors inevitably develop their own digital literacy skills. Additionally, DS tutors were active partners in the development of the DS and continue to be so in their own development as tutors. For instance, in addition to cross-training one another on various technologies during weekly meetings, tutors created and maintain a tutoring manual. Like the manual, trainings are requested by tutors in response to their own needs, and most trainings are developed and delivered by tutors, rather than the faculty director. As the DS tutors work to help other students develop critical digital literacy skills, they also actively work as a team to continue to develop and refine their own digital literacies.

**Curriculum development and content delivery in a speech class**

One example of how in-class workshops enabled tutors to partner with students in meaningful ways is evident when examining a speech class taught by one of the Digital Studio's faculty directors. The extended case profiled here illustrates how Digital Studio tutors partnered—with an instructor, students, a CTLE director, and a community partner—to develop a workshop to help students complete a service-learning assignment in the speech course. The assignment asked students to create digital tours for a natural history museum (fall 2016 and fall 2017), a planetarium (spring 2017), and a community organization (spring 2018) located in different states. Tutors maintained involvement with the service-learning project for four consecutive semesters.

In this instance, tutors were engaged as partners in the "enhancement of learning and teaching practice and policy through [both] scholarship of teaching and learning [and] curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy" (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014, p. 24). Tutors consulted with a faculty member across four semesters, providing valuable input about

strengths and weaknesses in the professor's project-specific pedagogy and instruction, with their feedback resulting in curricular changes. While the tutors were not students enrolled in the class, they were given opportunities to implement their feedback at the end of each semester in collaboration with the faculty member, wherein they could effectively co-create curriculum. Though this co-construction did not begin at the outset of curriculum development, as recommended by Willis and Gregory (2016), tutors were involved in the development of the DS at the outset and are now involved in any project-specific curricular or pedagogical revisions. This partnership also achieves the goals and upholds the principles of learning communities as described by Healey et al. (2014); in this instance, the learning community is embedded within the course design, with tutors contributing to curricular design and influencing pedagogy (Tinto, 2003).

### Fall 2016

During the fall 2016 semester, forty-seven students enrolled in two sections of the speech class were individually assigned a specific beetle and asked to produce a short informational video about the beetle's flight mechanisms. A DS tutor attended the class, provided and overview of DS services, explained the role of DS tutors to the students, identified how they could assist students in the production of their informational videos, and provided instructions for making an appointment. Students had the option of working with DS tutors to create and edit their videos, and 35% of students took advantage of working with the DS tutors. Students who worked with the tutors scored at or above the average assignment grade.

After the semester concluded, the faculty member met with tutors to share an analysis of the assignment and discuss the next semester's project. This conversation revealed that some students misinterpreted the assignment, some used low-quality images or images with watermarks, and some demonstrated different levels of understanding about the process involved. DS tutors provided valuable input about how students understood the assignment and about how students approached the process of completing the assignment—information that, in many cases, is unavailable to instructors. Additionally, DS tutors partnered with the faculty member to generate content and strategies for a workshop that could help address these issues.

### Spring 2017

During the spring of 2017, forty-two students enrolled in two sections of the speech class and developed similar videos. To improve the learning experience for students and to enhance the overall quality of the videos, tutors developed workshops on design techniques, production techniques, and storyboarding and delivered them during class time. The workshops oriented students to the project, encouraged students to plan their projects through storyboards and scripts, emphasized the importance of using appropriate materials and citing sources, and provided instruction in various digital design techniques.

After the semester concluded, the instructor met with the tutors to discuss the effectiveness of the workshops. While the workshops resulted in improvements, we concluded that students would benefit from seeing exemplars. Tutors created three videos over the summer to be used as exemplars during the fall.

*Fall 2017*

During the fall of 2017, twenty-two students who were enrolled in one section developed videos on specific birds. A local bird expert spoke to the class about birds, flight, and feathers and answered questions about their specimens. A DS tutor delivered a workshop during class time and showed three exemplars created by DS tutors. Even though one appointment at the DS was required and another was recommended, only ten of twenty-two students had appointments with DS tutors. The average grades for students who worked with the DS tutors were considerably higher (93%) than the average grades for students who did not (79%).

At the end of the semester in the meeting with the tutors and instructor, we noticed that requiring outside consultation was not effective. While mandatory tutoring has been shown to improve students' grades and increase students' motivation (Baggett, 2009; Vance, 2016), other students might resent being required to attend mandatory tutoring (Baggett, 2009; Hartman, 1990; Vance, 2016), resulting in a failure to attend tutoring or potentially ineffective tutoring sessions. Some students complied by going to the DS but did not work with a tutor. Additionally, some students self-reported that they overestimated their digital skills and decided not to go to the Studio. We decided that to better help students acquire digital literacy skills, we would have the class meet for two periods in the Digital Studio.

*Spring 2018*

In the spring of 2018, twenty-one students in one section created videos. Two class periods were spent in a workshop held in the DS with tutors and the instructor. A tutor gave instructions and demonstrated skills at the beginning of both workshop sessions. Students benefitted by having access to DS technology, allowing them to follow along with the tutor's instruction, and they also had the opportunity to see how other students approached the tasks.

**Reflections**

Overall, the major issues identified after each semester were more effectively addressed in subsequent semesters after discussions that emerged with the tutors, demonstrating the partnership between the tutors and the faculty member. One difference noticed by the tutors was that videos produced the first semester did not have multiple layers. Tutors helped students develop their technical skills, so in addition to polishing skills students may have had, the tutors also helped them develop new skills. These included composing multi-layered videos as opposed to one-dimensional videos. For audience members, labels on the screen can increase interest, understanding, and retention of material. Students who had more contact with tutors either through appointments and/or workshops were more likely to submit more effective videos, which resulted in higher mean grades.

Our community partner provided insights through reflection on the project stating that the breadth of product quality increased each semester. She commented that, three semesters previous, videos created by students who had not worked with DS tutors had volume control issues in the audio, which was either too low or varied from loud to soft. Videos also had editing problems. Over time, audio quality improved and fewer editing problems were noted.

Interestingly, our community partner noted that creativity had not changed over the project. The overall quality of videos became much more polished and professional over time.

This feedback from our community partner indicates that while DS tutors have assisted the faculty member in developing stronger guidelines and have assisted students in mastering the technical skills necessary for creating effective videos through workshops and one-on-one appointments, the tutors have not overstepped their role as tutors by providing creative or content input as students develop these projects. This focus on skills tutoring is in line with literature suggesting that non-subject specific tutoring (such as tutoring in writing or digital literacies) should focus on the tutor's area of expertise (in this case, digital skills) rather than the subject-matter content of the composition (Harris, 1990; North, 1984; Sunstein, 1998). In fact, as Chanock (2002) noted in her reflection on tutoring writing, being unfamiliar with the subject matter of a composition can be beneficial for tutors: "an instructor may have to hold back, when a student comes to ask about a problem with an assignment, because the instructor is in a position to 'hand them . . . answers'; the tutor is not, and may be able to help the students to 'find [the answers] themselves'" (p. 122).

Students who had more contact with tutors, either through appointments or workshops, submitted files in the appropriate format, used higher quality images, used fewer images with watermarks, seemed to better understand the process of creating an informational video, and used better editing skills as evidenced by the higher mean grades. As a result of partnering with tutors in the DS, students demonstrated clear academic gains. Students who worked with DS tutors demonstrated high levels of student satisfaction, rating the sessions an average of 4.74 out of 5 on the satisfaction scale.

CONCLUSION

Positioning DS tutors as partners enhanced the learning experience for the students, the tutors, and for the faculty member. The tutors' skills, knowledge, and approaches complemented those of the faculty member to help students achieve the course learning outcomes, while also allowing tutors and the faculty director to enhance their own digital literacy skills through involvement in the DS. Most significant, though, are the benefits derived from the partnership between DS tutors and the faculty member, which resulted in clear curricular changes, including adjustments to assignment specifications as well as classroom delivery. While implementing workshops seemed to have some benefits for students in spring 2017, the greatest gains in student success were seen in the following two semesters, when students were required to physically attend the DS, either for an individual appointment or through a workshop. Because these workshops were developed at the suggestion of the tutors and in direct response to issues they noticed when working with students during tutoring sessions, it is unlikely that similar curricular and pedagogical changes would have resulted without the tutors' input. Additionally, tutors noted clear gains in their own digital literacy skills, and the faculty partner and DS director have observed significant improvement in the tutors' ability to deliver workshops over time.

The student-faculty partnership discussed in this case study is unique among much of the literature in this area. Although the DS tutors were undergraduate tutors who were not involved in the development of the course from the outset, they were involved in the early-

stage development of the DS and have been consistently viewed as the digital literacy experts, not only by the students they work with, but by the faculty they work with as well. As a result, not only is the power gap between student and faculty member reduced, the tutors were not troubled by the same hesitancies students might initially experience when partnering with faculty (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015).

Our discussion of curriculum in this context falls in line with Fraser and Bosanquet's third category of curriculum, defined as "the students' experience of learning" (p. 272). When redesigning this project, we did not make content changes or adjust the role of this course in the overall program of study. We did, however, change the way that we valued student voices in the development of curriculum. And, because tutors had the opportunity to work with this curriculum across multiple semesters, they were able to better provide feedback from the perspective of both student and instructor. As tutors worked with more students, they were better able to understand the struggles students were having as learners, such as understanding and valuing particular components of the assignment, while also gaining a more nuanced understanding of how the professor could better facilitate learning in certain areas or bridge gaps in students' knowledge.

In their review of Students-as-Partners literature, Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) argued that reciprocity "positions both students and staff as having essential expertise to contribute to the goal of furthering education" (p. 14). The DS is an excellent example of the value of reciprocity; in fact, the development and success of the DS would not be possible without the investment of our undergraduate tutors who work alongside faculty and other undergraduate students to support the development of digital literacies across campus. In this way, the development and sustainability of the DS truly represents the "ethic of reciprocity" that is a vital component of fruitful Students-as-Partners initiatives (Cook-Sather & Felten, p. 179, 2017), with tutors, faculty members, and students participating as co-learners (Healey et al., 2014) and collaborators (Taylor & Wilding, 2009). Moving forward, we hope that the DS can provide the structure and support necessary for more professors to partner with our undergraduate student tutors in the development of curriculum not only at the course level, but also at a programmatic level.

*Our study protocol, 16-095, was certified as exempt by our university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).*

NOTES

1. The terms "functional" and "critical" digital literacies are based on the work of Selber (2004) in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*.

2. Capstone courses are typically offered in the final semester of an undergraduate degree program and are intended to allow students to synthesize the key concepts and skills they developed in their course of study in the production of a final project. Capstone courses may also be called senior seminars or senior theses.

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CASE STUDY

# At the Threshold: A Case Study of a Partnership Between a Student Organization and an Educational Development Center

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ABSTRACT

While most students-as-partners case studies have focused on partnerships between students and faculty, this case study outlines a collaboration between a student-led organization and an educational development unit at the University of Virginia. We turn the lens inward and consider the challenges involved in enacting an ethos of *radical collegiality* (Fielding, 1999) in this unique partnership and our work with training student consultants. We describe the evolution of our collaboration, the programming we developed, and what we learned in the process about sharing power and expertise while negotiating the interests of our respective organizations. We describe our discovery of how deeply institutional norms and academic power structures shaped our perceptions, experiences, and habits. And, using the analytical framework of threshold concepts, we explore our rocky navigation of issues of trust, vulnerability, and role confusion as we moved towards a clearer understanding of and appreciation for the limits of our different types of expertise.

KEYWORDS

co-creation, power structures, trust, student consultants, student partnerships

This case study describes the formation and development of Co-create UVA, a student-faculty initiative founded by a student-led organization and an educational development unit at the University of Virginia (UVA). The programming developed by Co-create UVA falls into a category of partnerships that Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) call "curriculum design and consultancy." It draws on initiatives such as Elon University's Course-Design Teams, Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges' Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) Program, and Carleton College's Student Observers (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014) and engages student expertise in course design, in new faculty orientation, and in other opportunities for faculty to learn from

students' perspectives. Co-create UVA initiatives encompass a range of practices and pedagogies, but the common thread is a repositioning of the roles of students and staff (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

Today, Co-create UVA also shares organizational features common to other student-partnership programs: It is currently supported by a faculty development unit that curates and facilitates student-faculty partnership work. Though examples of partnerships between educational developers and students have become more common (see e.g., Acai, Kirby, & Shammas, 2016; Marquis et al., 2015; Werder, Thibou, & Kaufer, 2012), Co-create UVA is unique in the context of U.S. higher education in that the initiative was originally conceived of and created through a partnership between two independent organizations: student-founded and student-led non-profit organization ReinventED and UVA's Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE).

To make sense of our experiences throughout the creation of our initiative, we use the framework of *threshold concepts*. Threshold concepts, as defined by Meyer and Land (2005, 2006), are "conceptual gateways or 'portals' that lead to a previously inaccessible, and initially perhaps 'troublesome', way of thinking about something" (2005, p. 373). The shift that occurs in the subjectivity of the learner can be experienced as troublesome, but once the threshold is crossed, it is transformative, integrative, and irreversible (Land et al., 2005, p. 373). Cook-Sather identifies student-faculty partnerships as a threshold concept in educational development, as it challenges norms in higher education that delineate faculty and student roles (Cook-Sather, 2012; Marquis et al., 2015). She proposes that, in addition to understanding students as experts, producers, researchers, and change agents, the idea of a *radical collegiality* (Fielding, 1999) is frequently foreign and troublesome for faculty (Cook-Sather, 2012, p. 187). For Fielding, collegiality, in contrast to the instrumental and individualistic nature of collaboration, is "overridingly communal in form and in substance" (1999, p. 17). He argues for a collegiality between students and teachers that is marked not only by "a radical, manifest equality in which teachers are also learners and learners also teachers, but also an equality which embraces difference as an important source of practical energy and intellectual creativity" (1999, p. 24). Similarly, radical collegiality is also often challenging for educational developers who invite, hire, and train students for partnership with faculty, as we will see in the second part of this case study. The first half of our article, however, explores threshold concepts within the less familiar context of a partnership between an educational development unit and a student organization.

This article is co-authored by one former and one current staff member at UVA's Center for Teaching Excellence (Stephanie Doktor and Dorothe Bach), a leader of ReinventED (Jacob Hardin), and an external consultant (Sophia Abbot). In contrast to the widespread practice in Students as Partners (SaP) scholarship of bringing together different types of expertise by keeping distinct voices intact, we have chosen to write the article in one voice, an approach that is more consistent with our current identities and the places from which we write. We divided the labor in a way that reflects our different professional goals and the rewards systems in which we operate (Mercer-Mapstone, Dvorakova, Groenendijk, & Matthews, 2017). Jacob drafted the description of ReinventED, Sophia drafted an account of her consulting work with Co-create UVA, and Stephanie and Dorothe drafted the other parts of the article. What

you are reading now is the product of numerous rounds of revisions by all co-authors, and the story that our article tells is the result of a collaborative process of shared meaning making.

THE INCEPTION OF CO-CREATE UVA

In 2014, Keaton Wadzinski, then a second-year undergraduate student, approached CTE staff with an offer to collaborate. Keaton had garnered the support to create ReinventED, a nonprofit organization with the aim of designing the future of education from kindergarten through postsecondary in Charlottesville, Virginia. Keaton and a team of three other students, including Jacob, were seeking to partner with the CTE not as individuals but as leaders of ReinventED, an organization with its own distinct goals. The shared identity of the ReinventED team meant the group felt empowered by the work that students participating as individuals in educational development programming often may not feel. Because of the high level of control in decision-making that students had in this collaboration between two independent, self-determined entities, the Co-create UVA initiative can be described as a *negotiated curriculum*, situated at the highest level of Bovill and Bulley's (2011) ladder of student participation and towards the high autonomy and strong connection end of McKinney, Jarvis, Creasey, and Hermann's (2010) continuum of student voices.

Given this organizational structure, we envisioned ourselves as equal partners in the "between and betwixt" space (Little & Green, 2012) of educational development typically reserved for professional developers with advanced degrees (Barrineau, Schnaas, Engström, & Härlin, 2016). However, we soon discovered how deeply academic power structures shaped our perceptions, experiences, and habits. To live up to our espoused values and enact an *ethic of reciprocity* (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017) and a radical collegiality, we needed to cross a number of thresholds that required us to challenge our assumptions about each other's expertise, make ourselves vulnerable, and patiently build trust.

UNDERSTANDING EXPERTISE AND PARTNERSHIP

**Threshold 1: Educational developers learn to trust student leadership**

When CTE and ReinventED began to build Co-create UVA, we brainstormed ideas on where to begin. CTE staff were guided by a conventional notion of expertise and invited an outside expert to facilitate a workshop on student-faculty partnerships. It did not occur to CTE staff to ask their ReinventED collaborators about relevant connections or expertise. When the invited presenter canceled two days before the event, the Co-create UVA team faced the decision to either cancel or create a replacement workshop. Keaton proposed we use the Stanford d.school's "design thinking" approach to introduce students and faculty to the process of co-creating (Both, 2016; Sanders & Stappers, 2008). As a user-oriented process, he argued, this approach would encourage empathy, generate ideas, and enable faculty and students to hear and learn from each other's' unique perspectives. Unfamiliar with the Design Thinking methodology, CTE staff members were confused by the process and skeptical about its ability to achieve the desired outcomes.

Ultimately, through Keaton's skillful pitch, CTE staff were able to challenge their notions of who holds enough expertise and power to facilitate a campus-wide CTE event, and despite their initial hesitation, they became eager to see this experimental approach in action. During

the preparation, they served as a sounding board, lending their understanding of the faculty perspective to what became a student-driven planning process. Two days later, after welcoming participants to the session, CTE staff sat back and observed how Keaton led groups of faculty and students through the process of interviewing each other with empathy, brainstorming ideas for solutions to identified classroom problems, and pitching them to the larger group. They witnessed how Keaton's facilitation skills matched the ambition of his vision and faculty and student participants left with concrete ideas for co-creating learning experiences together.

This first event was an exercise in experiencing the push and pull involved in role reversal and shifting power dynamics, which required a level of vulnerability and trust on the part of CTE staff as they relinquished control. Building on our initial success, we refined the design thinking model for student-faculty workshops and have offered them multiple times locally and nationally, with ReinventED leaders driving the process and CTE staff in a supporting role.

### Threshold 2: Students gain insight into faculty perspectives

The success of our pilot year inspired us to apply for an internal UVA grant to build a comprehensive program. We wanted to encourage student-faculty collaborations through several mechanisms, including trained undergraduate student consultants, grants for student-faculty course design teams, design thinking workshops, and informal student-faculty conversations at the orientation for new faculty. During the process of writing the grant, we encountered challenges that were in many ways the inverse of the ones we previously described: ReinventED collaborators struggled to understand the perspectives of faculty and of educational developers.

A conflict arose when the funding agency intervened in the grant writing process and suggested that ReinventED partner with UVA's Student Council on a joint proposal that would combine funding for two different student-led initiatives. Initially, this seemed like an attractive addition to the Co-create UVA portfolio, but it soon became clear that the goals of the Student Council were quite different from those of Co-create UVA. Whereas Co-create UVA aimed to cultivate student-faculty partnerships to enhance teaching and learning, the Student Council initiative focused on educating UVA faculty about the student-run academic conduct system. To all of us, the idea seemed to stretch the current mission of Co-create UVA and we agreed that we needed to consider our options carefully. Furthermore, CTE staff believed that the Student Council proposal communicated a coercive approach to "training" faculty and was written in a condescending tone. CTE staff believed the Student Council sought to reverse the power dynamics between students and faculty and have students educate faculty, and this was antithetical to the aims of Co-Create UVA's proposal, which sought to level pre-existing power hierarchies and foster reciprocal relationships.

Because of those risks, CTE staff made clear to ReinventED leaders that CTE as an organization could not associate itself with the Student Council proposal. While some ReinventED leaders agreed with CTE staff's perspective that the Student Council's approach was problematic, others were concerned Co-create UVA would not receive funding without Student Council co-authorship. ReinventED leaders hoped they could work with the Student Council to help them adopt a more collaborative approach to working with faculty.

Although CTE staff communicated that they could not continue the collaboration if ReinventED leaders decided to partner with the Student Council, they tried hard not to enact conventional power dynamics and refrained from telling their partners what to do. However, this refusal to take leadership and drive decision-making for the sake of preserving the ideal of equal power caused unnecessary debate between ReinventED leaders who disagreed with each other about the merger.

 Over the course of our heated conversations, ReinventED leaders began to more clearly understand the professional goals and priorities of their CTE partners. Considering the CTE's experience with this particular grant agency, ReinventED leaders also decided to trust CTE staff's reasoning that a well-formulated argument for separating the proposals might be more persuasive to the grant agency than stitching together poorly aligned initiatives. Once it became clear that CTE partners strongly believed in the future of our proposal on its own, confidence grew among the ReinventED leaders as well.

In working through this conflict, we all felt uncertain whether this would mean the end of our partnership. As we look back at this moment, we agree that what kept us together was our willingness to carefully hear each other out, to be open to changing our views in light of new evidence, and to accept the limits of our expertise. By paying attention to the process, we discovered the depth of our commitment to a partnership based on mutual respect (National Union of Students, 2012). Moving forward, a radical commitment to embrace difference "as an important source of practical energy and intellectual creativity" (Fielding, 1999) became a core piece of our philosophy. It influenced not only ReinventED's work with the CTE, but also its overall ethos for partnering with other organizations and individuals.

In the end, Co-create UVA and the Student Council received separate grants, allowing them to pursue their projects independently. With funding successfully secured, Co-create UVA set out to inspire "collective creativity" (Sanders & Stappers, 2008, p. 6) in students and faculty through an interlocking set of initiatives.

**Threshold 3: Educational developers learn to trust the value of student experience and perspectives**

We now shift our focus away from the partnership between CTE staff and ReinventED leaders and towards the experiences of CTE staff in training UVA students for their roles as teaching consultants. Systematically embedding students' perspectives into CTE programming had been a goal from Co-create UVA's inception. CTE's week-long Course Design Institute (CDI) seemed like the ideal place to begin. Established in 2008, CDI today helps approximately 100 instructors per year design learning-focused courses. Considering issues of student motivation throughout CDI, participants repeatedly find themselves speculating about how students may respond to their syllabi and assignment descriptions. With rough drafts being workshopped by faculty peers on days three and four of the Institute, it seemed logical to offer opportunities to consult with students as well.

In 2014, prior to the existence of Co-create UVA, CTE staff had assumed that, in order for undergraduate students to be successful when sharing their perspectives in the context of a one-time, short consultation session, they needed a basic understanding of learning-focused design principles. Accordingly, the initial training designed by CTE staff heavily emphasized

pedagogical knowledge, stemming from the CTE staff's limited understanding of what constitutes expertise. In the day-long training, they inducted eight student consultants into the ins and outs of backward design principles, Fink's taxonomy, alignment, and the analysis of sample syllabi with the help of a syllabus rubric (Palmer, Bach, & Streifer, 2014). Although trust in student expertise was an espoused value, the training program belied the CTE staff's fear that students' experiences as learners would be insufficient for providing valuable contributions. Thus, instead of valuing students' tacit knowledge, CTE staff attempted to equip students with knowledge in a field in which students were not experts. In feedback following the CDI consulting experience, students reported role confusion and a sense of overwhelm.

To restructure the training, CTE staff and ReinventED leaders consulted with Sophia Abbot, a former student consultant in Bryn Mawr's SaLT program who was at that time working as an educational developer at Trinity University. In the design and facilitation of 2015 training, Sophia emphasized students' ability to consult on the basis of their expertise as learners and their preexisting understanding of what helped them be successful. Sophia encouraged CTE staff to trust that by advising students to frame feedback around what supports their *learning*, student feedback would remain genuine and useful. In cases where students were confused by or misinterpreted a course document such as an assignment description, their confusion could serve as a point of learning for the faculty around where they needed to communicate more transparently.

Sophia's student consultant training primarily consisted of exercises in deep listening, practice in narrating thoughts out loud while reading syllabi and assignment descriptions, and affirmative feedback that clearly communicated the value of students' perspectives. Students also reflected on the limitations of their perspectives; they noted that theirs only constituted one of many possible views, and that they were not and didn't need to be pedagogical experts. To further help them understand their roles in relationship to pedagogical experts and to build empathy with instructors (Cook-Sather, 2015; Cook-Sather & Mejia, 2018), the undergraduate consultants attended the first day of the CDI, where they learned about theories of student motivation and observed instructors interact with CTE faculty. During the debriefing following this observation, students shared how surprised they were by concepts they had never thought about, how difficult teaching seemed to be, and how much instructors seem to care. They also realized that teaching and learning looked different in different disciplines and that they could not generalize from their experience.

Overall, in their feedback on the restructured training, students reported that they felt confident and empowered in a way that the initial trainees did not. Knowing the strengths inherent in their perspectives as students and the limits of their expertise, they were confident about their ability to offer valuable insights by simply narrating their thoughts while reading course documents and responding to instructor questions more broadly.

### At the Threshold: Co-create UVA Today

Today, Co-create UVA offers a variety of opportunities for dialogue between students and instructors. For example, our student-faculty luncheon at UVA's orientation for new faculty aims at shifting instructors' perceptions of students as lacking in expertise to seeing them as important resources and potential collaborators for designing, assessing, and enhancing

teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, 2016). Instructors participating in the CTE's week-long Course Design Institute receive feedback from undergraduate student consultants on drafts of their syllabi and assignments. Fully integrated into the CTE's consultation program, these students also conduct mid-semester focus groups and in-class observations for instructors interested in undergraduate student perspectives. Finally, Co-create UVA grants support students and faculty who wish to design courses together.

There are a number of challenges to maintaining and developing our initiatives. After the initial funds expired, we had to find ways to leverage existing CTE structures and resources. Recruitment of students has become more difficult after ReinventED leaders graduated. With the loss of the collaborating student organization, the Center no longer has an independent partner to provide sustained and empowered student input. Design Thinking workshops have been suspended, and student-faculty co-design grants have become part of a broader teaching enhancement grants program. With CTE staff now overseeing the student consultants as part of its overall consultant program—which includes faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students—there is less of a team spirit among undergraduate consultants and therefore a lack of identity and ownership. Without student leadership, Co-create UVA relies solely on CTE's efforts and has become absorbed into CTE operations.

CONCLUSIONS

Although there is ample research on the challenges inherent in partnership work, few case studies have explored the experience of educational developers and student leaders seeking to create a faculty-student partnership initiative in collaboration from the ground up. While the partnership presented in this article was in many ways unique, the lessons we learned are applicable to other contexts. Our challenges with bringing multiple voices into dialogue in a well-worn hierarchal system reflect those previously reported (Mihans, Richard, Long, & Felten, 2008; Murphy, Nixon, Brooman, & Fearon, 2017). In our commitment to flatten power structures, we have walked the path of others who found themselves in the throes of unproductive modes of role confusion and leadership challenges (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

Our experiences also suggest that collaborations between educational developers and student leaders are subject to pressures similar to those experienced in collaborations between faculty and students. Educational development and student organizations may both be situated in the liminal space between students and faculty, but preexisting power hierarchies reach into this space, creating barriers and thresholds that need to be crossed. Student leaders and educational developers who engage in partnership should monitor their actions and reactions in these collaborations, as they often speak louder than their stated goals and espoused values. They should also expect role confusion, uncertainty about what constitutes expertise, and a fear of giving up control as part of the process. Overzealous efforts to flatten power structures can further lead to leadership challenges and protracted decision-making. However, our experience confirms that collaborations between Centers and student leaders hold the potential to enrich educational development efforts and strengthen student agency.

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CASE STUDY

# Putting Student Partnership and Collaboration Centre-Stage in a Research-Led Context: A Case Study of the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship Programme at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

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ABSTRACT

In this case study, we evaluated the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) initiative at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), an extracurricular programme that focuses on academic staff-student partnerships and collaborations. While not directly integrated into university degree programmes, SURF provides students with the opportunity to develop practical research skills related to knowledge they have acquired in class. Participating students receive an authentic research experience, which involves collaboration on research projects with academic staff. All students are required to present results of their projects at a public poster presentation event organised by the university. This case study is a partnership between Academic Enhancement Centre (AEC) staff, who organize and run SURF, SURF students, and a lecturer (M.B.N. Kouwenhoven), and it presents a reflection on their experiences of the SURF programme, and in particular on the notions of partnership and collaboration and the potential tension between those two concepts.

KEYWORDS

Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF), partnership, collaboration, extracurricular programs, student engagement


Student engagement has become increasingly important in higher education in recent years. The idea is that engaged students will learn better and have a more rewarding learning

experience, which will ultimately lead to better results for all involved, including better grades and higher retention rates (Quaye & Harper, 2015). However, engaging students can be difficult and creates much anxiety amongst academics about *lack* of student engagement, especially in a transnational institution like XJTLU, where teaching across cultures is a potentially complicating factor (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). One initiative designed to engage students at XJTLU is the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) programme, an extracurricular programme at XJTLU that focuses on academic staff-student collaborations and/or partnerships and the potential tension between them.

In this article, we present a case study on the SURF initiative in the form of an evaluation of, and reflection on, the programme. The ideal outcome for SURF is for a genuine partnership to develop from the initial setup of groups of students collaborating with a supervisor. However, in some cases the hierarchical supervisor-supervisee relationship remains firmly in place, while in others, a more equal partnership develops. For this case study, SURF students were invited to collaborate with the Academic Enhancement Centre (AEC) staff who organise SURF, and a lecturer who participated in the SURF programme as a supervisor and helped to guide the compilation of this case study. We explore what it means to collaborate on a project if that project is already defined from the start by the supervisor. These students are credited as co-authors on this case study, which suggests a partnership, even if the parameters of this writing project were also predefined. Thus, we explore the affordances, limits, and the potential of these partnerships. The particular context of a transnational university in China is an important aspect of this case study, as cultural and crosscultural elements potentially have a significant impact on how partnerships are perceived and how they work in practice.

THE POTENTIAL OF STUDENTS-AS-PARTNERS WORK AT XJTLU

Students-as-partners work offers a range of potential benefits, particularly in relation to student engagement. For example, if students are approached as partners, then this potentially invites a sense of belonging to a community of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). It breaks down some of the barriers between academics and students, and opens the way towards a community of learners, based less on hierarchical relationships and more on learning partnerships with mutual benefits. Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014, pp. ix-x) note that such partnerships are rooted in three foundational beliefs:

- Students have insights into teaching and learning that can make our and their practice more engaging, effective, and rigorous.
- Faculty can draw on student insights through studying and designing teaching and learning together with students.
- Partnerships between students and faculty change the understandings and capacities of both sets of partners—making us all better teachers and learners.

Cook-Sather et al.'s emphasis is primarily on the reciprocal processes of teaching and learning, whereas SURF is more focused on students' development as researchers. Thus, the

partnerships between academic researchers and students in this context have an initial "master and apprentice" element. However, ideally this eventually develops into a genuine partnership in the process of working on the SURF project as a team. One supervisor identifies different phases in this respect: "As a supervisor, I had now changed my role to that of a scientific partner." The research outcomes of some SURF projects are conference presentations co-developed with students and research publications co-authored with students. Cook-Sather et al.'s (2014) discussion of the fundamentals of partnerships is highly relevant here, as genuine partnerships make us potentially all better researchers and learners. This is even more relevant at XJTLU, which presents itself as a "research-led" university. Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) make a similar key point:

> Partnership in learning and teaching represents a sophisticated and effective approach to student engagement because it offers the potential for a more authentic engagement with the nature of learning itself and the possibility for genuinely transformative learning experiences for all involved. (p. 55)

In their model of "students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education," Healey, Flint, and Harrington create different, overlapping areas of "partnership learning communities," the most relevant being "subject-based research and inquiry," which involves "co-researching and co-inquiring" (2014, p. 25). They further note that partnership puts reciprocal learning at the heart of the relationship, which involves trust, risk, interdependence, and agency. This challenges us to consider the level and extent of particular partnerships, i.e., between research supervisors and students in SURF projects. Trust and risk are key here because they are a prerequisite to affording students agency in such a partnership. Thus, trust and risk can be explored as measures of levels of partnerships in the context of SURF. A strong partnership implies breaking down the binary opposition of teacher and student to move the relationship beyond an apprenticeship model towards a partnership. This may be challenging in a Chinese context, where the power differential between teacher and student is generally greater than that in a UK context (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). Agency thus becomes central to the notion of partnership (Zhao, 2011), and relates to how much influence students have in the decision-making around SURF projects. This is echoed by the partnership process of writing this article, whereby students were asked to contribute as partners, but its structure and topic had already been decided by us as academics. The case study that follows reflects on the potential of partnerships and their limits.

SURF IN CONTEXT AT XJTLU

XJTLU, based in Suzhou, China, is a joint venture between Xi'an Jiaotong University in China and the University of Liverpool in the UK. XJTLU is the largest Sino-foreign university in China, with around 8,000 students on campus and 10,000 students in total, and offers dual degrees with English as the medium of instruction. XJTLU's espoused approach to teaching and learning is research-led teaching. As an extracurricular programme, SURF provides

undergraduate students with the opportunity to develop practical research skills related to knowledge they have acquired in class (Healey, Jenkins, & Lea, 2014). Participating students receive an authentic research experience, which involves collaboration on research projects with academic staff and presenting results at a public poster presentation. At the end of the event, a jury comprised of faculty members chooses winners from each faculty and overall winners, and students also elect their choice of best poster.

XJTLU initiated the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) for all departments in 2012, when 36 research projects from eight different departments were carried out during the summer by undergraduate students in Years 1 to 3[1], under close faculty supervision. Thus, partnership is not an explicit expectation but rather depends on the extent to which supervisors allow for a partnership to develop. From 2013, the university has allocated half a million RMB (around $75,000 USD) for around 70 SURF projects and 150 student fellowships every year (Wilson, Wu, Xie, Johnson, & Huijser, 2017). For some projects, one student may work closely with one supervisor, while for other projects, faculty members and students from different departments work together for up to ten weeks on projects that are interdisciplinary to varying degrees. Thus, there are different potential partnerships involved, and the level of agency students are afforded depends on how much faculty members trust students, and how much risk they are willing to take in this process.

SURF starts every year at the beginning of the second semester by calling for proposals from all faculty members. Once a list of SURF projects is finalised, an announcement is made for all Year 1 to 3 students to apply, and students are chosen by supervisors through a competitive selection process. During the SURF period, social events are organised for SURF students, as well as a formal workshop about developing a public academic poster presentation. From 2012 to 2016, more than 600 hundred XJTLU students have worked on research projects over the summer, making the SURF application process more competitive every time.

Part of the attraction of SURF is the opportunity to forge a partnership with mutual benefits for faculty members and students as co-researchers. Whether such partnerships are actually established, or even desired, or the collaboration stays locked into a supervisor-supervisee model is the focus of the following reflections and discussion.

SURF STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

The four student co-authors of this article were all involved in SURF projects. Three were part of the same SURF project in Astrophysics, while the fourth worked on a Business-related data analysis project. The Astrophysics project investigated the efficiency of the Moon and Jupiter in keeping the Earth safe from catastrophic impacts caused by asteroids and comets. The Business project focused on a new continuous monitoring model for automated auditing using specific data analytics software.

The process around the students' collaboration on this article consisted of an initial call for expressions of interest during a face-to-face orientation event for SURF. Students were asked to express their interest in collaborating on an article about their SURF projects, and were then emailed a set of points to consider in their written reflections. These related first to

what they had learned during their SURF experience, and second, to their involvement in defining and shaping the project they would be working on. We wanted to explore to what extent the projects were open-ended, allowing for input in how the team went about addressing them. Finally, they were asked to reflect on partnership and whether there was a difference between partnership and collaboration. The writing process on this article was similar to the supervisor-supervisee relationships of the SURF projects in that there was a power differential, and while partnership was the ultimate ideal, there were important differences in experience and expertise. Thus, it may be more accurate to call the writing process a collaboration rather than a partnership in the sense that the students contributed, but the process was managed by a senior academic.

### Learning experiences
The key learning experience in all student reflections related to the rewards of working in groups as partners with both supervisors and other students, and in particular the difference between their SURF project and other classroom experiences. These reflections are presented in the following sections as quotes from the reflective writing pieces written by the co-authors of this article.

> I got a sense of real research since the question we investigated did not have a clear answer, which is completely different from a question in class or in an exam. In this way, we got used to facing failure and learning how to deal with new problems, which meant looking back to check the procedures or trying to find new methods.

> The project improved my interpersonal skills and self-directed study skills. The division of work improved our efficiency, as it clarified what was needed. However, it was not a simple case of dividing the workload; rather we communicated on a daily basis with all members of the group to present results and adjust our approach.

> The most important skill I learned what how to communicate. Studying alone is ineffective in research; what is needed is speaking out about your ideas and commenting on others' ideas.

Interestingly, all of these experiences relate to collaboration and working in teams (including in partnership with the faculty member to varying degrees), which is sharply contrasted with "regular" learning experiences in their degrees. Indeed, it relates directly to what Healey et al. refer to as "the potential for a more authentic engagement with the nature of learning" (2014, p. 55).

### Shaping the project
As we previously noted, the project topics were proposed by faculty members who, on paper, had a supervisory role, in a similar way as a Masters or PhD student has a supervisor.

However, in practice, the extent to which supervisors "partnered" with students in shaping the project and the approach varied. While some presented very clearly defined projects to the students, others allowed for much more student input to shape and reshape the project scope, thus leaning more towards a genuine partnership. The Astrophysics-based project was a good example in this respect.

> I think it does not matter who defines the project, as long as every team member is interested in the topic. The advantage of the supervisor proposing the topic is that he is a professor who knows which topic is valuable for student to engage in.

> Even though the project had already been defined, it was not a question for which we needed to find a "solution" (as in an exam). Rather, the more important mission for us was to find the "question." The supervisor inspired and guided us in this respect.

> I do not think it matters whether the topic is determined by someone else or by me, as long as the topic itself is meaningful. The topic was also "mysterious" to the supervisor. Therefore, motivated by curiosity, we started our explorations. No explicit answers were "waving at us," which is exactly the meaning of research.

Partnerships are of course about power to some extent, but also about building trust and respecting each other's ideas. In terms of power differentials, there is a clear distinction from the outset between the roles of supervisor and students in SURF projects. Respect for the supervisors' expertise and authority is clearly acknowledged by the students here, as expected, but can be seen as a challenge if genuine partnership between equals is the ultimate goal. However, some of these reflections suggest that partnerships can develop despite the different degrees of power between supervisors and students; that the topic was also "mysterious" to the supervisor suggests, as Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) discuss, "a partnership learning community" involving "co-researching and co-inquiring."

### Partnership and collaboration

At the start of students' SURF journey, we explained to them the concept of students-as-partners and sought expressions of interest to partner in the writing of this article. As noted, the student co-authors were asked to explicitly reflect on the notions of partnership and collaboration, and whether they felt they were operating like students-as-partners in their SURF projects, leading to some interesting responses about the notion of partnership.

> I think partnership has a closer and more equal relationship between students and supervisor. This relationship will give students more freedom to deal with the research and propose their own thoughts about the topic. In our SURF project, instead of following instructions given by the supervisor, he was more like an organizer of our teamwork.

The partnership with my group members as well as my supervisor encouraged me to present my own ideas. Partnership offers me the motivation and confidence to explore more. At the same time however, collaboration does mean being a "helper" for certain tasks.

I do not regard my supervisor as a "partner." I am grateful to professors who sacrifice their time to educate me. I do not think any people can view their supervisors as partners before (or even after) they get a PhD.

As part of the process, my [student] partner and I had a weekly meeting with our supervisor, during which we reported on what we did during the last week, and compared the current schedule with the initial plan.

The first two student co-authors felt a clear sense of partnership with their supervisor in the project, and both commented on how motivational that was for them, creating "the possibility for genuinely transformative learning experiences for all involved" (Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014, p. 55). In contrast, the third student co-author did not think it was appropriate to consider supervisors (or teachers) as partners, which more closely aligned to more traditional ideas of teachers' roles in the Chinese educational context (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). The fourth student co-author was less explicit about this, but their response hints at a similar power differential between supervisor and students.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored to what extent SURF projects were characterised by partnerships between students and supervisors, and the potential benefits of such partnerships and collaborations. The writing of the paper was approached as a partnership in itself, if a challenging one. The analysis of this case study suggests that partnerships in the context of programmes such as SURF have important benefits for students involved in them. Particularly in a Chinese higher education context, it introduces students to a completely different way of learning, which potentially builds confidence and important research skills. Our case study further suggests that these benefits may be enhanced if there is a degree of partnership between students and SURF supervisors. However, the terminology around this appears to be less important than the actions of the supervisors. Overall, there is a range of approaches to supervision in programmes such as SURF, some of which come very close to partnerships between students and supervisors, while others lean towards a more traditional power distance relationship. It depends on each cultural and educational context what the best balance is in developing mutually beneficial partnerships.

NOTES

1. XJTLU has four-year degree programmes, and due to a government-mandated Final Year Project (FYP) that every student must complete as part of a Chinese degree, final year students do not participate in SURF. Unlike the usual three-year UK degree, the four-year degree includes a Foundation year with a strong focus on English. XJTLU students also have the option of completing their first two years at XJTLU and their final two years at the University of Liverpool.

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Huijser, H., Wilson, J., Wu, Y., Qiu, S., Wang, K., Li, S., Chen, W., & Kouwenhoven, M. (2019). Putting   168
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CASE STUDY

# "Best of Both Worlds": A Students-as-Partners Near-Peer Moderation Program Improves Student Engagement in a Course Facebook Group

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms like Facebook are designed to facilitate online communication and networking, primarily around content posted by users. As such, these technologies are being considered as potential enhancements to traditional learning environments. However, various barriers to effective use may arise. Our research investigated the effectiveness of a students-as-partners near-peer moderation project, arising from collaboration between instructors and senior students, as a vehicle for enhancing student interaction in a Facebook group associated with a large introductory science course. The quantity and quality of sample posts and comments from Facebook groups from three successive academic years were evaluated using a rubric that considered characteristics such as civility, content accuracy, critical thinking and psychological support. Two of these groups were moderated by near-peer students while the third group was not moderated.  We found improved course discussion associated with moderated groups in addition to benefits to moderators and the faculty partner. This suggests that near-peer moderation programs working in collaboration with faculty may increase student engagement in social media platforms.

KEYWORDS

social media, facebook, peer support, students-as-partners

Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace, LinkedIn, Snapchat, WeChat) are intended to facilitate personal and/or professional online communication, community building, and networking. Usage of such platforms has

increased in popularity among university students in recent years, to the point that many typically access them several times daily (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; McCole, Everett, & Rivera, 2014). Therefore, it is no surprise that instructors have attempted to leverage social media tools to augment the synchronous, face-to-face, print-based learning environments of typical university courses (Al-Bahrani & Patel, 2015; Freyn, 2017; Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009; Soluk & Buddle, 2015; Y. Wang, Fang, Han, & Chen, 2016; Q. Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Liu, 2012).

Facebook is a particularly pervasive social networking platform that is among the most frequently visited online sites for young adults (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). Unofficial Facebook groups are routinely created and administered by students to communicate with each other about their university courses, and formal incorporation of Facebook into learning environments has taken several forms (Irwin, Ball, & Desbrow, 2012; Manca & Ranieri, 2015; McCole et al., 2014; Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009; Thompson, 2007; Q. Wang et al., 2012). See Chugh and Ruhi (2018) for a recent review.

Many modern science courses have an associated online site created through an institutionally supported Learning Management System (LMS, e.g., Blackboard, Moodle, Brightspace, etc.) that incorporates social media features such as text or video message boards, chatrooms, podcasts, and email. A study by Schroeder and Greenbowe (2009) found that, in an organic chemistry course with both a Facebook group and an LMS site, the Facebook group received almost 400% more posts than the LMS site. This study highlighted several attractive features of Facebook as an educational technology for students. First, they are notified of recent academic group activity alongside notifications from their personal networks, which they already check quite regularly. Second, questions in the Facebook group received faster and more detailed responses from peers. And finally, students are familiar with the Facebook interface and generally feel it is a judgement-free and less intimidating environment for posing questions than the LMS (Irwin et al., 2012; Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009). Facebook has also been promoted as a potential academic communication tool due to the ease of facilitating discussion around shared multimedia such as pictures, videos, and links to other resources (McCole et al., 2014; Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009).

However, ease of communication does not ensure positive outcomes of communication. This is particularly relevant if the participants are members of disparate demographic groups, such as is often the case with professors and their students. More widespread adoption of Facebook as an educational technology has been hampered by incompatibilities with established synchronously face-to-face instructional methods, fears that it will undermine the professional relationship between professors and students, privacy concerns for faculty and students, online incivility, eroding academic integrity, and lack of authoritative content oversight (DiVall & Kirwin, 2012; Irwin et al., 2012; Legaree, 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Wang et al., 2012).

Students as Partners is a global initiative that fosters partnerships within which undergraduate students collaborate with professors on projects related to the educational mission of their institution (Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard, & Moore-Cherry, 2016; Matthews, 2017). With students stepping into roles as consultants, evaluators, co-facilitators, co-instructors, co-designers, or co-researchers, opportunities arise for new kinds of academic relationships to emerge based on synergistic skillsets,

interdependence, mutual respect, and shared commitment to enriching the educational experience for students and faculty alike (Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014; Weller, Domarkaite, Lam, Lam, & Metta, 2013). One specific example of initiatives that lend themselves quite naturally to a students-as-partners approach is peer-assisted learning programs (Rivers et al., 2017; O'Shea, Bennett, & Delahunty, 2017).

In the context of our project, students initially contributed as co-designers and principal implementers of academic support programming. They then collaborated as co-researchers and co-authors on this investigation of program effectiveness. Our guiding research question was: ***Did our near-peer support initiative, called the Biology Mentor Program, improve the quality of student interaction in a course-associated Facebook group?*** We hypothesized that it did.

METHODS
### Context
We conducted this study over three academic years (2013, 2014, and 2015) at Western University, a relatively large, research-intensive Canadian medical/doctoral institution. The specific academic setting was a course in the fall term followed by a companion course in the winter term in first-year evolutionary biology. The same cohort took both courses in a given academic year. These courses are part of a Bachelor of Medical Sciences program in which the required secondary school admission average was among the highest in the country relative to comparable programs. Most students in these courses identified primary healthcare as their main career goal. Average enrollment over the three years of the study was 1250 students, with roughly 60% identifying as female. Each week of the courses consisted of two 50-minute face-to-face lectures in an 800-seat lecture theatre, as well as one 180-minute laboratory session with a maximum of 40 students. The three faculty partners who instructed the courses, two male and one female, held weekly drop-in office hours for two hours each. A comprehensive course website, maintained on the university learning management system (LMS), provided access to announcements, course policies, lecture slides, e-textbook readings, archived lecture recordings, assignments, and several discussion forums moderated by instructors. One such discussion forum permitted students' posts to appear anonymous to peers but still identifiable to instructors.

### Facebook group moderation
The Biology Mentor Program (BMP) was founded in 2014 when a small group of senior undergraduate biology students approached the course instructor (Tom, also the corresponding author) to discuss how they might offer discipline-specific support to first-year biology students. The BMP was then co-designed as an informal, emergent students-as-partners project.

Our design team was aware that unofficial Facebook groups for our courses had often been created by individual students in the past. We thought that creation of more official, monitored, and moderated Facebook groups would improve the student experience. To get the program initiated, the course instructor recruited a cohort of 12-20 discipline-specific academic mentors and trained them to support a diverse student body in online environments. Mentors were near-peers in that they had taken the course within the previous two years.  Although the BMP did eventually offer face-to-

face workshops, the main initial responsibility of the BMP mentors was to work collaboratively with both instructors and students to create, populate, and moderate the interactions of an intentional learning community in a course Facebook group. No members of the instructional or administrative staff were included in the Facebook group.

Mentors were introduced to the class in the first lecture. They showcased the Facebook group as an optional, student-facilitated educational resource and invited students to join immediately. Mentor-moderators then encouraged online participation, posted course-related tips and recommendations, and modelled norms for group communication. They monitored posts and related comments for content inaccuracies, incivility, and academic dishonesty. Mentors alerted instructors to any significant problems with understanding that surfaced in the group. Such issues were then addressed in lecture with direct reference to the Facebook group. In a reciprocal way, instructors alerted mentors to any important revisions of lecture material or other course announcements. Mentors thus acted as trustworthy, arms-length liaisons between the class and the instructors.

A small group of these mentors, in collaboration with faculty partners, conducted all aspects of the program evaluation research that this article describes, from initial design to ethics approval to analysis to preparation of this manuscript.

### Data collection and analysis

We studied Facebook groups from three academic years. The Facebook group for the 2013 cohort was created by an unidentified student and unmoderated. Facebook groups for the two subsequent cohorts, for academic years 2014 and 2015, were created and moderated by the BMP as described above. We retrieved all posts and comments from all three groups using the *Grytics* software from Grytics.com. The total numbers of combined posts and comments to discussion forums on the course LMS were reported by built-in system analytics.

Students were given the option of opting out of this study through email contact with the BMP research team. All Facebook posts from students who did not choose to opt out were numbered, and a random number generator was used to select which posts, and their associated comments, would be analyzed. In total, 928, 922, and 938 Facebook posts and comments were randomly selected for analysis from the 2013, 2014, and 2015 cohorts, respectively. The quality of posts and comments was assessed on a scale from -1 to 3 according to the rubric outlined in Table 1. Two raters from BMP independently scored the same 83 randomly selected posts with their 357 associated comments. Because strong agreement between raters was observed ($K$ = 0.74), all subsequent posts and comments were analyzed by one evaluator or the other (McHugh, 2012).

We performed Student's t-tests to determine whether the scores of the posts and comments from the moderated groups were significantly different from that of the unmoderated group.

**Table 1: Criteria corresponding to the quality score of posts and comments.**

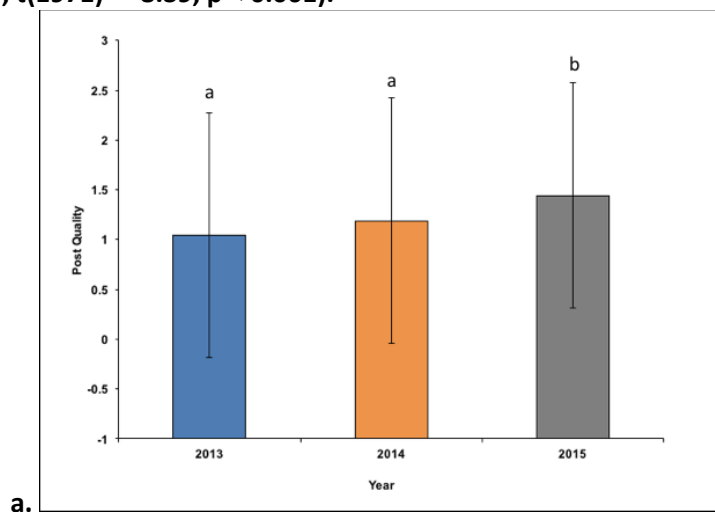| Quality Score | Criteria |
|---|---|
| -1 | · Incivil (profanities, rudeness, insults to professors or peers, etc.)<br>· Prohibited quiz questions and/or answers (the entire thread pertaining to this was deleted) |
| 0 | · Irrelevant ("memes", pictures for entertainment, etc.)<br>· Neutral (thank you, I don't get this, etc.)<br>· Administrative (messages from professor about exams, BMP workshop schedule, etc.) |
| 1 | · Repeating material in the same thread<br>· One-word answers (A, Yes, No, etc.)<br>· Paraphrasing for clarification purposes<br>· Asking for a response (e.g., "help me") |
| 2 | · Initiating or extending a discussion<br>· Attempting to answer questions posed. Can be scored a 3 if additional criteria are met<br>· Offering psychological support |
| 3 | If answering a question:<br>· Answers question thoroughly (longer than 3 sentences)<br>· AND/OR goes beyond course learning outcomes<br>· AND/OR integrates multiple concepts<br><br>If asking a question:<br>· Demonstrates critical thinking by integrating multiple concepts<br>· AND/OR goes beyond course learning outcomes |

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows that, although the instructors, course content, and overall course structure remained essentially the same over the three academic years we examined, Facebook activity increased each year. Conversely, overall participation on the LMS course discussion forums fell by nearly half over the same period. In all years, the number of posts to Facebook per 100 students was at least tenfold higher than that on the respective LMS discussion boards.

**Figure 1: Number of posts and comments per 100 students, retrieved from the unmoderated 2013 Facebook group, the moderated 2014 and 2015 Facebook groups, and the LMS discussion boards**
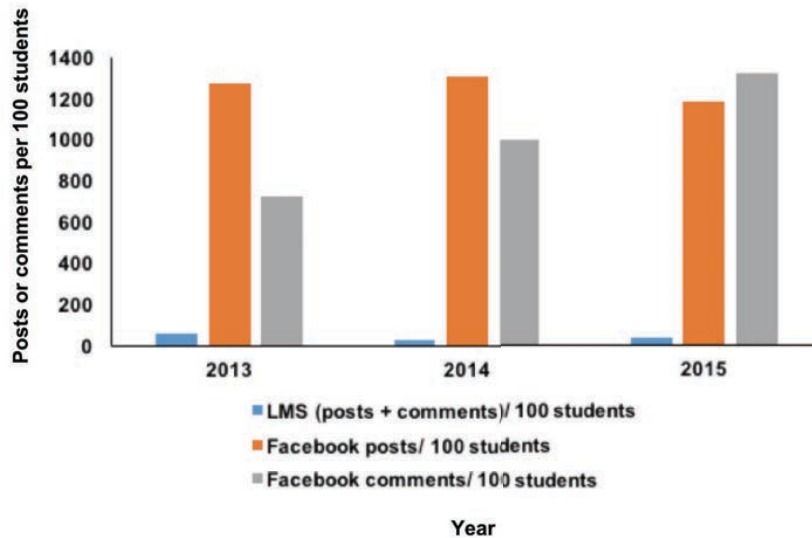


The quality of posts in the 2015 moderated Facebook group was higher relative to the unmoderated group (see Figure 2). Moreover, the quality of comments was higher in both 2014 and 2015 moderated groups relative to the unmoderated group. All of these increases were statistically significant.

**Figure 2: Post (a) and comment (b) quality from unmoderated 2013 Facebook group and moderated 2014 and 2015 Facebook groups. Means marked with the same letter are not significantly different. Posts: 2013 vs 2014, $t(407) = -1.18$, $p = 0.239$; 2013 vs 2015, $t(380) = -3.37$, $p = 0.001$). Comments: 2013 vs 2014, $t(1933) = -5.39$, $p < 0.001$; 2013 vs 2015, $t(1971) = -8.39$, $p < 0.001$.**

Jay, M., Lim, M., Hossein, K., White, T., Naqvi, S., Chen, K., & Haffie, T. (2019). "Best of both worlds": A students-as-partners near-peer moderation program improves student engagement in a course facebook group. *International Journal for Students as Partners, 3*(1). https://doi.org//10.15173/ijsap.v3i1.3693
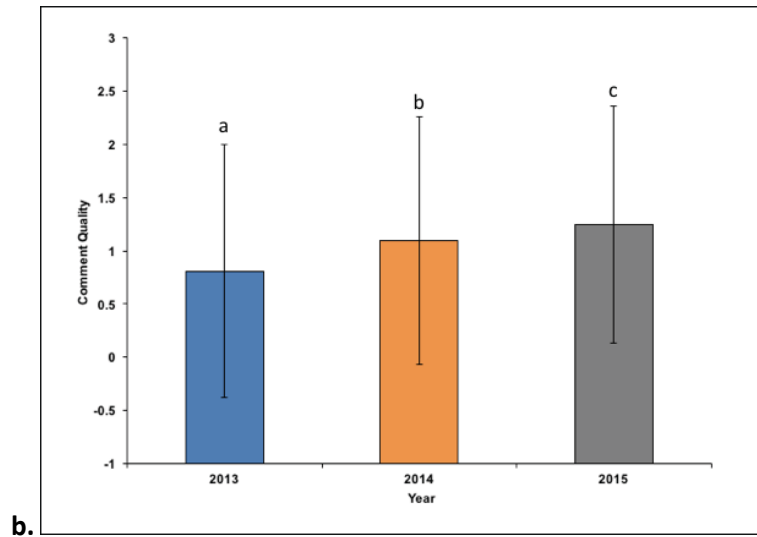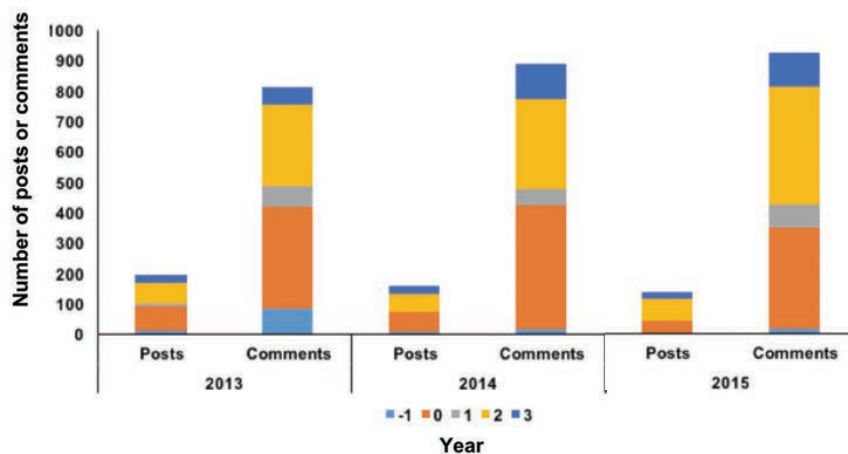
b.

Figure 3 shows that moderated groups experienced an increased proportion of posts and comments that were directed at peer-helping and critical thinking (levels 2 and 3).

**Figure 3: Distribution of rubric ratings for posts and comments from unmoderated (2013) vs. moderated (2014 and 2015) Facebook groups.**



DISCUSSION

Previous studies have examined the relationship between course instructors' involvement in Facebook groups and students' learning (DiVall & Kirwin, 2012; Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009). Our study was unique for two reasons. First, the moderation in our study was performed by near-peer student mentors, as opposed to course instructors or teaching assistants. Second, while the aforementioned studies did not compare the quality of the posts with and without moderation, we employed a rubric to assess the effect of moderation on the quality of students' interaction.

Our results demonstrate a clear trend of increasing quantity and quality of activity from unmoderated to moderated Facebook groups. These data support our hypothesis that our near-peer Biology Mentorship Program promotes higher quality student interaction in a course-related Facebook group.

The increasing trend in the average number of posts and comments per student from unmoderated to moderated Facebook groups likely has several underlying drivers. Perhaps most importantly, near-peer moderators actively encouraged students to enroll in the group and share their thoughts. The initial invitation to join the group came live from mentors during the first class, clearly demonstrating that the program was sanctioned by instructors who were working in collaboration with mentors to improve the student experience.

Peer mentoring has been shown to discourage online harassment (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). Near-peer moderated groups may well have shown higher participation because of the safer space for discussion created through modelling of supportive online interaction, as well as active suppression of harassment and incivility. Furthermore, if the mentors were uncertain about an answer to a question, they consulted the faculty partner and then shared the answer with the students. This way, students uncomfortable with directly communicating with the professors could instead ask questions in a less intimidating environment, while still feeling confident that they would receive reliable answers.

The improvement in quality of online interaction in moderated groups likely has several contributing factors. The use of role models, defined by Côté and Leclère as "individuals admired for their ways of being and acting as professionals" (2000, p.718), has been described as a powerful teaching strategy (Cruess, Cruess, & Steiner, 2008). The mentors in the Facebook group were trained to participate in a professional and helpful manner, setting an example of such behaviours to first year students. As such, it is possible that first-year students strove to model their posts and behaviours on that of the upper-year mentors, contributing to the higher quality discussions taking place in the moderated groups. The mentors also generally promoted academic integrity among the class and specifically prevented any inappropriate dissemination of assessment answers, etc. within the group.

The increasing quality of posts and comments between the first and second years of the moderated trials may be attributed to refinements in the mentorship program. Drawing on their experiences with the first moderated group, the student and faculty partners recruited more mentors to assist with moderating the group in the second year. In addition, the program created a weekly schedule for the mentors to ensure that the group was always moderated, and that questions were not left unanswered or incorrectly answered. Mentors also began hosting weekly workshops and office hours in an effort to build face-to-face relationships with the students.

Similar to the study by Schroeder and Greenbowe (2009), our study involved a course that provided both a Facebook group and a discussion forum on the official course LMS. In our study, the biology mentors clearly explained to the students the differences between the discussions that should be posted on each platform. Having access to both platforms allowed those students who chose not to use Facebook to still get their questions answered and discuss the course content with their peers. Furthermore, the official course LMS allowed for direct communication between

students and course instructors. Our study as well as Schroeder and Greenbowe's revealed much higher participation in the Facebook group relative to the official course LMS. The main reasons for this are likely familiarity, convenience, and efficiency (Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009).

We assume that most students in our study came to their postsecondary classes with Facebook already integrated into their daily lives. Based on the personal experiences of the student authors as modern undergraduates, many students typically access Facebook several times daily and have configured settings to automatically alert them to new posts. As a result, participation in the Facebook group can be a rather seamless extension of their personal use of this social media platform. Although the LMS provides direct access to instructors, it is much less familiar, much less engaging in design, much less conveniently integrated into students' online experience, and much more exposed to instructor scrutiny. Once students realize early in the term that there is relatively little traffic on the LMS, this may create a self-reinforcing system in which fewer and fewer students bother to monitor and post to the LMS, despite encouragement from instructors and the option to post anonymously to peers.

Our mentor-moderation model may present the "best of both worlds" approach to course Facebook groups. That is, mentor-moderated groups may foster increased student engagement by providing timely, civil, reliable support to students without the privacy or self-presentation concerns concomitant with direct oversight by their instructors.

In general, we appreciate that our project placed Facebook in a "grey area" of informal, extracurricular educational resources that, while recommended by instructors, are otherwise outside of the direct control of the institution. Student participation on Facebook was not officially regulated nor protected by our institutional policies related to data hosting and security, student codes of conduct, etc. Such concerns may have led some students to avoid the Facebook option.

If we move our focus off the Biology Mentorship Program *per se* and look instead at the experience of the faculty and student partners, we find additional benefits of this program in areas such as deepening content knowledge, enhancing transferable skills, and opening new avenues of research and practice. The following brief reflections from faculty and student authors underscore these points:

> The teamwork and collaboration skills I developed from creating workshops and working on this research project have served me well in my responsibilities as a medical student. These are skills (admin, organizing interviews, selecting applicants) that aren't necessarily taught to students directly. (Kevin, sixth author)

> Having learned the value of mentorship, I continued to both seek mentorship from senior students and provide mentorship support to junior students. (Mohammad, first author)

> The task of mentoring students on topics that I had not engaged with in depth for some time required me to revisit my old notes and reinforce concepts that I may have otherwise forgotten. Working with BMP transformed the content of first-year biology

from a prerequisite for graduation, to a foundational knowledge base upon which to pursue my further education. (Tara, fourth author)

Thanks to the inspiration I received from this work, I continued to participate in developing a medical education project and subsequently quantitatively assessing its effectiveness and participating at various research venues. (Mohammad, first author)

Participating in a students-as-partners project has immersed me in the behind-the-scenes of research that are often overlooked. This experience has granted me skills in data organization, statistical analyses, manuscript preparation, and time management. I've carried these skills with me into my Masters, making my transition from undergrad to Masters a smooth one! (Michelle, second author)

The BMP was a kind of gateway project for me as a faculty partner. The ease and success of working with enthusiastic and capable students in BMP was one of the motivators for me to create infrastructure supporting diverse students-as-partners projects across the Faculty of Science. (Tom, last author)

In summary, a students-as-partners near-peer mentor program was associated with increased quantity and quality of student course discussion in instructor-sanctioned, moderated Facebook groups relative to unofficial, unmoderated groups, as well as a variety of benefits to the student mentors and faculty partner. We expect that students in other large courses would benefit from comparably supportive discussions in moderated course-specific Facebook groups. Future studies are needed to assess the role of peer moderation in other disciplines or course structures. Furthermore, the relationship between students' grades and their activity in the Facebook group could be investigated. As suggested by Legaree (2015), perhaps mentor-moderation influences students' use of this particular social media technology toward ways that improve their academic performance.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Kevin Chien** *has since gone on to become a medical student at the University of Ottawa where he continues to be involved in medical education projects.*

**Mohammad Jay** *has since gone on to become a medical student at the University of Ottawa where he continues to offer, and receive, academic mentoring.*

**Khalid Hossein** *has since gone on to become a dental student at McGill University where he finds passion at the intersection of health care, research and education.*

**Michelle Lim** *has since gone on to become a Masters student in Microbiology and Immunology at Western University where she was particularly instrumental in moving this manuscript to publication.*

**Syed Reza Naqvi** *has since gone on to become a medical student at Western University where he sees the value of student/faculty collaboration in education.*

**Tara White** *has since gone on to become a Masters student in Global Health at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, where she conducts quantitative and qualitative research.*

**Tom Haffie** *is a faculty member, 3M National Teaching Fellow and a Teaching Fellow for Science at Western University, supporting faculty-wide students-as-partners programming.*

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REFLECTIVE PIECE

# Promoting an Ethical Economics Classroom Through Partnership

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In teaching economics, the instructor scaffolds what they teach on an implicitly assumed or explicitly recognized ethical vision. Such a vision holds true even as economists often separate "positive economics" from "normative economics," claiming positive economics finds its basis in data and theory whereas normative economics concerns the *ought* or *ethical* statements that data or theory may imply (Davis, 2016). Economics, furthermore, suffers from lack of diversity: from white men constituting the majority of researchers and teachers, to textbooks that fail to show the diverse range of real people participating in the economy (Aerni, Bartlett, Lewis, McGoldrick, & Shackelford, 1999). In contrast, students taking economics at the undergraduate level, and particularly at Smith College, a liberal arts college in Massachusetts where I teach as an assistant professor, are especially diverse. I believe, therefore, that the choices about *what* an instructor teaches in a course and *how* that instructor does so are ethical choices in teaching. These choices cohere around an instructor's pre-analytic vision of what a course ought to achieve, how the instructor models for students what constitutes good economics, or how diverse voices improve economics (Schumpeter, 2006/1954).[1]

Experience informs my ethical vision about my classes. As a student, my understanding of economics drew on my studies and life outside my South African classroom. In volunteering, I witnessed inequality and poverty made manifest through classrooms lacking textbooks or well-kept desks; I protested for access to anti-retroviral medication for people living with HIV/AIDS; I engaged in action to recognize the positive role of LGBTQ folks and people of color on campus and in wider society. My context informed my understanding of economics and my personal ethics. Though some of my students may experience concerns over unemployment, poverty, and healthcare, in the relatively wealthier climes of Western Massachusetts, many of my students remain distanced from the immediacies of poverty, policy, and production.

When considering my ethics in teaching, therefore, I ask myself many questions.[2] What ought I to do to recognize and correct for inequalities among students? How should representation—in gender, ethnicity, and so on—affect what examples and data I use? How can I recognize and alleviate students' mental health concerns? Can I make concrete and clear the challenges economics confronts and how data address such challenges?  Can assessment practices alleviate within-classroom inequalities generated by the high-school-to-college

pipeline and facilitate student flourishing? Can my students and I find ways to promote compassion and wellness? Does my teaching ultimately reflect my ethical vision?

Maintaining a course that reflects one's ethical vision requires effort, accountability, and perseverance. How could I hold to these commitments when the stresses of the semester felt overwhelming? I argue that sharing the burden for maintaining an ethical classroom can be done through a student-faculty partnership and that learning improves as a result (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014). In Fall 2018, I was offered a student-faculty partnership during my first time teaching the department's introductory statistics and econometrics class, during which three guiding principles grew from my questions and ethical vision:

1. to emphasize individual and communal learning with deliberate practice toward growth and integrity,
2. to facilitate student practices that would promote metacognition and mastery, and
3. to understand the roles of diversity and representation by confronting new data and worked examples.

I was partnered with a student, Emily, who was a double major in education and sociology. We kept the guiding principles in mind as we considered my pedagogy. Partnering with Emily improved my ideas and teaching, while also allowing me space to grow and flourish in future teaching. In regularly meeting with, holding myself accountable to, and witnessing the commitment of my partner, I felt more capable of maintaining the practices that adhering to my ethical vision required of me. I argue, therefore, that faculty-student partnerships—while improving pedagogy—reinforce and hone a shared ethical vision.

PARTICIPATORY POLLING AND PAIRING

I based my pedagogy on evidence from the learning sciences on facilitating deliberate practice, retrieval learning, spacing, interleaved practice, and metacognition. Retrieval involves asking students questions to recall recently learned material, thereby getting a student who might otherwise think they "understood" an idea to apply that knowledge; spacing requires a student to space their practice over time; and interleaving requires testing different ideas simultaneously (Brown, Roediger III, & McDaniel, 2014).

Together, these practices facilitate a student taking ideas from short- or medium-term memory and embedding them in medium- or long-term memory. Using such practices alongside reflection exercises can improve a student's metacognition—their ability to think about their thinking. My partner and I therefore focused on research-based practices. We used Poll Everywhere to ask multiple-choice questions and to produce word clouds. For multiple-choice questions, students would see a question projected on the screen at the front of the class and answer the question privately. They would then talk to classmates in a think-pair-share activity, after which they could change their answer. I would conclude by projecting a graph of the answers students gave and facilitating an in-class discussion (Boyle & Goffe, 2018).

**Figure 1. A word cloud poll from my first class asking about attitudes to statistics**
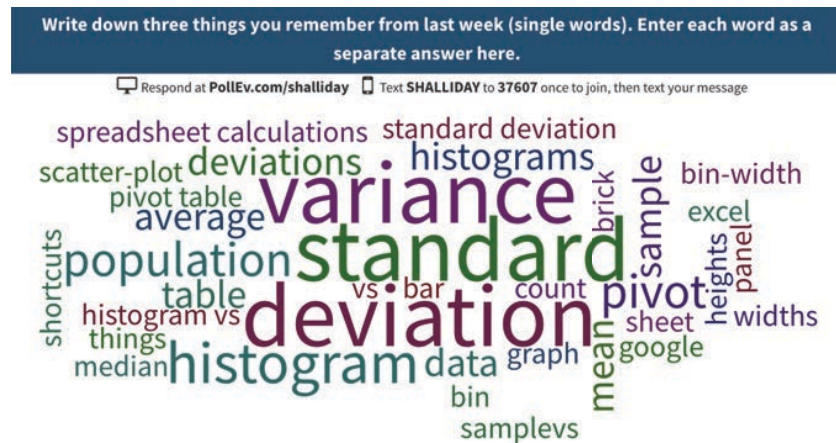


Straightforward though the activity may seem, Emily showed me how to improve it. During the think-pair-share, she mapped the classroom to see patterns of student behavior (Abbot, Cook-Sather, & Hein, 2014). In mapping the classroom, she identified problematic group behaviors: students did not participate in diverse groups, students did not talk enough, and students appeared uncertain about time constraints. She recommended I intervene as follows: make the student groups explicit so a student had to talk to a classmate and reflect, mix groups so students experienced more diverse opinions rather than talking only to friends, and specify time constraints to empower students to work to time.

Following Emily's advice, I changed my pedagogy to increase transparency and explicitness. I created named groups where students would participate in different groups at different times, and addressed uncertainty by explicitly stipulating time.[3] These small, iterative changes ensured that students engaged with each other better and improved their learning. The students, furthermore, acknowledged how my partner and I collaborated to continually improve the class. Such changes do not come without anxiety, however. Knowing students dislike change led me to worry about the consequences of these changes, but Emily re-assured me and supported me even when some students voiced passing discontent. Our ongoing discussions demonstrated how partnership involves more than academic discussion and analysis, but also a kind of collaborative care work that supports student and instructor alike.

MASTERY, METACOGNITION, AND MENTAL WELLNESS

In assessing student learning, I wanted to ensure students exerted effort to engage with the material while recognizing that they learn at different rates, enter classes with different levels of preparation, and may need to improve their metacognition. I framed my intentions around specific assessment and learning practices and, as many students feel anxiety around learning and grades, I investigated methods to alleviate anxiety and to promote mental wellness.

Students had two midterm exams and a final exam. Upon receiving their graded exams, students completed an exam wrapper (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010).

Exam wrappers ask students to reflect on how much time they dedicate to studying, to think about their study methods, and to assess whether their methods worked. After the exam wrapper, I offered students who had achieved fewer than the median number of points the opportunity to engage in a learning activity to improve their points up to a maximum of the median.

The learning activity had two parts. First, students had to re-answer the questions they got incorrect, for which they could talk to classmates, use their notes, and check the textbook. Second, students had to reflect on their answers, explaining why they got the incorrect answer the first time and how new answers were more correct. The learning activity facilitated deliberate practice and aided metacognition.[4]

Such an attitude towards assessment explicitly requires a professor to prioritize learning as mastery, rather than learning as credentialism (Kulik, Kulik, & Bangert-Drowns, 1990). Research in the cognitive, learning, and social sciences around competition and extrinsic versus intrinsic incentives demonstrates how students may undermine their learning if they view the outcomes as competitive and out of reach. Thus, providing opportunities to reflect on failure and to think about change encourages students to adopt a growth mindset, which correlates with later success (Paunesku et al., 2015). These strategies, moreover, tend to benefit students who would normally fall in the lower part of the grade distribution, therefore according with my intention to address pre-existing inequalities among students.

**Figure 2. A crude model of learning: Students may be of different types in a class, where some learn quickly earlier, some learn quickly later, or some learn roughly linearly. But exams occur regardless of a student's pace of learning and therefore may penalize those who learn more quickly later in a course.**
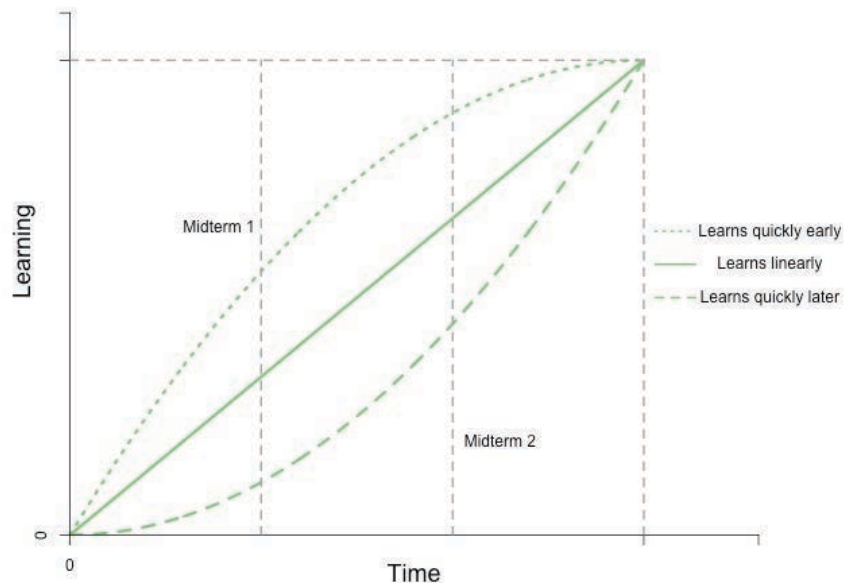


Though I began the class with the learning activity in mind, Emily encouraged me to be more intentional in explicitly discussing my model of learning with the students. She suggested I

graph how I saw students' learning rates differing, and explain why I believed an approach like mine benefits students and addresses learning differences, while not disadvantaging students who have done well already (see Figure 2). My partner urged me to recount personal stories of failure where reflecting allowed me to improve, and to discuss why I engaged in the practices I did to level the playing field for students from diverse backgrounds, such as first-generation college graduates like myself (Broda et al., 2018). My partner also asked me to share why my ethical vision motivated me to teach in the way I did.

Emily's recommendations helped make my strategies more transparent, which improved student understanding of my teaching methods and modeled how students can engage in their learning with compassion. Though a student might have begun by feeling alienated from mastery learning, my recognition of concerns over grades and my intent to alleviate anxiety meant they engaged more fully with the material. Hearing that I had struggled helped them see that professors have failed too and have worked hard to achieve success. I would not have been as open with my students nor as clear about my methods without Emily's help.[5] In writing their final course reflections, many students highlighted how compassion and personal identification motivated them to study, engage with learning, and work to help themselves and their classmates.[6]

Two other insights arose from my partner's and my engagement in assessment. First, Emily and I disagreed about the best ways to assess my students. Emily argued that I should use untimed assessments (as is more common in her classes), but my colleagues who teach this course do so with timed exams, and departmental or disciplinary norms are important constraints in one's practice. Second, as a junior faculty member and given my path to tenure, I am constrained in both how I can innovate and the extent of my innovation. Deviating too greatly from departmental assessment practices would be risky for me. Combining exam wrappers, my reflective learning activity for students who obtained fewer points, and discussing these practices in class provided us a way to reconcile our different positions and find a common ground while being within departmental and college practice. Emily also came to recognize the challenges junior faculty face in the academic hierarchy, which gave her greater insights into the functioning of higher education and her own college classes.


DIVERSIFYING DATA ANALYSIS

I wanted to equip my students to use and analyze data with the values of autonomy, integrity, and transparency.[7] Doing so required that I teach my students about reproducibility: ensuring that one's methods and data analysis can be reproduced by independent third parties who have no vested interests in one's work. We therefore adopted a version of the TIER protocol (i.e., Teaching Integrity in Empirical Research, see Ball & Medeiros [2012]). Students use the protocol and learn how to structure folders, write documents, and maintain program files. If a student follows the protocol, then other researchers can read and reproduce their work.

While highlighting transparency and integrity, I also wanted to value autonomy: to ensure that students as citizens could access and verify data analysis. Emily took on these values while upholding the importance of diversity in data and classroom discussion, and her commitment and insight improved my own as we came to know each other better during the semester.

During our weekly meetings, we spoke about social inequalities in the curriculum and worked on ways to bring more diverse data and problems into the classroom. We used data from three countries—the US, South Africa, and the UK—for final student reports and analyzed other publicly available data from many countries. We reproduced analyses that interested students because of topics that affect their lives, such as the minimum wage; had documents or data that students could access to reproduce the analysis; and diversified the examples my students saw. We covered a variety of topics, some of which I highlight below:[8]

- *How do we understand gender, education and child health?* We used data from the World Bank and GapMinder to understand child mortality, parental education, and income for low income, middle income, and wealthy countries.

- *How do race, gender, education, and income correlate in unequal societies?* Using the National Income Dynamics Study from South Africa, we repeatedly engaged with questions of historical inequality (i.e., apartheid) and its effects on differential welfare and educational achievement.

- *Does raising the minimum wage affect employment?* Students who complete an introductory economics course are typically taught that, in theory, a minimum wage causes unemployment and excess demand for jobs in the industry. But what does it mean for evidence to conflict with theory (Card & Krueger, 2000)?

Continually talking with Emily, I became more conscious of examples I taught or that students would read, many of which were separated from student experiences, or which might reinforce negative stereotypes. For example, in our textbook the author employs a (manufactured) example where women spend more money than men, and in so doing promotes stereotypes about buying behavior and gender. I created new examples from the High School and Beyond dataset on test scores and gender, where gender may or may not predict test scores, but with which students more readily identify. I hoped my inclusion of other examples might qualify what was covered in the textbook and expose students to new ideas and data. Having a partner who reminded me of my ethical vision and provided support helped me to maintain my discipline in developing original content.

CONCLUSION

Instructors enter their classrooms with an explicit or implicit ethical vision about education and the ways in which their pedagogy brings their vision to reality. A student-teacher partnership provides a structured way to surface, revise, refine, and implement an instructor's vision. The student partner can provide shared responsibility for the instructor's ethical vision, practical guidance from a student perspective about how to alter and implement a shared ethical vision in the classroom, and accountability as someone who moves from student to peer through partnership and shared endeavor.

NOTES

1. I acknowledge my positionality as a cisgender, white, immigrant male instructor and this acknowledgment constitutes a part of my ethical vision and informs my attempts at curricular reform.

2. I shall not exhaustively define what constitutes my vision but hope that the questions reveal some of its aspects. I take for granted that cultivating autonomy and critical thinking among my students plays a role in my vision; see, e.g., Garnett (2016). Also, I consider this ethical vision as somewhat separate from the stance of practicing virtue in the classroom as outlined by Binder (2016), though her argument that one needs fortitude remains true of my experience.

3. I would tell students, "You are now going to partner with your Group [X]." Though making groups explicit improved engagement, the classroom was ill-suited to students moving around regularly, showing the ways in which architecture affects pedagogy.

4. This task did not come without tradeoffs: already successful students often wanted the solutions to the exams as soon as possible to reflect on their learning, but I could not distribute solutions as early as normal to facilitate the reflective practice for students who wished to improve their grades. I hope to improve how I manage such student expectations.

5. Indeed, diversity training at another institution saw minority students in particular benefit from recounting personal stories and asking about personal details and struggles, (see Oliver, 2018).

6. I used course stories, a reflective writing practice that students completed at the end of the semester. See, for example, Brewer and Jozefowicz (2006) for using reflective writing in economics courses.

7. Allgood and Bayer (2016) argue that being able to analyze data should be viewed as a "core competency" of a student graduating with an economics major.

8. It being the first time I taught the course, my endeavors were also constrained by time: deriving new examples and analyzing data in accessible ways is hard and time consuming.


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REFLECTIVE PIECE

# From a Little Idea to a Project: Establishing a Student-Staff Partnership Program to Support International Students in Their MA Programme

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In March 2018, at University College London (UCL), the Support and Preparation for International Researchers in Education (SPIRE) was launched. SPIRE was a student-led project initiated by two of the authors, Sophia and Sergio who were international PhD students at the time. The aim of the project was to support international students during their Master of Arts (MA) programmes and to help them prepare for their dissertations. In addition, it aimed to establish a mutual research community between PhD and MA students.

Even though this initiative was launched in 2018, its beginnings can be traced to early 2016, when we noticed there was a need for supporting the international MA community.

The purpose of SPIRE was mainly in helping international students in conducting and writing the the MA dissertation. This narrowed focus presented challenges and opportunities during the development of the initiative. The dissertation is a core component of the MA curriculum, with specific requirements, deadlines, format, etc. The aforementioned elements are assessed and marked by the academic staff, from which initially we had little contact. We designed and conducted all the workshops in SPIRE and had extensive contact with the MA students, having privileged access to information that in many cases escaped the reach of the academic staff. Living in the fringe between students and academics facilitate a deeper understanding of the learning experience, having also little agency on formal pedagogical decision making. The interactions with the students provided valuable insights that inspired us to build a partnership between university staff and ourselves, which created great benefits to all the stakeholders, especially the MA students.

Since we implemented the initiative in 2016, we have experienced different levels of association with university staff in an attempt to establish some form of partnership between them and us. These efforts were not always purposeful, especially at the beginning. Instead, they were driven by various administrative issues. However, as time went by and the ideas of building a student-staff partnership were growing constantly, the relationship between us as international PhD students and the university staff developed as well. In the following sections, we describe the developmental changes of SPIRE, including

key contextual events to illustrate our experiences in developing this student-staff partnership.

This reflective piece focuses on how a partnership between students and university staff evolved over the past two years and how we anticipate SPIRE could move forward. Our analysis is based on the "4-I" organizational learning framework (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999), which shows how an individual idea can become part of an organization, moving from an individual point of origin to a shared, collective process. Although this reflection is strongly connected with the evolution of SPIRE in this particular university, we believe that it might inform other student-led initiatives that involve student-staff partnership. In the next section, we describe some of the key characteristics of the project, analysing three key stages of development of the student-staff partnership. We conclude this essay with some comments and thoughts regarding the potential of student-led initiatives to tackle issues from a bottom-up perspective.

THE "4-I" FRAMEWORK

Originally proposed by Crossan et al. (1999) almost two decades ago, the 4-I framework was developed to understand how organizations integrate innovations into their core practices, transforming their work and practices. The 4-I stands for four key concepts that frame organizational learning: intuition, interpretation, integration, and institutionalization. The model has been advocated for its recognition of how an idea moves from an individual to a collective position (see Figure 1) (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Wayman, Jimerson & Cho, 2012). Even though this framework has not been used to analyze the development of a partnership in a higher education context, we believe that a model that combines the evolution of an idea and the movement between individual and collective not only fits the building of student-staff partnership and the SPIRE experience but also allows for making greater connections with previous research and experiences. Accordingly, we believe that analyzing the SPIRE experience using this model will allow readers to connect this initiative with their own potential student-staff partnership experiences.
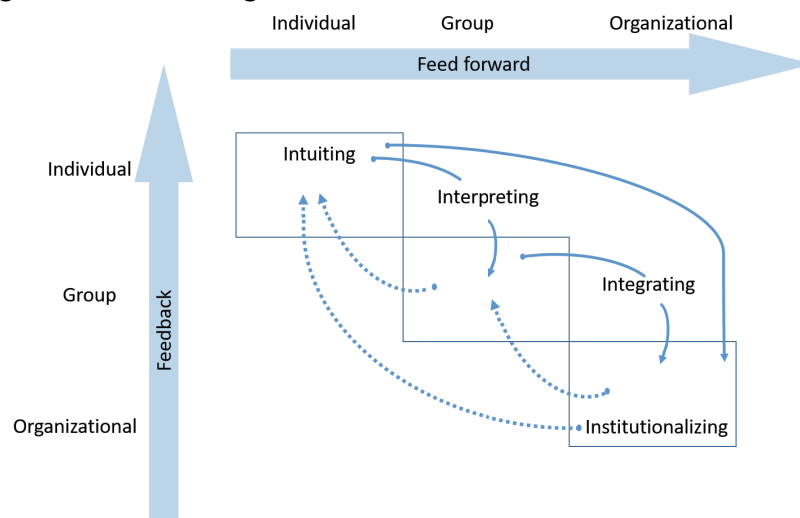
**Figure 1: Organizational Learning Process**



Figure 1: Source: Crossan et al. (1999)

### Stage 1: Intuition

Intuiting is the preconscious recognition of the pattern and/or possibilities inherent in a personal stream of experience. This process can affect the intuitive individual's behavior, but it only affects others as they attempt to (inter)act with that individual. (Crossan et al., p. 525)

In our first year of PhD studies in early 2016, we encountered many international MA students. Throughout the year of our study, MA students discussed their essays and dissertations with us, seeking help and asking about our experiences in doing research. These requests varied between questions about basic knowledge and definitions (e.g., How many participants should I interview?) to complex queries (e.g., What is my epistemological stance?). This pattern of experience led us to reflect on the relevance of the formal curriculum and the teaching strategies offered in the MA programmes. We were specifically interested in the alignment between the pedagogical approach and the learning needs of the students.

Furthermore, as the modules on research in the MA programmes were sometimes optional or misaligned with other parts of the curriculum, some students felt challenged and unprepared to do the dissertation. Through these initial informal conversations and requests, we progressively noticed (or intutited) the complexity of the problem, moving away from an individual to a systemic perspective.

### Stage 2: Interpretation

*Interpreting is the explaining of an insight, or idea to one's self and to others. This process goes from the preverbal to the verbal and requires the development of language.* (Crossan et al., p. 525)

When discussing this issue almost two years ago, we noticed that a potential problem was affecting a significant population of international students. While the university was offering support to MA students through the formal curriculum and some other complementary modules, some international students felt ill equipped and a lack of confidence in working on their dissertations. As Sergio, looking back on that phase, wrote:

> The responses (from the staff) were not very positive and encouraging. Most of the staff whom we spoke to are native-English speakers and are from the UK. They may not necessarily understand the struggle faced by international students. In addition, they thought that the existing support was enough and a new initiative would be unnecessary.

At the beginning of SPIRE, we started trying to address this state of confusion. Even though the staff and MA students shared the same goal—the completion of a dissertation—the perspectives of the staff and the voices of the MA students were radically different. It was based on this confusion that we thought there was a need to connect these different voices and to bridge the differences. We also felt that it was necessary to build some form of support for the MA students.

### Stage 3: Integration

*Integrating is the process of developing shared understanding amongst individuals*

*and the taking of coordinated action through mutual adjustment. Dialogue and joint action are crucial to the development of shared understanding. This process will initially be ad hoc and informal, but if the coordinated action taking is recurring and significant, it will be institutionalized.* (Crossan et al., p. 525)

Leaving the previous stage, we decided to build a pedagogical space that concentrated on our individual efforts and practices through a workshop. At that time, the challenge was huge, mostly because nothing like SPIRE had existed before. Our doubts related to both technical and practical issues. We were used to working with one student at a time following a very personal approach led by their individuals needs. In order to cater to the larger MA student body, we needed to shift from an individual and question-led approach to a collective and curriculum-centred approach. Furthermore, we had to consider some basic questions when starting any professional development initiative, such as regarding venue, duration, and frequency of the support.

In an unexpected way, it was the combination of curricular and administrative issues that pushed the partnership forward. Solving the administrative problems required us to contact university staff. At that time, we contacted a senior academic staff from UCL, who taught us in our first term (in 2015) and usually encouraged students to engage in student-led academic activities. We thought she would be supportive of offering support to international MA students. She immediately solved the administrative tasks and moved our thinking forward. We learned much from the staff, and Sergio recalled the conversations we had with her:

> I remembered that this academic was very generous and approachable, even though she hardly knew us. She saw the potential of our project. At that time, she was concerned about the distance between the doctoral and master's school. We did not know it at that moment but her concern greatly influenced one of SPIRE's current main components: the collaboration between PhD and MA students.

A key lesson from this stage lay in the benefits of reaching out to other stakeholders within the university. Our contacts with the staff not only allowed us to solve some relevant administrative issues but also expanded the boundaries of our initial considerations with regard to the goals of our project. As previous research has established, although it might be difficult to achieve, a partnership should result in a win-win situation (Lefever-Davis, Johnson, & Pearman, 2007). We believed that at this stage, the difficulty was to find the right partner, but it was also important not to give up. After experiencing "closed-doors" during the interpretation stage, we did find a person who believed in the value of the project. This was truly a game-changing moment for the project, even though we did not realize it at the time.

### Stage 4: Institutionalization
*Institutionalizing is the process of ensuring that routinized actions occur. Tasks are defined, actions specified and organizational mechanisms put in place to ensure that certain actions occur. Institutionalizing is the process of embedding learning that has occurred by individuals and groups into the institutions of the organization including systems, structures, procedures, and strategy.* (Crossan et al., p. 525)

With the successful experiences we have described above and positive feedback

received from the students, we started to recognize the importance of SPIRE to the students and started to explore the sustainability of the project. We reflected at the time on searching for funding within the university:

> *Sophia:* We explored several funding schemes in UCL and finally found the ChangeMakers scheme, which supports initiatives that aim to improve the learning experiences of students. Most importantly, the funding helped to upscale the whole project and formalized the initiative.

> *Sergio:* We were able to rerun the workshops, and to include nine PhD students as mentors for the master's students. Building a mutual research community between postgraduates became one of the main elements of SPIRE. These would not have happened without the funding.

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges that international students in the MA program encountered, we conducted ten individual interviews and two focus group interviews with them in 2016. These provided a good foundation of evidence for building our workshops. The gathered data provided rich and precise information about the students' challenges and allowed us to build an evidence-based approach to move the conversations with the staff forward. Additionally, since we were part of the ChangeMakers scheme, we approached different MA programme leaders to build a formal partnership with members of staff in the faculty. Sophia recalled her meeting with one of the staff: "We presented the project to the MA dissertation coordinator. Her open-minded attitude towards student-led initiatives has helped us recognize the wide range of possibilities of our project."

This meeting was one of the cornerstones of the project as it allowed us to identify and share similar goals. The Dissertation Handbook developed by the dissertation coordinator was aligned with the objectives of our workshops. She explained her rationale in creating the document, and she shared her experiences with us of being an MA dissertation supervisor and her plan to support the students in the programme. Looking back on that phase, Sergio said:

> We attended the programme meetings, which enabled us to understand the staff's perspectives on master's students' supervision. At the same time, we shared our findings from our interviews with the master's students, which helped them understand the challenges of international students.

In the process of developing SPIRE, the important milestone was when we established a partnership with the staff working in the MA programme. We became more aware of the importance of understanding different perspectives and building links with different communities. As international PhD students, we became more aware of the challenges experienced by the international MA students. As novice researchers, we were able to understand the higher education setting better and how to conduct research more effectively. We attempted to bridge the two discoursesas students and as educators,  and embed our new understanding in the development of SPIRE. It was a rewarding experience. Most importantly, all of the stakeholders benefited from it at different stages of this project.
 SPIRE is still a growing project, as more MA programme leaders of the university

have approached us to explore collaborations between postgraduate students and staff teaching in different MA programmes. We noticed that establishing a student-staff partnership is significant in formalising SPIRE in UCL. In other words, SPIRE is unlikely to be a success in terms of the scale of the project without building trust between the students and the staff. It is a two-way process where staff and students can synchronize two perspectives. We hope that SPIRE will eventually become one of the modules in MA programmes at UCL, or contribute to the current research modules in terms of curriculum and content design. If it does, first-time researchers and international students will be key components in designing the support for doing a dissertation in the university's MA programmes.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis based on the 4-I organizational framework links the process of launching SPIRE with the establishment of student-staff partnership in a higher education setting. Moving from an initial moment when you have a "half-idea" to a moment when you have a full project takes a considerable amount of time and requires perseverance on the part of the students. As the 4-I framework proposes, one of the key components of this journey is moving from an individual to a collective stance. At the beginning, we were two individuals thinking about a problem and a solution; as we were writing this reflective piece, we were three people discussing the student-staff partnership collectively who wanted to share this experience with a wider audience.

Even though the future of the project is unclear, we have started more in-depth conversations with the MA staff and the leadership team of UCL. Almost three years ago, we were dreaming and sketching the project; however, raising awareness at the top level of the university and contributing to the goals of third parties was something unexpected. The steps that we moved forward with in building the student-staff partnership were much more significant than we understood at the beginning.

Being students in this university for years, we now have noticed a degree of fragmentation not only between the students but also between the students and the staff. In this situation, time plays a critical role, in particular for international MA students who have a very intense year that partly precludes their engagement in activities beyond their academic duties. As PhD students, we approach time differently. Studying in the university for three to four years, and being involved in research activities, we are in a privileged position of being outsider and insider, able to reflect on the teaching and learning of the students across the years. We have been able to identify consistent patterns and difficulties encountered by the students and the research training needed, and we can act as a third party in creating a bridge between MA students and staff.

Reflecting on our experiences, we would like to address the significant elements that might provide references for other student-led initiatives elsewhere. First, it is important to find partners who believe that the involvement of students can improve the teaching and learning of the university. Without support and trust from academics, our preliminary ideas would not have been turned into a project.

Second, establishing a student-staff partnership takes time, and interaction and communication are the most crucial factors. Through back-and-forth conversations with staff, we not only started to understand their perspectives but also became able to articulate the challenges encountered by international students more clearly to the academics. Working in a university with people who have diverse cultural backgrounds is no

doubt an opportunity for all university members to develop an inclusive learning community.

Third, it is important to recognize the existence of "blind-spots" and to promote student-led initiatives to tackle the issues. It is impossible to tackle all issues from everyone's perspective, but it is possible to understand the differences. Being open-minded to different perspectives can help partners identify problems as well as work out a suitable solution.

Our project aimed to make a change to the international students' learning experience. As international students ourselves, we care for our peers and we hope that they have the best learning experience possible. Nonetheless, we never anticipated how much we would learn and grow, not only in terms of developing SPIRE but also in establishing a relationship with inspirational people. We hope this essay can encourage readers to establish a partnership that helps students turn their small ideas into a rewarding adventure involving student-staff partnerships.

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BOOK REVIEW

**Shaping higher education with students: Ways to connect research and teaching** by
Vincent C. H. Tong, Alex Standen, and Mina Sotiriou (Eds.).

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The edited book, *Shaping Higher Education with Students,* provides an excellent authorial example of Student-Staff Partnerships (SSPs). Student editors and student authors make up a good proportion of the writers, many of whom are working with staff writers. In it there are numerous disciplinary and transdisciplinary examples that provide substantial insight into processes of how SSPs may be realised in practice, especially for forging connections between teaching and research. My work has concerned the explicit development of student research skills and the book's position on who does the developing is clear; it is staff and students in partnership.

The stated aim of the book is to position University College London "as a case study for what can be achieved when students and staff work together to disrupt traditional relationships between research and teaching, and to reconceptualise partnership working in a higher education setting" (p. 17). The book provides multiple ways of enabling SSPs, from student involvement in curriculum design to collaborative research, as well as multiple levels of engagement, from individual/small teams of students to the involvement of an extensive number of student co-contributors. Individual chapters deal with a variety of SSP approaches including engaging postgraduate teaching assistants, workplace learning, interdisciplinary studies, and using technology in research-based education. As the book's purpose is to shape higher education through the ongoing influence of students, it shows the potential of SSP to provide an enduring approach that keeps curricula current and fit-for-purpose.

For me, the book raised a number of issues about SSPs and I will focus on four: power relationships, threshold concepts, student inclusion in SSPs, and empirical evidence.

For students to be partners in teaching and research, the writers argue, "power does need to be distributed towards students so that they can make an equal contribution through their expertise in the student experience" (p. 31). The book acknowledges that negotiating power dynamics can be a difficult area for SSPs, which is an ongoing source of scholarly discussion in the *International Journal for Students as Partners*. Reading the book, I observed the tensions inherent in these shifting dynamics, especially tensions that are linked to accountability. If students have increased power to plan or act, but the teaching staff are the ones held accountable for perceived quality, completions, and learning outcomes, this can be problematic. What can be done in SSP to rectify this potential inequality in accountability for partnerships where power is more in the hands of students than traditionally is the case? One potential answer from this book is the rich sense of student engagement, enhanced learning, and potential for a variety of improved learning

outcomes, including performance measures and student satisfaction. The potential of great learning outcomes and engagement can make staff feel less vulnerable and more willing to be accountable for SSP outcomes.

A number of the chapters cite Cook- Sather's (2014) article on pedagogical partnerships as a form of threshold concept for higher education. Because threshold concepts are "conceptually difficult, counter-intuitive or 'alien'" (Meyer & Land, 2003, p. 412), I think it is important to consider how many staff will cross this threshold, especially as they have the pressures of accountability in higher education. This is particularly salient due to the book's drive to help universities realise SSP's potential, where "all members of the university community will have to embrace new ways of thinking about the relationship between learners and teachers in the process of knowledge creation" (Matthews, Cook-Sather, & Healey, 2018, p. 28). While numerous strategies are needed to help university educators span the divide between "getting" SSP and not, this book provides a useful resource towards helping some cross that threshold through its provision of varied examples, especially with its strong student voices.

Related to power and learning or curriculum design, the case studies in this book brought many questions to my mind that were linked to notions of threshold concepts in disciplines. How effectively can students influence programs of study with reference to the complexities of design that accounts for student learning of crucial concepts in discipline-based courses? There are strong examples in the book that tutoring and peer assistance is effectively conducted by those who have recently completed the same course of study or are currently enrolled. It may be, then, that a SSP approach to designing the curriculum or influencing its implementation is effective for student learning of the crucial and tricky threshold concepts in a course. Therefore, future research can expand the case studies in this book by investigating the learning outcomes for all students affected by SSP in a variety of contexts. In other words, empirical evidence of student learning associated with SSP is a critical next step for the SSP scholarly community.

My final focus is on equity and inclusion. The issue of equity has generated much discussion by students (e.g., Bindra et al., 2018) and staff (e.g., O'Shea, 2018). There was a clear commitment in the book to disrupting student-staff power hierarchy or addressing student-staff inequality. From a broader social justice perspective, I wanted to know more about how the SSP case studies presented in the book were working toward addressing student equality.

Dwyer (2017), writing as a then undergraduate student, raised concerns about partnership practices that "prioritise high achieving students as ideal participants" because this "exacerbates the disparities between certain types of individuals and both implicitly and explicitly encourages peer competition among staff and students" (p. 12). It would be great to know more about the students engaged as partners in this book. Is there a benefit from having as partners a mixture of students who have different orientations to learning, such as those who are serialistic learners wanting logical, sequential learning and those who tend to be more holistic learners who prefer less structure and more open-endedness (Pask & Scott, 1972)? Are some orientations more likely to be involved as partners than others? Do students who become partners originate from across the education spectrum in terms of GPA, gender, cultural and language background, and socio-economic background? How can programs ensure that students who do choose to be partners broadly represent all students affected by each initiative rather than merely enforcing their own ideas? Because as Matthews (2017) recently argued, "Without reflecting on diversity and inclusion, a risk is

that students-as-partners may be biased in favour of 'like students' partnering with 'like staff'" (p. 2). Explicit statements on the proportion of student contributors who were first-in-family, their socio-economic distribution as well as academic performance would provide a lot of insight into who the power is shifted towards in the book.

      *Shaping Higher Education with Students* is a great start to addressing the issues raised here through its rich examples of SSP practice from a diverse range of contexts. This book will prove to be particularly helpful and insightful for academics striving to connect research with teaching, staff setting up or facilitating extended SSP projects, and students commencing research projects and other partnerships with staff.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

**John Willison** *has been intrigued for 30 years by how students may effectively engage in research-based learning—first in high schools, then primary schools, and in the past 15 years, in higher education. In collaboration with many academics, he devised the Research Skill Development (RSD) framework in 2004 to inform educators and students across the span from primary to PhD. The RSD, and the more generalised version, the Models of Engaged Learning and Teaching (MELT), were the subject of two Office for Learning and Teaching grants, and two National Teaching Fellowships. Numerous resources are available at [www.rsd.edu.au](www.rsd.edu.au) and [www.melt.edu.au](www.melt.edu.au).*

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