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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.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reflections of Students and Staff in a Project-Led Partnership: Contextualised Experiences of Students-as-Partners

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ABSTRACT

For many years, the methods of teaching and learning have remained relatively unchanged, with teachers bestowing knowledge to their students in a one-way hierarchical approach to learning. However, Student as Partners (SaP) as a concept and an ideology aims to disrupt traditional power structures of learning to offer a shared space where students become co-creators of change. This research reflects on one particular SaP project, a small-scale, project-based, institutionally resourced partnership whereby 14 students collaborated alongside 3 staff members to enhance the quality of the student experience at an Australian university. The current study aims to explore what factors mediate newly formed student-staff partnerships. Using a qualitative thematic approach, the paper draws from various online surveys to share particular contextualised experiences of student-staff partnerships. These include: learning together and navigating power dynamics, opportunities to build relationships, and balancing work and study. They became the specific strategies that mediated effective partnership. The implications of these themes highlighted that the context-dependent nature of SaP should be realised in an effort to develop institutionally appropriate practices.

KEYWORDS

student as partners, student experiences, contextualised partnership, non-academic partnerships, staff experiences

At a time of increasing university pressures to meet the needs of students, SaP provides space to realise new, authentic, and respectful relationships between students and staff. SaP offers a counter-narrative to teaching and learning in higher education by disrupting power structures and engaging students in meaningful relationships. It aims to interrupt the bystander model of traditional education by offering a place where students become active and engaged leaders through project-led environments to enhance the student experience. Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014) define SaP as a "collaborative,

reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways" (p. 6).

This research does not aim to offer in-depth accounts of various definitions of partnership. For a deeper account of the emergence of the term "student partner," its various definitions, and differences between "student partners" and "student voice," see Cook-Sather, Matthews, Ntem, and Leathwick (2018) and Fielding (2001, 2004, 2011). Rather, this paper follows the guidance of Cliffe et al. (2017), who offer meaning in partnership by identifying it with particular principles, such as inclusivity, trust, authenticity, empowerment, and responsibility. Additionally, the staff and students within this project set their own co-created, contextually dependent guiding principles. Despite the institution driving the vision, timeline, funding and scope of the project, the partnership model still enabled meaningful forms of student engagement to exist.

This paper follows Williamson's (2013) conceptualisation of partnership as something that "goes far beyond the mere consultation, involvement, or representation of students in decision-making. Where partnership exists, students not only identify areas for enhancement, but they help to identify ways to carry out that enhancement" (p. 8).

The current study discusses the findings of a 6-month, small-scale, university-led and -funded, first-time, project-based partnership. Students were purposively selected and exhibited positive attitudes and motivations to work alongside staff and other students to further enhance the quality of the student experience.

The guiding question of this paper aimed to examine what contextual factors mediated newly formed student-staff partnerships. The paper draws from Healey, Flint, and Harrington's (2016) standpoint to outline how context has been relatively overlooked in the literature compared to generalised frameworks. In addition, it offers a deeper understanding of staff experiences in non-academic projects, which has also been under-documented in the field (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The research was designed with students at its heart, as students co-created the research questions for the surveys. The findings from the paper outline three themes that were consistent across the analysis of the survey reflections completed by both students and staff. These themes were (a) learning together and navigating power dynamics, (b) opportunities to build relationships, and (c) balancing work and study.

CONTEXTUAL EXPERIENCES IN SAP

SaP in its simplest sense is underpinned by co-creation. It promotes a new concept of relationship where students and staff create, evaluate and analyse purposes together (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011). Drawing upon Cook-Sather's (2018) work, this paper initially reviews her literature in the field of Student as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) in the United States. Although it has a different name, it shares many of the broader philosophies of SaP. According to Cook-Sather et al. (2014a), development of new customs of academic freedom between staff and students is made possible through meaningful and respectful relationships. However, Cook-Sather (2010) also reflect that some staff might perceive SaP as fanciful and that power relations may be too ingrained to be disrupted.

Acknowledging and interrupting authority can be difficult as it is both invisible and engrained through formal schooling. However, students are more conscious of power dynamics as they are often marginalised. Cook-Sather et al. (2014c) also noted that most publications do not address staff experiences and tend to focus on student outcomes. This is evident in the higher proportion of publications on student outcomes rather than staff

outcomes (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). This paper addresses this gap by triangulating reflections from staff and students to highlight consistent mediating themes.

However, not all partnerships aim to have a clear, deliverable outcome (Bryson, 2016). For this reason, SaP can be seen as both a process and a product (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). While frameworks may help scale up a project within a university, its adoption across the spectrum of possible SaP applications should be tempered with caution. For instance, a framework for improving teaching and learning at the course level (see, e.g., Jensen & Bennett, 2016) would not fit extracurricular governance-based projects like those presented in Barrineau, Schnaas, Engström, and Härlin (2015). Coupled with the low rates of inter-institutional and cross-institutional partnerships (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), a one-size-fits-all framework may not be appropriate in all contexts.

There also has been an overreliance of SaP used solely for teaching and learning purposes (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Hence, project-based initiatives, outlined in this study, need greater contributions to the debates regarding student partnerships in the field to reflect from a non-academic, teaching and learning perspective of SaP. Due to the relative infancy of the field, student partnerships with PhD students and professional staff are limited, which restricts the breadth of their contextual understandings. Moreover, results in the literature have been overwhelmingly positive in favour of partnership, with little critique of the consequential or unexpected outcomes of partnership that arise from the contextual and subjective interests in which they were created.

It is important to distinguish between student-voice (Cook-Sather, 2014b) and student-action (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011). Student-voice aims to understand students' perspectives while student-action is where students often take the lead role in the partnership. In light of this distinction, the project team adopted a new faculty-wide, institutionally funded, student-voice partnership in an effort to enhance the quality of the student experience.

CO-CREATING THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Moving away from a general template, the partnership set out to co-create three guiding principles agreed upon by all parties. The first co-created principle, titled "diverse contributions," aimed to ensure that there was a diversity of experiences and ideas of the student partners to promote greater equity and inclusion in the project. The project sought to address this concern by deliberately recruiting students from a diverse range of academic as well as cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For this reason, strong academic achievement was not a criterion for recruitment.

The second co-created principle was "shared responsibility." The literature also identifies this as critical to SaP (Marquis et al., 2016), and ongoing clarification of goals was critical to building a sense of shared responsibility between partners. Dwyer (2018) also observed that accountability mechanisms promoted a more equal conception of partnership. The team met weekly to discuss and seek feedback on critical aspects of the project, which also promoted accountability and transparency of roles. An online collaboration tool was used to update students between meetings and provide a space to share documents. This reinforced the team's shared responsibility for delivering project outcomes and helped students and staff feel connected to project activities.

Lastly, "structured reflection" encouraged students and staff to think, engage, and meaningfully connect their current experiences. Students and staff volunteered to complete three online reflections before, during, and after the partnership about their experience of

working together. The research methods, techniques and questions used in these reflections are outlined in Table 1. The project context is similar to Marquis, Jayaratnam, Mishra, and Rybkina's (2018) partnership, which was exclusive to particular students who had already presented motivations for participating in partnership.

Before discussing the implications of this research, the paper heeds Healey and Healey's (2018) advice that newly formed partnerships must be understood by the context in which they operate. Gibbs (2010) also stresses the importance of context, as otherwise it may lead to inappropriate best practice models. This paper contributes more broadly to the international SaP literature by celebrating the uncertainty of partnerships through the appreciation of the subjective, lived experiences within them and by questioning generic frameworks that camouflage the context in which they operate (Cliffe et al., 2017). As Healey and Healey (2018) state, "people who have experienced partnerships are arguably in a better position to reflect on partnership through these conceptual frameworks than those who are new to this approach" (p. 6). This research aims to contribute and extend Healey's and Healey's (2018) contextual implications of partnership by proposing that newly formed partnerships could benefit from setting their own set of co-created guiding principles relevant to their motivations, attitudes, needs, and context.

RESEARCH METHOD

The next section identifies the research question and method to make explicit the scope and objectives of the research.

Our research question asks: ***What contextual factors mediate newly formed student-staff partnerships?***

The partnership project aimed to investigate the undergraduate student experience in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences with a specific focus on retention and employability. An expression of interest was provided to staff members in the student experience team, and three staff members showed interest in being involved in the project. Three professional staff worked with 14 students from June to December in 2016 and conducted three main undertakings together. They:

1. Developed guiding principles through focus groups to unpack the relationship and develop good practice principles between students and staff.
2. Piloted and evaluated discipline-based employability workshops that included "idea-to-enterprise" approaches as well as traditional career experiences.
3. Devised a workflow model for creating mutually beneficial and supportive student-staff partnerships in the future.

Participants

Fourteen students and three professional staff participated. The fourteen students were recruited over a 2-month period and represented a diverse demographic of the student body. The average age was 22 years old, with a range between 19-28 years of age. Most students were in their third year (n=6) and fifth year (n=4), with two in their second year and one student in their fourth year of study. The majority of students were domestic students (Permanent Resident or Australian Citizen n=13), with one international student recruited for the project. The participants were mostly female (n=9); however, a sizable minority of male students (n=5) participated in the project. The majority of students were

studying full-time (n=13), with one student studying part-time. The participants of the study studied across a broad range of disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, and education to ensure a representative spread of students within the faculty. Academic achievement was not considered as a selection criterion for recruitment, thus giving students with mixed academic performances the opportunity to participate in the program. Student motivations for involvement was considered during the selection process when candidates were shortlisted and interviewed.

Research design

Merriam (2009) outlines an interpretative paradigm of lived experience, wherein each individual's social reality is self-constructed and subjective experience is valued by researchers. Given the nature of this project (i.e., highly context-dependent and grounded in social interaction), a qualitative data-collection approach was undertaken. The current study adopted Patton's (2005) broad inductive thematic analytical approach to design where the research was driven by practice and themes organised according to the reflections provided during the research process. This was conducted in five steps. The first was through the familiarisation of data. The second was assigning codes to the data. The third stage aimed to determine any patterns or themes in the identified codes. The fourth step included a method of triangulation to ensure that the theme was expressed by both students and staff. The last step was to review and name each theme that best encapsulated the grouped codes (Merriam, 2009). For instance, time and work commitments were themed into a broader category of "balancing work and study."

An anonymous survey was chosen to ensure that staff and students could openly express their concerns without coercion. Furthermore, the anonymity reduced opportunities to ascertain the identity of the respondents which may have otherwise been possible due to the small sample size. The questions for each of the research methods are listed in Table 1. The research questions were co-created with students. The same questions were given to staff and students to ensure consistency of the data. The data was transcribed and themes that appeared continually were then identified for further scrutiny. For example, using a method of thematic triangulation, if staff and students both referred to "workload" in the transcription, it was identified as a theme for further interrogation.

Research method

The data was analysed using two different research methods: reflective journals and a focus group. The first, the reflective journals (i.e., Reflection Journal 1, 2, and 3, as presented in Table 1), used an open-ended online survey to gain feedback about their experiences in the project. Students and staff who were part of the project team were asked to complete three anonymous online written reflections before, during, and at the end of the project. The aim of the reflections was to document student and staff experiences with engaging in partnership and to identify common mediating themes consistent among both staff and students. Although staff drafted the reflective questions, students had the opportunity to change and add questions through group discussions. The final questions reflected the ideas and interests of both students and staff.

The second method were focus groups (i.e., Journal Reflection 4). Here, students were asked to attend a focus group at the end of the project to discuss their reflections and insights gained at the end of the project. One focus group was led by a staff member and the other was led by a student. Upon receiving signed consent, students were recorded and

their data was transcribed. The information was then grouped into common themes which were identified by both staff and students.

During the project, student partners requested an additional opportunity to discuss and reflect on their partnership experience. In response, staff organised an informal conversation to better understand how students' partnership experiences were meaningful to them. This dialogic process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the written reflections because it helped highlight what was meaningful to participants during the partnership process.

Table 1: Description of data-collection questions and method

RESEARCH TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION OF DATA COLLECTION METHOD	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS
Reflection Journal 1	Thirteen students and three staff completed an anonymous online survey.	· What is your definition of a partnership between students and staff? · What would you like to learn/achieve while working on this project?
Reflection Journal 2	Ten students and three staff completed an anonymous online survey.	· In what ways have your ideas about student-staff partnership changed throughout this project? · How do you feel decisions about responsibilities between students and staff have been made on this project so far? In what ways would you like to see them changed? · What have you learnt while working on the project, and how might you apply these skills in the future? · Thinking about your time on the project, what would you have done differently to enhance your partnership experience?
Reflection Journal 3	Nine students and three staff completed an anonymous online survey.	· What was your top challenge and your top success while working on this project? What did you learn from these experiences? · What were the outcomes of the project? In what ways did we achieve (or not achieve) those outcomes? · If you could do this project again, what would you do differently and what would you keep the same? · What suggestions do you have for enhancing student-staff partnership in future projects?
Reflection 4 (Focus Group)	Eleven students were divided into two groups for a semi-structured reflective discussion, both of which were facilitated by staff. The session was recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were de-identified.	· Thinking about our shared expectations that we developed at the beginning of the project, do you think we met these expectations together? Is there anything that we missed or could have improved? · What was your most memorable experience working on the project? · What suggestions do you have for enhancing student-staff partnership in future projects? · What could we do next year to build on this specific project?

FINDINGS

Based on the reflections of team members, the partnership model used for this project appeared to foster a positive and mutually beneficial experience for both students and staff. Throughout the project, students and staff were asked to reflect on their experience and how they could improve their current partnerships. As such, this section explores findings related to the experiences of working in partnership for students and staff and additionally outlines strategies to foster effective staff-student relationships in future. The findings were guided by the study's aim to discover the factors that mediate or enhance effective partnership. Three themes were identified: learning together and navigating power dynamics, opportunities to build relationships, and balancing work and study.

Learning together and navigating power dynamics

While working in partnership, both students and staff learnt new skills that enhanced their employability and service to the community. These skills were contextually dependent to this newly formed partnership. Students and staff also differed in their conceptions of power dynamics at the beginning of the project, which these excerpts demonstrate:

> I would like to learn how to communicate with others while in partnership. I find it difficult to navigate power relations in the workplace. While I would love to contribute to work, I am very aware of my place in the hierarchy and how I approach decision-making differs according to my own position of power/lack of. (Student, Journal Reflection 1)

> A partnership to me entails mutual respect, equality and collaboration in decision making. I understand that there exists a power dynamic, however I am keen to genuinely engage students in an equal and meaningful way. (Staff, Journal Reflection 1)

In particular, the students' reflections tended to indicate an element of discomfort with the existing imbalanced power dynamic. However, Glasser and Powers (2011) represent discomfort as a productive component of partnership which should be embraced accordingly. Students expressed a helper-helped relationship at times which may need reconfiguration to further foster a relationship that mediates power relations. Equally important was the need to provide space for opportunities to build intellectual, emotional, and social relationships together. At the beginning of the project, students identified skills that they wanted to develop and connected skill development to their own employability. As they progressed through the project, they felt that they learned technical skills that would make them more employable (e.g., data analysis, event management, and focus group facilitation) while improving their confidence, interpersonal communication, and analysis skills. One student noted,

> In my eyes, I see the result, the end goal, the product . . . as the most important thing and definitely the part that I've liked most about the project. Because it's everybody working mutually together, cooperatively. . . . We are all cognisant of the steps that it takes to get to where we want to be at the end of the project. (Student, Reflection 4)

Other skills included presenting to key stakeholders, organising events, learning more about working in a team, and contributing to a "real research project."

Learning did not come without challenges. Students found that they underestimated the time it would take to learn and apply a new skill. For example, some students underestimated the time it would take to learn a new software, which in turn affected how quickly they could complete the task. Similarly, an event-planning student partner had never organised catering before and felt uncomfortable voicing their lack of knowledge to do so. As a result, they did not seek help and found the task difficult. By the end of the project, the staff felt like they had learned from the student partners and expressed that they enjoyed building a relationship with learners more than anticipated.

Opportunities to build relationships

Students and staff considered a range of strategies for working with other people, including within the project team and with external stakeholders. Three factors were important here: communicating regularly, fostering peer interaction, and engaging external stakeholders.

Communicating regularly

To manage regular communication, students expressed that certain different modes (i.e., emails, calling, texting, face-to-face meetings, and cloud-based platforms) suited their student lifestyle and helped them to stay engaged with the project. Many students found that face-to-face interactions were the most effective way to maintain relationships. Weekly meetings were viewed as important to maintaining a connection with the team and the project outcomes. Similarly, some students enjoyed working in the office alongside staff members and explained that it was easier to ask for clarification. One student noted,

> I enjoyed coming into the office. . . . I think that was really good to be able to come in and see everyone. You can just ask really quick questions. . . . Rather than writing an email and taking the time you just say, what does this mean? (Reflection 4)

Fostering peer interaction

Fostering peer interaction was outlined as an important aspect of building relationships. Staff sought to foster peer-to-peer connections, particularly for organising events. Staff found that "having peers to talk to peers resulted in much richer information and ideas for action, as students really opened up to other students" (Staff, Journal Reflection 2). Each student was paired with another student to co-organise the event, a decision that was based on informal feedback from the students responsible for events. This provided a positive support framework for students and shifted their focus from seeking solutions from staff to solving challenges together. Further, staff found it difficult to let students fail and stepped in quickly to ensure that activities stayed on track. One staff member noted,

> Sometimes, it was difficult to know when to step in and complete a task or let the student complete it themselves. This was a common issue when the events drew nearer. I think I could have stepped away a bit more and let the students figure out that they had to complete certain tasks in order for the event to happen. (Staff, Journal Reflection 3)

Engaging external stakeholders

A challenge raised by students and staff alike concerned engaging external stakeholders, including promoting events and focus groups to students, working with student societies, and engaging with relevant staff. Stakeholder engagement was a critical part of the project, and some students felt that this requirement was beyond their skillset. Students suggested that the student partner job description should explicitly outline that the role entails promoting and advertising opportunities to other fellow students. Additionally, students suggested that the student partner induction should include training that focuses on the complexities of promoting opportunities to students and other stakeholders.

With respect to engaging with staff, students suggested that it would be beneficial to provide student partners with earlier and more frequent opportunities to engage with school staff. In this project, staff took responsibility for this outreach, but did not communicate this clearly to students. Some students felt as though they did not work as efficiently in areas of the project because they were not sufficiently connected to staff. Lastly, with respect to student societies, it was considered important to provide training to new student society executives on how to manage events in the university context and to complement the current work of student societies (e.g., social networking evenings) with employability and skill-building seminars.

Balancing work and study

Students' greatest concern was the ability to balance work and study. One clear outcome of the project was a need to offer a range of strategies for students to balance each. By providing flexibility, communicating assessment schedules, and reviewing the recruitment timeline, some avoidable stresses for students could have been alleviated.

Flexibility

The students enjoyed the flexibility of the work hours provided, as they could fit the project work into their schedules. Staff negotiated deadlines with students and allowed them flexibility to undertake the task at their discretion. Maintaining flexibility was therefore a critical component of ensuring work-study balance, as it allowed students to accommodate multiple priorities.

Communicating assessment schedules

With respect to the assessment schedule, students suggested providing a more concrete assessment timetable for the semester to be used by staff when assigning tasks. Even though students provided a rough overview of their semester to staff at the beginning of the project, some felt that staff did not adequately consider their schedules. One student suggested creating a live document where they could submit their weekly timetables, as student commitments often change week to week.

Recruitment timing

Lastly, in relation to recruitment timing, students agreed that recruitment for the position could have happened earlier in the semester to allow for training and extra preparation for the focus groups and events. Students believed the short time frame between recruitment, induction, and implementing their tasks was challenging. Students also agreed that there was no assessment in the first few weeks of the semester and that

they could have used this time to focus on their role. This challenge caused considerable stress for students, particularly in the middle of the project, when students attempted to meet project and assessment deadlines simultaneously. This manifested itself in different ways for different students. One student felt that they were not given enough choice about event timing, which coincided with assessment. Another found it easy to concentrate on work and took on a number of additional tasks that caused stress when assignments were due. Others felt overwhelmed and wished they had communicated more openly about these challenges. Although their perspectives varied, the challenge remained the same throughout the project:

> I wish that I had let the Staff Partners know when I was struggling with my workload. (Student, Reflection 2)

> My top challenge was time. Having to juggle the Student Partner role with my other commitments and studies was at times very stressful despite the fact that I keep a calendar and a planner at my desk. . . . It was quite challenging at some points to meet my Student Partner deadlines within the required timeframes and perhaps I should have negotiated these further or found strategies to work more efficiently to meet them. (Student, Journal Reflection 3)

> If I were to change anything, I would change my state of mind. Although (mostly) not related to how the project went, I feel that if I were to be calmer and approach my event planning with less worry about how it would affect my own work and image as a student, I could've given more to the project. (Student, Journal Reflection 3)

> As far as my [work] . . . just everything kind of happening towards the end of semester, everything kind of needed to be prepared right in the middle of my exams. . . . I found it very hard to manage but I did." (Student, Journal Reflection 4)

Other mediating factors

Two sub-themes that arose during analysis that were identified by both staff and students but were not prevalent enough to be categorised as an overarching theme were (a) the need for student renumeration and (b) the need for a shared office.

Both students and staff suggested that paying students was a valuable and undisputedly mediating factor for effective partnership. Both staff and students stressed the importance of financial incentives in ensuring the quality of outcomes and for fostering a sense of equality within the partnership. Payment helped students to prioritise throughout the semester, resulting in better quality work. Renumeration was also seen as legitimising the partnership and encouraged students to take the partnership more seriously. This was supported by both staff and students:

> Don't underestimate the value of paying students for their work. Students expressed their feelings of equality, of partnership, and genuine contribution, all stemming from the initial fact of being paid as a co-worker on the project. (Staff, Journal Reflection 3)

> It was a good reinforcement of the Student Partner message that we are actually being treated as though we have serious skills that we can offer. I think it would have been confusing if the project description had have been it's all about equal partnership and equal work and then it was $10 an hour. (Student, Reflection 4)

The second key factor worth mentioning was the lack of access to an office or a shared space. Students thought that the office set-up, which was behind a locked door that only staff could access, created a barrier and made it harder to have informal conversations throughout the day. This developed as the second key sub-theme that negatively mediated SaP in this context.

DISCUSSION

The paper identified three particular co-created guiding principles that may help support newly formed partnerships as considerations for future work. The set of guiding principles concerning diverse contributions, shared responsibility, and structured reflection coincided within three themes identified in this research. For instance, the theme "learning together and navigating power dynamics" and the guiding principle of shared responsibility both related to how well students and staff could set specific, measurable, clear, and accountable goals. Moreover, staff and students found that when creating opportunities to build relationships, it was critical to develop multiple channels of communication to foster teamwork, provide opportunities for students to work with each other, and deliver support to engage with other students. By encouraging a range of contributions, this theme coincided with the principle of diverse contributions. Lastly, "balancing work and study" became a consistent theme in the findings and, through the principle of structured reflection, students were given flexibility in accommodating student work schedules.

Revisiting the research question regarding what contextual factors mediate newly formed student-staff partnerships, we identified several considerations. For instance, a mediating factor identified in relation to the theme "learning together and navigating power dynamics" was the need to set a clear message about the benefits of partnership for both students and staff throughout the life of the project. This could be inclusive of, but not limited to, training and development surrounding power, attitudes, and preconceived beliefs. This could be particularly helpful for first-time, project-based, extracurricular partnerships that may similarly encounter this aspect as a mediating factor. Both students and staff anticipated navigating power dynamics as an issue and as such were uncertain about whether genuine partnership was possible. However, students were surprised by the high level of effort and engagement staff put into the project. This was similar to Cook-Sather et al.'s (2014) findings that staff who actively engage with student perceptions and contributions, rather than merely dismissing them, found SaP transformative, both emotionally and cognitively. It is therefore prudent to note Cousin's (2010) realisation that student-staff partnership must be prepared for and embrace an emotional shift, just as much as a cognitive shift.

With respect to providing opportunities to build relationships, students focused heavily on employability skills. Comparatively, staff focused on how to provide more effective opportunities for collaboration with students. Students who were the most willing to learn and take on new challenges appeared to receive the most benefits from the partnership. All staff believed that opportunities for partnership with students would benefit the project outcomes, and consequently, that they must foster collaboration with

students and help them learn together and navigate power dynamics. This research supports earlier findings within the field that power dynamics must be taught, or at least acknowleged, for newly formed partnerships (Glasser & Power, 2011).

To this end, it is worth tailoring communication about the benefits of partnership to staff and students that relates to their lived experiences, attitudes, and motivations. This will support a shared learning experience while offering opportunities to build relationships with each other. For staff, the project promoted the development of a diverse range of perspectives and insights into how students learn, while leveraging students' expertise and ideas to improve teaching and learning. It also assisted staff in building capacity in collaborative work environments where a power dynamic exists. To this end, the current paper adds to the body of knowledge in non-academic staff experiences in SaP, which has been limited in the literature (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

At the end of the project, students expressed that they had gained a greater understanding of the university as an institution and felt more confident in having opportunities to influence change. Matthews, Dwyer, Hine, and Turner (2018) noticed a similar phenomenon whereby, students often moved from "co-creators" to "change agents" organically as they expressed an interest in initiating future teaching and learning activities in collaboration with staff (rather than waiting for an opportunity to become involved). This was an unanticipated outcome of the partnership model and opens up the possibility of students initiating new project ideas and seeking avenues to collaborate with staff. However, Cook-Sather (2014) suggests that such change can be "troublesome, transformative, irreversible, and integrative" (p. 186). In order to avoid alarming potential staff partners, Cook-Sather (2014b) suggests proposing SaP to staff by framing the conversation around dialogue, rather than change. Given the traditional power dynamic at university, fostering students to become change agents from co-creators would require a structured, strategic, and resourced approach to SaP.

Regarding opportunities to build relationships, another contextual factor that mediated effective partnership was space, which only became apparent during the project. Students noted that a lack of a shared space was a barrier to effective partnership and that it undermined the whole concept of equality as they were unable to readily access a swipe card to enter the office and had to rely on staff members to let them in. A more open, accessible space would have encouraged more interaction between students and staff and may have been more convenient for project-based learning.

CONCLUSION

The paper offered practical strategies for others interested in developing student partner relationships in an effort to (a) examine the importance of appreciating the context-specific factors of partnership and (b) draw conclusions from the three themes derived from the project for the use in future projects within the institution in which it was developed. Offering moments of reflection before, during, and after as a collaborative learning activity was critical as it allowed students and staff to explicitly reflect on the relational and socio-emotional aspects of partnership.

With respect to opportunities to build relationships, the need for multiple channels of communication to foster more meaningful and authentic relationships needs to be considered. Understanding and balancing work and study was identified as students' biggest challenge during the project. However, this was overcome by giving students flexibility in

their work agendas, creating shared assessment rosters, and recruiting students earlier to allow for additional training and preparation.

The current research was successfully reviewed according to research ethics committee guidelines (Ethics approval number: 2016001181).

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RESEACRH ARTICLE

Politicised Compassion and Pedagogical Partnership: A Discourse and Practice for Social Justice in the Inclusive Academy

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ABSTRACT

Despite changes prompted by global legalisation and policy developments for social justice and inclusion, many institutions of higher education remain driven by neoliberal values, an endemic culture of performativity, and an emphasis on individual success. These phenomena inform, disfigure, and invert inclusion and equality in policy, practice, and outcome. In response, we propose *politicised compassion* fostered through pedagogical partnership as a political and social justice reaction to the status quo. This paper explores this proposal, grounding it in international research studies on student experience, partnership, and equality. The work's novelty is in its advancement of Zembylas' (2013) work on "critical compassion" through what we term politicised compassion with the goal of enabling sustained student agency, student success, and the creation of active, considerate citizens. Our work invites critical considerations of where such a discourse for meaningful social justice and equality can take place within the academy.

KEYWORDS

politicised compassion, pedagogical partnership, social justice, equality, student experience

Although global legalisation and policy developments for social justice and inclusion have proliferated in recent years, these are in tension in many Western contexts with shifts to the right in government and wider society, increasing intolerance of the "other," the reinforcing of structural inequalities, and the impact of long-term economic and structural woes upon the poor and oppressed. This tension plays out in colleges and universities (Cook-Sather, Des-Ogugua, & Bahti, 2018; Gibson, 2015; Gibson et al., 2018), which are microcosms of the societies in which they are situated. Alongside other efforts that strive for inclusivity and equity in higher education (Bracken & Novak, 2019; Burke, Bennett, Burgess, Gray, & Southgate, 2016), politicised academics working in partnership with politicised students can be key to countering systemic inequality and to pursuing justice. We argue for a process of "politicisation" of education and the need for a collaborative

discourse that leads to and supports what we have termed *politicised compassion*. We propose that pedagogical partnership between faculty and students is a space within which politicised compassion can be developed as a discourse and a practice for meaningful social justice and equity.

CONTEXT: INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Internationally, higher education has enacted significant changes to its practices and goals in keeping with global legalisation and policy developments for social justice and inclusion. There has been much debate about the worth and impact of initiatives such as "Widening Participation" in the UK (Burke, 2012; Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2003; DfES, 2004; Gale & Hodge, 2014; Gibson, 2015) and a commitment by the U.S. Department of Education (2016) to create diverse and welcoming campus communities for all students. These initiatives have generally been credited with increasing numbers of higher education (HE) students who were previously excluded (e.g., disabled students, ethnic minorities, "mature" learners, working class students, and "first-in-the-family" students). However, significant under-representation of these groups continues. Studies have asserted claims of discrimination against disabled students, also known as "disablism," and practices of covert discrimination are perpetuated due to a lack of understanding of or critical engagement with how and where discrimination exists in the sector (Madriaga, 2007; Ahmed & Swain, 2006; Burke, 2012; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012; Gibson et al., 2016).

The term "inclusion" in education has been redefined, repackaged, and rebranded (Gibson, 2006; Gibson & Kendall, 2010; Gibson, 2015), its definition determined by the dominant political agency of the day. Its original meaning was grounded in human rights and equality as captured in the work of Oliver and Zarb (1989), Barnes and Oliver (2010), Allan (2015), and others. Once colonised by the establishment, the term lost its original ideals, and radical change for social justice became overshadowed by bureaucratic wrangling and debates about resource allocation. Gibson (2015) highlights this development in her work with disabled students where "the world of many 'included' disabled students is one of trial and error, frustration and failure" (p. 875). This misunderstanding and redefining by policy makers and institutions has resulted in the loss of inclusion's original critical and political stance, as once defined by those who continue to live with exclusion and oppression (Madriaga, 2007; Madriaga, Hanson, Kay, & Walker, 2011; Quinn, 2013; Liasidou, 2014; Gibson, 2015).

Hockings (2010) articulates what inclusive education (IE) means in relation to HE and how it is deeply connected to ideas regarding social justice as opposed to mere "welfare" approaches to teaching and learning for students who are positioned by the dominant culture as lacking the capacity to succeed at university. She argues:

> Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others.

As Cook-Sather (2015, p. 5) notes, we can conceive of difference "as constituting unbridgeable divides among us," or we can let it "inspire respect and empathy" and serve as

"a basis for developing connections and as a resource for learning and growth." We argue that inclusive education should do the latter and that it is about creating an equally transformative educational experience for all our students by taking into consideration and valuing their various identities and intersections.

This work connects to the field of "diversity" and what that means in relation to identity, both self-selected and externally imposed. We critically consider how institutionalised and policy-driven definitions of diversity are contributing to inequality through their pathologising of "difference." ARC (2013) clarifies who is being referred to when policy specifies diverse student groups: "'Widening participation students' are not a homogeneous group. . . . [They include] people from lower socio-economic groups, mature students, part-time learners, learners from ethnic minority groups, vocational and work-based learners, disabled learners, and care leavers" (p. ii).

Thus diversity refers to those traditionally excluded from HE, and positions many aspects of identity as external to the "norm," which has negative results. For example, Madriaga et al. (2011) argue: "Normalcy heralds a nondisabled person without 'defects,' or impairments, as the ideal norm. . . . this sense of normalcy reproduces thinking that non-traditional students are non-white, working class and/or disabled" (p. 901). This reproduction of "normalcy" and "non-traditional" creates a culture where HE institutions continue to marginalise and suppress those who seek equality and academic success (Slee, 2008; Madriaga et al., 2011).

The widening scope of IE from questions of disability to those of diversity and other intersectionalities has, according to Slee (2008), "softened and subverted" IE's claims (p. 100). Ahmed and Swain (2006) also critique the "softening" of language, arguing that the label "diversity" "individuates difference, conceals inequalities and neutralises histories of antagonism and struggle" (p. 96). Intersectionality, on the other hand, underscores the "'multidimensionality' of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989: 139)" (Nash, 2008, p. 1) and "highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). Indeed, "social inequality is not only determined multidimensionally along different axes of inequality—such as gender, migration, socioeconomic background, age, disability, and so on—but emerges particularly in the intersection of these axes as they mutually constitute each other within social contexts" (Gross, Gottburgsen, & Phoenix, 2016, p. 51).

In current HE practices, much discussion of inclusive education centres around the establishment's creation of "diverse" student identity, where their academic needs are assessed and considered as "other" in relation to the established norm and where policy discourse refers to such students as non-traditional. The language glosses over differences in ways that divert attention from inequalities, thereby re-producing divisions and reinforcing insiders and outsiders. It is important to note the complexities and tensions involved when attempting to locate, define, or label groups of people. Labelling can be an ostracizing activity, creating and then reinforcing a person's or people's externally imposed excluded form.

Whilst international undergraduate prospectuses and university websites make it appear that HE successfully includes many diverse students, looking deeper, we see that this is not always the case. With high dropout rates, university transfers, negative student feedback, stories of frustration and failure (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012; Gibson, 2012; Quinn, 2013), the world of many "included" students is one of trial, error, and failure rather than

growth and academic success. Noting HE's history (i.e., historically who had access and who did not), Hughes (2015) wonders "whether contemporary universities are capable of righting social wrongs at all" (p. 304). Related to this point, Gibson (2015) draws on Bourdieu's theory of habitus—that institutional habitus, through habits of mind and practice, result in a form of institutional agency, which maintains the disenfranchisement and exclusion of "other"—to explore the nuanced ways in which traditional thinking and established norms continue to exclude the "diverse" student.

Other critiques inform a critical analysis of international HE "socially just" practices and positions. Giroux (2010), drawing on the work of Agamben (1998), argues that the main driving force behind HE and education in general is neoliberalism, not social justice. He maintains that

> we are witnessing the emergence and dominance of a form of bare pedagogy and the construction of a new kind of market-driven individual. It places an emphasis on winning at all costs, a ruthless competitiveness, hedonism, the cult of individualism. . . . Within this pedagogy, compassion is a weakness, and moral responsibility is scorned because it places human needs over market considerations. (Giroux, 2010, p. 185)

In a similar critique of recent developments through which universities have been turned into "enterprises serving the market," Grummell, Devine, and Lynch (2009) argue that such neoliberal practices result in the culling of compassion and the creation of a culture where an indifference to the affective domain of learning and the emotional subject is commonplace (p. 191).

Inclusion and its original social-justice driver are being suffocated by this neoliberal discourse. Debates, political and historical stories around equality, and humanity are repositioned in the more digestible language of diversity, not in the articulation of unethical, unjust, unequal, or oppressive histories and their continuation. Thus, by creating policy and practice from within such a constrained position, the academy is merely re-creating, controlling, and containing various student bodies within a dominant and unproblematized structure (Fleras, 2011). Walker (2010) makes a strong case for a radical change to what informs the academy—where it finds its rationale, what its key purpose is—by arguing that HE's rationale has for too long made an incorrect assumption: that economic growth and human development mean the same thing. The work of Gale and Hodge (2014), alongside that of others (Quinn, 2013; Gibson, 2015), makes clear that education and social justice in the university are imaginary due to their being overshadowed… by a dominant neoliberal discourse (Gale & Hodge, 2014).

This overview of how and why practices of institutionalised inclusion and equality are failing provides the context for our idea of politicised compassion through pedagogical partnership. Contemporary research suggests continued inequality within HE due to the dominant neoliberal driver of profit, unproblematized approaches to inclusion, and the continued pathologising and re-positioning of minority groups as "other." Seeking a way forward by critically considering compassion as a part of the educator's role in HE, in the next section of our discussion we define politicised compassion and draw on student experiences and analyses from previous research studies to further argue for its necessity. Our goal is not to contend that all students experience the same forms of pathologising and

othering, which would be antithetical to our overall argument. Rather, we share students' individual experiences, which might or might not be the same as other students' experiences, in order to name issues that all should consider.

DEFINING POLITICISED COMPASSION: A DISCOURSE FOR A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

It would be ill considered to suggest faculty work without holding their students as humans in their thoughts and pedagogical practices. Likewise, it would be unfair to argue educators in HE function without a sense of compassion for each other, their students, and themselves. However, in our neoliberal spaces that encourage enacting performativity rather than attending to the actions and thoughts of people, such positions are becoming more and more difficult to maintain and increasingly untenable in terms of impact (Lynch, 2010; Gibson & Baskerville, 2017). In this section of our discussion we consider what a political discourse focused on socially just and compassionate pedagogy might look like.

Compassion, as a state of being, entails an emotional reaction to something or someone. This reaction is tied to feelings of empathy and may result in a state of action. Warwick (2016) takes a moral perspective on compassion, exploring the places and need for civic compassion in his work on education for sustainable development (ESD). Writing about the need for "kinder learning spaces," he articulates the necessity of a curriculum that supports students in understanding themselves and others through developing an "ethic of compassionate concern for well-being and the common good" (Warwick, 2016, p. 408). Complementing this civic compassion, Rashedi, Plante, & Callister (2015) emphasise action; compassion "extends beyond merely feeling concern for others. . . . [It] is an action-oriented affective state . . . [that] requires one's strength to be with the suffering" (p. 132).

Zembylas (2013) discerns a crisis in relation to practices of uncritical compassion that encourage student and faculty positions of pity, objectification, paternalism, and voyeurism from where no significant action can take place. He states: "pity retains the asymmetry between the spectator and the sufferer and downplays the existing power differentials and inequalities" (Zembylas, 2013, p. 507). This discourse of pity, Zembylas (2013) maintains, results in "feeling sorry about those who suffer without necessarily taking action to alleviate the structural conditions and effects of suffering" (p. 506). He argues for incorporating a politics of compassion into the work of critical educators that acknowledges what and where structural inequalities exist and challenges privileged irresponsibility.

Students can offer individual and collective insight into their lived and observed experiences with inequality. Their analyses provide richly layered and nuanced interpretations of structural and cultural barriers to inclusion. These analyses, when given a platform and valued by the academy, provide both the substance and the catalyst for politicising compassion—a form of compassion that results in a notable change to university/wider societal practices and related student experience. Through engaging with these student analyses, we see how, where, and why significant inequality in our university and wider society continues.

For instance, students who participated in two studies—an international study with undergraduate students from Cyprus, New Zealand, the United States (US), and the United Kingdom (UK) (Gibson et al., 2017), and a smaller-scale study with undergraduate students in one university in the southwest of England (Gibson, Grace, O'Sullivan, & Pritchard, 2018)—highlight the struggles and challenges that our included and institutionally positioned

"diverse" students' experience. One is stereotyping, as one UK student asserts (Gibson et al., 2017, p.17): "I think diversity creates stereotypes—it's still labelling and not celebrating it or letting it just be." A student from the US concurs (Gibson et al., 2017, p.17): "I guess with my diversity, it doesn't make me who I am and there are a lot of things that make me who I am, not just that one thing. Like, that doesn't define me . . . like stereotypes." Two other students highlight how othering happens through labelling when they come to university—how it is, in fact, a function of coming to university. As one student from New Zealand explained (Gibson et al., 2017, p.18): "Well I've always thought of myself as normal until coming to university because I am 'mature student,' 'solo parent' and I've had 'dyslexia.' So until starting university I was just, this is what I was." A student from the US distinguishes between describing oneself and being labelled by others (Gibson et al., 2017, p.18): "It feels okay to label yourself because that is within your choice and control, but it doesn't feel so good when someone else labels you." These excerpts of student analyses provide critical insights regarding matters of language, labelling, and how institutional practices position and stereotype in ways that are not experienced as helpful or inclusive—in fact, quite the opposite.

Other student analyses highlight that knowledge is power and show education failing to provide important knowledge to students, thus hindering their experience and reinforcing their lesser-valued position. As one student from Cyprus put it (Gibson et al., 2017, p.21): "Some of us don't know our rights, and therefore we don't ask for them." Another student explained that, even when students try to access knowledge and support, they are often thwarted (Gibson et al., 2017, p.21) : "Basically, we need to feel that we belong in this university, . . . communication should be easier. I should not send ten emails and go to the Students' Welfare Department ten times in order to be assisted." Alongside this are stories of departmental failures in communication and related practitioner/tutor preparedness. Another student from Cyprus explained (Gibson et al., 2017, p.19): "I'm embarrassed to go ask for extra time. Sometimes I ask, but once, a teacher asked me for a proof. I don't like this."

These analyses show where and how injustice and exclusion continue to operate. They reveal where students have experienced a lack of compassion and understanding through their external positioning within institutional policy discourse and, subsequently, because of ongoing structural inequality, continue to experience exclusion. These examples highlight how the academy, whilst seemingly working for inclusion, pathologises those it positions as diverse or "deserving other" and functions without a political understanding of a student's own position and/or life experience.

Zembylas (2013) argues that critical compassion is cultivated "when we begin to understand the conditions (structural inequalities, poverty, globalization, etc.) that give rise to suffering and acknowledge some sort of human connection" (p. 516). What needs to follow this dawning understanding, he argues, "is taking action that dismisses essentialized categories of victims and benefactors and highlights instead the impact of solidarity on reducing everyday inequalities" (p. 516). Zemblyas' (2013) call for solidarity and his proposal for pedagogies of critical compassion provide a framework for considering a meaningful response to contemporary injustices in education and wider global matters of inequality. Our work responds to this call for action; it argues for solidarity amongst faculty and students and for moving beyond holding a critical position on what compassion is. Our idea of politicised compassion is a political position that encourages practical action framed within the wider critical work of social justice and equality.

Solidarity and discourse within, between, and across parties of student and faculty are key to realising a discourse of politicised compassion in higher education. The need to ask difficult questions and engage in challenging discussions about social injustice regarding how it becomes manifest and is re-created through institutionalised and wider social positions and practices are central to PC. Politicised compassion works in response to Zembylas' critique of essentialised categories of "other" (e.g., "non-traditional/diverse student," "ethnic minority," "disabled," "poor"). In holding a PC position, we can deconstruct essentialised categories and explore their origins and histories in relation to positions of power (i.e., who has power and what authority and questions of agency are considered). PC enables students, faculty, and connected advocates to see the existence of inequality within a complex array of structural and human constraints that result in practices and positioning that prevent the development of agency, thereby recreating dependency, paternalism, and exclusion. Thus, PC is an action-oriented, critical, and collective response of solidarity to the status quo of neoliberalism, exclusion, and micro and macro forms of inequality as and where they exist. The question is where and how to position this discourse such that it enables the change it aspires to create.

In the next section, we link this active and political form of compassion to partnership practice between faculty and students, offering this discourse and practice for equity as a forum and platform for change in challenging times.

LOCATING A SPACE FOR POLITICISED COMPASSION WITHIN PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

Politicised compassion requires engagement, commitment, and social action. The fear and uncertainty fostered by the current political climate, fuelled by performativity pressures, promote instead distrust and alienation. The hierarchical audit culture requires academics to monitor each other: "Workplace collegiality and responsibility are threatened by the way in which the top-down surveillance . . . is matched by lateral surveillance as we not only begin to responsibly monitor ourselves but also our peers and colleagues" (Cupples & Pawson, 2012, p. 18, quoted in Mutche & Tatbe, 2017, p. 228). The fear and self-monitoring students experience likewise leads to alienation. As Bovill (2017) explains: "in many instances, students' alienation is an understandable and logical response to the conditions they find themselves in, within the higher education context" (p. 15).

Pedagogical partnerships strive to create the conditions Mann (2001) proposes as counter-responses to alienation: "solidarity; hospitality; providing safety; redistribution of power; criticality" (p. 15, quoted in Bovill, 2017)—as well as compassion. Pedagogical partnerships support students and faculty in embracing the vulnerability and transformative potential of collaborative work focused on working toward more equitable and inclusive practices. They do not automatically do so, however; some students do not feel that they can participate in partnership efforts (Marquis, Jayaratnam, Mishra, & Rybkina, 2018), and not all partnership experiences are empowering (Healey, Lerczak, Welsh, & France, 2019). But if structured intentionally, pedagogical partnerships can support meaningful dialogue that breaks down traditional barriers between instructors and students; affirm students' knowledge and capacities and increase their confidence; and support the transformation of faculty teaching practices, which can begin to transform the culture of the institution (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; Cook-Sather et al., 2019; de Bie, Marquis, Cook-Sather, & Luqueño, 2019). Many partnership programs also compensate students with pay, which many

students need to earn to be at university, for work that is meaningful and dignified (Jack, 2019). For these reasons, partnerships have the potential, as we discuss below, to nurture the development of politicised compassion.

Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014) define pedagogical 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 conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (pp. 6-7). When such collaborative work focuses on both surfacing and addressing the structural inequities that make engagement and success in higher education more accessible and attainable for some students and less so for others, it promotes solidarity, offers hospitality, provides safety, and redistributes power, and it does so with a criticality that promotes politicised compassion. Such programs have been developed at small and large, selective and comprehensive, well-funded and under resourced HE institutions in more than 11 countries (Cook-Sather, Bahti, & Ntem, 2019) and can take the form of stand-alone programs, be part of teaching and learning centres, or be folded into other existing institutional structures (e.g., work-study).

Seeing the possibility of imaginary social justice is the first step in becoming politicised. Once faculty see students' experiences more clearly and learn from students' analyses of their experiences, and once students experience being seen and listened to as well as learn to see and listen to other students, this political awareness can spark further dialogue and action. Moving beyond the imaginary (Gale & Hodge, 2014), such work has the potential to produce new meaningful practice for social inclusion.

Pedagogical partnership affords students and faculty opportunities to name and address inequitable and exclusive practices from multiple perspectives. Certainly the different institutional roles of faculty and students provide different perspectives, but partnership work is also informed by the multiple dimensions of identity each person brings to those roles—the experiences, causes, and potential ways of addressing how differences in cultural capital, gender, ability, race, and more position students and faculty differently in higher education. Once students and faculty are more aware of the lived experiences of others in those roles, they can develop both agency and commitment not only in regards to deconstructing essentialised categories (e.g., who has power) but also in regards to working against those categories.

Partnership "gives primacy to processes of dialogue and negotiation in teaching and learning grounded in the principles of mutual respect and inclusivity" (Matthews et al., 2019). Drawing on three key guiding principles that underlie partnership—respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, p. 175), as well as trust, courage, plurality, authenticity, honesty, inclusivity, and empowerment (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014, pp. 14-15)—partnership is enacted within "an ethic of reciprocity": a "process of balanced give-and-take not of commodities but rather of contributions: perspectives, insights, forms of participation" (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017, p. 181). Among the markers of meaningful student-faculty partnership work are that it fosters inclusive collaborations and nurtures power-sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection (Matthews, 2017). All of these constitute and can inform a politicised compassion through which both faculty and students recognise or deepen their understanding of inequities and forms of exclusion and, rather than simply regret them, which compassion alone certainly allows, actively work together to address them.

This work connects to what Zembylas (2013, p.504) has called "critical pedagogies of compassion": the pedagogies that engage students and educators in a critical interrogation of the intersections among power, emotion, and praxis in society and education. Such pedagogies in higher education can be "regarded as practices of care that encourage students and educators to be attentive to their own emotional positions with regard to caring responsibilities and privileged irresponsibilities" (Zemblyas, Bozalek, & Shefer, 2014, p. 210). This links to the counter-responses that Mann (2001) identifies in the current conditions of higher education. Student-faculty pedagogical partnerships both enact and support critical pedagogies of emotion. They create redefined "counter spaces" (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) where differences of all kinds, when engaged with compassion and reverence, can become resources for developing greater empathy and respect (Cook-Sather, 2015; Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013) and can inform intentional action to redress inequities (de Bie, Marquis, Cook-Sather, & Luqueño, 2019; Mercer-Mapstone, Islam, & Reid, 2019).

Our interest is how contemporary forms of pedagogical partnership can bring considered forms of politicised compassion into partnerships themselves, into the classroom practices that partnership support, and beyond partnerships. Specifically, we see compassion as a political response to the status quo of neoliberalism, hegemony, exclusion, and Zembylas' concern regarding pity and narcissism—the mindset students and faculty can fall back into, or the more distanced and passive state of pity in which they focus only on their own experiences, not on those of others. Through political forms of compassion, we can see with our students the realities of where exclusion and oppression take place, how inequality takes form, and where power is held, and we can challenge practices of pity and enable a learning outcome and an understanding that is transformational for the learner—and, often, the teacher.

There is a growing sense of awareness amongst the student body that individual responsibility and political activism, stemming from a connection with the oppressed, which may include the students, and their stories, is a way forward. The perspectives we include in this section of our discussion were offered by students and faculty over a decade during which students have been raising questions, engaging in protests (Jaschick, 2016), expressing "renewed interest in civic and political engagement," and engaging in more activism (New, 2016) on college and university campuses. These are responses to the long legacies of discrimination and structural inequality that have impacted students' identification with and sense of inclusion in or exclusion from the institutions they attend (Cook-Sather et al., 2018). As with many of the protests in the 1960s and 1970s, the current wave of student protest in the US, as well as in New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and Europe, "has been generated by, and is entwined with, national concerns, particularly racism, sexual violence, and growing inequality" (Volk, 2017).

The quotes from students and faculty below suggest that pedagogical partnerships inside HE enable students and faculty to engage and fight structural inequalities both inside and outside the academy. As we note earlier in our discussion, we do not mean to suggest that the students we quote experience the same forms of pathologising and othering as other students or that their perspectives on and experiences of partnership are uniform or universally shared. Instead, we offer excerpts that capture the underlying and sometimes explicit themes that have surfaced across multiple studies of student partners' experiences. Although the students who attend these HE institutions and some of the faculty with whom they work might be marginalised in various ways, they are still relatively privileged members of society, and they can use that privileged position to engage in activism.

We illustrate this possibility through several examples. These examples demonstrate how the pedagogical partnership program that the second author of this discussion, Alison, has directed for 13 years provides a forum within which faculty and students can engage in listening, attending, caring for, and learning from and with one another. In these activities participants are guided by a "radical collegiality" that "embraces difference as an important source of practical energy and intellectual creativity" (Fielding, 1999, p. 24). This partnership program, called Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT), is based at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges in the United States. It pairs undergraduate students and faculty in semester-long, one-on-one partnerships focused on co-creating equitable and inclusive pedagogies (Cook-Sather, 2018a). SaLT pays student partners by the hour for their work (Jack, 2019) or provides an independent study through which they can earn course credit. It strives to support faculty and students as they "dance with the cultures of difference in order to explore the possibilities of a meaningful pedagogy for inclusion" (Gibson, 2015, p. 883).

The excerpts in this section of our discussion are drawn from ethics-board approved research studies of student and faculty experiences of participating in SaLT (in which case they have no citation) or from published essays and articles on this work (in which case they include citations). These excerpts illustrate how students and faculty come to awareness and begin to take action, embracing their own identities and advocating for those with a range of "othered" identities. The space for politicised compassion in pedagogical partnership in SaLT is created through mutually informing conversations—weekly classroom observations the student partners conduct in their faculty partners' classrooms, weekly meetings of the pairs of student and faculty partners, and weekly meetings Alison holds with groups of student partners (Cook-Sather, 2018a, 2016). In these spaces, student and faculty partners develop language to name experience and develop approaches to addressing inequities (Cook-Sather, 2019).

Through participating in partnership through SaLT, student partners assert that they develop not only awareness but also a sense of legitimacy, capacity, and responsibility. This outcome is particularly important for students who have been othered. In contrast to the students we quoted in the section of our discussion above called "Defining Politicised Compassion," who described being stereotyped and labelled, students in SaLT regularly offer comments such as this one:

> I was more aware of my own identity and my own experiences and what I can contribute. I think I felt stronger and more empowered to give my voice. I felt like I had more to contribute in my own classes and just talking to students. (Quoted in de Bie et al., 2019, p. 44)

The development of such awareness and empowerment contrasts sharply with the experience of being stereotyped and labelled.

When students with more privilege participate in partnership, they develop a different kind of awareness, capacity, and sense of responsibility. Another student who participated in SaLT asserted: "my awareness of my privilege made me reflect on inequity in those [classroom] spaces that we were in. So I worked really hard to bring that into all of my partnerships." She explained: "I tried to make space for faculty to see that my experience as a student is not the universal experience of the student." Similarly, another student who experiences multiple forms of privilege explained:

> It helped me be kind of a better citizen in the classroom . . . [and] got me started thinking about how students can be better advocates in those spaces and include one another and create more of a sense of community and shared endeavor in the classroom. (Quoted in Cook-Sather, 2018b, p. 928).

Through the classroom observations and the weekly meetings that constitute SaLT, student partners name their own experiences and develop much greater awareness of others' experiences as those unfold within inequitable institutional structures. As one student partner explained:

> You are trying to think about how structures of power are working all the time, so that has a huge influence in a classroom in thinking about whose voices are getting heard and how often and how is the content of the class landing with people of different identities. (Quoted in Cook-Sather, 2019)

This naming and raised awareness carry as a form of politicised compassion beyond the partnerships and into students' own classrooms. For instance, one student partner explained: "I started to think of myself more as an advocate within classroom spaces for my peers. I began to feel I had a lot more agency and could be an agent of change within my classroom spaces" (quoted in Cook-Sather, 2018b, p. 929). Another student asserted that working in the role of student partner reinforced for her that "not only did my perspective, assessment skills and commitment to make spaces safer for underrepresented groups deeply matter—they could drive important transformation in classrooms and in the student-teacher relationship" (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, pp. 277-278). Experiences of partnership, student partners consistently argue, prompt students, even after they graduate, "to voice [their] discontentment towards situations that [they] felt were unethical or culturally insensitive instead of merely being a silent witness" (student quoted in Cook-Sather & Agu, 2012).

Just like student partners, faculty partners can develop a sense of politicised compassion through their partnership work. One faculty partner explained how working in partnership with a student from an underrepresented group "widened my interpretations and often cleared the way for me to listen and see more sensitively and with expanded or adjusted context in subsequent classes" (quoted in Cook-Sather, 2019). As we note above, seeing the possibility of imaginary social justice is the first step in becoming politicised. The listening, expanding, and adjusting this faculty member describes are first steps.

Faculty also describe developing the language to name and address inequities in their classrooms. For instance, one faculty member explained:

> [Working in partnership with a student partner of color allowed me] to speak more openly and frankly about race. [My student partner offered] suggestions for how to redirect the conversation, how to call out students, or how to support other students in the class to contest [racist] views. (Quoted in Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, p. 279)

Faculty who are themselves underrepresented in HE suggest that working in partnership with students both affirms their identities and supports them in taking action.

One faculty member, who self-identifies as "a mixed-race White and Hispanic woman from a low-income urban area" (Perez, 2016), wrote that her partnership with a student, also an underrepresented minority in HE, was "essential for developing the brave space necessary to have these conversations, validating how my personal experiences influence my teaching, and supporting the changes I attempt to make" (Perez, 2016). This faculty member both talked with students enrolled on her courses about inequities and injustices in the natural sciences and also wrote an essay about her efforts to model challenging such injustices and to reach a wider audience—yet another form of politicised compassion.

As these excerpts suggest, when partnerships are intentionally constructed and supported, and when faculty and students enter the brave space partnership offers, that space can become one in which politicised compassion is nurtured. Both faculty and student partners suggest that partnerships argue for and can enact inclusivity (Cook-Sather, 2018a; de Bie et al., 2019), and when students with a diversity of identities experience themselves as "holders and creators of knowledge" (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 106), their efforts can combat neoliberalism, hegemony, exclusion, feminine marginalisation, pity, and narcissism. Not only can partnership counter othering, making students "feel like who I am is more than enough—that my identity, my thoughts, my ideas are significant and valuable" (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, p. 277), it can model, enact, and support a more equitable way of engaging and promote more equitable practices within and beyond the institutions at which it unfolds. Working within existing structures as well as being intentional about the inclusion of a diversity of students (de Bie et al., 2019; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2019), partnership can promote action toward equity through mobilising politicised compassion.

CONCLUSION

This paper has engaged in matters of social justice and inclusion and critically considered the academy's positioning of non-traditional or diverse students. We have argued and evidenced that, whilst the HE sector seemingly works for inclusion, it can pathologise those it positions as diverse or "deserving other" without a critical understanding of students' own positions or life experiences. To move forward we have suggested the university needs to become critically familiar with the political histories of students' identities. A more critical and nuanced understanding of students' stories and analyses of their lived experiences is necessary, whether connected to matters of gender, race, disability, sexuality and/or social class alongside an understanding of the affective domain in their learning. Without this understanding the university fails to fully engage with students, thereby contributing to the ways in which they are institutionally positioned and failing to address where social injustices occur and how a deficit model of the "non-traditional" student results in further exclusion.

We see this paper as political, arguing for the consideration of politicised compassion, which we identify as a collaborative student and faculty tool for inclusive pedagogy and action for social justice within and beyond the classroom. Student voices support the idea that a critically considered politicised form of compassion comes from a place that sees where power resides, grasps related matters of habitus, and works to hear student and faculty voices through meaningful forms of pedagogical partnership.

Pedagogical partnership can work to enact this form of politicised compassion—creating the conditions and supporting the work necessary for discerning, naming, and combating inequity. It also creates a space where students can articulate the different

dimensions of their identities and work with faculty to imagine how the university can create spaces that are welcoming, supportive, and valuing of those differences as resources rather than casting them as deficits to be fixed or managed. The partnership construct can be a space and a process, creating a scaffold for dialogues of politicised compassion and providing a place from which the tangible results of those conversations can push back against the dominant neoliberal flow of divisiveness and destructiveness in education and in wider global society. In sum, we have argued that in the context of failed forms of inclusive education, solidarity can be found amongst faculty and students via the forum of pedagogical partnership. From this forum, politicised compassion can be enabled to encourage practical, well-considered action for social justice and equality.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Being Patient Through the Quiet": Partnering in Problem-Based Learning in a Graduate Seminar

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws connections between scholarship on problem-based learning (PBL) and Students as Partners to frame a case study from a graduate seminar in Public Rhetorics for Social Change. Students partnered with each other and the instructor to decide on a public project, approaching the partnership as a pedagogical problem to explore, discuss, and collaboratively define. Drawing on student and teacher reflections about the partnership, the study's findings highlight important themes about partnering with students: partnering with students may result in uncertainty and discomfort, takes time, values different perspectives, and can make teachers and students vulnerable to each other. Responding to a phrase from one student's reflection—"being patient through the quiet"—the study argues that patience and quiet are necessary for supporting a successful partnership with students but that caution is needed to prevent dominant narratives from silencing marginalized student perspectives.

KEYWORDS

problem-based learning, SoTL, students as partners, public rhetoric, graduate pedagogy

As a teacher-scholar committed to partnering with both students and local community groups, my course designs strive to incorporate "high-impact educational practices" (Kuh, 2008) such as service-learning and public engagement projects. The high-impact practices in my classes invite students to learn actively and collaboratively (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010), to become involved in local communities through experiential learning (Crossling & Heagney, 2009; Roberts, 2018) and to envision themselves as agents of change in the classroom and in public spheres beyond the classroom (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Cushman, 1996; Flower, 2008). While in the past I have coordinated with university staff to establish community partnerships for experiential learning, I saw an opportunity for a different model when teaching a newly developed graduate seminar in my university's English department. I approached public engagement as a pedagogical problem to explore, discuss, and collaboratively define through

student-instructor partnership, rather than a pre-defined (i.e., instructor-defined) community-based project.

In the following study, I use a combination of teacher reflections and students' end-of-course reflections to recount the negotiations we went through in partnering to define a collaborative public project. Our pedagogical collaboration aligned with how Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill, and Peter Felten (2014) define student-faculty partnership as "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally . . . to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, or analysis" (pp. 6-7). My approach to partnership in this graduate seminar was grounded in reciprocity, mutual respect, and care. I argue that a valuable component of partnering with students is modeling the time-consuming processes of problem solving in partnership and making ourselves vulnerable to our students (Felten, 2017; Holmes, 2015)—that indeed these are often indicators that we have moved the classroom toward a collaborative culture of learning. The case study analyzes the findings from the data which show that partnering with students:

- may result in uncertainty and discomfort,
- takes time,
- values different perspectives, and
- can make teachers and students vulnerable to each other.

Responding to a phrase from one student's reflection—"being patient through the quiet"—the study examines how patience and quiet are necessary for supporting a successful partnership with students but cautions readers to consider how these traits can allow for dominant narratives to silence marginalized student perspectives. Before delving into the study, I articulate the important connections between problem-based learning (PBL) and Students as Partners (SaP).

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING & STUDENTS AS PARTNERS

Problem-based learning is a pedagogy that embraces inquiry and uncertainty, modeling for students the realities of the "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973) they will continue to face beyond our courses. As Anna Kwan (2009) explains, one of the most comprehensive definitions of PBL is a "total education strategy based on the principle of using real-world problems as a starting point for the acquisition and integration of new knowledge" (p. 91). Because PBL provides an opportunity to apply course content knowledge to the ongoing work of tackling society's problems, it seemed especially apt for the Public Rhetorics for Social Change course. I hoped students would enact a public project that addressed a real-world problem, using what they learned of public rhetoric to move towards change in the world around them.

While not all approaches to PBL align with the scholarship on SaP, the two pedagogical approaches meaningfully reinforce each other in course design. As this study demonstrates, instructors who employ PBL join the problem-solving processes with their students and assume "the role of facilitators and co-learners" (Kwan, 2009, p. 91) rather than that of observers of students' problem-solving from a distanced, all-knowing position. As partners in learning,

teachers model co-inquiry grounded in reciprocity to develop a mutually beneficial and respectful partnership. Both PBL and SaP scholarship highlight the importance of setting a course context that moves away from the "sage on the stage" model to support all learners (i.e., students *and* teachers) in exploration of the problem. As Kwan (2009) argues, "PBL is more than an instructional method, but a nurturing environment" (p. 91). Similarly, SaP practitioners envision partnerships as "creating the conditions for curiosity and common inquiry" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, p. 10), and central to these conditions is establishing an environment that helps all partners feel respected and nurtured through the collaborative processes of inquiry.

THE COURSE & PARTNERSHIP

The student-faculty partnership referenced in this case study occurred during a graduate seminar titled Public Rhetorics for Social Change, which was a special topics course within the English department at Georgia State University (GSU)—an urban, public, research university located in downtown Atlanta in the United States. The course invited students to consider the ways citizens, activists, and scholars use writing and rhetoric in public contexts to address injustices, collaborate with community groups, and advocate for social change. Seven graduate students enrolled in the course, the majority of whom were graduate teaching assistants pursuing their M.A. or Ph.D. in English, though one student was pursuing a degree in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

The Public Rhetorics for Social Change graduate seminar met for two and a half hours one day each week during a 14-week semester from August to December. The design of the course balanced theoretical readings on public and counter-public spheres, social movements, and community literacy with individual student research projects and a collaborative application project—what I called a "public project." The course grade was determined as follows: 25% Individual Weekly Reading Responses, 40% Individual Final Research Essay and Exam Presentation, and 35% Collaborative Public Project.

I decided to leave the public project open-ended, with the only requirement that our class collaboratively partner to define this work, as explained in this excerpt from the syllabus:

> During the first few weeks of the semester, we will devote a portion of our class time to discussing how we might enact some of the issues from the course readings. This public project may take many forms, but I would like for us to consider ways that we might take public action and/or move toward social change. One of the major challenges of this project will simply be defining the task at hand. As the project takes shape, you will gain a better sense of what you need to contribute for this component of the course.

What I originally envisioned as "the first few weeks of the semester" for defining the project turned into nearly two-thirds of the semester (approximately nine of the 14 weeks). Through this extended time of dialogue, the partnership with graduate students aligned with a problem-based learning model. Our problem to solve was to collaboratively define a public project. We spent thirty minutes to one hour of each week's two-and-a-half-hour seminar discussing the public project—writing about our interests, sharing ideas, making lists on the board, and conducting informal research.

The process of building a nurturing environment of respect and reciprocity began during our first-class sessions and continued throughout the semester. For example, I scheduled our seminar in a conference room with one large table and I brought coffee each week. The design of the space decentered my authority because I took a seat alongside students, and the small kindness of offering coffee led students—of their own volition—to bring sugar and creamer, further supporting self-care and a nurturing classroom environment. I also strived to build a nurturing environment by inviting students to share their personal values and commitments when we discussed the public project; I made time for each student to share their perspective, even if that meant delaying our discussion of the reading for that day. A final decentering strategy was simply handing off the marker: often, when our discussions resulted in notetaking on the board, I asked a student to record the discussion, rather than me controlling what content made it onto the board and how it was phrased and organized. This also positioned me as a co-inquirer brainstorming possibilities together with students.

At the end of the semester, I assigned students a reflection (graded pass/fail for submission) about their experiences of partnering to negotiate the public project. I included a disclaimer to remind them of the tendency for reflections to demonstrate growth, progress, and enlightenment, as well as narratives of praise for the teacher or course (Emmons, 2003); I wanted students to interrogate their experiences with partnership and problem solving in the ways Sarah L. Ash and Patti H. Clayton (2009) have written about in their discussion of the power for critical reflection to generate, deepen, and document learning. These student reflections became part of the data set for the study, and I quote from them throughout the analysis to document student voices.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research was designed as a case study; as Creswell (2014) explains, case studies involve "in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" and thus are "bounded by time and activity" (p. 14). In this case, the study focused on a particular course (i.e., Public Rhetorics for Social Change graduate seminar) and the specific processes of partnership among seven graduate students and their instructor in the fall semester of 2013. The research protocol for this study was reviewed and given approval from GSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Students were invited to participate in the study during the final week of the course, and participation allowed me to quote from their course writing using pseudonyms.

One challenge of engaging in PBL and SaP was decentering my authority as a teacher-researcher to build a respectful partnership with students, while necessarily needing to step into these roles at times by grading assignments or asking for consent in a research project. Shuttling between these roles was a constant balancing act: releasing the reins entirely could lead to disaster but gripping them too tightly could distort the goals of partnership. I asked students to consider consenting to allow me to read through their work not only as a teacher but also as a researcher, once grades had been submitted. The course assignments students completed were requirements for the course to demonstrate their learning and application of concepts regardless of whether they consented to the study.

Considering my dual roles as teacher and researcher, I took additional precautions to minimize the sense of coercion students might feel in the consenting process. For example, after introducing the study, I asked one student to collect signed or unsigned forms to seal in an envelope, and I left the room while students considered signing the forms. The consent forms were sealed in an envelope and submitted by the student to my department Chair, who securely stored them until semester's end. As the instructor, I did not know who had consented to participate in the study until after grades were submitted.

During the consent process, I highlighted statements on the form that were intended to minimize potential coercion:

> Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time and without any penalty to your grade in this course. . . . Your choice to participate or not participate will have no impact (positive or negative) on your grade for this course, nor in my personal opinions of you (e.g., it will not hurt my feelings if you choose not to participate).

The first part of this excerpt from the consent form was boilerplate language from my IRB's template. However, the last sentence was my own addition; it was important to me, especially coming out of a classroom environment built around nurturance and partnership, that I mitigate students' feeling badly about not consenting—as though it would make me not like them or hurt my feelings—or, alternatively, that I would like them more or be happier if they consented. Being clear about the implications of consent or non-consent was also important for these graduate students because I continued to advise many of them after the conclusion of the class. In the end, all seven students enrolled in the course consented to be in the study.

The data collected for the case study included (a) pedagogical materials, such as the syllabus and assignment descriptions; (b) student writing, such as discussion board posts, reading responses, reflections, and writing assignments (including seminar papers and group writing for the public project); (c) teacher reflections by the researcher kept as notes in a reflective teaching journal; and (d) pictures of notes on the classroom whiteboard after class discussions.

Once final grades were submitted, I accessed the consent forms and began compiling data. Each student was given a pseudonym, and all identifying information was redacted. While the research for this study is informed by the entire data set, students' end-of-course reflections about the public project, combined with my reflections, became the primary data sets for the findings analyzed here; these collected materials better captured our reactions, opinions, and feelings about the process of partnering to define the public project. Appendix A lists the reflective questions students were asked to answer in their end-of-semester reflection.

As a teacher-researcher, I approached data collection and analysis as a participant-observer, acknowledging that it is nearly impossible to obtain a fully objective analysis, nor is it necessarily preferable, when conducting research in a class that one is also teaching. As Lee Nickoson (2012) argues, "'Teacher' and 'researcher' identities are difficult if not impossible to

separate" (p. 105), and, because of their participation in the classroom culture, teacher-researchers are "experiential experts" (p. 103) who will ideally bring a hybrid, outsider-within approach to teacher-research. Shuttling between the insider-teacher and outsider-researcher, my engagement with students during the course and my analysis of the data set as a researcher at the conclusion of the course positioned me to "learn not only *about* [my] students but also—and crucially—*from* them" (Nickoson, 2012, p. 111). Indeed, this is why I quote heavily from student reflections in the following analysis.

I conducted two cycles of coding for students' reflections. First, I used descriptive coding to develop a list of codes for common words, trends, or themes. Descriptive coding "summarizes in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70). For example, I used the code "uncomfortable" to mark comments such as "they forced me out of the comfort of the ideas I had." Because "descriptive coding leads primarily to a categorized inventory, tabular account, summary, or index of the data's contents" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 72), it provides the groundwork for a second cycle of coding, which involved developing the broader categories outlined in the findings of this study.

FINDINGS

In the following pages, I explore the main themes that emerged from students' and my own reflections. While many of the themes here align with what scholars studying Students as Partners already know to be true (Matthews, 2017; O'Shea, 2018; Peters & Mathias, 2018), they highlight student reactions—in the words of students themselves—to the experiences of partnership, ranging from the discomfort of uncertainty to the rewards of learning from diverse perspectives that challenge our own perspectives.

Partnering with students may result in uncertainty and discomfort

One of the first challenges that arose in our partnership was that students were anxious about the task at hand. In reflecting back on partnering with students, I recognize that working through this uncertainty and discomfort became an important component of building trust. For example, one student who I will call Leslie wrote in her reflection at the end of the term: "I was slightly uneasy with the open-ended nature of the project as it was initially introduced, and I saw immediately the challenges it would present with regard to the variety of schedules and personalities."

Similarly, another student, Beth, noted that the process of partnering to define the public project was "arduous" and "occasionally frustrating," but she ultimately saw the value in such an approach, likening it to some of her own pedagogies as a teacher of writing: "pedagogically, this is a strong method: I recognized some of the same discomfort and resistance in myself as I do in my students when they must design an assignment beginning from learning goals."

As Matthews (2017) argued, because partnering with students is grounded in reciprocity that involves collaborative negotiation, "the outcomes of SaP are unknown at the beginning of the joint endeavor" (p. 4). This became evident from students' perspectives as they reflected on the ways they had to embrace the unknowns of the project. In her reflection, Beth "recognized the value of not simply being assigned a project, or even given a list of options to choose from

because formulation of the problem turned out in some sense more difficult than the solution." Even though the unknowns of the process were unnerving for students at times, Beth concluded that she was

> encouraged that there is no neat bow for this project. . . . This feels authentic and pleasingly open-ended. . . . There is more work to be done, and the "real world" constraints do not allow everything to be wrapped up by semester close.

Beth's focus on the "real world" here further aligns our partnership with PBL pedagogies, as "learners explore open-ended and real-world problems" through "self-directed learning" and by "work[ing] collaboratively in small groups to support each other" (Kwan, 2009, p. 91)—all similar goals for SaP as well.

Another student—Skylar, who identifies as non-binary and uses "they" pronouns—noted in their reflection that some discomfort arose in bringing a different disciplinary perspective from "feminist studies" to a class of primarily English majors: "being outside of my 'home' in feminist studies made me see things differently," and Skylar acknowledged that this resulted in some discomfort. Partnership, in this case, meant working through our different disciplinary values and worldviews to define the public project.

From my perspective as the instructor, I also had to become comfortable with uncertainty and work to not overtake the reins of the project. Leslie noticed this and commented:

> In your decision not to coerce us—or even steer us—you put a tremendous amount of faith in us as a class and as burgeoning scholars. As a result, it seems that we really do feel like we own this project, and, consequently, we have a different level of investment. . . . I don't say this to flatter but to genuinely applaud your restraint.

At times I questioned whether the burden of problem-solving and partnering to define the project was taking away from course time that may have been devoted to content. As a new hire teaching my second graduate seminar, I also wondered if decentering my authority in the name of partnership would undermine my credibility as an advisor and scholar.

While students and I experienced discomfort at times, we balanced this with building trust and a shared sense of responsibility. Leslie commented on the importance of trust and faith in her reflection: "in the spirit of true collaboration . . . we trusted one another to contribute where we could," and we had to have "faith that [classmates] . . . would step up." Similarly, Yang, who is from China, explained how the process of partnership helped her gain a "deeper understanding of 'community' in the US context . . . a community is a place where every member . . . take[s] responsibility. Community is based on the active participation of each member." Trusting ourselves and each other to uphold our responsibilities and commitments to the work of partnership was an essential component of the project.

As these student reflections suggest, the lessons learned from partnership were a valuable use of class time, modeling the messy processes of negotiation we go through to solve

real-world problems. And, even though the process felt "arduous" at times, we came to see that time as essential to a well-formed partnership with students.

Partnering with students takes time

Our partnership to define the public project took months instead of weeks; however, this gave us the time we needed to voice our opinions, share our concerns, and move the group forward—even if slowly at times—toward defining a project. As Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber argue in *The Slow Professor* (2016), we can apply lessons from the slow foods movement to higher education. Their work calls us to fight the cultures of speed and efficiency: "Slow professors act with purpose, cultivating emotional and intellectual resilience to the effects of corporatization in the academy" (Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. 90). Research on SaP continues to emphasize the necessity of partnership as a process that takes time to develop (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Matthews, 2017). However, "efficiency" has risen as a critique of PBL, with some research suggesting that "PBL curricula cover about 80% of what might be accomplished in a conventional curriculum in the same period" (Kwan, 2009, p. 104). In the face of these challenges, SaP and PBL practitioners must be prepared to defend the value of such approaches.

The process of partnership in my course truly tested the value of slowing down in a culture of speed. While mid-semester some students expressed concern about how long it was taking to decide on a project, end-of-course reflections highlighted how important these discussions were and the necessity of time to work through them. For example, Andrea commented: "just finding a project we could all agree on . . . turned out to be the most difficult part, yet it was also the most rewarding part of the project." Our negotiations during the partnership resulted in thoughtful consideration of issues of sustainability, ethics, purpose, and audience for the public project. Students brought different kinds of interests and investments—activist, pedagogical, or service-based. Our partnership modeled for students the improvisational and sometimes scrambling processes of starting public projects from scratch to solve real-world problems.

Without time for the partnership, not all voices might have been heard, not all positions expressed—a lesson in the value of diverse perspectives that I explore in the coming pages. One student, Leslie, beautifully articulated the value of taking our time, reflecting that she learned "the value of being patient through the quiet, remaining calm through apparent indecision, and having faith." Throughout the partnership, each member of the class and I as the instructor had to take turns being patient and waiting through the quiet of apparent indecision. Indeed, this is a benefit of slowing down and giving partnerships the time they need to develop and flourish.

It is not always easy in a partnership to be "patient through the quiet"—those moments of silence in the room when I as the instructor question this pedagogical approach, when students question the purpose or value of partnership, when our group has reached a point of apparent indecision. In choosing to be patient through the quiet, though, we build trust, reinforce our mutual respect, and can begin to make progress. Part of how we build trust in moments of quiet is by making sure we have reconnected as a group before moving ahead; in reflecting on whether or not the weekly breaks between class meetings delayed our decision-

making processes, Andrea commented that the slower pacing insured "the public project was a better reflection of the group as a whole—instead of an idea that one person pushed until everyone else agreed to it."

Partnering with students values different perspectives

One of the rewards of partnership was the significance of each person's unique perspective; within our small class, we had two international students, one student from another discipline, and two students returning to school after years of full-time teaching. This wealth of diversity in experience really demonstrated to me the power of partnering with students—it gave each student a stake in our pedagogical work and allowed them to bring their worldviews and life experiences to bear on our discussions. One student, Karen, reflected: "I loved . . . hearing about other people's ideas and talking through the different values that we held about how the project should be shaped."

Through our partnership, we learned how our different perspectives and backgrounds impacted how we defined the problem and potential projects. Yang underscored this point in her reflection:

> I would say the process of working out a focused area in which every member of our class might have a chance to contribute her expertise is the most prominent benefit, yet also greatest challenge we have been through. In this class, the classmates' backgrounds vary greatly in terms of education, culture, and profession. . . . The various backgrounds are of great value to our project because it can always bring in fresh ideas and new angles to look at things.

This is not to say that there was always agreement across difference. Karen recounted a heated exchange during one class discussion when a peer challenged "our ideas about working for some kind of 'other'"; for Karen, the challenge to her ideas about what the public project should be and who it should serve were, in her words, "useful" because they "forced [her] out of the comfort of the ideas [she] had." These moments of disagreement in our class discussions also challenged my dual role as teacher and partner: part of me wanted to jump in and help resolve the issue, but I also recognized the importance of letting student partners work to resolve differences on their own terms. Decentering my authority to move towards more equitable power dynamics resulted in letting student discussion proceed without much interference from me. However, I also tried to balance my roles of co-learner and partner with being a facilitator—a central role for the teacher in PBL (Kwan, 2009)—by posing questions and re-directing our attention back to the task at hand.

Another student, Beth, reflected on the "moments of tension and even dread" when our course conversations about the project caused "political and social agendas [to] clash": she asked "what might a 'social justice' project look like, to make such a range of passionate, informed minds unite behind a purpose?" Realizing that this kind of clashing is not unique to our classroom partnership, Beth contended that "these discussions and disagreements were rehearsals for the kind of resistance and defensiveness one might meet from a community one hoped to be involved with." Similarly, Yang explained, "It is never an easy task to unite and

organize a group of people among whom the individual experience is extremely different; it requires communication, mutual understanding of one another, appreciation of each others' expertise and knowledge." Mutual understanding and appreciation became core components of our group's partnership—without them we would not have been able to communicate across our differences to move the project forward.

Karen, who also teaches writing, noted some of the challenges of partnership while reflecting on similar experiences of her students:

> It was a challenge to me to accept that I didn't get everything I wanted out of the project. . . . I hope that the experience of not getting my way . . . will make me more empathetic about how my students feel a lot of the time. Not everyone gets to be doing their favorite thing all the time.

When we came to an agreement about the public project, we all experienced give and take—getting part of what we wanted while having to sacrifice other parts. This negotiation was, as students aptly noted, challenging and frustrating at times, but the partnership allowed us to talk through disagreements and move toward collaborative action.

Partnership can make us and our students vulnerable to each other

As the theme explained above demonstrates, partnering with students may result in uncertainty and discomfort, which can make teachers and students vulnerable to each other. This vulnerability often emerges as a result of putting ourselves and students in what can feel like a risky situation. As bell hooks emphasizes in *Teaching to Transgress*, engaged pedagogies involve teachers making themselves "vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (hooks 21). Indeed, partnering with students to define such a major component of a course—as we did with the public project—is somewhat risky: risky for teachers to trust in our students' abilities to successfully collaborate and come to a decision, and risky for students to trust in an unfamiliar process when their grade depends on it. Even though the public project was a pedagogic effort constructed in partnership, I took on the role of evaluator at the end of the course, which may have resulted in a tipping of the scales: less risk for me in a position of grade-wielding power, more risk for students to agree to an unknown collaborative project. While I was asking students to partner through the uncertainty of defining the public project, there was vulnerability in their discomfort. And, when our group reached an initial agreement, I had to reveal some of my vulnerabilities as a not yet tenured professor.

The class initially agreed to a project that involved leading an on-campus forum for students, faculty, and administrators to discuss the challenges non-native English speaking students face at our institution. However, after sending initial inquiries to gather support from key stakeholders, I received considerable pushback from a more senior colleague in another department. In the next class session, I decided to share my concerns with students about proceeding with the project—making myself vulnerable by expressing my frustration with the fact that I felt hemmed in by my untenured status, not wanting to be perceived as a problematic new colleague. I agreed to proceed with the project if the majority of the class thought it was for the best, but students listened and carefully considered my position,

acknowledging my feelings of concern and offering "reciprocal care" in choosing a different project (Holmes, 2015). As Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014) argue, "because faculty roles and responsibilities vary widely," instructors need to "think carefully about how partnership . . . fits into [their] career development" (22). For me, this was an unanticipated complication of partnering with students that ultimately built further trust among us as we listened and learned from each other.

I also learned through the end-of-course student reflections that one student was made to feel vulnerable about their gender identity. Skylar explained how they were "surprised by some of the assumptions" their peers made when a classmate stated during a brainstorming session that "we are all women" as a basis for pursuing a women's issue public project. Skylar reflected on how they tried to explain that "not everyone in this room wants to be labeled as a 'woman'," but ultimately they "felt like my point did not get across—my masculinity was not legible in this space . . . it felt like my own assertion about naming and gender was erased." Skylar's experience with partnership has caused me to question the ways in which traditional power structures, privileged perspectives, assumptions, and dominant narratives are not magically erased even when authority in the classroom is decentered through partnering with students. Recent scholarship on Students as Partners has increased attention and focus on power dynamics, ethics, and inclusivity in partnerships (Matthews, 2017; O'Shea, 2018; Peter & Mathias, 2018). As Peters and Mathias (2018) note, "genuine partnership requires more than consultation, involvement, or active participation of students as consumers"; their work draws on Paulo Freire's liberatory pedagogies to achieve "genuine partnership" and resist appropriation of this work for neoliberal purposes (p. 54).

In reflecting back, my own choices as an instructor to sometimes sit back in silence—being "patient through the quiet"—to allow for what I thought was a diversity of perspectives, was in this case replicating some of the same damaging power dynamics I was hoping to disrupt. While making ourselves vulnerable to each other can be productive in partnership, this student's experience has called me to take more responsibility as the instructor to ensure that what the majority of the class has experienced as a diversity of perspectives is the reality for all students in the partnership. Instructors partnering with their students should continue to be patient and quiet, not allowing our privileged voice to dominate the partnership; however, Skylar's reflection reminds us that there are also times when inequities demand our *impatience* and *outcry*—to call out each others' assumptions and privilege, to highlight alternate narratives of the diverse life experiences and identities represented in our partnerships. Had I known this student felt silenced in partnership, I could have worked to address this inequitable positioning through our ongoing partnership.

As SaP practitioners we must continue to, as Matthews (2017) argues, "nurture power-sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection" (3). This example from Skylar's end-of-semester reflection further supports recommendations in the SaP literature that reflection during partnership should be ongoing (Matthews, 2017). In the case study presented here, I learned that student partners need to be given opportunities for both individual and group reflection throughout the partnership process. Had I asked for individual reflections throughout the semester, I might have been able to address some of Skylar's concerns before the course ended. Because of the sensitive nature of their comments, the privacy of an individual

reflection may have allowed Skylar to voice their concerns more comfortably in writing than in a shared group space of the classroom. Instead, I practiced in-process verbal group reflections about partnership as a way of "checking in" with students; unfortunately, this group style of verbal reflection served to replicate and re-inscribe power dynamics that silenced Skylar in the first place. To reinforce what Matthews (2017) claims, reflection—both individual and collaborative—should be an ongoing, in-process component of student partnership, rather than an after-the-fact consideration.

CONCLUSION

This case study from a graduate seminar on Public Rhetorics for Social Change highlights how theories about Students as Partners are instantiated when that partnership is approached from a problem-based learning perspective. Because both pedagogical approaches are grounded in co-inquiry, SaP and PBL can work in tandem to help build a classroom culture of nurturance, mutual respect, and trust as we together work toward exploring a common problem. Moreover, the lens of PBL reminds SaP practitioners to embrace the messy, uncomfortable, or ill-structured problems that may arise in partnership, acknowledging that these markers suggest that our partnerships have formed stronger foundations from putting time and collaborative energy into working through challenges that inevitably arise in partnership. Given the relatively small class size and the graduate level of the seminar, there are some limitations to the applicability of the findings. However, the value in this case study lies in the way it documents student reactions to partnership, reinforcing and adding a cautionary perspective on this valuable pedagogical approach.

"Being patient through the quiet" provides practitioners with a productive phrase that both calls us to be resolute during the slow development of partnerships and to take turns being silent to allow for a diversity of perspectives; it also calls attention to the limits of patience and quietude in the face of inequities that may arise through differences in partnership. As Kwan (2009) argued, an essential condition for students to have positive learning experiences from PBL is "a good facilitator who is effective in communicating learning outcomes and expectations to students, and in working with students to create a nurturing environment" (p. 103). Similarly, in applying PBL to SaP, we must remember that the teacher's role in partnership is not a silent bystander but an active participant and facilitator; in our efforts to decenter our power and authority in the classroom, instructors must still facilitate the process of partnership and the construction of a nurturing environment. Keeping reciprocity, open communication, and mutual respect at the core of our partnerships with students helps us remember that we have so much to learn from each other.

This research was successfully reviewed by the author's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Positioning Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Assistants as Instructional Partners

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate teaching and learning assistants (UTLAs) can help to implement student-centered learning and collaborate with faculty as instructional partners. Researchers have documented the benefits of student-faculty instructional partnerships, but additional research is necessary to better understand how UTLA-faculty partnerships are established and sustained. In this study, I explored how UTLAs are positioned in interactions with faculty for two undergraduate courses at a large, public research institution over the Fall 2018 semester. This in-depth examination revealed UTLAs may be positioned as students, informants, consultants, co-instructors, or co-creators. Positioning of UTLAs changed moment-by-moment, and the different positions were not always mutually exclusive. Thus, UTLA-faculty partnerships are complex and dynamic; even when ranking or characterizing partnerships broadly, considering variety and fluidity in positioning may help uncover the nuances behind different partnerships. This research provides insight into the interactions of collaborative UTLA-faculty instructional partnerships and the factors that may affect those interactions.

KEYWORDS

student-faculty partnerships, learning assistant, positioning theory, undergraduate biology education

In order to support student-centered instruction at the post-secondary level, instructors may integrate undergraduate teaching and learning assistants (UTLAs[1]) into their courses (Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2008; Miller, Groccia, & Miller, 2001; Otero, Pollock, & Finkelstein, 2010). UTLAs support student learning through various roles, including facilitating active engagement and student discussion in lecture (Jardine & Friedman, 2017; Otero et al., 2010), evaluating students' work (Preszler, 2009), and assisting students outside of class (Close, Conn, & Close, 2016; Kopp, 2000). Undergraduate courses with UTLA support demonstrate greater student academic achievement (Pavlacic, Culp, Harvey, Cathey, & Buchanan, 2018; Preszler,

2009), increased student articulation of reasoning (Knight, Wise, Rentsch, & Furtak, 2015), and improved student understanding of course concepts (Otero et al., 2010).

Beyond helping to enact student-centered instruction, UTLAs also can work with faculty to improve teaching and learning. A growing body of literature explores student-faculty partnerships in teaching and learning, or reciprocal relationships where students and faculty work together towards improving teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Little, 2011; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Werder & Otis, 2010). Scholars have begun to explore partnerships between faculty and learning assistants (LAs) more specifically, and emerging research demonstrates that partnerships vary in level of collaboration (Sabella, Van Duzor, & Davenport, 2016). These scholars have begun to investigate what occurs during LA-faculty meetings (Davenport, Amezcua, Sabella, & Van Duzor, 2017), but additional research is necessary to better understand how interactions between UTLAs and faculty influence the development and maintenance of UTLA-faculty instructional partnerships.

In this study, I addressed the empirical question: **In what ways are UTLAs positioned in interactions with faculty?** I used positioning theory (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) as a framework; thus, I considered the rights, duties, and obligations (positions) distributed among people in changing patterns (storylines) as they engaged in particular kinds of actions (acts). I examined audio recordings of meetings and e-mail conversations between two different faculty members and their UTLAs, collected over the course of the Fall 2018 semester, and supported my interpretations using interviews, observations, and artifacts. This research helps to uncover interactional features (e.g., word choice, body language, conversation topics) of collaborative UTLA-faculty instructional partnerships and provide insight into the contextual factors (e.g., UTLA role and pedagogical training, instructor experience, meeting structure) that may affect those interactions.

STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

UTLA-faculty instructional partnerships are a unique type of student-faculty partnership, in that UTLAs are students partnering with a faculty member to fill an instructional role. Overall, student-faculty partnerships reconsider the traditional divide between teacher and learner and provide both with opportunities to better understand and engage in student-centered educational practices where student ideas and experiences are the focus (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Healey et al., 2014; Sorenson, 2001). Student-faculty partnerships may lead to the availability of courses that result in deeper, more meaningful, and more equitable learning experiences for students (Bovill et al., 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Students that participate in partnerships demonstrate an increase in confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning (Bovill et al., 2011; Cook-Sather, 2010, 2011a) and experience a greater sense of belonging (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Faculty that engage in partnerships reap practical, emotional, and intellectual benefits, including improved teaching practice, greater understanding of students' experiences, and values more strongly associated with teacher identity (Bovill, 2014; Cook-Sather, 2008, 2011a, 2014; Felten et al., 2013).

Student-faculty partnerships may vary in focus and level of collaboration (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014), and researchers have explored specifically how UTLA-faculty

instructional partnerships vary. UTLAs meet regularly with faculty to plan, cover content, and share concerns, and these meetings play out in a variety of ways. Sabella et al. (2016) characterized three levels of LA-faculty partnerships: mentor-mentee partnerships, faculty-driven collaboration, and full collaboration. Mentor-mentee partnerships were one-directional with limited LA input, where meetings consisted mostly of faculty reviewing content and introducing activities. In faculty-driven collaboration, faculty elicited feedback and insights from LAs, but faculty were still in control of LA involvement. Collaborative partnerships resulted when faculty members shared control with the LAs, who were willing and able to make substantive suggestions and contributions to help improve the course. Sabella et al. (2016) suggested that the nature of the LA-faculty interactions likely depended on faculty members' and LAs' views of their respective roles as well as LAs' aspirations and abilities.

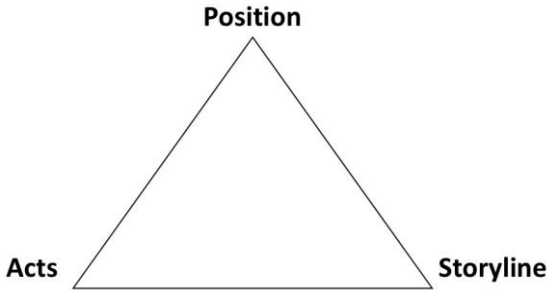
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POSITIONING THEORY

I used positioning theory (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) as a framework to explore how UTLA-faculty instructional partnerships were established through interactions between UTLAs and faculty. There are three fundamental aspects of positioning theory (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Harré et al., 2009; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999):

1. Positions: Rights, duties, obligations, and associated expectations distributed among people in changing patterns (storylines) as they engage in performing particular kinds of actions (acts);
2. Acts: Spoken, written, or other communicative acts through which positions are enacted; and
3. Storylines: Patterns or narratives created through acts and positions.

For example, UTLAs and faculty positioned as co-creators might enact that position through collaborative group discussion about the design of a certain assignment, under the storyline that the UTLA role involves creating instructional materials with the faculty member. These three fundamental aspects are overlapping and interconnected (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Three aspects of positioning theory



Adapted from van Langenhove & Harré, 1999.

Positioning theory suggests that the process of positioning happens through interactions between individuals, and positions are influenced by the time and context in which the individuals are situated (Harré et al., 2009); therefore, I examined the positioning of UTLAs by studying the spoken, written, and other communicative acts between two faculty members and their UTLAs over the course of a semester. For this study, I adopted the perspective that positioning can be examined from both a macro and micro perspective (Anderson, 2009), in that I considered UTLA positioning through summarizing general patterns of interaction as well as analyzing more specific moment-to-moment interactions.

METHODS

Research settings

The data come from two different UTLA-supported undergraduate science courses at a large, public research university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. I chose these two cases because I had prior relationships with the instructors, so I had reason to believe they would be information rich in regards to my research questions. In addition, I had already established a level of comfort and familiarity with the courses and the faculty members, which allowed for more profound data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). All participants have been given a pseudonym to protect their identities.

Case 1: Cell Biology in a living-learning program (LLP)

During class sessions for the Cell Biology course, taught by faculty member Dr. Cell, five UTLAs circulated around the lecture hall and guided student groups through activities. The UTLAs also held office hours where they led group discussions about content and homework. In addition, UTLAs were responsible for grading homework and exams. The UTLAs met weekly with Dr. Cell to discuss upcoming activities, share insights, and work on course materials. Additionally, the UTLAs engaged in a one-credit pedagogy course to support their professional development, which was also taught by Dr. Cell.

Case 2: Introductory Genetics

The UTLAs for Genetics were responsible for independently leading a 2-hour weekly discussion section, which aligned with lecture meetings led by the course instructor, faculty member Dr. Genetics. The UTLAs also graded student work and held weekly office hours. Dr. Genetics met with the UTLAs each Friday afternoon in preparation for the upcoming week to discuss content, facilitation plans, successes, and challenges.

Although my aim was not to conduct a cross-case comparison between the two cases, they exhibited notable contextual differences (summarized in Table 1) that provided opportunities to analyze how context might impact UTLA-faculty partnerships (Healy & Healy, 2018).

Table 1. Summary of basic descriptive information for Case 1 and Case 2

	CASE 1: CELL BIOLOGY IN LLP	CASE 2: GENETICS
UTLAs	5 UTLAs, all new	11 UTLAs, all returning
Instructor	Dr. Cell, first time teaching course, experienced in education research, administrator for LLP	Dr. Genetics, multiple semesters of experience teaching the course
UTLA Role	Facilitate small-group discussion during large lecture, lead office hours, grade homework and exams	Independently lead discussion section, lead office hours, grade coursework and exams
Pedagogy Course for the UTLAs	One-credit, 14-week course, during first semester as UTLA, taught by Dr. Cell	One-credit, 10-week course, during first semester as UTLA, taught by other biology faculty member
UTLA-Faculty Preparation Meeting	Weekly 1-hour meeting on Thursday evenings, following pedagogy course meeting	Weekly meeting, approximately 45 minutes long, Friday afternoon directly before Genetics lecture course

Data sources

This study employed ethnographic data-collection methods, which included participant observation, artifact collection, and interviewing, while focusing on specific instances of interactions collected through audio and video recording. I attended all scheduled, in-person meetings that occurred during Fall 2018 between the faculty members and their UTLAs and collected field notes and audio recordings. I recorded video at some meetings, so I had a record of how UTLAs and faculty arranged themselves in the room and the typical body language of the UTLAs and faculty. During observations, I acted as a participant observer (Merriam, 1998), in that my main role was to observe, but I interacted with the UTLAs and faculty as appropriate to build rapport and better understand the situation. Since I attended all meetings throughout the semester, my presence was part of the norm; therefore, the researcher impact was likely minimal.

In addition to observations and recordings of meetings, I gathered written artifacts relevant to understanding each case, including UTLA reflections, syllabi, course assignments, and handouts used to guide the UTLA-faculty meetings. The instructors forwarded me all e-mail communication between them and their UTLAs, and I downloaded and compiled these exchanges. I also conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with instructors at the beginning and end of the semester and with UTLAs during the semester.

Data analysis

Data analysis was ongoing during and after data collection. Over the semester, I continually wrote memos with themes from observations and ideas to pursue in subsequent data-collection activities, such as potential interview questions or additional artifacts to collect (Merriam, 1998). After data collection was completed, I began to "consolidate, reduce, and interpret" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178) the data. First, I reviewed all observational field notes and

memos to create a general description of interactional norms for each case. Then, I analyzed transcripts of audio recordings using an open constant comparative coding method (Miles & Huberman, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to generate categories and themes related to ways UTLAs were positioned in moment-to-moment interactions. This coding process was inductive and iterative, in that I developed initial interpretations and findings from the data and reworked those interpretations and findings as I analyzed more data. I used data collected through ethnographic methods (e.g., participant observation, artifacts) and interviews to support analysis.

UTLA-FACULTY INTERACTIONAL NORMS

Positioning can be examined from both a macro and a micro perspective (Anderson, 2009). Thus, I start at the macro level by presenting a rich description of the overarching interactional norms for the two cases.

Case 1: Open discussion amongst a teaching team

The UTLAs and Dr. Cell met every Thursday evening in a classroom located in the dormitory building for the living-learning program, where they gathered around one large table. Dr. Cell sat amongst the UTLAs as if she were an equivalent member of the group. Use of the terms “we,” “us,” and “together” were very common, and Dr. Cell regularly provided the UTLAs with opportunities to discuss opinions, make decisions amongst themselves, and share personal experiences. Dr. Cell was the recognized leader of the meetings, in that she determined the topic of discussion or task to be accomplished, but the UTLAs did the majority of the talking. As one UTLA, Gabe, said in an interview, “She really makes it feel like we’re a team as opposed to, I guess, just follow the leader.”

The meetings began with the 1-hour pedagogy course sessions, which felt more like a class than a meeting, as the UTLAs completed assignments to support their development and came prepared to discuss assigned readings. Still, the sessions were highly discussion-based and relatively open-ended. Although the course had a set curriculum, Dr. Cell asked the UTLAs what topics they were interested in, what they liked or did not like about the course, and how it could be improved.

At the conclusion of the pedagogy course sessions each week, the group began to discuss logistics and issues for the Cell Biology course, or as Dr. Cell said in an interview, “This is what the team is doing this week.” Dr. Cell typically started the meeting informally by passing out upcoming assignments and discussing thoughts about implementation. However, she would always follow up her plan by asking the UTLAs for their opinions and suggestions. In the interviews I conducted to supplement observational data, both the UTLAs and Dr. Cell noted that meetings were a time to provide each other with feedback.

Case 2: Teaching-team gathering to review responsibilities

Since the Genetics course’s UTLAs individually led their own discussion sections, the Friday afternoon meetings between the UTLAs and Dr. Genetics served as a space for them to debrief and review issues, and for the UTLAs to attain information and support necessary to prepare for the coming week. As one UTLA put it in an interview,

> The purpose for those meetings is to make sure everyone's on the same page for what's to come in the next week. It's a good time to touch base on how discussion went the week before because she always wants input. . . . So it's definitely a good time to give feedback on how the week went. And then in terms of preparing for the next discussion . . . at that moment we can go over questions we have or problems we foresee.

The meetings were very structured and organized, but at the same time comfortable and casual.

The meetings were held in one of the classrooms where the UTLAs taught their discussion sections. Tables were arranged in rows that faced the front of the room where there was a whiteboard and projector screen, and each seat had its own computer monitor. Through this arrangement, the UTLAs were able to follow along on their computer screens and put themselves in their students' shoes while Dr. Genetics talked through the upcoming activities. Dr. Genetics sat at a designated instructor desk, at the side of the room, and remained seated throughout the meeting to feel at an equal level and connected with the UTLAs. All of the chairs in the room could be easily moved and rotated, so despite the computer screens occasionally blocking the view between the UTLAs and Dr. Genetics, eye contact was frequent. There was an overall feeling of friendliness and support amongst all of the UTLAs and Dr. Genetics.

Dr. Genetics prepared a handout to guide each meeting, which included an overview of the coming week's activities, reminders related to course logistics, and suggestions for announcements to send to students. Although Dr. Genetics took up the majority of the speaking time, the UTLAs seemed engaged and included. Throughout the meeting, Dr. Genetics asked for their perspective on students' performance or the design and implementation of future activities and assignments. She used the terms "we" and "us" when discussing the course plan, and she regularly shared her reasoning behind instructional decisions. She mentioned areas for flexibility in the UTLAs' teaching, and frequently emphasized their experience with statements such as "you've all done this before." At various points, the UTLAs discussed their teaching and made teaching decisions among themselves.

UTLA POSITIONING

The brief descriptions above served to summarize the interactional norms for two cases of UTLA-faculty interactions explored in this study. Below, I dig deeper into each case to illustrate how UTLAs were positioned moment-to-moment during the interactions and provide detailed examples to supplement the descriptions. UTLAs were positioned in generally five ways: as (a) students, (b) informants, (c) consultants, (d) co-instructors, and (e) co-creators. These positions were not fixed for any setting, time, or individual, nor were they mutually exclusive.

This additional analysis demonstrates that even when UTLAs and faculty have established relatively stable interactional norms, UTLAs are not always positioned the same way. Thus, instead of assigning overarching characterizations to partnerships, it is worth considering how UTLA-faculty partnerships might be a more fluid mix of different characterizations, depending on time and context (Healy & Healy, 2018).

UTLAs as students

UTLAs are, first and foremost, undergraduate students. They spend a significant amount of time in classrooms, answering to authority, and learning from those who are considered more expert in the discipline. As well, they most likely have less teaching experience than the faculty they work with. Thus, reasonably, the UTLAs were often positioned as students, in that expectations for behavior were to listen to the faculty member, follow directions, complete assignments, or answer questions posed by the faculty member. Most often, the faculty member was the one to position the UTLAs as students by explaining concepts, giving directions, or providing teaching-related advice; however, at times, the UTLAs would position themselves as students by behaving the way they would in a classroom.

Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics often took on the responsibility of explaining logistics or biology concepts to UTLAs while UTLAs behaved as if they were in a classroom. Most of the time, when the faculty members explained something to the UTLAs, they spoke for extended periods of time while the UTLAs listened. However, sometimes, these explanations involved back and forth discussions while the UTLAs asked questions for clarification and follow-up.

Beyond giving directions and explaining concepts, Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics took time to communicate pedagogical advice to the UTLAs. During every pedagogy class session, Dr. Cell facilitated discussions around education topics and readings, pointed out when and why she was making certain pedagogical decisions, and shared resources about teaching. This modeling started on the first day; after engaging the UTLAs in an icebreaker, Dr. Cell told the UTLAs: "Different techniques I will try to make explicit when I'm doing them so notice we did the icebreaker first." Dr. Cell shared resources with the UTLAs, such as a list of active learning strategies and examples of questioning techniques.

Although Dr. Genetics did not teach the pedagogy course that her UTLAs took, she still sometimes shared pedagogical advice with her UTLAs. For example, before they led review sessions for the first exam, she told them in their preparation meeting: "When you're doing practice problems this week you should use questioning strategies that are inclusive and not just letting one or two people dominate the conversation." To support this statement, she included resources on the UTLAs' weekly handout.

UTLAs as informants

The UTLAs regularly informed the faculty what students were saying and doing in class and in UTLA-led office hours. Sometimes, the instructor explicitly asked the UTLAs to report on how things were going. At other times, the UTLAs positioned themselves as informants by sharing information related to students' learning and academic performance with the faculty, even when not explicitly asked. The UTLAs occasionally provided information gathered from situations and contexts where instructors would not have been present, such as the dormitory lounge, before and after class, or the back of the classroom.

In both Case 1 and Case 2, the UTLAs positioned themselves as informants after the instructor asked questions such as "How are things going?" or "How was last week?" Typically, both Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics would start their meetings by asking this question or a similar question. The UTLAs responded by sharing how things went in class logistically, how students felt about an activity, or how students behaved.

Sometimes, the UTLAs positioned themselves as informants even when they weren't explicitly asked to report on how things were going. For example, when talking through the final exam, Dr. Cell shared a list of possible exam questions. One UTLA, Kristen, informed her that the students were not understanding a concept, based on her conversation with the students during office hours:

> Kristen: I was a little worried about junctions with them. It's not going so hot. . . . I just think it's like really complicated and they're feeling a little lost. The people who just . . . I feel like a little swimming in the water with the homework just kind of like. . . .
> Dr. Cell: Oh, wow! Ok! Good to know!

Dr. Cell's enthusiastic response demonstrated that she appreciated the information. In an interview, Kristen mentioned, "I think all of us are super comfortable telling her anything we might be hearing or anything we might think because she is so receptive to it," which corroborates the interpretation that Dr. Cell is appreciative of their insight.

Both Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics noted that they gained valuable insights through the accessibility and approachability of the UTLAs. In an interview, Dr. Cell stated, "because they're peers, they're going to be a little bit more approachable than I would be to a certain extent. When there are issues in the class, they'll hear probably the grumblings before I do." Dr. Genetics expressed similar thoughts by stating, "[The UTLAs] are valuable because of their perspective, they interact with the students in a smaller group." Both instructors focused on the fact that the UTLAs had increased access to students and their perspective.

The UTLAs seemed to recognize their value as well. One UTLA elaborated in an interview:

> I think [Dr. Cell] also likes that we get feedback from the students that we can give to her that they might not necessarily say to her. . . . I think sometimes they're, like, a lot more open with me . . . so then we can kind of, like, gather their feedback and, like, filter it from, like, what it's like being a student.

The UTLAs were peers to the students, and therefore, students were more open and honest with them than they would be with an instructor. Also, the UTLAs played a role in "filtering" student feedback by determining which comments were important and communicating the student perspective in a way that was valuable to the instructor.

UTLAs as consultants

Quite frequently, the UTLAs were positioned as consultants, in that their assumed right or duty was to provide advice related to class activities, assignments, and exams to the instructor. The position of consultant is similar to that of informant but goes beyond that position; informants report information while consultants report information and make suggestions based on that information.

As part of the pedagogy course requirements, Dr. Cell positioned the UTLAs as consultants by assigning them the task at the end of the semester of choosing an assignment to revise for a future semester and explaining how and why they would make those revisions. Dr.

Cell also positioned her UTLAs as consultants by asking them to review draft exams. For each exam (i.e., midterms and the final), the UTLAs and Dr. Cell talked about the entire draft exam together, and Dr. Cell listened to the UTLAs' thoughts on each question. Dr. Cell facilitated the conversation through questions such as "Is this too broad?" or "If you had to replace this with a different question related to [topic], what would you replace it with?" She often used the word "we" when asking for their thoughts, which demonstrated she considered preparing exams for students to be a group effort. In the final interview, Dr. Cell noted how helpful it was to have the UTLAs review the exams; she stated, "They picked up a bunch of things; some things I thought were super obvious they said they thought would be difficult, and some things I thought would be difficult they thought were super obvious." She recognized that the UTLAs provided her with a new perspective on the questions.

For Genetics, UTLAs were positioned as consultants on draft exams through e-mail communication. Due to limited time during in-person preparation meetings, Dr. Genetics sent each exam to one or two UTLAs and gave them the opportunity to review the exam and send questions or comments back via e-mail. She approached different UTLAs for each exam in order to spread out the extra effort required by this task and was always clear to them that reviewing the exams was optional based on time and interest. In an interview, Dr. Genetics noted:

> They've got a great perspective on what the students may or may not know or how they might read things . . . but I try not to require them to give me feedback. Right. I try to make that, like, if you have the time and you want to do this, I would appreciate that, but they've already got a lot of work to do.

Thus, Dr. Genetics might have limited how often she positioned her UTLAs as consultants in order to respect their time.

Both Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics repeatedly thanked the UTLAs for their feedback and input, demonstrating they respected and valued their ideas. The UTLAs confirmed in interviews that Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics considered their opinions and were responsive to their suggestions. For example, one UTLA said about Dr. Genetics, "I think she does a good job . . . of respecting your ideas and having you be a part of making this course better," and another UTLA said, "We're not just her workers. We're more like working with her, not for her." Similarly, one UTLA said about Dr. Cell, "She definitely will actually make changes based on what we say and values our opinions," and another said, "She . . . seemed like a really open person. She's always looking to improve, so I think that's made me really comfortable." The UTLAs' perceptions that their ideas were appreciated likely contributed to their willingness to act as consultants. In addition, by expressing continued appreciation and recognizing the efforts of the UTLAs, the faculty members established high levels of trust and respect key to maintaining confidentiality when granting students access to exam material.

UTLAs as co-instructors

I considered the UTLAs to be positioned as co-instructors when they were referred to as teachers by the faculty member or made collective decisions with the faculty member about teaching or grading. As co-instructors, instead of just sharing information or advice, UTLAs

discussed teaching and learning with the faculty member as a team, and the team came to a group decision about instruction.

The UTLAs in both cases were responsible for working together to grade student exams, and Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics trusted the UTLAs' judgment and gave them freedom in determining appropriate partial credit for open-ended questions. For Cell Biology, the UTLAs were each responsible for grading a separate page of the exam. After each exam, the group dedicated a meeting to "grade norm," in that they started grading together as a group to come to consensus on appropriate responses and partial credit. Dr. Cell let the UTLAs talk through the answers, and rather than tell them exactly how many points to assign, she allowed them to make the ultimate decision. Then, each UTLA took the remainder of their ungraded pages home to grade on their own time. The following week, the group re-combined the exams and discussed trends and problem areas.

For Genetics, the UTLAs also met as a group to grade exams for a long afternoon, directly following each exam. They completed all grading in person, together, sustained by ample snacks provided by Dr. Genetics. The grading sessions happened in a conference room, around a large table, which was different than their typical meetings. In interviews, the UTLAs confirmed the grading atmosphere was friendly and comfortable, and one UTLA noted that the grading meetings "helped me not view Dr. Genetics so much as an authority figure." Similar to grading discussions between Dr. Cell and her UTLAs, the Genetics UTLAs conferred with each other to discuss students' answers.

The UTLAs were also positioned as co-instructors by being provided with choice and flexibility related to how they approached working with students. Although Dr. Genetics gave her UTLAs a suggested plan for teaching each week, she made it clear the plan was flexible and that they could make their own decisions. As one UTLA said in an interview, "She definitely understands we're responsible and we will get everything done . . . and she gives us a little bit of flexibility." Dr. Genetics trusted her UTLAs to do what was best for their students.

Sometimes, for the UTLAs, being positioned as a co-instructor overlapped with being positioned as a student, in that Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics recognized their UTLAs as teachers, but as novice teachers learning to work with students. After the UTLAs for Cell Biology discussed the challenge of not always knowing the answers to students' questions, Dr. Cell reassured them that this challenge was not unique to them. She explained: "You guys are talking about . . . difficult things I think all teachers have to deal with, which is [that] we don't know everything. Those things happen just about for every teacher no matter how experienced." By admitting that she, and other teachers, face the same challenge, and by using the word "we," she positioned the UTLAs as part of a group that she is a part of, as well: teachers.

UTLAs as co-creators

At times, the UTLAs created instructional materials along with the faculty member, or on their own with support and feedback from the faculty member, which went beyond consulting with faculty to actually creating class content. The UTLAs were positioned as co-creators when the faculty instructors asked them to plan lessons, develop lecture or review material, and write exam questions.

For the Cell Biology course, the UTLAs helped to brainstorm exam questions, and by the end of the semester, they wrote one question themselves as a group. Dr. Cell also gave her

UTLAs the opportunity to write a lesson plan, create presentation materials, and teach the class a topic of their own choice. In the Genetics course, the UTLAs were positioned as co-creators when they were given the opportunity to collaboratively develop an exam-review presentation before each exam or to create practice exam questions for review sessions.

The findings presented above illustrate in detail the five ways UTLAs were positioned in the data; I summarize the positions and associated acts and storylines in Table 4.2.

Table 2. Summary of UTLA positions and associated acts and storylines

POSITION	STORYLINE	ACTS
UTLA as student (Faculty as teacher)	Faculty instructors are more expert in both content and pedagogy than UTLAs.	UTLAs raised their hands to answer and ask questions. Faculty members explained course concepts or pedagogy.
UTLA as informant (Faculty as information seeker)	UTLAs serve as a communication channel between faculty and students in the course because of their approachability and accessibility.	Faculty members asked questions such as "How are things going?" UTLAs reported on class-related experiences with students.
UTLAs as consultant (Faculty as advice seeker)	UTLAs provide pedagogical advice and suggestions to faculty based on their student perspective and experiences.	Faculty members asked the UTLAs to review draft assignments or exams in person and over e-mail. UTLAs and faculty engaged in free-flowing and collaborative conversation, building off each other's suggestions.
UTLAs and faculty as co-instructors	UTLAs support grading. UTLAs are considered teachers.	UTLAs and faculty members participated in collaborative group discussion around grading. Faculty members referred to the UTLAs as teachers. Faculty members noted flexibility and autonomy in the UTLAs' work.
UTLAs and faculty as co-creators	UTLAs help to create instructional materials, including exams.	Faculty members gave the UTLAs an opportunity to develop instructional materials and exam questions. UTLAs and faculty members engaged in collaborative group discussion.

DISCUSSION

Through analyzing data collected during a semester of UTLA-faculty interactions for two different courses, I provided examples of how the UTLAs were positioned as students, informants, consultants, co-instructors, or co-creators. I offered a dynamic view of UTLA-faculty

partnerships and showed that, despite each case having relatively consistent interactional norms, there was still fluidity in how the UTLAs were positioned.

Positioning theory suggests that positions are mediated through discourse, so this study attempted to reveal some of the more overarching discourse patterns in the UTLA-faculty interactions. Most of the time, faculty determined UTLA positioning by asking questions or giving explicit directions. For example, "How are things going?" more often positioned the UTLAs as informants, while "What do you guys think?" more often positioned the UTLAs as consultants. However, the data also revealed that the UTLAs positioned themselves at times, potentially because they gained the sense that position was appropriate in that particular moment based on interactional norms.

One could infer that I presented the UTLA positions in order from least to greatest collaboration with the faculty member, or from least to most power that the faculty member allowed the UTLAs to have in terms of instruction. However, in doing so, I did not intend to rank the positions in terms of desirability. Positioning UTLAs as co-instructors or co-creators does allow for the UTLAs to have more power in the instructional process, which is something to strive for in a UTLA-faculty partnership. Nevertheless, positioning the UTLAs as students may still, at times, be appropriate and beneficial to provide them with the structure and support they need in order to improve their teaching. A collaborative instructional partnership does not necessarily require the UTLAs and the faculty to have equal power; rather, they should work together to negotiate power based on time, experience, ability, and goals (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

Other scholars have characterized levels of UTLA-faculty partnerships (Sabella et al., 2016), and my findings help to expand upon these characterizations by providing a more detailed account of UTLA-faculty interactions and the variety and fluidity in UTLA positioning. In mapping the interactional norms for Case 1 and Case 2 onto Sabella et al.'s (2016) characterizations, I would characterize Case 1 as fully collaborative, in that the UTLAs and Dr. Cell worked together on instruction, and Case 2 as faculty-driven collaboration, in that Dr. Genetics requested UTLA input and feedback but determined the outcome. However, labeling or categorizing UTLA-faculty partnerships in specific ways might limit our understanding of the complexity of those partnerships and lead us to fail to notice variation. Considering moment-by moment UTLA positioning may be more useful to create an accurate depiction of UTLA-faculty partnerships. As van Langenhove and Harré (1999) put it, "the concept of positioning can be seen as a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of a role" (p. 14).

IMPLICATIONS: CREATING COLLABORATIVE UTLA-FACULTY INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

This study reveals various implications for those who are interested in establishing or supporting UTLA-faculty instructional partnerships. Faculty members should reflect on how they are positioning their UTLAs. The UTLAs should reflect on how they are being positioned or how they are positioning themselves and challenge positioning that might be limiting their involvement in the instructional process.

There were also a number of factors and contextual features that may have impacted how the UTLAs were positioned in the two cases presented here. Although I do not intend to communicate any causal claims, I suggest instructor experience, UTLA role, UTLA pedagogical

training, and format and structure of meetings had an influence on the positioning of the UTLAs in their interactions with the faculty members.

Instructor experience with the course

In the semester during which this study took place, Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics had different levels of experience with the courses they were teaching. Fall 2018 was Dr. Cell's first time teaching the cell biology course; thus, she may have been more open to critique, input, co-creation, and collaborative problem solving. In contrast, Dr. Genetics had taught the Genetics course for several semesters and had created the materials that the UTLAs were using in their teaching. Thus, the UTLAs may have viewed Dr. Genetics as more of an expert and perceived the course as more established. Instructor experience with a course may impact how often the faculty member opens up space for the UTLAs to make suggestions or discuss improvements to the course.

UTLA role

The UTLAs for the two cases performed very different roles in terms of working with students. In both cases, the UTLAs led office hours for students and helped the instructors to grade assignments and exams. However, in terms of in-class roles, in Case 1, the UTLAs facilitated small-group discussions during the large lecture taught by Dr. Cell, whereas the Genetics UTLAs led their own discussion sections. In Case 1, during circumstances when students in the class worked on activities, the UTLAs and Dr. Cell took on similar teaching roles in that they all walked around and facilitated discussion. Thus, Dr. Cell may have been more likely to position the UTLAs as co-instructors while discussing their teaching. The Genetics UTLAs did not teach alongside Dr. Genetics; rather, they taught separately and independently. This separation may have limited how often they were positioned as co-instructors and increased how often they were positioned as informants or consultants because they were the only ones with eyes into their specific discussion section.

UTLA pedagogical training

The UTLAs in Case 1 and Case 2 participated in different pedagogical preparation courses. For the Cell Biology UTLA pedagogy course, the UTLAs were receiving course credit for their participation, so they were often positioned as students in that setting. However, through activities such as revising instructional materials, the UTLAs were positioned as informants, consultants, and co-creators. Also, discussions around pedagogy often led to the UTLAs being positioned as co-instructors. Since Dr. Cell was leading the pedagogy course, there were additional opportunities for her to position the UTLAs in more collaborative ways and have more time to establish rapport. In Case 2, the UTLAs had already taken their required pedagogy course in a prior semester, and Dr. Genetics was not the instructor for that course. Disconnect between pedagogical training and UTLA preparation meetings with the faculty member may limit how much the UTLAs and faculty collaborate around instruction.

UTLA-faculty meeting format and structure

Meeting location and room arrangement may influence how the UTLAs interact with the faculty member and with each other. By sitting around a table together, the Cell Biology UTLAs and Dr. Cell established a feeling of community, which may have encouraged more open discussion. The Genetics meetings were held in a classroom where the UTLAs sat in rows, sometimes hidden behind computer screens, and this set-up may have led them to feel less inclined to discuss instruction with each other and Dr. Genetics. However, the group of Genetics UTLAs (11) was more than twice as large as the group of Cell Biology UTLAs (5), so with more people, there were constraints in room arrangement and individual speaking time. Faculty members should consider how they can arrange the room and structure the conversation to provide individual UTLAs a voice.

Overall, even though these cases of UTLA-faculty partnerships differed, what I found to be most influential in terms of their collaborative nature was the recognized notion of a "teaching team." The UTLAs in both cases were never positioned as helpers or workers, but instead as novice colleagues with valid opinions, perspectives, and expertise. Even when positioning the UTLAs as students, Dr. Cell and Dr. Genetics communicated a focus on the UTLAs' professional development; rather than talking *at* them, they were talking *with* them. Faculty should carefully consider how their words and actions, and the responsibilities they designate to their UTLAs, while respecting their time and ability, communicate (or don't communicate) the notion that UTLAs are part of a "teaching team."

This research was successfully reviewed according to the University's Institutional Review Board.

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NOTES

1. I use the term "undergraduate teaching and learning assistants" (UTLAs) to refer to undergraduates who facilitate student-centered instruction in a lecture course or recitation sections associated with a lecture course. I build off literature related to the "learning assistant" model (Otero et al., 2010), "peer led team learning" model (Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2008), "peer learning assistant" model (Groccia & Miller, 1996), and other literature that may use terms such as "undergraduate teaching assistants" or "peer facilitators." Different terms may represent different roles; therefore, when describing specific models, I use the term associated with that model. When synthesizing across models and terminology, I use the overarching term UTLA.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

Hannah Jardine *supports faculty, graduate-student, and undergraduate-student development in teaching and manages the Academic Peer Mentoring Program as a Postdoctoral Associate at the University of Maryland's Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC). Her research*

examines how undergraduate teaching and learning assistants can work with faculty to support course reform.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Redefining the Roles of Master and Apprentice: Crossing the Threshold Through the Co-Creation of a First-Year Seminar

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ABSTRACT

Students as Partners is an innovative approach to higher education that seeks to redefine both student and faculty roles and expectations on college campuses through the creation of equitable and inclusive partnerships in a variety of ways. This paper details our research in the co-creation of the curriculum for an undergraduate first-year seminar. It describes our journey from conceptualization to assessment of the course including creating the class, administering it for first-year students in the fall of 2018, and evaluating how successful the course was based on both our own perspectives, as well as student course feedback. Findings suggest that both partners had a transformative experience in which they crossed a threshold, creating new expectations surrounding roles and relationships for future student-faculty partnerships. Additionally, the students enrolled in the course provided feedback about the perceived successfulness of the co-created curriculum and the overall course experience based on our collaborative efforts.

KEYWORDS

students as partners, curriculum development, first-year seminar, co-creation

When it comes to higher education, we find ourselves constantly innovating pedagogies to reach a population that changes substantially faster than the institutions themselves. Many educators seek ways in which to better approach increasingly diverse students in inclusive and equitable ways. To do so, we must break down institutional hierarchies and barriers when it comes to the traditional faculty-student relationship. Students as Partners (SaP) is an innovative approach to higher education that "aims to capture an aspiration for working together in higher education in a way that rejects traditional hierarchies and assumptions about expertise and responsibility" (Cook-Sather, Matthews, Ntem, & Leathwick, 2018, p. 1). While traditional subject-based research partnerships between faculty and students have long existed in higher

education, this pedagogical approach seeks to acknowledge student expertise and shift more power to them in a wide array of decision-making processes across campuses.

This paper details our experience with the co-creation of the curriculum for an undergraduate first-year seminar (FYS) course. We are an assistant professor of sociology and a student partner majoring in computer science and political science. It describes our journey from conceptualization to assessment of the course including creating the class, administering it for first-year students in the fall of 2018, and evaluating the success of the course based on both our own perspectives as well as student course feedback. We found that the marriage of institutional expectations for an FYS and the SaP pedagogy made perfect sense. FYS classes are typically designed to focus on student success and retention of first-year students. Based on existing research, partnering with a current student in the curriculum design could enhance and reinforce these goals by relying on their expertise as a student rather than faculty's assumptions about what incoming students need.

We begin our discussion with a review of the SaP literature. We rely on Cook-Sather's (2014) conceptualization of the threshold concept to frame our own personal threshold moments during this project. We also highlight the SaP pedagogical fit for an FYS course. Next, we present three perspectives on the project: that of the faculty partner, the student partner, and of the entire class compiled from themes found in enrolled student feedback. Findings suggest that SaP allows for a unique type of innovation when a faculty member and student collaborate on curriculum design. This is especially true in the context of an FYS course. However, the student partner experienced some negative costs associated with his role in the course. Lastly, while both partners each had a transformative experience in which they crossed a threshold of new institutional roles and expectations for future student-faculty relationships, students in the course also reaped some of the benefit of this new type of partnership. In fact, it was the student partner's presence in the course that created a sense of belonging for first-year students struggling to find their sense of place on a college campus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014) focus on reciprocity, respect, and responsibility as the core principles that should guide student-faculty partnerships. While subject-based student-faculty partnerships have the longest history in higher education, SaP as a pedagogy suggests that these traditional relationships are not inherently equal when it comes to power in the partnership as the faculty mentor typically takes the lead while the student acts as an apprentice. Yet these partnerships also provide evidence that students often thrive in their college experience when they develop these close working relationships with faculty. Additional research has focused on students as consultants in partnership with a faculty member (Cook-Sather, 2014; Cook-Sather & Motz-Storey, 2016; Gourlay & Korpan, 2018; Kandiko Howson & Weller, 2016) along with students as mentors to new faculty during the orientation process (Cook-Sather, 2016). However, the most overlooked dimension of SaP is in curriculum design (Loveland, Moys, Tollett, & Towriss, 2016; Moys, 2018; Moys, Collier, & Joyce, 2018). Much of the research in this area has also been limited to the context of the United Kingdom. This paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature with our U.S.-based curriculum-design application of SaP.

Additionally, we are unaware of any literature that focuses on the FYS course context as a model for implementing SaP.

It is important to understand SaP as an ongoing process rather than a static project. Meyer and Land (2006) describe threshold concepts as gateways that lead to transformed understanding. In teaching and learning, one key threshold concept involves transforming the assumption that teachers hold the knowledge that students come to passively learn As a pedagogical approach, SaP embraces this type of threshold moment as a transformative and long-lasting process that changes our way of thinking and redefines relationships across campus, all while encouraging diversity and inclusion of thought (Cook-Sather, 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Matthews, 2017). SaP is about changing relationships permanently rather than just for the duration of the project. The outcomes of this change in process are particularly difficult but highly important for minority students who have not traditionally held positions of power on college campuses (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015). In fact, the SaP pedagogy may help students struggling to feel like they even belong on a college campus develop a sense of identity and place in higher education. Student partners take on an authoritative role as subject experts while students in the classroom can see themselves in the student instructor. Developing both a sense of self as a college student and feeling a sense of belonging early can also aid in overall student success and retention outcomes.

The effects of crossing the type of faculty-student power threshold described above can also have affective outcomes on a personal level and disrupt the compartmentalization of institutional life (Cates, Madigan, & Reitenauer, 2018). Felten (2017) notes that these affective outcomes are due to the emotions that are inherent in interpersonal relationships. Being open to the emotional connections made in a student-faculty partnership is what helps participants cross the threshold in a meaningful and long-lasting way. Most importantly, "the benefit of student involvement in the enhancement of teaching is dependent on the perceived authenticity of student voice within a circumscribed idea of student expertise" (Kandiko Howson & Weller, 2016, p. 10). SaP can only be successful if all participants are equally invested in the idea that students can be equal contributors to a project because of their own unique expertise. This may seem counterintuitive to many faculty members, who are trained to guard their knowledge, authority, and power carefully. Opening up to a student emotionally to build a relationship while acknowledging the agency and capacity of the student as more than just a passive learner is necessary for crossing the threshold.

Faculty are often the unchallenged authority on a college campus while students sit in the classroom as passive learners. The expertise students bring with them to the classroom often goes overlooked as professors seek to impart the knowledge of their disciplines, as it will appear on final exams. However, SaP seeks to redefine the relationships traditionally found in higher education by breaking down the assumption that knowledge is a one-way street (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015; Cook-Sather et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Peters & Mathias, 2018). This is especially relevant in an FYS course in which first-year students are learning about the expectations and practices of their institution. Peer instruction, in which the student partner is a subject expert, is particularly meaningful in this context for both the student partner and the student peers they interact with.

METHODS

This research was conducted at a small liberal arts institution with a student body of approximately 1,700 students in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States between June 2018 and January 2019. Our team was comprised of an assistant professor of sociology in her fifth year of teaching at the institution and a computer science and political science double major transitioning from his freshman to sophomore year at the college. This partnership was brought together by a passion for *Star Wars* and an interest in both teaching and collaborative research. The project was made possible by an internal grant that traditionally facilitates SaP in subject-based faculty-student research partnerships.

Between June and August of 2018, we worked to design an FYS from the ground up, guided by the SaP pedagogy, called "*Star Wars*: The Good, The Bad, and The Sociology." This course spent half the time teaching first-year students how to be successful in college and half the time practicing critical reading and writing skills using the *Star Wars* saga and supplemental readings pertaining to introductory sociological concepts. We worked together to select readings and video content, design assignments, create in-class activities, and even build quizzes and exams. Joe helped designate which type of institutional resources should be included on the syllabus and the order in which they should be addressed based on his own first-year experience. Elizabeth made arrangements with these resources for key staff in each area to present their resource to the class. Lastly, we also wanted to include the students in their own SaP project, so we created a semester-long assignment that would culminate in a presentation at a campus-wide venue. The students took on the role of subject-experts and presented course material to over 100 of their peers from all across campus.

From August to December of 2018, the course had 16 students enrolled. It was a racially diverse group of first-year students and included 13 males and three females. We created assessment mechanisms over the summer which were administered to students and collected for analysis upon completion of the course. These tools included feedback surveys administered at both midterm and end of semester along with an extra-credit evaluative question on the final exam specifically asking, "In what ways do you think that being in a co-created course affected your experience in this class? How did your learning experience compare to other courses this fall?" Surveys were administered using Microsoft Forms, and students received extra credit for completion. All open-ended data were coded by both the student and faculty partner for interrater reliability. Following the work of Berg (2009), we practiced open coding, asking ourselves the question, "How did our partnership affect students in the course we designed?" Common themes were then used to develop coding frames, which included the visible presence of the student partner throughout the course, the relatability of having a student partner create the course, and students feeling prepared for their college education as discussed below.

In addition to the feedback data collected from enrolled students, we also relied on our own personal experiences in assessing the usefulness of the SaP pedagogy. We find these subjective disclosures an important part of understanding both our findings and the research that was conducted (Berg, 2009). We each discussed how we came to be interested in the project, the role we played in the partnership when it came to curriculum design, and a reflection on how we each experienced a transformative threshold crossing during our

partnership. These perspectives are critical in helping other students, faculty, and institutions understand the intricacies of implementing a new pedagogical approach that complements our project findings.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

The faculty partner

After agreeing to teach a first-year seminar for my institution, I quickly realized I didn't know anything about being a student in today's world. Therefore, I recruited a student partner. I simply asked for a student who had successfully completed their FYS and who loved *Star Wars*. I am a sociology professor, and he was a rising sophomore in the Computer Science department; this was an interdisciplinary twist that added to the excitement of our partnership.

We began our course-design project by looking for appropriate readings not only on the *Star Wars* saga and sociology but also on how to be a successful student in college, the importance of higher education, and the value of the liberal arts. Joe helped scour through stacks of books and articles that I had started to collect in the spring. I would give him micro lessons in core sociological concepts including race and gender while also discussing the social institutions of politics, religion, and family, all themes found throughout the films that we hoped to include. He would then determine which readings he felt were accessible and interesting to first-year students. Together we would discuss the rigor and appropriateness of his suggestions. He helped determine how many class periods we might need to cover a certain subject while also preserving space for a breadth of topics. As a non-sociology major, he also made sure that I was providing sociological explanations that were basic enough for non-majors with no prior knowledge of the subject.

Joe was also integral in designing engaging activities. For example, we developed the idea of doing a scavenger hunt around campus. He helped identify the most important resources first-year students would need and should know how to locate. He then developed a passport for students to have stamped at each location. These passports also included a helpful fact Joe developed regarding each location. We then used this list to schedule additional fieldtrips to each location for further instruction. It was invaluable to have my student partner's help in these projects because he had recent first-hand experience with these services and the order in which students would likely need to access them.

Other ways we collaborated included in-class activity design and writing assignments. Joe was able to articulate what made an assignment accessible and interesting to him during his first year of college. He provided a perspective unique from my own and helped me establish a reasonable level of rigor. An example were reminders from him as to the workload and expectations students would also be facing in their ENG101/102 course and how our class should complement those assignments. When it came to developing grading rubrics for our assignments, Joe helped me understand how to best make sure feedback would be received constructively rather than critically. He also helped design a scaffolded series of grades in which assignments started out low stakes and became increasingly larger portions of the course grade. He emphasized that this would help students feel less deflated and hopeless at the beginning of their college career and incentivize them to respond positively to feedback. Lastly,

in order to ensure his presence in the course when it was offered in the fall, Joe filmed a series of short videos that were integrated into the class, explaining the course, the assignments, and "tips and tricks" for being successful throughout the class.[1] These would prove to be extremely successful at demonstrating Joe's presence in the class, even when he was not physically present.

Initially, I found this project to be very unsettling. This partnership demanded that I essentially pre-test all my ideas with a student, something I don't think many faculty think about or do when we plan a new course. We run it the first time, often creating on the fly, and then we make adjustments based on how it went. Giving up this kind of control to an untrained undergraduate student went against all my training, especially as a female academic needing to possess an air of authority for her students to take her as seriously as their male professors. But then it became freeing. I realized I was still a part of the partnership and could help make sure the course met a specific level of rigor and included all institutional requirements. I spent less time worrying about reaching the students in my class, and I put more effort into helping Joe turn his ideas into praxis. I taught him about sociological concepts, and he helped make them accessible to incoming first-year students, most of whom were not sociology majors. He taught me about computer software capabilities and ways of including technology in the classroom. His enthusiasm for *Star Wars*, especially the newer films and TV series, was infectious. I explained to him my fondness for the classic trilogy, and he discovered the importance of context when viewing a cultural artifact. Most importantly, he relied on his own FYS experience to shape the experiences of the next incoming class. And I have never felt more prepared to teach a class in my entire career.

I was then able to take this transformed sense of partnership into the classroom. I did it by showing Joe's videos in class as well as posting them on our institution's learning management system; Moodle. I continuously opened myself up to critique by students in the class both informally and through the assessment mechanisms designed with Joe. We also had the students create a student-led, campus-wide presentation, empowering them to teach the campus about their semester-long projects. This was another example of how Joe and I sought to teach the campus about SaP both inside and outside the classroom. Attendees were exposed to an explanation of my partnership with Joe while also seeing first-year students taking command of course material. Students enrolled in the course became empowered with their newfound expertise and agency, and many cited the event as their favorite part of the course in their feedback.

In *The Empire Strikes Back* (Kurtz & Kersher, 1980), Yoda tries to teach Luke a lesson after his plane sinks even further into the Dagobah swamps. Luke is convinced that he will never be able to get it out. "Always with you it cannot be done. . . . You must unlearn what you have learned." In embarking on a SaP endeavor, I too had to unlearn what I had learned about traditional student-faculty relationships, expertise, and institutional role expectations. Once I did, I crossed the threshold.

The student partner

As a student, I have always been interested in the idea of pursuing research in college. At my current institution, I was fortunate enough to receive internal funding to pursue this

interest. I knew I wanted to do research during my undergraduate years; I just did not know how I would come across it or what I would be studying. In the fall semester of my first year of college, I came across an advertisement from Dr. Kiester detailing a possible student-faculty research opportunity. After seeing this advertisement recruiting students interested in *Star Wars* and FYS, I knew it was the perfect opportunity for me. After going through Dr. Kiester's application process, I was fortunate to be selected as the student partner. We applied for the available internal funding and became research partners in the summer of 2018, ready to pursue SaP.

Over the summer, I spent a significant amount of time learning the processes and thoughts of a professor in higher education designing a new course. Being only a year out of high school at the time, I had my own ideas as to how professors thought and how classes were developed, but nothing close to what I learned with this experience. This was a very interesting project because essentially, I was learning the "behind the scenes" of college. I had the opportunity to talk to a professor outside my own coursework, learning about everything that goes into curriculum development. This was all on top of being equally responsible for an entire FYS course for the upcoming fall semester.

It was not just being a student and a professor that made this research partnership interesting, but also the fact that it was interdisciplinary as we are a team made up of a sociology professor and a student studying computer science and political science. Throughout the summer, I realized that it was not just me who was learning new things. I was teaching Dr. Kiester about how it is to be a student at the institution. I was also able to show my own academic strengths while contributing to the course and our work together with my computer science background by providing technical skills she lacked and making our work more efficient and accessible to students in the class.

During this double-sided learning experience, we came across an article detailing a particularly resonating concept in SaP work: the threshold concept. We found ourselves experiencing this exact concept, crossing the threshold between student and faculty roles through collaboration on this course-design project. I crossed the threshold utilizing this research and, with the help of Dr. Kiester and the course we made, provided a similar opportunity for other students to also have a transformative experience.

Once the class was in session, it was a very abnormal experience to be a student who just happened to also be an "instructor" to a handful of my peers coming into the college. It was both a rewarding experience and an unsettling one. It was rewarding in that I was able to be a mentor to some incoming first-year students and assist them in their academic journey by giving simple tips to aid their studies. I was also able to provide inspiration to a few of the students participating in the course by sparking a desire to venture into their own SaP work in the future.

However, it was not all good feelings that came from being the quasi-instructor that I was to these students. I felt as if there was a certain pressure to be a model student for them, as I was the one who helped design and implement assignments that they would be graded on. This affected my day-to-day academics for my own scholarly experience as I held myself to a higher standard when in communication with the students taking the course. This was a positive motivator for me to better myself, but it also added an abnormality to my semester. I

also noticed different changes in tone throughout the semester from various participating students towards me, because their viewpoints shifted from that of a peer to that of a stereotypical student and instructor. This is also another thing that I did not think to consider when working in a SaP mindset: the social implications that come from being a peer who was partially responsible for what they would be graded on.

These social implications are often overlooked in the SaP literature, which is typically very scientific and lacks the emotional responses of the student participants. In my experience, taking up the work as an instructor makes for a vastly different college experience. In being an instructor who is also a peer, there is no longer the barrier of instructor-to-student; all communications are student-to-student, which makes for a much more rewarding and complicated experience for different interactions. Some rewarding moments for me included students showing a desire to achieve their goals at college and being positively affected by participating in our SaP experience. These were some of the best feelings from the whole experience, because they were what I aimed to do in this research project. I wanted to provide a successful entrance into higher education, in which I created a course that could teach the basics of college and inspire the students involved to act on their passions and get the most out of their time in college. When asked about their experience in the class, one student responded:

> Since this class was co-created under a student-faculty partnership, it has definitely affected my experience in the class. Having a student only a year older help create a class made the class based on a student's perspective. Therefore, him being a student, he knew how much a student can handle and what wasn't important. It affected my experience because I realized if another student can get through this class then so can I. My learning experience in this class taught me how to write better papers and work harder towards my goals. It taught me to look at things from a different perspective than I am used to. This will not only help me in my other courses, but in real life.

Receiving responses like this allowed me to see the positive influence that a successfully co-created course could have on incoming first-year students.

However, there were also negative interactions that included direct personal criticisms from students and a forced social separation. For example, when talking with some students before tests, they would sometimes ask for information I would not give them, so I would have to withdraw from the conversation. Other instances included hearing occasional negative comments about having a peer in the role of instructor. Students react differently in a course and in response to their professors. Based on my observations, these reactions appear to be amplified, both positively and negatively, when the course design and instruction comes not only from a professor but also from a peer.

Having spent some time unofficially working as a teaching assistant (TA) for another professor, I can also say that this experience differs from this more traditional student-as-instructor relationship. As a TA, my role had more to do with helping fellow students master subject material with an understanding that I was not privy to all course content. However, in this instance, students were well aware that I had helped develop content including questions

for quizzes and exams. It was this knowledge that created a negative reaction from peers when I refused to simply give them access to the content and the answers.

Overall, I hope that this research helps break down the stereotypical barrier between students and professors and ends the social implications for students participating in this innovative work for higher education. I believe that if SaP becomes more prevalent in academia, then it will foster a more creative and collaborative approach to the college experience. I am happy to have had this opportunity to work as a student partner on such an innovative pedagogical approach, and I am thrilled to be a part of the SaP pilot program at my institution. I am going to continue to work on breaking the barriers between myself as a student with my other professors in the future, and take more control over my own education as well as the people around me. This is all due to crossing the threshold.

The class

Sixteen first-year students took this class during their first semester at the institution. The class was designed to help first-year students develop basic college skills including critical thinking, writing, and oral communication. Students were also tasked with participating in a SaP project of their own. They had to create presentations that were the culmination of a semester-long assignment and that required group work to complete. At the end of the semester, each group then made a campus-wide presentation, demonstrating the way in which they had become subject experts.

Throughout the class, there were various feedback mechanisms given to the students to gauge the success of the course. This included both a midterm and end-of-semester survey evaluating satisfaction with the course along with whether or not the student partner's impact on the course felt noticeable (e.g., Do you think Joe's input in designing this course has been noticeable?; How satisfied are you with the writing assignments in this course?). Additionally, we looked at institutionally administered course evaluations for any mention of level of satisfaction with the course or the student partner's impact. After compiling the data and going through the open coding process, we noticed some key themes in students' feedback. These themes included the visible presence of the student partner throughout the course, the relatability of having a student partner create the course, and students feeling prepared for their college education.

The first theme of the student feedback pertained to the visible presence of the student partner throughout the course. This was accomplished with pre-recorded video segments by Joe directly speaking to the class. We decided to use these videos to make sure that students were invested in SaP and knew that Joe was an integral part of the course design and implementation even though he was enrolled in his own courses at the time this course was offered. Students responded positively to his presence:

> Being able to walk into class and seeing a video of Joe explaining the next assignment and his suggestion of when to start it. Also, being able to have a student to talk to when you have any questions was really awesome too. My learning experience was completely different compared to my other courses. Having a student and a professor made me learn so much more and I was truly appreciative to have this opportunity.

> I believe that the co-created class under a student-faculty partnership was more beneficial. This affected my experience by giving a better understanding to the class. This was done with videos from Joe at the beginning of every chapter. Also, by a clear explanation on what kind of effort was required to do well.
>
> I feel that this class being co-created in partnership with a student definitely aided in the explanation of the sociological aspect of the class. The terms were clear and understandable for a first-year class that consisted of many different majors and levels of interest in sociology.

Students often smiled when Elizabeth would play a new video at the beginning of class, often saying "Hi Joe" in response to the video. While faculty often convey to their classes things such as course expectations, assignment details and deadlines, and substantive material, hearing the same information come from a peer was perceived to be more beneficial than coming from the professor.

Second, not only was Joe's presence noticeable and welcome, students reported that he made the class more personable. Using SaP in an FYS provides students with a more relatable pillar in their education. Students noted in their feedback that faculty have not been in the seat of an undergraduate student for a very long time, making them feel less approachable. However, under the SaP approach, students appreciated that they had a peer providing professorial insight alongside the faculty member, giving students someone more relatable in the course. When asked about their experience in the class, this was the most prevalent theme, as the following student comments demonstrate:

> My experience in this class felt very familiar and welcoming meaning that Joe knows what being a student is like, so he co-created the course with that in mind. Making it simple.
>
> It honestly made the class better. Joe's input made it better for the students. His input helped us a lot because he knows what it's like being a college student. He was able to help set things up so that we didn't become overwhelmed. This course was probably one of my favorites because I like *Star Wars* and I like Sociology. It was able to blend the two. This course was very interesting.
>
> I think this affected me in a good way. Joe sits in my seat everyday and understands what it's like to be a student in today's time.
>
> It affected my experience by giving me something to relate to within the class. I knew that it wasn't going to just be 100% all the professor's input going into the course. My learning experience was much greater when compared to other courses because I had many different ways to learn.

> I feel like it affected my experience because you got to feel the student part of the class and also because I know Joe. I got help from him and got to ask him questions about the class.

While we had anticipated that there would be benefits for both the student and faculty partners when utilizing SaP to cross the threshold, we did not anticipate the significant impact it appears to have had on the students in our co-created class. They too seem to have crossed a threshold when it comes to their assessment of having someone deemed more relatable conveying the same information. This increased their perceptions of success in the class and helped them develop a sense of belonging on campus.

The third theme that we noticed in the student feedback was the level of preparedness students felt they achieved in this course. Since student success is a primary goal of an FYS course, we designed a variety of assessments that would measure this goal including writing assignments, tests, group work, and public speaking presentations. Students suggested in their feedback that the course did make them feel adequately prepared to handle the rigor of future college courses:

> This was a class that assigned a lot of work, between papers and other work, just like my English class. In my English class, not many people understood what was due and when. However, in this class the structure was made so everyone could understand.

> I had to do more intense group work for this course than any other course that I am taking, which for me took away from how I completed assignments that were part of the entire group "effort."

> My least favorite part of the Experience Event was the nerves I had before it. I get really nervous and I was super scared to present in-front of many people. My favorite part of it was me overcoming my nerves and being proud of myself after it.

These responses suggest that Joe's collaboration in the curriculum design resonated with his peers. His understanding of what skills students needed to build in their first semester of college and how to get them to actively engage with our course assignments was invaluable to our FYS.

Constant feedback is important for any course creator, but even more so for ones seeking to actively give students an amplified voice in their own education. It gives an idea of what students like and dislike about a course. This feedback is truly irreplaceable in the assessment of the success of a course, particularly one grounded in SaP. We were grateful not only for the positive feedback but also for more critical assessments of assignments or course structure that could be used to improve the course in its next iteration, such as the following comments:

> This course was one of my favorite courses this semester. . . . Knowing that this class was co-created with a student, and was also being taught for the first time, I came into

> the class expecting for there to be rough spots. Things like the essays at the beginning of the semester or the scheduling of out of class trips felt off. However, they were off by product of it being a new class, not a failure on behalf of the curriculum. My all-time favorite part about this class was the Experience Event we did, something none of my other classes would have even thought of doing. Projects like that showed genuine collaboration by both student and teacher, and I'd love to see more in the future.
>
> I do not know how to incorporate it into a sociology class, but I would recommend talking about the music of *Star Wars* for a day. The soundtrack is just as memorable and well-known as the characters, along with the fact that John Williams did an amazing job in every movie. It would be interesting to talk about how themes are reused in different trilogies, and also how different songs are used in different contexts throughout a trilogy such as "Duel of Fates" in the prequels.

We loved this last comment so much, we decided to create a Sociology of *Star Wars* music module for the class in the fall of 2019. The students seemed to appreciate this course overall and provided a large amount of feedback and their personal assessments of the course throughout its duration. We feel this is imperative to both an FYS course and the SaP model, and our use of it in curriculum development made a positive learning experience for both the enrolled students as well as ourselves.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Over the past six months, we have actively sought to change the student-faculty dynamic while increasing the success of an FYS course at our institution. We embarked on this project excited to create a new experience for ourselves and our students. In doing so, we discovered several implications of SaP pedagogy, particularly in the FYS course context.

First, we found that the FYS context greatly benefits from the innovation of the SaP pedagogy. Students felt more engaged and connected to the course because of the student partner's role in the course design. His presence in the class, even in the form of a pre-recorded video, gave them confidence and helped them feel as though they were more prepared to face the challenges of college life and that they in fact belonged on a college campus. This is particularly important for first-year students and especially meaningful for first-generation students who least know what to expect in college. These findings also have implications when it comes to the issue of stereotype threat that many contemporary students face when they arrive on a college campus. Steele (1997) suggests that stereotype threat is a sense of not belonging coupled with a fear of performing a negative stereotype associated with one's group identity characteristics. This is especially relevant for racial minorities and first-generation college students with no idea what to expect on campus or in the classroom. The findings from our racially diverse sample suggest that SaP may have a role in helping students overcome this threat by providing them a sense of belonging and giving them a boost in confidence that they will be successful in college. These results would also have implications for student retention which is particularly important during the fall to spring semester of a first-year student.

Secondly, our findings demonstrate how impactful a peer can be when given the chance to be a subject expert. Historically, we have seen this in traditional student leader roles on campuses including resident assistants, peer tutors, and student government. Our findings indicate that peers in curriculum design and their presence in the classroom should also be utilized to increase student success and connectedness, especially when it comes to incoming first-year students. As our students noted from their own SaP experience, they were very proud of their participation in the campus wide presentation event which made not only them, but students in the audience, imagine what their own student-faculty partnership might look like and in what other areas they might be viewed as subject experts. SaP is then capable of increasing student investment in the college experience in general and in their campus in particular.

Finally, both partners had a transformative experience in which they crossed the threshold of traditional faculty-student relationships. We concur that "genuine partnership in learning and teaching is an act of resistance to the traditional, often implicit, but accepted, hierarchical structure where staff have power over students" (Matthews, 2017, p. 6). Both partners felt an equal opportunity to contribute to the course design, each having to learn to cope with a shift in authority. Elizabeth had to break free from authoritative expectations as a subject expert to allow Joe the freedom to teach her what students want and need. Joe had to overcome submissive expectations as a passive learner seeking knowledge to assert his expertise at being a successful student. While this originally made us both uncomfortable, the experience changed our outdated view of traditional relationships on a college campus and made us want to advocate for reimagining a larger role for student-faculty partnerships in classrooms across campus, not only for the student and faculty partners but for the students enrolled in their class.

Through our own perspectives about crossing the threshold combined with student feedback on the course's success, it appears that relying on the expertise of the student partner was successful in changing the experience of each person touched by this course. Students enrolled in the class and those who attended the student-led campus event approached us for advice about initiating their own SaP curriculum-design project at the institution. It is this enthusiasm and feedback that we hope to share across our own campus while also inspiring and encouraging our readers to seek SaP opportunities at their own institutions without waiting for a campus-wide initiative. By sharing our own subjective experiences as the researchers, we hope to strengthen the understanding of the transformative threshold moment and its significance in perpetuating SaP as a process rather than a static moment. This is important when considering the long-lasting implications for the student success and retention campuses seek.

This project clearly has institutional and geographic limitations that we note. Additionally, Bindra et al. (2018) note a significant problem with SaP pedagogy in that it can act as a mechanism that reproduces inequality at institutions that fail to acknowledge the importance of including minority students even if they do not meet certain GPA or academic standards. They note that SaP projects that do not adequately compensate student partners monetarily also privilege wealthy students who can afford to partake in the experience without

pay. Disrupting these traditional power structures is a valuable component of SaP as a threshold concept and should be further investigated.

This research was successfully reviewed according to our institution's IRB committee guidelines.

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NOTES

1. The student partner recorded eight videos played in class which were also integrated in the LMS. They ranged from 1-3 minutes in length and included a welcome to the class, writing tips and tricks, writing assignment instructions, midterm exam study hints, previews of upcoming course materials, presentation help, how to be successful on the final exam, and a goodbye. They would appear about every other week as the class was learning a new skill or making a transition in subject material.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Holding Space and Engaging with Difference: Navigating the Personal Theories We Carry into Our Pedagogical Partnership Practices

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ABSTRACT

Partnerships between students and faculty are increasingly established within higher education. Everyone's unique life story or background influences how they understand partnership praxis. Acknowledging individual understandings of student-faculty partnership matters because personal stories can influence how such partnerships form, function, and evolve. We, as students and faculty, share our individual theories of partnership to illuminate differing ways people can make sense of partnership as praxis. Using a reflective, autoethnographic research approach, we unpack two interdependent threads from our narratives: (a) holding space for how personal histories shape the experience of partnership and (b) engaging the messiness of partnership. To understand and nurture inclusive practices, we contend, means engaging the unique standpoints and social positions that both students and faculty bring into partnerships. Instead of attempting to collapse and converge different perspectives of partnership, we take pause to consider how these differences can enrich partnerships and be honoured throughout a partnership.

KEYWORDS

students as partners, partnership, narratives, stories, faculty-student partnership

Quality relationships between students and faculty (i.e., educators) matter in higher education (Cureton & Gravestock, 2018). Engaging in pedagogical partnerships, often discussed within the umbrella term Students as Partners (SaP), is fundamentally about learner-teacher relationships. Students can partner with faculty in and out of the classroom on an array of initiatives such as governance; curriculum enhancement; pedagogical practices; assessment design; discipline-based knowledge creation; institutional research, including the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL); and student experience (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). Research on Students as Partners (or research using similar terms) reveals a range of beneficial outcomes for both students and staff, such as improved engagement, learning, employability, and student-faculty relationships, along with a reduction in barriers inhibiting partnership practices including power, resistance, and logistics (Matthews, Mercer-Mapstone, et al., 2019). Partnerships are messy, sociocultural, and relational in nature where power and identity are always a factor (Matthews, Cook-Sather, et al., 2019).

In the spirit of partnership as a messy work-in-progress and out of a commitment to reflective writing and stories as legitimate scholarship (Cook-Sather, Abbot, & Felten, 2019; Healey, Matthews, & Cook-Sather, 2019), we join ongoing conversations about theorizations of partnership. We argue personal stories are sometimes lost in theorizations of partnership, and we encourage incorporating these unique stories and social locations (e.g., role, status, structure) as part of efforts to theorize partnership (e.g., Bovill & Bulley, 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Matthews, 2017; Matthews, Cook-Sather, et al., 2019).

We dive into the diverse ways we come to, make sense of, and communicate about partnership praxis through an autoethnographic approach where we share our five individual theories of partnership. From these, we unpack two interwoven threads about engaging in student-faculty partnerships: (a) holding space for how personal histories shape partnership and (b) engaging the messiness of partnership. We close with implications for how practitioners can nurture partnership as ongoing, dynamic, and complex relationships. Specifically, by encouraging practitioners to listen *and* hear each other's perspectives—to hold space—and to consider how people from various social locations can partner in learning and teaching.

Diversity in our life stories and how we make sense of partnership may not surprise readers, as it would seem self-evident that making space for dialogue matters to any partnership, particularly in power-laden and hierarchical educational structures. Yet, research into student-faculty partnerships demonstrates students and faculty do not always do what is self-evident. For example, a student in an extracurricular partnership project remarked,

> Sometimes communication was a bit of a struggle because everybody has their own way of formulating their opinions and everybody has their own perspectives. And at times we found that we were all formulating our opinions but we weren't actively listening to each other even though most of our opinions all had things in common. (Marquis, Black, & Healey, 2017, p. 727)

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As a result, this student reported a loss of motivation and burn out (Marquis et al., 2017). This troubling result sounds the horn for more nuanced and attentive research that acknowledges the complex and multiple ways of being in partnership. As Marquis et al. (2017) argued, research into student-faculty partnership must move beyond the "celebratory" and "universalism" in scholarship and practice that masks variation.

While engaging in partnership can have an array of beneficial outcomes, literature indicates navigating relationships and the power dynamics inherent to them is the most widely reported inhibitor for partnership practices (Matthews, Mercer-Mapstone, et al., 2019). We also acknowledge the majority of research about pedagogical partnership has come from Western scholars in anglophone contexts and involves small numbers of students, and there are strong calls for more participation of equity-seeking students (Bindra et al., 2018; Green, 2019; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; O'Shea, 2017). Such research is emerging, yet the lived realities are complicated (de Bie, Marquis, Cook-Sather, & Luqueño, 2019; Cook-Sather, 2018). Yahlnaaw (2019), an Indigenous student reflecting on partnership experiences, explained,

> I did not want to speak against those who were not students. . . . I felt that my voice was irrelevant as a student and as an Indigenous person—I was simply there to fulfil the diversity requirement . . .the dominance of colonial knowledges and pedagogical practices left me feeling I had little room to share my knowledge. (p. 7)

Much work remains to understand and nurture meaningful and inclusive learner-teacher partnership practices, which means asking tough questions about taken-for-granted dynamics that shape student-faculty interactions (Matthews, 2019). In this paper, we explore our diverse theories and stories of partnership in an attempt to hold space throughout a partnership to appreciate each other's ways of seeing the world instead of presuming a shared partnership identity that suggests a neat and easy process.

CONNECTING, WRITING, AND REFLECTING TOGETHER: OUR RESEARCH APPROACH

We embrace a reflective, shared auto-ethnographic research design that privileges subjectivity and reader-writer relationships. We draw on Merriam's (2009) notions of the socially constructed world where individuals hold differing perspectives shaped by worldviews and life experiences. First, we introduce ourselves in Table 1 and then share the story of the research and writing processes that led to our theorizations of partnership. Our research approach was emergent and fluid as we engaged in vibrant conversations, debates, analysis, and writing. We subscribed to an ethos of openness in designing and carrying out a research partnership.

Table 1. Who we are (in alphabetical order) and how we describe ourselves in our own words in relation to this work

Alise	When we initially started working together, I was a PhD student, as well as a

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	university staff member and instructor. I have since graduated from being a student. I've participated in a number of formal "Students as Partners" projects since 2016—paid as a student on some, and as a staff member on others—at McMaster University in Canada. I am also involved as a "service user" on partnership projects with mental health care professionals, while in other moments I am situated as a social work "professional" and instructor of social work courses on disability/madness. Additionally, I have been both a community organizer of Mad/disability peer support groups where I identify as a peer/member, as well as a "partner" in social justice projects with equity-seeking groups to which I do not belong. As a result of simultaneously occupying numerous locations/positions within a range of partnerships (student-faculty, service user-service provider, community-university, peer-based, cross-equity), my relationships to partnership are rather complicated!
Chris	I am a PhD student (in Learning Sciences) at the University of Calgary, Canada. I have participated in several student-faculty research partnerships within my faculty and the university's institute for teaching and learning. My doctoral research focuses on how educators perceive disability and inclusion, and how their perceptions shape practice. I am also interested in how educators and students can collaborate to better understand and improve teaching and learning. I have been the Student Engagement Advisor for the SoTL Canada Council and co-chair of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) Student Engagement Interest Group.
Frits	At this moment, I am retired from being a senior staff member from the HAN University of Applied Science in The Netherlands and also from being a teacher and researcher in Dutch language and literature, after more than forty years in secondary and higher education. I do miss young people around me at this moment. They inspire me to do what I have to do in life! I have my own company to coach and guide both professionals and students and pupils. I plan to write articles or even a book about how students and professionals can work together as real partners. In the past I have written a book about Emotional Intelligence in Education, two books about how to study in higher education and a lot of articles and columns about education, but almost all of them were in Dutch. Currently, I am co-grandparenting six kids with fun and pride.
Kelly	I am now an associate professor working in a centralised teaching and learning unit at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. I moved to Australia from New Orleans, USA in 2006. I completed my PhD in 2014 in education while working full-time. I co-parent two kids born in 2013 and 2017. In 2015 I was awarded an Australian Learning and Teaching Fellowship on the topic of engaging

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	students as partners in learning and teaching. Since then I have spent a lot of time engaging in, and thinking and writing about, Students as Partners in higher education.
Rayna	I completed my doctoral education in Developmental Psychology at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. Following this, as I grew increasingly passionate about student support, I completed a Postdoctoral position with our graduate school and teaching institute, where I focused on providing students with training to enhance their research, teaching, and professional development. I am currently a Lecturer within the Child & Adolescent Development department at San José State University (SJSU) in California, USA. Here, I've been working with SJSU's Peer Connections to partner with Student Peer Educators in my classroom. These Peer Educators provide academic and resource support for students in courses across the university that typically have lower success rates.

We—five co-authors from four countries, with differing experiences with student-faculty partnerships—connected at the 2018 International Students as Partners Institute (ISaPI). This annual event brings together people to encourage "stretching participants' thinking about the possibilities for [student-faculty] partnership" (Marquis et al., 2019, p. 191). At ISaPI, we observed the many ways attendees made sense of partnership by drawing on their pedagogical stances and life histories to translate, often implicitly, theoretical frameworks of student-faculty partnership to discussions of practice. Kelly became curious about how the attendees' personal theories of partnership (compared to more objective or abstract theorizing) intersected with attempts to engage students and faculty as partners at their institutions. Kelly, thinking and reading about praxis—where theory (thinking) and practice (doing) are intertwined in constant conversation (Freire, 1970)—invited attendees, including undergraduate students, postgraduate students, academics/faculty, administrators, and professional staff to join a post-ISaPI collaboration exploring students as partners praxis.

In joining the collaboration, ISaPI participants were asked to share their personal theories of partnership, which were described as "the set of principles that inform and guide your practice of being in teaching and learning partnerships in higher education." The invitation was open-ended, with no expectation of reference to specific theoretical models. The four of us, Alise, Chris, Frits and Rayna, answered the call and joined Kelly. We note no undergraduate students or non-academic staff (beyond Alise who held multiple roles) elected to participate. The five of us come from different countries but our demographic makeup is similar and representative of ISaPI attendees: white, privileged, and from Western countries. We are an intergenerational collaboration ranging from early career to retirement with differing sexual identifications, mental health/disability backgrounds, and first languages.

We collaborated in a year-long series of conversations (via virtual meetings and emails), individual writing, and co-writing about student-faculty partnership. Our inquiry was centred on our collective self—the *auto* of autoethnography—"studying one's own experiences or those of

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one's community," where there is "an emphasis on the creative resources of writing, especially narrative, for generating, recording, and analyzing data" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260). Our approach privileged the narrative accounts of our personal theories of partnership, and our reflective processes supported and challenged us "to explore different realities and knowledges about learning and teaching" (Trahar, 2009, p. 1). Combining reflection and autoethnography invites personal and socially situated lived experiences to be the focus of inquiry (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Like Duarte's (2007) self-exploration as a SoTL practitioner, we are practitioners of partnership seeking to enhance our "sensitivity towards the knowledge gained in the process" (p. 2) of reflective analysis.

OUR PERSONAL THEORIES OF STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIP

After writing our personal theories, we realized our individual narratives were qualitatively different in tone, style, and content. Several of us initially tried a traditional approach to analysis of thematic grouping but felt the result was too sterile, too simple, and too void of our unique perspectives that brought us together. Our initial analysis was also asynchronous and individual, and it became apparent that none of us could authentically capture the perspectives of others without doing this work collaboratively rather than cooperatively (i.e., negotiating and developing ideas together rather than assembling ideas developed individually). Further discussions led us to keep the messiness of our personal theories and leverage them toward better understanding the complexities of student-faculty partnerships.

Our belief that people's experiences inform their personal theories of partnership inspired us to ask: What ideas are lost and privileged over others in the name of consensus? What personal histories of teaching, learning, partnership, and life are masked by neatly crafted lists of partnership principles or practices? Can we hold spaces for diverse or conflicting perspectives and still be considered partners? We argue partnership is relational work and should engage these questions thoughtfully, which we attempted in co-writing this paper. We share our theories in their raw form (presented below in alphabetical order) and reflect on how our ideas converge and diverge as we consider the implications for partnership praxis.

Alise de Bie, Postdoctoral Research Fellow (PhD student at the time of writing)

My theory focuses on how partnership approaches might contribute to social justice—both at the micro level as well as campus-wide. I appreciate how partnerships invite different ways of relating to each other (relational justice), as opposed to only rearranging our infrastructure (structural justice), but I also want them to have impacts and effects beyond interpersonal relationships. At the same time, I'm really cautious about the notion of "partnership." The disability/psychiatric survivor communities I belong to have developed significant critiques of collaboration with more powerful others (de Bie 2020; de Bie & Raaper, 2019).

Inspiration

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My thinking towards and against partnership is informed by the academic disciplines of Mad(ness) and Disability Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, psychiatric survivor organizing, and the theoretical conceptualizations of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), ethical loneliness (Stauffer, 2015), and psycho-emotional disablism (Reeve, 2012) that I developed through my doctoral work. I also think about how some of the proposed values/principles/goals of SaP (like trust, empathy, empowerment) have been theorized and troubled by survivors of trauma, feminists, and other critical theorists (de Bie, 2020). I value how theoretical frameworks can help me better understand—conceptually and practically—my experiences of and politics on partnership.

Importance

The university can be very isolating for people from equity-seeking groups, especially when we're engaged in equity-related studies (e.g., gender studies, disability studies) and have few colleagues working in our area. In response, I have had to search for colleagues across the institution. Often, folks interested in teaching, as part of that commitment, actually care about students, and engage in a lot of care labour to support them. Consequently, I've appreciated associating with these colleagues and SaP spaces that seek to challenge the university's usual culture of abandonment and neglect—even when I'm conflicted about partnership as a practice.

Rayna Friendly, Lecturer

My theory is that the student-faculty partnership can aim to be *equitable* (i.e., fair) but will never be equal (i.e., the same). The power dynamic between students and faculty is always present in some form, in the fact that students are given their grades, certifications, and reference letters by faculty. Thus, the status between the "partners" will never be truly equal. For this reason, during pedagogical partnerships, faculty have a responsibility to protect students in their relatively vulnerable positions, as well as to become a source of empowerment and mentorship for students.

Inspiration

As a teacher and researcher within the field of child development, I frequently consider ethical practices when working with vulnerable human populations. I've learned to question whether individuals are put into positions of potential harm (psychological, physical, confidentiality, etc.), and then restructure those situations in order to reduce the likelihood of such harms occurring. The same applies to situations when students and faculty form partnerships. One way my university reduces student vulnerability is to ensure faculty do not partner with students currently in their courses, to mitigate any potential grading biases by a student's faculty partner.

Importance

I believe a student-faculty partnership can be equitable where both parties can benefit from working together, each contributing in a "fair" way as agreed upon early in the

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partnership. I hope academic institutions will consider, ahead of time, the power dynamics that exist in these partnerships, as well as anticipate conflicts that may arise when designing or redesigning students-as-partners initiatives. This will help prevent potentially harmful outcomes for students (academically and professionally), while increasing chances for equitable and successful student-faculty partnerships.

Kelly Matthews, Associate Professor (Higher Education)

My theory is about relationships. For me, engaging with students as partners in higher education is about learner-teacher relationships. The spirit of challenging the status quo resonates with me. The SaP movement raises all kinds of questions about how students and academics (faculty) are positioned in relation to each other. How are they relating? The construct of partnership challenges traditional notions of how students and academics can interact and work together on learning and teaching. The values of partnership inform my practice. Empathy allows people to understand each other's standpoint. Being open to broader notions of who gets to contribute their expertise enables another way for students and academics to learning together. In doing so, assumptions about the "job of a student" and the "job of a teacher" are questioned, re-imagined, and re-shaped through dialogue.

Inspiration

As a student, I have rarely felt comfortable being myself in classrooms. As a teacher, I felt equally uncomfortable and constrained but in different ways. Growing up in New Orleans, I also took for granted my daily encounters with people from a range of standpoints and "diverse" groups, which felt comfortable and familiar in contrast to my daily life in Brisbane. Human relationships that foster questioning and challenge norms created possibilities that have transformed me far more than any classroom. I want those human relationships that engender an independence of thinking to be more common in higher education. SaP has given me the words to talk about what I think learning could be and the community to explore this thinking.

Importance

My theory of partnership gives me permission to be a different kind of academic. Through the broader SaP movement, I can connect with other people who share a commitment and ethos even though our practices might look different.

Christopher Ostrowdun, PhD Candidate (Learning Sciences)

My theory is rooted in how students and faculty do partnership, and what informs how partnership is done. The former is about what students and faculty bring to partnership (e.g., attitudes, expertise), what each does (e.g., shared goals, empathy, learning from each other), and what each leaves with (e.g., project outcomes, personal growth). For the latter, I draw on Clandinin's (2013) work on narrative inquiry, which I used in my Master's degree work, to see partnership as people coming alongside each other's lives. Partnerships are shaped by where

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they occur (physically and metaphorically), when they occur in the lives of each member (e.g., career stage, undergraduate/graduate student), and how each member engages in the relationship (e.g., social dynamics around power, intention, values).

Inspiration

In my experiences in SoTL partnerships with students and faculty, we sometimes reflected individually and collectively about our experiences of a partnership. We tried to make sense of what went well and our aspirations for future partnerships. Often we felt a partnership was greater than the sum of its parts and struggled to pinpoint what made a partnership tick. Our models and frameworks always felt incomplete, as if we were perpetually chasing just the right theory to capture it all.

Importance

With this theoretical framing I attempt to articulate three stages of partnership—coming, doing, and going—and unpack three of the forces at play—place, time, and people—that inform what happens. I believe a humble, yet intentional, awareness of these forces can foster positive partnerships and an appreciation for the ebbs and flows that occur. Crucially, members of a partnership should actively discuss such forces and avoid assumptions about people's lives and experiences.

Frits Roelofs, (Retired) Senior Staff Member

My theory compares educational partnership with other partnerships, such as my life-partner, a sparring-partner, or even a partner-in-crime. In every partnership you see three "C"s. First, "contact": We have to spend time and energy to know each other as human persons. How do I drink my coffee, what is the colour of your eyes, and so on. The second, "contract": What do we have to do with/for each other? Raise our kids, start a business, study together? There are mutual goals. The third, "complementarity": After the first two Cs we can investigate where our differences are. How can I fill what my partner isn't capable to realize? How can we be reciprocal in a partnership? In education all over the world, people can only work and exist by the willingness of others to be part of the process of education. Imagine what it would look like if a teacher is teaching but no students are there. There is a great interdependency, and few people are aware of that.

Inspiration

When I look back to my history in education, both as a student and a teacher, the common thread is and was always the collaboration of all the people in education. Not only students and teachers, but also the collaboration of parents, managers, and others involved in education.

Importance

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By acknowledging and working with this interdependency, education could really change into a 21st-century-worthy and sustainable system where the main goal is learning, understood in all facets of the word, and not selecting the "right" people for the "right" goals.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR PERSONAL THEORIES

Our theories reflect a shared interest in partnership, while highlighting the various priorities and histories that influence how we understand partnership. We unpack two interdependent threads from our narratives: (a) holding space for how personal histories shape experiences of partnership and (b) engaging the messiness of partnership practices. We ask readers to consider how such factors can both complicate and enrich inclusive and meaningful student-faculty partnerships.

Holding space for personal histories in partnership praxis

Reflecting on our five personal theories of partnership shows how individual histories shape the ways people make sense of student-faculty partnership. Holding space is about listening to and hearing another person's perspectives and histories without passing judgement, and it avoids disempowering or devaluing another person's experiences (Floyd, 2016). Personal histories—the rich and intricate stories people bring, share, as well as develop together through lived experiences with others—frame the standpoints and expectations of individuals and institutions in learning communities (Mårtensson, Roxå, & Stensaker, 2014). The different interpersonal and community relationships of our histories shape our dispositions, priorities, and the details of what we really mean by partnership. For example, Kelly plays with the paradox of valuing human relationships and connections while also valuing them as a way to engender independent thinking. Her feelings of discomfort in being herself growing up inspire Kelly to rethink relationships between students and faculty that question the unwritten rules of learner-teacher dynamics. In contrast, Alise writes about belonging to disability/psychiatric survivor communities and how the hesitation of "partnership" within these spaces has informed a critique of partnership as inherently good.

Kelly wants to engage students in partnership and foster relationships, but the historic wounds of partnering with more powerful others run deep and wide among members of particular communities, such as the disability/psychiatric survivor communities noted by Alise, which makes members of such communities cautious about partnerships. Yahlnaaw (2019), as an Indigenous person, experienced such a challenge first-hand when collaborating with some SoTL scholars and was told their Indigenous "approach to research was labelled 'alternative' because [they] do not believe in data collection in the Western tradition" (p. 7). To which Yahlnaaw remarked, "Indigenous knowledges were present long before colonial knowledges; therefore, if anything is to be labelled alternative, it is colonial knowledges" (p. 7). Such exchanges highlight the fragility of relationships and a need for both groups to have an equitable seat at the table. This means positioning students as empowered partners informed by their lived experiences and not as figurative advisors or commentators. It also means a mutual respect for troubled histories throughout a project, not just a lukewarm acknowledgement at the start. Trust between student and faculty partners is delicate, and a

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sense of caution may never dissolve. For example, holding space for Alise's kind, but firm, reminders of the complicated personal histories we bring to partnership helped make our writing more thoughtful and humble by challenging our assumptions about partnership praxis.

Several of us also tap into broader theoretical perspectives intertwined with lived experiences in how we understand partnership. Chris leverages narrative inquiry as a formal way to connect others' lived experiences with academia or to connect across disciplinary boundaries, where norms and practices may differ. Alise aligns their experiences with Mad (psychiatric), disability, and gender studies. Similarly, Rayna's training in child development and experience working with vulnerable populations inform a woven stance on protection and empowerment of students in such partnerships. Each theoretical lens a partner brings has specific histories and philosophical underpinnings, which are sometimes incompatible. For instance, Dollinger and Mercer-Mapstone's (2019) frank debate about neoliberal versus social justice lenses to student engagement showcases how seemingly opposing ideas can find points of connection, though not necessarily consensus or agreement. Explicitly creating spaces for conversations about individual perspectives can encourage partners to find ways to effectively engage in partnership despite—and sometimes because of—opposing ideas. However, some perspectives may be irreconcilable and forcing such a partnership could be damaging to those involved. Treading into unfamiliar territory requires time and space, yet they are crucial in better knowing how past experiences and familiarities with philosophical traditions shape future trajectories of partnership.

Each of our personal histories colour how we understand and engage in partnership. At the same time, when we and other scholars invoke models or principles of partnership (e.g., Bovill & Bulley, 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Matthews, 2017) or derive new theorizations, it can be easy to lose such stories in an effort to generalize across contexts (Matthews, Cook-Sather, et al., 2019). Competing forces to find consensus, honour personal histories, and complete a project can strain a partnership. Such tension can be healthy if approached with a humble, thoughtful, and dialogic lens, while also respecting cases where irreconcilable differences indicate a partnership should not proceed.

Engaging with the messiness of partnership

Teaching and learning research is messy (Johnsen, Pacht, VanSlyck, & Tsao, 2009), as are relational and lived pedagogical partnerships (Matthews, Cook-Sather, et al., 2019). People constantly straddle multiple contexts and relationships, and a student-faculty partnership may only be one small piece of a person's life. Each of us, in our own ways, encountered the messiness of partnership when writing our personal theories and reflecting upon them. While drafting this article—itself a partnership project—we wallowed in the messiness of how to connect, but also appreciate, our unique perspectives. In our conversations, Alise reminded us that plain "acceptance" of diversity can halt a person trying to meaningfully engage with differences—to hear *and* listen to each other. Moreover, some differences are irreconcilable and can challenge a partnership and attempts to find consensus or shared meaning.

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Some of us reflected on messiness in terms of power and identity. As one example, Alise's narrative troubles common presumptions of partnership as inherently a "good thing" and highlights the complexity of partnerships between students and faculty. For instance, how partnerships might be negotiated when members identify as belonging to a marginalized group alongside identifying as a student or faculty. Alise has seen negative repercussions for people belonging to disability/psychiatric survivor communities when they are part of educational collaborations that include substantial power disparities. Rayna emphasizes "faculty have a responsibility to protect students in their relatively vulnerable positions," which speaks to the messiness of power dynamics intersecting with identities. Faculty hold power but can also be vulnerable. Students and faculty share a responsibility of being empathetic and compassionate in understanding each other's identities and positions of power when engaging in partnership.

Some of us touched on the messiness of life intersecting with partnership. For instance, Chris resonates with the notion of coming alongside each other's lives (Clandinin, 2013) to acknowledge that the messiness of a partnership is couched within the messiness of life. He recalls how members of a partnership adapted to one member temporarily stepping away after having a child—a common life event, yet one not provisioned by many theoretical models of student-faculty partnership. We similarly experienced varying availability of time and energy as Alise defended their PhD and Rayna grappled with a heavy teaching load. These examples show the parallel tracks of students and faculty co-existing in shared spaces but experiencing them in diverse ways. Being busy is common but both sides may be unaware of the other's perspectives: students seldom get to peer behind the curtain of academic life and faculty may be years or decades removed from being a student. Partnerships need to acknowledge the complications of such differences and foster resilience to navigate a project's ebbs and flows.

Frits notes navigating and renegotiating traditional student-faculty norms is uncomfortable and emotional work, yet critical for meaningful partnerships (Hermsen, Kuiper, Roelofs, & van Wijchen, 2017). By playing with the analogy of life-partners or sparring-partners, he emphasizes how the range of emotions in a partnership defines its richness. For Frits, being a pedagogical partner asks people to draw on their beliefs about partnership in the domain of daily life and imagine them in the domain of education. Frits' perspective reiterates how personal histories and experiences inside and outside the academy complicate partnerships but also give them meaning. Together, our narratives visualize the messiness and the richness of partnership that scholars encounter as they attempt to theorize partnership praxis (Matthews, Cook-Sather, et al., 2019).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

The layers and levels of our theories vary, but a linking thread among us is relationships. Where we diverge is in how those relationships form, and what they mean for the practice and scholarship of partnership. For instance, as a student, Chris encourages faculty to use inclusive practices that do not presume students always want to be partners and recognize how students' personal lives could influence how they engage in partnership. In their roles as faculty, Rayna and Kelly point to their responsibilities to acknowledge power dynamics and

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reconsider professional identities within traditional student-faculty relationships. Frits, now retired after a lifetime in the academy, reminds us to zoom out to the bigger picture of partnerships in life. He stresses interdependence between partners and getting to know each other as individuals rather than just by student or teacher roles. We relish this dissonance. We take pause.

We hope others take pause to consider diverse perspectives of partnership and how they are shaped by personal histories. Holding space for alternative experiences of student-faculty partnership and personal histories can encourage people to resist quick movements toward consensus (e.g., progressing to project outcomes, publishing a paper; de Bie, 2020). Moreover, as researchers continue to theorize Students-as-Partners models to recognize that partnership is not a one-size-fits-all practice (Matthews, Cook-Sather, et al., 2019), we advocate people take time to identify narratives and perspectives that are at odds and consider ways to engage in partnership. As well, we encourage people to recognize when not to engage in partnership because of irreconcilable differences and the potential for harm. To facilitate more inclusive partnerships, we invite partners to iteratively revisit personal histories and perspectives to consider how these could be shaping a project and which perspectives are being privileged over others. In doing so, we are not seeking forced or performative self-disclosure, as some people might feel uncomfortable disclosing different perspectives. In other words, sharing a personal history or conceptions of partnership should be an opportunity, not a requirement.

(Re)visiting personal histories before, during, and after partnership can be especially meaningful in moments of dissonance as partners reflect on their experiences and consider future trajectories. These are also moments to reimagine what partnerships are, and could be, as part of broader discussions about teaching and learning in higher education. Partnerships are chances to question the status-quo and push against dehumanizing and inequitable traditions of academia in how relations between students and faculty are conceived (Bindra et al., 2018; Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017; Dwyer, 2018). We advocate for a partnership ethic that values human relationships by engaging the diverse life histories and stories that shape the unpredictable processes of learning, knowing, and being together in higher education.

Limitations and future directions

While this paper reflects an initial effort to think across the diverse perspectives we bring to this work, our social locations as white co-authors from Western countries no doubt limits how we theorize the impact of our personal histories on partnership. Contributions from non-dominant perspectives are needed to better understand and further theorize how personal histories inform work in partnership. Further work could explore more structured ways to hold space for personal histories and engage messiness within, or in addition to, existing partnership models. As well, research is needed to better understand how different perspectives and social locations of partners impact experiences and processes of partnership. In future work, we as authors, are curious about the perspectives of those from marginalized groups regarding the

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possibilities and limitations of partnership approaches, and the circumstances in which partnership might have negative consequences.

CONCLUSION

In the spirit of reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and praxis (Freire, 1970), we bring our narratives into conversation with personal histories and messiness as central constructs in partnership. In doing so, we tackle the necessary and generative tensions in how partnership praxis is theorized as complex, relational work (Matthews, Cook-Sather, et al., 2019). Instead of masking variation or striving for a tight conception of partnership, we deliberately keep our unique standpoints in view to inform how and why we engage in partnership practices. We urge for expansive thinking that enables practitioners to bring their own complicated stories and evolving theories to the growing movement of Students as Partners in an effort to enrich learning, teaching, and partnership work.

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CASE STUDY

Our Quest for Success: Using a Multidisciplinary Students-as-Partners Model to Develop an Innovative Online Learning Game

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ABSTRACT

In their review of the students-as-partners literature, Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) found that only 5-6% of published research articles on student-partnership models focused on multidisciplinary partnerships. This case study, authored by five undergraduate students and two academics, sought to examine the utility of using a multidisciplinary students-as-partners approach to advance the development of an online learning game focused on food insecurity. The multidisciplinary nature of the partnership facilitated perceptions of an equitable partnership, contributed to innovative design ideas, and conferred several benefits to the collaborators beyond those traditionally seen in the students-as-partners literature (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). However, the multidisciplinary nature of the partnership also posed unique mentoring and coordination challenges that should be considered when adopting a multidisciplinary approach to teaching innovation.

KEYWORDS

students-as-partners, game-based learning, food security, multidisciplinary

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In their review of the students-as-partners literature, Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) found that only 5-6% of published research articles focused on multidisciplinary partnerships. As such, there is a need to examine the unique advantages and challenges of adopting a multidisciplinary approach to students-as-partners. The development of an online learning game offers an ideal environment for doing so. Digital learning games have grown in popularity as a teaching tool to engage students in the learning process (Arnab et al., 2015); but their development requires expertise across multiple domains, including computer programming, art

design, and user experience. Most educators do not have the skills needed to create digital learning games on their own (Gunter, Kenny, & Vick, 2008). We suggest that a students-as-partners model offers a unique opportunity to bring together student expertise from a variety of disciplines in order to co-design these games. We also argue that these multidisciplinary partnerships offer students and academic staff important opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning and professional development, above and beyond single-discipline partnerships.

A students-as-partners approach includes students in the co-creation of teaching and learning via "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, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, p. 6–7). In these partnerships students are valued as the individuals who are closest to the learning process, and therefore, best able to provide expertise on what it is like to a be a learner (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Woolmer et al., 2016). Students are rarely thought of as subject-matter experts within these partnerships, however. Indeed, students' lack of subject-matter expertise is cited as a concern that faculty and students share about these partnerships (Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felton, Millard, and Moore-Cherry, 2016).

In this paper we challenge this view of expertise and suggest that students do have a place in providing unique subject-matter expertise, separate from that of faculty, especially within the context of multidisciplinary approaches to teaching innovation (Woolmer et al., 2016). Specifically, we discuss a case study in which we drew on student subject-matter expertise across multiple disciplines to co-design an innovative online learning game. In the process, we used the multidisciplinary nature of the partnership as a tool for stripping away the expert-based power differentials that typically exist between faculty and students. In its place, we created a partnership model that emphasized student expertise, shared goals, collaborative responsibility, and reciprocal learning (see Mathews, Dwyer, Hine, and Turner, 2018).

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The FSQ Project was a multidisciplinary effort between three academics and eight students who worked together to design a learning game focused on food insecurity. The project was initiated when AM, an instructor of nutrition, approached KB, an instructor of psychology, about the possibility of working together to design a learning game focused on food insecurity. KB and her colleague, AG, a post doctorate in psychology, had previously used student consultant models to design and evaluate two in-class learning games (Bramesfeld & Good, 2015; 2016). They had not previously developed a digital learning game, however. Fortunately, two important resources came together to make the project possible. First, we secured an eCampusOntario grant that provided funds to hire a student leadership team to design and develop the game. Second, our team was accepted into a pilot project for a new Library Collaboratory initiative that provided us with the use of a shared innovation space and connected us with eLearning and technology experts. AM helped launch the learning game project as a subject matter expert, while KB* and AG* worked in collaboration with student partners to co-design the game (*indicates an author on this paper).

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As the need for various game development roles were identified, funds from the grant were used to hire student leaders from a variety of disciplines across the university (e.g., nutrition, computer science, communication, digital media). Once hired, students were given freedom to shape their own job titles and job descriptions. Our final team included the following student leadership roles: Aboriginal Experiences Research Assistant (JK*), Game Developer (KR*), Food Security Storytelling Consultant (LR*), Food Security Research Assistant (JB), Indigenous Resource Trainee (TM), Creative Assets Developer (MB*), Concept Artist and Storyteller (SK*), and Technology Consultant (MF).

Each student leader was involved with the project for a total of 6 to 12 months. Consistent with Bovill et al.'s (2016) description of students as pedagogical co-designers, student leaders shared responsibility for planning, designing, developing, and evaluating the learning game. Like other students-as-partners projects, students on the team were treated as the experts most closely oriented to the experience of being a learner (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Woolmer et al., 2016). Students were also treated as subject-matter experts within their own disciplinary domains. All members of the team were provided with access to the Collaboratory innovation space. Our team met regularly to provide updates, exchange ideas, and perform collaborative work. Our team also consulted with 9 subject matter experts, 3 nutrition students, and 15 instructional design and technology experts. A link to the game, as well as a description of our team members, partners, and game development process are provided on our project website (https://www.ryerson.ca/openlearning/projects/food-security-quest/).

PROJECT EVALUATION AND OUTCOMES

To evaluate the success of our partnership, the seven authors of this paper worked together to identify a series of self-reflection questions focused on (a) the nature of our partnership, (b) the distribution of decision making power, the (c) strengths and (d) limitations of our partnership, and (e) the uniqueness of our partnership relative to other class-based and/or research-based experiences. (Later, in response to a reviewer's comment, we returned to the question of uniqueness to additionally explore how our project differed in relation to other work-integrated experiences). Each author provided written responses to these questions. Five authors then analyzed the responses to identify key themes. This analysis revealed that our multidisciplinary partnership was defined by a sense of equity and shared responsibility that created a powerful sense of authenticity and opportunity for professional development, but also created anxiety and difficulty coordinating action. Our team meetings and partnership with the Collaboratory were key for overcoming these challenges.

Equity

Students on our team noted that a defining feature of our partnership was the equity between the students and staff. Students acknowledged that a hierarchy continued to exist between faculty and students, but it never felt like it had an impact on any of the work that was performed throughout the partnership. Everyone was respected and taken seriously, which allowed for increased levels of creativity and collaboration between the members of the team. Students also liked choosing their own job titles, which reinforced their place as equal co-

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designers on the project. In their responses to the feedback questions, the language that students used to describe their roles in the project included terms such as "respected", "trusted", “empowered”, "valued", "equally important ", "encouraged", "included", and "supported". One student author noted, “I have never experienced a group that genuinely made every group member feel equal and valued”.

Similarly, the faculty viewed the students as truly equal partners. Because each individual on the team held expertise that was crucial to the task, the faculty were stripped of their traditional role as the “expert in the room”. This changed the normal power dynamics, which created an authentic environment for true collaboration.

Shared Responsibility

The high level of autonomy, leadership, and flexibility given to the students created a powerful sense of shared responsibility and joint ownership of the project. This created meaningful opportunities for professional development and growth (as discussed in the next section); however, it also created significant anxieties for members of our team.

Students described their initial feelings about the level of responsibility as “daunting”, “too much”, “imbalanced towards the students”, and “overwhelming”. Students expressed wanting to rely on the faculty for mentorship, but being unable to do so as the faculty members were not content experts within their domain. The project forced students to go beyond their comfort zones to become self-reliant and to seek out their own sources of support. Despite these anxieties, students also noted how empowering it was to meet these challenges:

> At first, I felt that I was given too much creative power. I was not used to having to make decisions on my own. I later enjoyed having creative control, and I felt proud that my team trusted me.

Faculty also reported a complex duality in which they held ultimate responsibility for the project from a budgetary and reporting standpoint, but wanted to respect the collaborative partnership and give students freedom and autonomy to be creative. The trade-off in granting students this freedom is that the faculty often felt disconnected from the development process. Moreover, due to the multidisciplinary nature of the team, the faculty found it challenging to coordinate and mentor students coming from disciplines other than their own.

Professional Development

Despite these challenges, team members were in agreement that the shared ownership of the project created opportunities for innovation, reciprocal learning, professional development, and growth. A common theme that emerged in our analysis is that our project felt more “real” to our team members than other research and class-based projects have felt. One student described it well,

> It was different in the sense that I was applying concepts that I have learnt in the class to real life experiences... In very few other courses in my program or

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> projects do I get the opportunity to reflect on my personal experiences and incorporating it in to a project, in that aspect it was definitely very different and unique than any course work I have done in the past.

The "realness" of our project occurred in large part due to our unique treatment of student expertise. Unlike most of the students' prior academic and research-based experiences, our partnership recognized students as equal partners in the contribution of subject-matter expertise. This focus on subject-matter expertise was reminiscent of students' other work-integrated experiences in practicums and co-ops, however, unlike these other work-integrated experiences, students also found themselves drawing on their expertise as students to advance the project. In their own words students noted,

> [When developing the game] I thought about the "games" that I had to play as a student and I definitely used that experience to shape something together that was a richer experience.

> Being an Indigenous student of nutrition, and having studied food security specifically, absolutely had an influence in how I thought/reacted about and to the game.

The duality between student and subject-matter expertise often created interesting tensions. For example, early on in our process we had a discussion about how to introduce the core instructional material of the game. From a student perspective, we were in agreement that this information should be "front and center", but from a game development perspective it was also clear that centering this material could potentially take away from the enjoyment of the game. Had we centered the student experience, our game might have been less engaging. Had we centered the subject matter expertise, the game might not have been as educational. However, combining the perspectives forced us to work through the tension to generate a solution designed to meet both the educational and entertainment goals of the project.

The opportunity to lend multiple forms of expertise to the project contributed greatly to students' opportunity to share reciprocal knowledge and skills with one another, while also developing a dynamic collective knowledge about the project.

> We had to step out of our personal fields of expertise to understand new subject, contexts, and realities not previously understood coming from our separate backgrounds.

> Working on the team was an incredible experience that has impacted me for the better personally, professionally and academically. I have a deeper respect and appreciation for "the process" and the importance of thorough planning… I learned how to be a better leader working with such a strong team who all brought admirable leadership qualities to the table….

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The faculty also expressed an appreciation of the reciprocal learning experience. The multidisciplinary nature of the team contributed to the innovation of the project and afforded growth opportunities well beyond working within one discipline. Most surprising, however, was the extent to which this project pushed the faculty to develop their own leadership and professional development skills. Both KB and AG had previously managed research and teaching innovation projects with students from their own discipline. In previous contexts, their leadership value came from their expertise of their disciplinary knowledge. However, in the current project, the faculty could not rely on their own content expertise as a source of leadership, as they were not the content experts on this multidisciplinary team. As such, the faculty had to develop their skills in empowering, motivating, and guiding student leaders to find their own solutions. This process pushed all of us well outside of our comfort zones, but was also tremendously rewarding and growth promoting.

Coordination

In the words of Leopold (2006), it is "not easy to bring together the creative ideas of students from [] various backgrounds and to mediate between them" (p. 130). Likewise, our team found it difficult to understand the jargon, processes, and expectations of team members from other disciplines. Each of us had different ideas about the overall goals, direction, and structure of the project. Furthermore, some tasks did not lend themselves well to collaboration, as it was easier for a team member to finish the task on their own. At times this meant that our team felt less like a cohesive multidisciplinary group and more like individuals working in separate silos. Furthermore, members of our team were hired in a staggered process over several months, as we often didn't know what roles we needed until we needed them. Unfortunately this meant that some members of our team were brought on to the project after key decisions about the project had already been made. The students pointed out that this threatened the true equity of the partnership because not everybody had a voice in the process from the beginning. Working through these challenges added to our time pressures.

Despite these coordination difficulties, our team managed to pull it all together remarkably well. One student likened our process to a puzzle. Each of us contributed our own unique pieces to the puzzle, but in the end it all came together a whole. One factor that facilitated the success of our process was our regular team meetings. Team meetings allowed for the integration of ideas across disciplines and opportunities for sharing knowledge. Access to the shared Collaboratory space also contributed to our partnership. We found the shared space to be creative and fun. The space provided resources, including abundant white board space to brainstorm and record ideas, and access to technology experts with whom we could exchange ideas and ask questions. The Collaboratory also provided workshops and mentoring opportunities beyond our project, which contributed to the professional growth of our team and helped fulfill the mentoring vacuum mentioned earlier. Moreover, students on our team were given the same level of access to the shared innovation space as faculty, which created a neutral ground for students and faculty to come together in true collaboration. In the words of one student, the Collaboratory "made the team feel excited to be there". Our access to this

Burling, M.G. H., Rahouma, L., Good, A., Kasper, J., Kranyak, S., Ramnarine, K., & Bramesfeld, K. (2020). Our quest for success: Using a multidisciplinary students-as-partners model to develop an innovative online learning game. *International Journal for Students as Partners, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v4i1.3928

collaborative physical space became a catalyst for creating the metaphorical space needed to create a genuine partnership (Dwyer, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the multidisciplinary structure of our partnership turned out to be crucial for achieving our desired outcomes. Similar to other student-as-partners projects, our project benefited from the expertise that students could provide as the stakeholders closest to the learning process. Additionally, students' expertise as subject-matter experts enhanced the overall quality of our online learning game and created unique professional development opportunities. As a consequence, our partnership produced many of the same outcomes as other students-as-partners projects. Using the same language as used in Mercer-Mapstone et al.'s (2017) literature review (Tables 3 & 4, pp. 11-12), our project promoted shared ownership of the learning process, increased understanding of "other's" experiences, enhanced trust between students and faculty, and promoted self-awareness and skill development for students. Importantly, however, the multidisciplinary nature of our partnership also promoted outcomes seen less commonly in the research literature, including positively shifted power dynamics between students and faculty, enhanced student-to-student relationships, improved learning outside of the discipline, enhanced career development for faculty, and opportunities for student-faculty co-authorship of a publication (via this paper).

Our multidisciplinary partnership also offered unique challenges. McKerlie et al. (2018) noted that collaborating with students on the development of digital learning tools takes time, as faculty and students often approach digital learning development with differing goals and expectations. Our experiences echoed this point. Our team found itself reconciling differences in perspective between student and faculty, as well as differences in perspective across discipline. This extra layer of difference added additional time pressures as it was often difficult to overcome process barriers that arose due to differing disciplinary knowledge, jargon, and expectations.

As novices to the digital game development process, our faculty team also struggled to know in advance which student leadership roles would be needed to complete the project. Students on our team noted that the staggered hiring of the student leadership roles threatened the equity of the partnership, as students who were hired later in the process felt locked out of key decisions made at the beginning of the project. This challenge highlights a key difference between our multidisciplinary partnership and other multidisciplinary partnerships, such as the one described by Woolmer et al. (2016). In Woolmer et al.'s partnership, team members came from different disciplines, but there were faculty and students from each discipline on the project. Thus faculty could anticipate and "front load" the planning work of the project to ensure clear roles and expectations. In contrast, the faculty on our team came from very different disciplines than the students on our team. This reality made it very difficult for our faculty team to anticipate and plan our work in advance. Our observation suggests that there may be a steeper learning curve involved in effectively planning for partnerships in which students and faculty come from different disciplines.

Burling, M.G. H., Rahouma, L., Good, A., Kasper, J., Kranyak, S., Ramnarine, K., & Bramesfeld, K. (2020). Our quest for success: Using a multidisciplinary students-as-partners model to develop an innovative online learning game. *International Journal for Students as Partners, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v4i1.3928

Relatedly, the multidisciplinary nature of the project also created challenges when it came to providing student mentorship and guidance. A strength of our partnership is that shifting the expectation of disciplinary expertise on to the students helped to reduce traditional faculty-student power dynamics predicated on disciplinary expertise. Given this, we are wary of addressing this mentorship gap by adding in more faculty collaborators, as this could reposition expertise – and the power that comes with it – back into the hands of faculty. A better model might involve the inclusion of a secondary mentorship model in which student leaders are asked to work with external mentors from their own discipline who can act as subject matter guides as needed, but who maintain an arms-length distance from the project so as to ensure that students remain the primary subject matter expert for the team (see Woolmer et al., 2016 for a similar mentoring framework). We partially achieved this model via the Collaboratory technology advisory group who provided general advice and mentoring to our students. Moving forward, we aim to formalize these connections more clearly to ensure that each student has a designated mentor within their own discipline to whom they can turn to for advice.

Finally, our project would not have been a success without the eCampusOntario funding and our partnership with the Collaboratory. Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) and others have pointed out that students-as-partners models are most successful at empowering co-creation when these programs can be "scaled up" to create opportunities for all students. Institutional programs such as the Library Collaboratory may provide an important framework for scaling up innovation projects such as ours as they create efficiencies in providing innovation space and resources to faculty and students from multiple disciplines who wish to work in partnership.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

Meredith G.H. Burling and **Lina Rahouma** (*listed alphabetically) are the lead student authors on the paper. They were instrumental in (a) identifying the question prompts that were sent out to our authorship team, (b) analyzing the responses in order to identify the key themes, (c) finding articles that helped contextualize the themes within the broader SaP literature, and (d) outlining an initial draft of the manuscript. They also summarized the reflections about the partnership from a student perspective.*

Arla Good, **Joleine C. Kasper**, **Samantha Kranyak**, and **Kieran Ramnarine** *(listed alphabetically) are supporting authors on the paper. They contributed to the development of the question prompts, provided reflections about the partnership, contributed to the identification of paper themes, and provided feedback on a draft of the paper. Arla lent voice to the faculty perspective, whereas Joleine, Samantha, and Kieran lent voice to the student perspective*.

Kosha D. Bramesfeld (corresponding author) *is the faculty lead and corresponding author for the paper. Along with Arla, she provided reflections about the faculty side of the partnership. She also contributed to the development of the question prompts, the identification of paper themes, and provided mentorship and writing guidance during the development of the paper. She was affiliated with Ryerson University during the development of the Food Security Quest*

project, but authored this paper after becoming affiliated with the University of Toronto Scarborough.

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CASE STUDY

Students as Partners in E-Content Creation: A Case Study Exploring Student-Staff Partnership for Learning and Student Engagement Using Digital Applications for Co-Creation of E-Learning Materials

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ABSTRACT

In order to enable learners to take control of their learning needs and actively contribute in their learning processes, educators can partner with students in various reciprocal student-staff partnership (SSP) settings where students can be co-creators, co-producers, curators, or co-deliverers of the curriculum. Our project, undertaken to enhance the curriculum as part of a teaching qualification, places emphasis on educators partnering with first-year undergraduate students over e-content creation within an existing module, using readily accessible digital applications in order to promote active learning in students and improve student engagement. In this case study, we evaluate the extent to which SSP, as an approach to the creation of e-learning materials using digital applications, enhanced learning and student engagement in an existing module. Our student partners perceived SSP to be an excellent platform for learning, actively engaging in the classroom, and developing skills such as communication and digital literacy. However, they expressed some concerns about overcoming the traditional hierarchies within our SSP initiative.

KEYWORDS

co-creation, active learning, student engagement, partnership

Reimagining the application of digital technology for classroom learning and making it accessible to students, staff, and other stakeholders is an ongoing challenge facing institutions of higher education (Britland, 2013; King, 2018). Some argue that using digital applications in the classroom for creating e-learning materials may benefit students, as it enables learners to use their devices to enhance their learning and hone their digital literacy skills whilst allowing educators to personalise lessons and find innovative ways to track individual student achievements (Curtis, 2014). Bovill, Cook-Sather, and Felten (2011) suggest students can be involved in the learning process by engaging in co-creation, curation, course design, or to co-deliver curriculum through staff-student partnerships.

Partnerships are collaborative, reciprocal processes between academic staff and students in teaching and learning, where all participants can contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2014). This project, undertaken as part of a postgraduate certificate in teaching and learning in higher and professional education, sought to enhance the curriculum of a taught module using technology to promote digital literacy through co-creation of e-learning materials. In this article, we explore how educators partnered with first-year undergraduate students to co-create and deliver e-learning materials using mobile digital applications. The aim of our case study was to evaluate the extent to which a student-staff partnership (SSP) approach to the creation of e-learning materials using digital applications enhanced learning and student engagement in an existing module.

OUR CONTEXT

E-learning is gaining widespread acceptance in many higher education curricula, but students have typically been consumers or recipients of e-learning materials produced by their tutors without students' active engagement (McKerlie et al., 2018). Neary, Saunders, Hagyard, and Derricott (2013) argue that including students in the production of digital materials to support curriculum delivery and personalized learning for themselves and others enhances learners' creativity and turns students and teachers into collaborative explorers in uncharted territories.

In order to enable students to take control of their learning needs, educators can nurture a power-sharing relationship with students over digital content creation. This can be achieved by treating students as co-producers, curators, and co-creators of e-learning materials using various mobile digital educational applications (McPherson & Heggie, 2015; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Terrel, 2018).

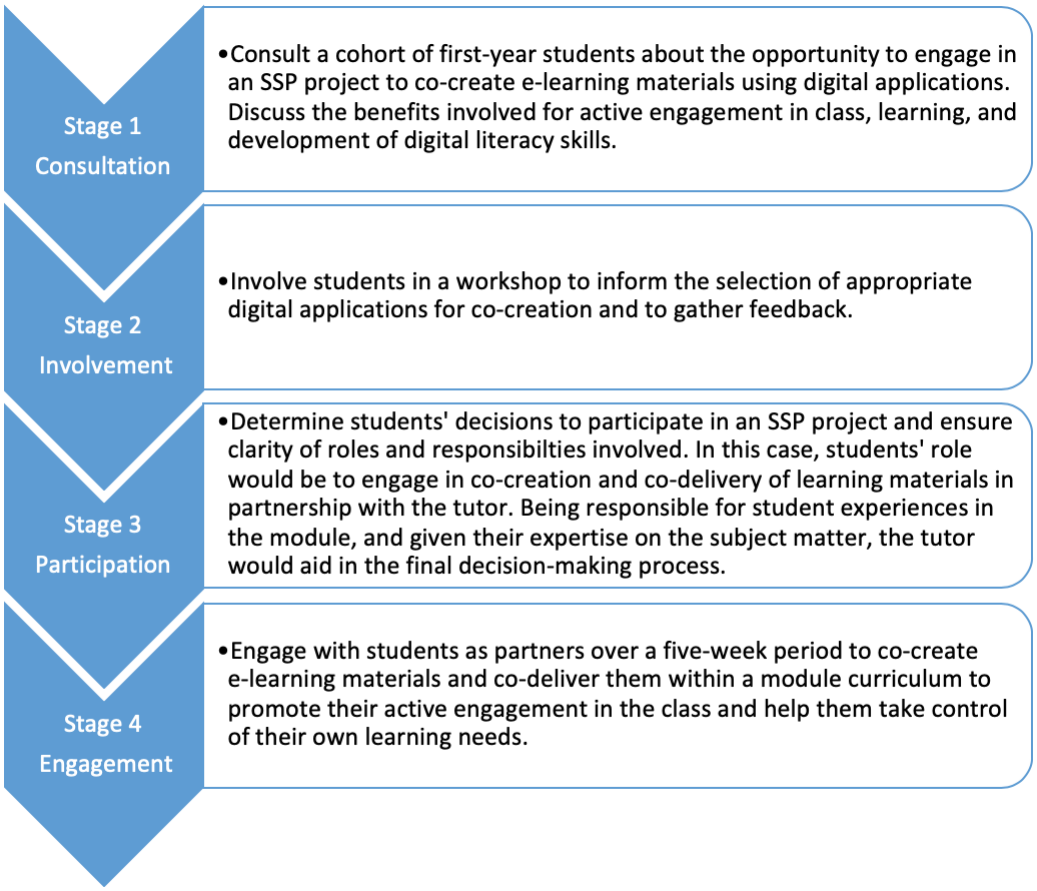
Student-staff partnership (SSP) is gaining momentum in teaching and learning in higher education as an enabler of student engagement (Bryson, 2016; Curran, 2017; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Engaging students in partnership to co-design e-learning materials can support learner engagement. Through SSP, tutors can inform students about using various digital applications to help with their learning practices, alongside engaging students in setting their own learning goals and managing their own learning needs. It provides students with the opportunity to embark on an interactive journey that enables them to develop and acquire learning and digital literacy skills (Greaves, 2012). According to Oddone (2016), the role of technology in education can be reimagined by allowing students to use it for coding, media production, design, and collaboration, transforming learners from passive consumers to active creators of digitized learning materials.

The benefits of engaging students in producing and co-creating e-learning materials are many. This type of engagement through co-creation is linked to institutional virtual learning environments (VLEs) for scaffolded learning, promotes peer learning through sharing (Van Dijk & Lazonder, 2016), and generates e-learning materials designed to support learners. Thus, SSP initiatives enable educators to deliver curricula that promote a digitally enriched learning environment, promote active student engagement, and provide learners and educators opportunities to co-develop their digital literacy skills for a digitally connected world (Terrel, 2018).

SSP has been described as a process rather than a measure for the achievement of predetermined outcomes (Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014; Matthews, Groenendijk, &

Chunduri, 2017). Seventy-four percent of the literature on SSP highlighted personal development of both staff and students, with the potential to enhance skills, motivation, creativity, staff-student communications, and self-efficacy as some of the key positive outcomes of the partnership process (Matthews, Groenendijk, & Chunduri, 2017). However, SSP initiatives can also give rise to challenges. They can be time- and resource-intensive for both staff and students (Bell et al., 2019). They may also reinforce pre-existing power differentials between students and staff (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Students' expectations about the roles they will enact in university may make it difficult for them to comprehend or appreciate working in partnerships with tutors, and this may prevent them from engaging in SSP work and exploring their potential for teaching and learning (Rakrouki, Gatenby, Cantore, Davidson & Rowledge, 2017). According to Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard and Moore-Cherry (2016) and McKerlie et al. (2018), some of these issues may be overcome by ensuring transparency and trust during the process. To address this concern in our project, we applied Healey et al.'s (2014) four-stage holistic approach to engage students in partnership for co-creation of e-learning materials, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Four stages of engaging students in partnership (adapted from Healey et al., 2014)



STUDY DESIGN

This project involved collaborating with 35 first-year undergraduate students studying an accountancy module in the second semester of the 2017/18 academic year. The project spanned five weeks. Each week during the first four weeks, one app was explored and used for co-ceation. Table 1 provides a summary of the digital applications used for co-creation. In the final week, we sent all 35 students enrolled in the module an e-mail inviting them to participate in a focus group.

A total of six students agreed to participate. The focus group was guided by eight questions, which we adapted from Curran (2017) and Matthews et al. (2017), and which captured students' perspectives on student-staff partnership for learning; the impact of its use as an approach in co-creation of e-learning materials using digital applications, the challenges and opportunities posed by partnership, any changes observed in their engagement levels in class and in their approach to learning as a result of engaging in partnership, and the need for undergraduate students to engage in SSP practices for digital skills development.

My co-author and I used thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyse the focus group responses and name key themes.

Table 1. Digital application for co-creation

Week	Digital application	Function	Engagement process
1	**Sutori**	A student-centred approach for collaborative learning for the flipped classroom using timeline presentations for storytelling (Sutori, 2019).	Using Sutori, students worked independently in the classroom to curate and organise various online resources relevant to a module topic in the form of a personalised storyline and present these in the classroom for collaborative learning.
2	**Canva**	A graphic design tool used for both web and print media design and graphics. It enables users to access over a million photographs, graphics, and fonts and use them by dragging-and-dropping (Canva, 2019).	Students opted to work in pairs to create an infographic using Canva on a module topic and present it to fellow students and the tutor to generate group discussion.
3	**PowToon**	A readily available application that enables users to create videos individually or in collaboration in order to captivate, engage, and explain (PowToon, 2019).	In collaboration with the tutor, students worked in small groups to create short interactive educational videos on PowToon to explain a number of module topics in the class.

4	**Prezi** **Kahoot**	A presentation application that allows users to create and publish interactive presentations online (Prezi, 2019). An application that provides a platform for game-based learning that is particularly suitable for designing formative assessment activities (Kahoot, 2019).	Students chose to co-deliver a lecture session with the tutor using these applications and actively engaged in designing a lesson plan for the topic selected. Students set learning objectives for the selected topic and selected formative assessment activities to assess learners. This enabled students to extend their skills and awareness of behind-the-scenes curriculum development processes at the university (Bell et al., 2019).
5	**Loop**	A digital feedback application that enables tutors to capture student voices in real time in order to adapt classrooms to maximize learning outcomes and gather evidence to support impact (Loop, 2018).	Focus group participants were asked to download and install the application on their smartphones prior to the focus group session so that they could access the questions during the session. Using Loop, participants were able to record their responses quickly and easily on their smartphones. It also saved time with data transcription by enabling the quick export of data to a spreadsheet for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Four key themes emerged from our content analysis of focus group participants' responses: SSP as an approach to learning, SSP for co-creation of e-learning materials using digital applications, SSP for enhancing student engagement, SSP for enhancing student engagement. To protect their anonymity, we refer to participants by the initial letter of their first names.

SSP as an approach to learning

''with SSP, the lecture is more interactive between tutors and students''- L

Our SSP project provided participants with an opportunity to learn from each other through effective communication. Students felt that SSP was good practice to use in lectures for collaborative learning. They thought SSP settings could be a good addition to other courses as it acts as a catalyst for developing helpful relationship between staff and students for a better educational experience.

'It creates a good relationship between staff and students due to effective communication regarding the course and other opportunities available''- N

''I feel student-staff partnership is beneficial to use in a lecture. It's good to be part of a project and collaborate''- M

''It is a good method to learn from each other''- L

Our findings support those in previous literature that SSP provides opportunities for students to make active contributions to their learning (Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten, 2014; Bovill & Felten, 2016) and promotes peer learning through sharing (Van Dijk & Lazonder, 2016).

SSP for co-creation of e-learning materials using digital applications

''*I found it inspirational to be able to co-explore digital applications in the class with staff and other students in order to produce e-learning materials. It supported me in thinking creatively''- J*

''Using digital applications for co-creation helped me to achieve a different approach to learning''- A

All of the participants in the focus group thought that using various digital applications for learning was important (Curtis, 2014). However, what participants found inspirational was the opportunity to explore digital applications in class with staff and other students for co-creation of e-content. As in Neary et al.'s (2013) research, engaging actively in the production of digital materials to personalise learning for themselves and others made them feel more creative. They found our partnership project to be an excellent way to use digital applications for teaching and learning. Partnership provided them with the opportunity to increase their confidence in using digital technology creatively for learning by engaging in a collaborative scholarship process as co-creators, curators and co-deliverers of teaching and learning materials (McPherson & Heggie, 2015; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Terrel, 2018). This suggests that, if given an opportunity to explore the co-creation of digital applications in partnership with staff, some students are likely to experience a transformation from passive consumers of digitized learning materials to active consumers, as discussed by McKerlie et al. (2018) and Oddone (2016).

''*SSP is a great experience to develop our skills through co-creation using digital applications*" (sic) - A

All six participants agreed that the opportunity to collaboratively co-create e-content with the tutor and their peers and using various digital applications contributed to the development of their digital skills (Curtis, 2014; Greaves, 2012; Terrel, 2018).

''It is a great opportunity for students to gain knowledge, develop their confidence and digital skills''- K

''*The tutor-student partnership is an excellent way to practice how to manage work projects through teamwork which can be a transferable skill to the work environment''- M*

''I believe it changes the sense of university experience the more I am involved''- J

For these students, partnership was an excellent way to practice teamwork skills. It also changed the sense of university experiences for them by allowing them to become more involved in their learning and skills development (Matthews et al., 2017).

SSP for enhancing student engagement

''The lecture is imparted in a rather collaborative environment, providing more participation in class from the student side''- M

Four of the six focus group participants commented that partnerships such as ours provided a more "relaxed" and "supportive environment" for learning in the classroom, as it improved active student participation in the class.

''Student-staff partnership makes the class academically engaging with neither the staff nor the students left behind in achieving their targets''- N

Five of the six focus group participants thought that the partnership project gave them an opportunity to actively contribute to the development of others in the class, and they found this aspect motivational. Increased motivation has been found to be one of the key outcomes of staff-student partnerships (Matthews et al., 2017). In our case, perhaps this was because they felt actively engaged in their learning processes and appreciated the opportunity to contribute in the decision-making process as a result of engaging in partnership (Bovill et al., 2011; Bovill & Felten 2016; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; McCulloch, 2009).

One participant noted that working in partnership had a "huge influence" on their engagement in the class, since it provided the opportunity to learn from others in the process of the partnership. Another found it beneficial and inspiring, helping to improve their "punctuality and attendance in the class."

All of the focus group participants noticed some positive changes in how they approached their academic studies. Working in partnership with staff made them feel more motivated and creative in their academic studies, increased their ability to multitask in the class and gave them more confidence in their research and communication skills.

''By co-creating e-learning materials through SSP, I found an alternative method for learning and participating in the class''- L

''SSP motivated me to do multiple tasks in the class within a limited time''- N

''Staff-student partnership has motivated me more towards my academic work. I have gained research and communication skills that will help me through my studies''- K

These statements support previous findings on the benefits of student-staff partnerships as a process (Healey et al., 2014; Matthews, Groenendijk & Chunduri, 2017) and also for enhancing student engagement in the class (Bryson, 2016; Curran, 2017; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

Challenges and opportunities faced by engaging in this SSP initiative

''I think the success of a staff-student partnership project needs to be based on an excellent and solid communication between both parties''- M

One of the key challenges student partners mentioned facing was overcoming the traditional power relations during the partnership process. Three out of six focus group participants indicated that they did not notice any difference in their interactions with the staff due to the maintenance of the pre-existing hierarchy between staff and students.

''The tutor is a staff member and must still be treated with utmost respect''- J

These participants felt that students' fixed assumptions of the difference between staff and student roles would be a difficult barrier to overcome (Rakrouki et al., 2017). Some students struggled to revise their relationships with staff, continuing to place tutors on a pedestal rather than coming to see them as equals. This supports the assertion that staff-student partnerships may reinforce inequality between staff and students (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

In contrast, three of the participants seemed to agree that, by engaging with staff as partners, they felt a positive difference in their interactions with staff and fellow students in the module and were keen to engage in more partnership practices.

''SSP presents a lot of opportunities because one develops a better relationship with the partners involved. It gives them the confidence to ask questions to the tutors without hesitation'' – K

''It provides better opportunity to learn from the tutors by overcoming any barriers to express concerns and asking questions more confidently''- L

It is crucial to develop trust and build transparency during the engagement stage of staff-student partnerships (Bovill et al., 2016; McKerlie et al., 2018). Applying Healey et al.'s (2014) four-step holistic approach to our project may have helped to ensure transparency in the engagement process, which in turn helped to build trust in order to overcome the traditional power relations. This may have enabled students to build better communication and working relationships with staff and peers. As Matthews et al. (2017) described, the SSP engagement process improved staff-student communication for these students.

Another challenge reported by a minority of the participants in the focus group was not being able to explore the possibilities offered by partnership to its full potential due to the limited availability of time in scheduled classes. Two participants found the process to be time intensive (Bell et al., 2019).

"It is important to take into account the availability of time in a class to collaborate and prepare extra material when the student needs to comply with assignments and other obligations''- M

''Challenges were to manage time and communicate effectively in a new platform such as SSP''- J

Despite the challenges they faced, all the participants appeared to agree that staff-student partnership provided the "best platform for sharing knowledge" between staff and students and is a key opportunity to enhance academic progression.

''I have experienced it to be the best method for learning''- A

All six participants felt that institutions of higher education need to consider including SSP practices in their curricula, since it will be of "major benefit to students" in many ways.

CONCLUSION

Overall, students found co-creation of e-learning materials using digital applications and in partnership with staff beneficial for their learning, engagement, and skills development. However, because only six students were involved in the evaluation process, it is not possible to generalize the outcomes.

The existing power relations mentioned by the students were noticeable during the engagement process, as some of the students were quite hesitant to ask questions or challenge the opinions of the tutor. This may have prevented both staff and students from exploring the full benefits of engaging in partnership. To overcome this barrier in future partnership projects, it would be useful to explore ways of navigating pre-existing inequalities between staff and students in order to enhance the engagement process for both parties.

Nevertheless, for this cohort of students, all of whom were participating in their first collaborative process for teaching and learning, this project prompted them to consider partnership's potential for making active contributions to their learning needs in the future.

For educators wishing to co-create or design e-learning materials with students, our case study may suggest digital applications that would be valuable tools for their own digital co-creation projects. Teaching practitioners interested in ways to improve student digital literacy skills in the classroom may use the co-creation process we outlined in this case study as guidance for using readily accessible digital applications. The outcomes we present here indicate that the application of an SSP approach is recommended to ensure the experience of engagement is meaningful for both students and staff.

This project was reviewed and approved by the University of Bolton, Faculty of Professional Studies Research Ethics Committee (March 2018).

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Nurun Nahar *is a Lecturer in the Institute of Management Greater Manchester, University of Bolton. Nurun is a fellow of the Higher Education Academy and is passionate about first year student engagement, student-staff partnership and technology enhanced learning in Higher Education.*

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CASE STUDY

Co-Creating Real-World Research Skills

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ABSTRACT

This case study considers a students-as-partners' research project that aimed to develop technologically-driven tools to enhance teaching and learning in higher education. It focuses on how the project enabled student participants to gain real world research skills and experience. We present reflections from both a student and a staff perspective and propose START (Support, Time, Adapt, Risks, Trust) as an approach to engage students to gain real-world research skills. *Support* refers to providing support for skills gaps and learning in an applied setting. *Time* refers to providing time to settle into the project and develop confidence, including realistic timeframes and deadlines. *Adapt* refers to giving students the space to develop not only the required skills but also the tools to develop their own abilities and confidence through a supportive, flexible and open environment. *Risks* refers to taking risks for example in terms of roles, responsibilities and leadership. *Trust* refers to providing guidance and encouragement that will allow students to achieve on their own and take shared ownership.

KEYWORDS

research skills, student-as-partners, teaching and learning, higher education, technology

This case study considers a students-as-partners' research project that aimed to develop two technologically-driven tools to enhance teaching and learning in higher education. The first being a university- wide mobile app, the second being a course-specific virtual reality game. The project is set at a small, teaching intensive university in the North West of England and this case study focuses on how the project enabled undergraduate students to gain real world research skills and experience. The case study presents reflections from both a student and a staff perspective and puts forward START (Support, Time, Adapt, Risks and Trust) as an approach to engage students in real world research.

Ultimately, the aim of this article is to offer evidence that student/staff partnership working practices allow students to gain a deeper, understanding of research skills and practice through support, and propose START (Support, Time, Adapt, Risks, and Trust) as an approach to providing that support. We will provide a brief overview of the literature,

describe the project, and, finally, focus on our reflections on the process from a students-as-partners perspective.

Students-as-partners projects should engender a positive, meaningful, reciprocal relationship among students and staff that engages all participants equally, though not necessarily in the same manner (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014), allowing all parties to benefit through working and learning together (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014).

Educational staff have focused on trying to make the student experience more engaging based on evidence that positive student engagement leads to enhanced resilience, persistence, learning, and academic achievement (Celuch, Bačić, Chen, Maier-Lytle, & Smothers, 2018). Some advocates of student engagement have begun to promote the uniting of voices of both staff and students and students' active involvement as, for example, agents of change, co-creators, and partners in their own educational experiences.

The benefits of engaging with students as partners in their own learning include increased motivation and learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Little et al., 2011; Nygaard, Brand, Bartholomew, & Millard, 2013), student perceptions of improved teaching and classroom experience (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Curran & Millard, 2015; Nygaard et al., 2013), and enhanced employability (Dickerson, Jarvis, & Stockwell, 2016; Pauli, Raymond-Barker, & Worrell, 2016).

Despite the benefits of engaging with students as partners in higher education, there are also challenges. While the shifting of "traditional" hierarchies can be transformational, tensions around power and the shifting identities of "staff" and "student" can arise as partners reconfigure boundaries and structures and navigate the transition from "us" and "them" to "we" (Healey et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone, Marquis, & McConnell, 2018). Indeed Mercer-Mapstone, Dvorakova, Groenendijk, and Matthews (2017) discuss the issues around power and the tensions between labels of 'staff' and 'student' which impacted early on in the current project.

OUR PROJECT

Staff co-authors Julie and Duncan applied for, and were awarded, a £34,000 (matched-funded) Student Led Technology Enhanced teaching and learning HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England now the Office for Students, OfS) catalyst fund to support the strategic aims across the HE sector. The project we submitted aimed to engage undergraduate students in researching their own student body to design and develop technology-based teaching and learning tools in order to enhance the student experience within HE. The two tools or interventions developed were a mobile app, that was available to students across the university and a subject specific virtual reality (VR) game, further details on both tools are given below. The initial phase of the project involved understanding current students' use of technology, as well as gaining an insight into what students would potentially like to use within their teaching and learning. Therefore, before any technological intervention was designed, the student researchers collected data using a questionnaire to gather this preliminary information.

The research team was composed of three undergraduate students from three different academic disciplines—Psychology, Education, and Sport—and two academic staff, co-authors Julie and Duncan, from Psychology and Education respectively. Co-author Pippa was a psychology undergraduate at the time of the project, and took the lead on the research element of the project. This article focuses on the perspectives of the three co-

authors, and their reflections on the project from which their START approach to supporting students emerged.

Our project involved identifying student's current and future usage of mobile technology for learning, and attitudes towards technology for learning, from one small, teaching-intensive university. The data we collected informed the design and creation of two technological interventions to enhance teaching and learning. Evaluation took place through user feedback in the form of questionnaires and focus groups for both of the developed tools.

The first intervention we created was a mobile app that we later piloted university-wide, although not discipline specific the app aimed to be beneficial for the whole student body, providing some core academic skills and information to aide learning. The app included an interactive map and educational games, as well as functions to enable students to interact with each other and the university campus through wayfinding functions and a quiz using strategically placed QR codes. This app developed by the students on this project facilitated as a pilot for developing the implementation, and the tailoring, of a commercial university mobile app. As well as wayfinding, the app enabled students to develop some key educational skills such as referencing through the use of educational games. The games within the app also highlighted the support services and facilities available to the students, that students may not be aware of. The second intervention was a therapeutic VR game for use with counselling students at the university and embedded in the BSc Psychology, Psychotherapy and Counselling pathway which Julie is programme lead for. The research team partnered with students from the creative technology department to assist in the development of these interventions.

The following sections consist of our reflections upon the whole research process, with a particular focus on the dynamics of partnership and of change. We emphasise how the student researchers employed on the project honed their research knowledge, skills, and confidence through this opportunity to take part in real-world research. We highlight many of the pros and cons of students-as-partners work in higher education. We conclude by describing the START model that emerged from our reflections and that we developed to encourage and provide some guidance for supporting students working in partnership.

PIPPA'S PERSPECTIVE

At the start of the project, I felt very daunted and slightly out of my depth in terms of skills and knowledge, as did my peers, and therefore the student team members let the staff members take lead on the project. On reflection, this lack of knowledge and skills encouraged traditional hierarchies to persist, as Healey et al. (2014) discuss, in that we trusted Julie and Duncan's knowledge and viewed them as being in a position of power.

As the project progressed, our confidence grew, due not only to our gaining knowledge but also the opportunity to apply that knowledge. We therefore felt able to take control of the project by making decisions, taking initiative, and communicating developments to Julie and Duncan. For example, in the design and development of the app, we knew more than they did. The project began to transform into the students-as-partners project that it was intended to be, supporting Healey et al. (2014) on how transformational the shifting of "traditional" hierarchies in higher education can be. Alongside this, Julie and Duncan's support and trust was paramount to developing a high-quality product.

As a team we worked effectively, which was evident in how we met project deadlines and presented our knowledge at conferences. For the student members of the

team, I think that the desire to gain recognition from the staff team members for our hard work and the challenges we were overcoming was also a motivating element. This desire was founded on the respect we all had for each other's personal, academic, and social qualities. It became increasingly evident throughout the project that we brought different sets of skills and knowledge from our different academic disciplines, for example, knowledge of SPSS, teaching practices, and research experience.

The student members of the team designed the questionnaire that we used to assess students' current and desired use of technology. This was extremely challenging, as we had never designed a questionnaire from scratch. We struggled with how to ask and format the questions. In order to overcome this challenge, we sought Julie and Duncan's advice, and after three attempts, we designed our final questionnaire. Even though designing the questionnaire was a challenge, we overcame it and that has given me the confidence to design questionnaires and to understand what questions to ask to yield the right information to answer research questions.

My discipline, psychology, is research heavy. I did well in the research methods module of my degree, so I felt confident to take the lead on setting up SPSS and data analysis. Reflecting on the experience, I did struggle at first, but with support from the whole team, I learnt how to use SPSS more efficiently. On completion, I felt a sense of achievement and pride that I had been determined not to fail at the task and this added to my newfound confidence as I met the expectations of the project and team. This experience also had a positive impact on my evaluation of my ability to complete my third-year dissertation.

What have I gained from the experience?

On reflection, I have gained an enormous amount from this experience. I have acquired research skills, and my confidence in using SPSS and conducting analysis has increased. My apprehension about writing a dissertation has completely gone and has been replaced with motivation and excitement. In terms of employable skills, I am able to give presentations, manage time, work as part of a team, demonstrate initiative, and learn new information quickly, and I have expanded my professional networks.

My experience of working on the project has had a major impact not only by enhancing my knowledge and skills, but also as an amazing journey of personal development. From the start of this project, I have not only changed as a person, but I now have a clear vision for the future. I have enjoyed and benefited from the project so much that I now want to carry on with research and apply for a PhD studentship and since writing this reflection I am now over a year into my PhD study. Just as importantly, I have created lifelong friendships, so much so that I and another member of the team want to carry on our collaboration. I would like to see more opportunities for students to get involved with research, as being involved in real world research that enhances learning, motivation, and employability skills is an invaluable experience.

JULIE AND DUNCAN'S PERSPECTIVE

We, Julie and Duncan, pursued the funding for this project based on our desire to work with students as partners, supported by senior management at the university. Unfortunately, due to the funding deadline, we had to develop the bid without student input. On reflection, this was not the best way to set up the partnership, as this initially

established our roles as that of employers/supervisors. Our responsibility for reporting to HEFCE and the university also contributed to this sense of hierarchy.

We recruited students to the project through an open call, attracting students from across disciplines, and from this we started to realise that some of our expectations of the students were unrealistic. We had a level of naivety with respect to disciplinary differences that became very obvious during the interviews, as we asked students about their research methods experience in their programmes. The students that we recruited more strongly demonstrated their ability to apply what they had learnt; however, we still held unrealistic expectations of their research expertise, especially for Pippa. Our expectations for the sports rehab and education undergraduates were not as high.

We were surprised when the students could not design a questionnaire, so we introduced more support. However, once we initiated support, we realised quite quickly that the vast majority of the issues we were encountering could be attributed to a lack of confidence. There was a point early in the project where we sat down with the students and discussed whether we thought the project was going to work. We were honest about our fears around the negative impact that we might be having on them and the financial responsibilities that had been placed on us. It was only when we shared our fears with them that there was a lightbulb moment for them and they realised that they could be totally honest about their struggles and their relationship with us. This was a defining and transformative moment for the project. As the students' confidence grew they began to see their own value and worth as partners.

It was hilarious when they took control and led for the first time, as they were trying to gauge our reactions and not offend us. For us, there was a sense of relief that they had finally taken hold of the project. Whilst there were challenges, both of us have gained a tremendous amount from working with each other and with the students. We had worked together previously, but working together on this project cemented our working relationship and developed our friendship. Since this project, we have collaborated on a number of projects and value the critical friendship in supporting our professional development this also gives an avenue for personal as well as professional support through a strong working partnership.

Working with the students was refreshing as it brought us both back to thinking about the basics of building relationships with students and how we can empower them to take charge of their own education.

Transforming from a tutor-led to a students-as-partners project

One of the most challenging aspects of this project was allowing the project to become more student led, which was an initial aim of the project. From our (Julie and Duncan's) perspective, once we established trust, we felt able to let go and let the students take control, and essentially leave them to get on with it. Until that trust and commitment was evident, we as project leads could not let go. As the funding holders, and as researchers, we had the responsibility to report back to HEFCE and fulfil the aims of the project. This responsibility made both of us uncomfortable with the initial power shift, as the students didn't fully appreciate the reporting mechanisms and their roles within the process. However, as trust developed among us and it became clear that the students were invested in and fully committed to the project, it developed into a students-as-partners project. This was particularly evident once the first intervention, the app, was designed and

needed to be developed and the students were involved in appointing and managing the creative technology students.

While many of the early tensions around power and roles eased as the project progressed, some tensions remained because we were unable to involve students in the initial project bid and subsequently recruited them to "our" project. Therefore, despite it being a partnership, reporting structures continually reinforced hierarchies. The team used Cook-Sather et al.'s (2014) partnership principles (respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility in teaching and learning) to displace traditional structures and roles and to have more balanced and fluid relationships. This balance in roles developed over the first few months of the project. The experience for Julie and Duncan does indeed support the transition issues moving from "us and them" to "we," as discussed by Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2018) when undertaking the SaP's project.

At the end of the project, we asked the students to reflect on their experiences. It came as no surprise that applying the skills students learn within the classroom embeds the learning of those skills. However, what was striking and one of the most interesting issues to come out of this process from Pippa is how her confidence in her knowledge of research methods has grown through taking part in this real-world research. It became clear that engaging with students as partners enables confidence building and real insight into the world of research**.** Pippa's engagement with this world of research has also included presenting at a number of national conferences, writing reports for the funding body, and wider dissemination of the research, such as a contributing to a book chapter and peer-reviewed journal articles.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS GOING FORWARD

The students-as-partners approach to a research project was new for both Julie and Duncan, and proved a learning curve for all involved. In co-authoring this piece with Pippa, we wanted to share the value of not only involving students within the research process, but also allowing them to take the lead and develop their confidence and skills outside of the classroom. Due to this experience we have developed five top tips that we would take forward into another students-as-partners project, or any project involving students as researchers, through an approach we have called START:

1. **Support:** Provide support for skill gaps and learning in an applied setting, as we did with the questionnaire design. Staff also need departmental and institutional support.
2. **Time**: Provide students with time to settle into the project and develop their confidence. This also means setting realistic timeframes and deadlines. This was a year-long project, a timeframe that provided students and staff with time to engage fully in a students-as-partners project.
3. **Adapt**: Give students space to develop not only the required skills but also in their own abilities and confidence through a flexible and open environment. Students and staff need to adapt to being part of a students-as-partners team.
4. **Risks**: Be willing to take some risks and believe in students, trusting that they want to achieve and do well. This aspect is evidenced throughout Pippa's reflection and the students' commitment to the project and desire to achieve. This is also evidenced through Julie and Duncan's account of the transition from tutor-led to students-as-partners project.

5. **Trust**: Guidance and encouragement will allow students to achieve on their own and take shared ownership. Establishing trust during this project enabled the students to bring their own ideas to the project and this project, the authors believe, was much more successful because of student's perspectives. Students also need to develop trust in academic staff in order to fully engage and for the project to be a true partnership.

Both students and staff need time to understand what each other can offer to the project. Remember this is a partnership, providing students the opportunity to grow as well as an opportunity for staff to learn from, engage with, and understand from a student perspective. Designing interventions or tools for teaching and learning needs student buy-in, in order to increase the success of the tool and its uptake by the student population. As such, what better way is there to gain the student perspective than from engaging in a students-as-partners project?

Ethical approval was obtained by the University of Bolton Ethics Committee in March 2017.

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CASE STUDY

Departmental Action Teams: Empowering Students as Change Agents in Academic Departments

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ABSTRACT

Supporting and sustaining positive educational change is an area of increasing focus in higher education and remains a persistent challenge. Using student partnerships is one promising way to help promote these much-needed changes. This case study focuses on Departmental Action Teams (DATs), which are groups of faculty, students, and staff working together in the same department to make sustainable improvements to undergraduate education. Here we focus on DATs from four different departments, across two research-intensive universities in the USA, to draw attention to the important roles that students play as change agents in these groups. We also reflect upon the inherent challenges in building partnerships that incorporate meaningful power sharing to effect educational change.

KEYWORDS

cultural change, departmental action teams, systemic change, STEM education

Improving undergraduate education remains a pressing challenge. Despite numerous efforts to transform higher education, many efforts are driven by underdeveloped notions of how change works (Beach, Henderson, & Finkelstein, 2012; Borrego & Henderson, 2014). Typical approaches consist of developing new teaching techniques or curriculum with little attention to how the techniques will be used by instructors in relation to a larger educational system. Such scale-up approaches have a modest impact at best (e.g., Austin, 2011). Creating meaningful change requires engaging with the university as a system (Kezar, 2011).

Engaging a university holistically requires attention to institutional culture. Culture can be defined as "a historical and evolving set of structures, symbols, people, and resulting power relationships between people" (Reinholz & Apkarian, 2018, p. 3). Because academic departments have a relatively consistent internal culture, they are seen as a key unit of focus

for change (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2014). Through long-term engagement, departmental cultures can be shifted sustainably, resulting in lasting change (Reinholz et al., 2019).

Students also play a role as change agents in departments (e.g., Dunne & Zandstra, 2011; Healey, 2016; Hornsby & Simkins, 2017). Students are key stakeholders for universities, they have their own expertise, and they have resources, connections, and entry points to change that faculty members do not. To contribute to the field of Students as Partners, this article documents successful partnerships between faculty, students, and staff as they work as change agents in the context of Departmental Action Teams (DATs). Because DATs are a research-based model that has been tested on multiple campuses, this line of inquiry has the potential to suggest more generally the role students can play as change agents.

BACKGROUND

A DAT is a model originally proposed by the authors, and it consists of a group of four to eight faculty, students, and staff that aims to make broad-scale educational improvements within a department (Reinholz, Corbo, Dancy, & Finkelstein, 2017). A DAT is an externally-facilitated group that attends to both the *outcomes* of their work and the *process* through which that work takes place. The facilitators are typically postdoctoral researchers or members of a Center for Teaching and Learning. DATs create lasting changes by focusing on cross-cutting issues (e.g., curricular alignment, equity, community building) that cannot easily be solved by a single person. With support from leadership, DAT participants work voluntarily on a shared vision for improving undergraduate education in their department.

Students play an important role in DATs. All DATs include at least one student, and many DATs have two or three undergraduate and graduate students as members. Given inherent power dynamics between faculty and students, facilitators aim to promote power sharing among participants (Matthews, 2017). In addition, students are paid a modest stipend, which honors their time and can increase opportunities for students from a variety of backgrounds to participate (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

DATs are facilitated in accordance with six principles (Quan et al., 2019):

1. Students are partners in the educational process.
2. Work focuses on achieving collective positive outcomes.
3. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation inform decision-making.
4. Collaboration between group members is enjoyable, productive, and rewarding.
5. Continuous improvement is an upheld practice.
6. Work is grounded in a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

Although students have an influence on how all principles are enacted, principles one and six have an explicit focus on meaningful student partnerships and equity within the group. Principle one draws directly from the Students as Partners literature, and recognizes that students have unique knowledge and expertise to contribute (Hammer & van Zee, 2006; Robertson, 2015). Principle six focuses on equity, and postulates that diversity among team members adds value to a group and its work (Milliken, Bartel, & Kurtzberg, 2003). One

important form of diversity that is often present in DATs is different roles in the department, from student members to tenured faculty. Principle six also promotes equity amongst all voices in a team, to support collective decision-making. To honor these principles and mitigate the power dynamics inherent in heterogeneous groups, DATs develop community standards for group interactions and build a consensus vision to guide their work. In addition, facilitators explicitly focus on process skills, building norms for equitable collaboration and checking in with individual members (e.g., through a coffee meeting) when needed.

METHODS

This article focuses on DATs at two research-intensive campuses in the USA. To describe how students made these types of contributions to DATs, we used a case study approach, which is appropriate to understand a "contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). We examined multiple cases to understand how this particular phenomenon manifested in a variety of contexts. Data collection included many forms: detailed meeting minutes, facilitator journal entries, artifacts created by the DATs, interviews and focus groups with DAT participants, and the extensive experience of facilitators (which helped us form impressions of the data).

Here we report on four departments, selected because they provide meaningful examples of student partnerships in DATs. All department names and participant names are pseudonyms; we drew the department pseudonyms (Summoning, Potions, Divination, and Herbs) from the Harry Potter series.

We drew from a theoretical model of students as change agents that emphasizes four roles that students can play (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011). Drawing upon these four roles, we delineated the types of contributions students make in Table 1, along with examples from DATs.

Table 1: Four roles of student change agents (department pseudonym in parentheses)

Contribution	Example
Student voice contributes feedback, perspectives, and experiences unique to students to form a more complete picture of the issues at hand.	Staff and faculty value the contributions of students on the DAT (Summoning).
Decision-making involves students in making decisions about issues that affect their community.	Students voices contributed meaningfully to DAT decision-making (Potions).
Co-creating involves students, faculty, and staff working together to revise teaching and learning practices (e.g., curriculum development).	Students co-develop Student Learning Outcomes for a major (Divination).
Actions involve students taking concrete steps to achieve a goal.	Students recruit other students to take a draft assessment (Herbs).

RESULTS

Potions

The goal of the Potions DAT was to improve equity within its undergraduate major, because the student population was not very diverse in terms of race and gender. The Potions DAT engaged in a variety of activities, including supporting the department's participation in a campus-wide diversity initiative, contacting admitted students from underrepresented groups, working with university Strategic Relations to develop inclusive advertising materials, connecting with student groups in the department, and creating an equity-focused seminar in the department (Rainey, Corbo, Reinholz, & Betterton, 2016).

DAT participants described the benefits of having *student voices* in the DAT. For instance, Cassie, a staff member, described the value of having "a very diverse set of opinions and perspectives." Val, a faculty member, emphasized the value of *student voice*, stating that, "having both the undergrad and grad student perspectives about both their experiences and what they really care about I think has been really important for shaping what we do, and that's incredibly valuable."

Student members emphasized how the DAT allowed them to contribute to *decision-making* in the department. Willow noted that as a graduate student, the DAT had given her

> a way to voice what I'm thinking, because like if I want to change something in the department that's just not going to happen, but if I bring something up here the faculty on this committee have the potential to influence other faculty in the department that I would just never be able to reach and would be terrified to try to talk to anyway.

Willow's statement also draws attention to the inherent power dynamics between students and faculty, as she notes that she would normally have little influence and would be "terrified" to talk with faculty members about change.

Cedric, an undergraduate student, followed up on Willow's statement by noting he felt "empowered" to take *actions*, and that he wanted to

> do these activities, plan, organize, execute. And really, you know, maybe undergrads have a lot more energy, they haven't beaten it out of us yet, but I think we are kind of an untapped potential resource, that it's at least good to have open communication between all these levels. You know, I've been able to effect change already with the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender] training that they're going to be starting to do in the department starting fall.

What Cedric describes is being empowered as a part of the DAT, and that would allow him to take *actions* that can change the department, such as implementing training to raise awareness about the experiences of minoritized populations.

Summoning

The Summoning DAT focused on building community within its new undergraduate major, through new departmental events and social networking. DAT members perceived that

the variety of partnerships in the DAT had been crucial to its success. For instance, Bernard, a graduate student, said he "enjoyed" the DAT because of the many "different pools of knowledge" there were to draw from. He described how graduate students are "involved with a lot of different committees," whereas the undergraduates "know a lot about the existing culture within the majors." He continued that the instructors are "really tied to undergraduate education" and "the classroom experience," while faculty know the "official processes" of the department. Together, all of these stakeholders bring useful and complementary skills. This emphasizes the value of *student voice*.

Kate, a faculty member on the DAT, also emphasized the importance of *student voice*. She stated that they could not just "assume" what the students want, and then "be upset that they don't show up." She emphasized the need to be proactive in getting students involved, and she saw the DAT as a way to do that. Although the focus of the DAT had been on undergraduate community, Kate felt that the work of the DAT helped them create "a better overall community all the way around" for stakeholder groups in the department.

Despite these positive results, there were still inherent tensions in the group. The undergraduate student member, Sawyer, first described the DAT as "intimidating," but over time he began to understand the DAT as a "community [where] everyone was equal." Sawyer did not elaborate on how his feelings shifted, but we suspect it was supported by explicit efforts of the facilitators, given that in our experience such issues do simply resolve themselves automatically.

Sawyer also described how faculty members on the DAT "suggested" that he present at a faculty meeting, because they thought it would "convince more people" coming from students. This shows how the faculty genuinely embraced *student voice*, by acknowledging the effect a student voice would have over faculty voice in the context of a faculty meeting and then providing a way for Sawyer's voice to be heard. Sawyer described faculty at the meeting as "very welcoming," and he recognized concrete impacts from this *action*. For example, he mentioned that another DAT member "created a seminar class specifically as a result of the DAT to help us [students] create resumes." In summary, he stated, "I feel like our voices have been heard, and they're working to their best abilities to try and answer some of those questions, which I think is pretty cool."

Divination

One goal of the Divination DAT was to revise the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for one of its majors. To date, the DAT has developed SLOs for one of its majors and is designing new assessments for the SLOs. This work was taken up by the whole department during a departmental retreat, and the department decided to create documents to explicitly connect the curriculum to the SLOs.

The facilitator journals for this DAT make frequent mention of interactions between Peyton (a graduate student), Marley (an undergraduate student), and other DAT members. Very early in the DAT's work (just two months after it had formed), the facilitators noted the role of *student voice*, describing how the faculty members recognized student expertise. "Marley's point of view was considered frequently for determining if the SLO was assessed or not. He's living the experience that they are trying to guess at." A month later, the facilitators

documented Riley, a faculty member, explicitly valuing the contributions of the students during a meeting, and at the same meeting, the students also recognizing their own value in contributing to the group.

There were also documented instances of Marley "reporting out to the group" from his subgroup meeting and being treated as "an equal member of the DAT." This related to his work in *co-creating* the SLOs. Marley began to more freely offer his perspectives during meetings, even without being explicitly asked what he thought. It became clear that the students were an important part of the DAT, when nearly a year after the formation of the DAT, one of the faculty members remarked it was "too bad Marley isn't here, we could use his input." Again, we see a group where *student voice* was explicitly valued and the student members of the DAT became increasingly involved and shared power in the *co-creation* of the DAT's work.

Herbs

The Herbs DAT focused on how to assess skills development across the department's major. This DAT has developed and piloted and is implementing a skills assessment as well as creating a department-wide assessment plan. Undergraduate student Jamie described her involvement in *co-creation*, through "identifying skillsets from syllabi," "coding" the skillsets, and contacting professors to determine the top five skills. Through her work in a summer subgroup of the DAT, Jamie helped develop a draft assessment for the skills and recruited students to take the assessment. On the whole, she noted that the group dynamics were "very comfortable, very friendly," but that she still "felt a little out of place" with PhD students and faculty members. This shows that even in a facilitated group with efforts to meaningfully create an equitable environment, the traditional power structures inherent in student and faculty roles can still persist.

Ellen, a graduate student on the DAT, described how the DAT was "interviewing students about what they want," and the students described having "no software or coding skills," which made it hard for them to compete for jobs. Ellen "brought this to a faculty meeting and now there are initiatives to build this into [their] curriculum." This example shows the importance of *student voice*, concrete *actions* such as interviewing students, and involving students in *decision-making* (through the faculty meeting). We note that students had more decision-making power within the DAT, and this only translated partially to the rest of the department.

Still, Ellen also noted power dynamics, contrasting when she was the only graduate student on the DAT, and when more students were added. She remarked that when more students were added to the DAT, some faculty reverted to traditional modes of interaction, "delegating tasks down to the students more than they delegate to each other, and also being a little bit more resistant when students challenge them." Ellen describes a situation where the presence of more graduate students made it easier for them to be seen as "other" from the faculty, whereas when she was the only student it was easier to be perceived as an equal member of the group. To explain why this happened, Ellen believed it was "just habit," and that "in all other contexts it's totally fine to delegate down to" students.

DISCUSSION

This brief description of four focal departments highlights the ways that students can be enabled to act as change agents in a DAT, which provides value to the DAT work. In particular, *student voice* provided new ways of looking at areas of improvement in undergraduate education, *decision-making* allowed for students to contribute to structural changes in the departments, *co-creation* of products resulted in new assessments and learning outcomes, and *actions* led to concrete activities taking place. The students themselves felt more empowered to engage in change work to improve their departments. All of the DATs we have described made meaningful and lasting improvements to their departments. Moreover, student, faculty, and staff members on the DATs all noted additional benefits from the interactions.

These cases also highlight some of the inherent challenges of involving students as partners in change working groups. Students such as Sawyer and Jamie mentioned how working with faculty could be intimidating, and how it was easy to initially feel out of place. Still, both Sawyer and Jamie described increased feelings of comfort as the DAT progressed, which suggests that facilitation moves in the DATs may help overcome some of the inherent power imbalances. The cases support previous assertions that action should be taken to share power between students and faculty (Matthews, 2017).

We hypothesize that power imbalances may be addressed in multiple ways in the future. Our work suggests that some imbalances arise from a department's existing culture and how it shapes power relations between students and faculty. Thus, we hypothesize that changing other aspects of a department (e.g., student engagement in courses, community building, undergraduate research) could potentially shift the overall culture in a way that supports power sharing in the DAT. We also suspect that faculty members in the study were unaware of how students felt about power imbalances. We hypothesize that sharing this concern in general (e.g., by sharing examples from the students we quoted) and creating opportunities for feedback from students could raise awareness within a DAT and prompt structural and behavioral changes towards equity. As noted in other models of change (e.g., Rogers, 2010) awareness is often the first step towards change, so deliberately including time to reflect on power relations and how they manifest in a DAT could decrease power imbalances. All of these hypotheses need to be tested with future research.

In closing, this article contributes to the Students as Partners literature by drawing attention to the many ways that students can contribute as change agents. Further, we showed how the model from Dunne and Zandstra (2011) can be a useful organizing framework for understanding how students contribute to change efforts. Our work suggests that students can play an important role in supporting systemic change in undergraduate departments, but further research is needed to explore students' participation in DATs across more contexts.

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No authors were students at the time of this work.

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CASE STUDY

A Collective Education Mentorship Model (CEMM): Responding to the TRC Calls to Action in Undergraduate Indigenous Health Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, a Collective Education Mentorship Model (CEMM) is described by four non-Indigenous students who co-created and undertook a program with this model for an undergraduate-level university experiential learning experience centred around Indigenous health. This model is framed around shared teaching of students by various collaborators/mentors and built upon the values of collaboration, mentorship, reciprocity, and capacity building. Based on feedback from the students and collaborators involved in this experience, this model appears to be a promising means of better situating students as partners in experiential learning through the redefinition of student-supervisor roles, responsibilities, and the sharing of power. Furthermore, this model appeared to create more diverse experiences for students and minimized supervisor burden. Although this model was created specifically for the education of trainees in Indigenous health, it can be further adapted for other student placements and programs where these assets would be beneficial.

KEYWORDS

mentorship, undergraduate, experiential, Indigenous health, community engagement

Multi-mentoring, team-based mentoring, and community mentoring are models that have been utilized in the past in the context of undergraduate-level university research (Huizing 2012; Nicholson et al., 2017; Young et al., 2015; de Janasz, & Sullivan, 2004; Sorcinelli & Yun,, 2007). The many-to-many model of mentoring (in which multiple mentors interact with multiple mentees) is a cited structure with documented professional and personal development benefits that has been critical to challenging the traditional one-on-one apprenticeship model within undergraduate education (Girves et al., 2005; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004). These models have evolved due to the increasingly complex environment of academia, and in order to be inclusive of underrepresented groups (Nicholson et al., 2017; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). Furthermore, these models have been found to accommodate limitations in mentor skills, time, and financial resources, as well as facilitate an environment that promotes interdependence, mutuality, and reciprocity, which better situate students as partners in mentorship relationships (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004). In shared mentorship models, students are exposed to a greater variety of ideas and information, as mentors bring different strengths and fulfill different gaps. Despite the applicability of these models to experiential learning in Indigenous health, such experiences have not yet been documented.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada published 96 Calls to Action to advance the process of reconciliation in Canada. Three of these Calls to Action identified the importance of education for building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In conjunction with this, student interest in the history, culture, and health of Indigenous peoples in Canada has increased, particularly at the post-secondary level (Yeung et al., 2018). These recent developments have posed new challenges for educators, as there is a general shortage of Indigenous mentors and teachers in post-secondary institutions (Henry, 2012). The increase in demand for their teaching and supervision, particularly for work and experiential education placements, research positions, and graduate theses has led to a heavy "supervisor burden" that has made it difficult for these teachers to balance student mentorship with other academic responsibilities. A related issue pertains to the importance of prioritizing mentorship by Indigenous mentors for Indigenous trainees, as greater positive impact has been identified when mentors and mentees can relate more personally and identify similarly (Rose, 2005; Garvey et al., 2009; Mangan & Trendle, 2019). Enabling these relationships to be constructed meaningfully in academia also requires that Indigenous mentors and teachers are not inundated by other mentorship demands.

This article intends to outline and propose the use of a shared mentorship model for the teaching of Indigenous health trainees to combat disproportionate burdens associated with supervisorship. Furthermore, we argue that the values imbued in shared mentorship can be more aligned with the philosophy of Students as Partners, and ultimately, more suited to learning experiences in Indigenous health.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

The Collective Education Mentorship Model (CEMM) was developed in 2015 at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada by Dr. Bernice Downey, the current

Indigenous Health Lead at the Faculty of Health Sciences, and a group of four students in the Bachelor of Health Sciences (BHSc) Honours Program. This program offers an interdisciplinary approach to the study of health and disease and emphasizes the Inquiry model of learning, which applies problem-based, self-directed learning in collaborative, small-group settings (Ai et al., 2008; McMaster University Bachelor of Health Sciences Honours Program, 2018). The CEMM was created for the Extended Learning Experience (ELE), an experiential learning course offered to students in the global health specialization of the BHSc program.[1]

The CEMM was designed unintentionally as a result of the student group's difficulties with finding a primary supervisor willing to oversee four students over a semester-long experiential learning opportunity. Discussions with Dr. Bernice Downey, the eventual main student advisor, drew their attention to the reality of supervisor burden that made the supervisorship of four full-time students very infeasible. Through these conversations, Dr. Downey agreed to assume the role of a "navigator" for the students, helping them develop relationships with various Indigenous collaborators. Her expertise, personal experiences, and unique position as both a recent doctorate student and transitioning member of faculty led her to craft the vision for the CEMM as one that would uniquely position students and collaborators as partners in a reciprocal learning relationship.

IMPLEMENTATION AND STRUCTURE

The CEMM was a student-designed model of shared mentorship, wherein a small group of students received teaching from multiple collaborators simultaneously throughout the duration of their learning placement. This model adopted a specific language: the term "collaborator" was used instead of "supervisor" or "teacher" (as in traditional student placements) in order to distinguish the CEMM as a model that promotes greater student participation and involvement in the experiential learning partnership. This language was also more inclusive of the diverse identities of participating individuals: while the traditional language of "supervisor" or "teacher" largely alludes to those in academe, the use of "collaborator" welcomed a greater diversity of participants, including faculty members, local community organizers, and other knowledge holders of students' choice.

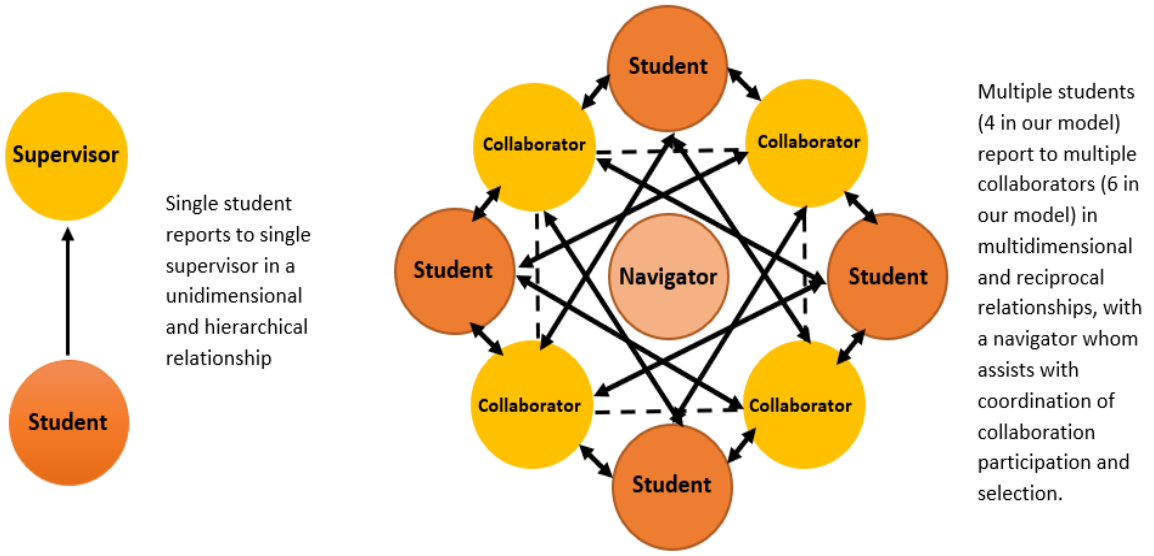
In the operationalization of this model, students worked on multiple different projects with their various collaborators simultaneously and collectively participated in diverse experiences and opportunities offered by collaborators. The model was also called a mentorship model because it was intended to go above and beyond simply teaching of students; it was aimed to promote the guidance of students, both in their journeys of learning, but also in their careers, their worldviews, and through role modeling.

In the first application of the CEMM, shared mentorship of four students was undertaken by six collaborators. The initial outreach for collaborators was challenging, as students found that they lacked connections with the local Indigenous communities. Eventually, through their broad outreach, the group connected with Dr. Bernice Downey, who agreed to assume the role as the "navigator" throughout this experience. As an Indigenous post-doctorate student, Dr. Downey was instrumental in bridging the gap between the students and the Indigenous communities. She assisted in the development of relationships between the

students and the collaborators she recruited, keeping both parties responsible to a relationship of reciprocity that would be beneficial to both students and collaborators. The process of brokering relationships took approximately one month and involved preliminary meetings with collaborators and attending community gatherings, events, and other informal activities. Once participation was confirmed from all parties, each collaborator was appointed one specific student, who would act as the main liaison between the collaborator and the group. Ultimately, a diverse group of collaborators and projects was assembled, spanning fields such as anthropology, history of medicine, public health, and pediatrics.

The experiential learning experience framed around the CEMM was by nature one that was relational: the group of students met with each collaborator individually, as well as collectively. The initial meetings between the group and individual collaborators were used to explain the logistics of the CEMM and the responsibilities and benefits of participating. Collaborators were also given the opportunity to explain their expectations for the experience, as well as details about any deliverables they were hoping the group could produce. At the end of the CEMM experience, one collective meeting was also held with all collaborators, students, program advisors, and interested faculty. This final, collective meeting was used for students to present their learnings from the experience as a whole, many of which were drawn from working across disciplines and through many projects. This collective meeting also allowed collaborators to interact with one another and actively participate in the social network created through the students. The original design of the model intentioned more of these collective meetings to be held, including one at the beginning and halfway through the experience. Given the inaugural nature of this experience, it was logistically challenging to organize more than one meeting, but multiple meetings should be intentioned in future implementations of the CEMM.

Figure 1: Comparison of the traditional research supervisorship model with the CEMM



SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

Successes

From the students' perspective, the CEMM provided a versatility of experiences that would not exist in the scope of a traditional one-on-one student supervisorship. Throughout this experience, the students assumed hybrid identities: they were at once project partners, but also observers, personal assistants, and mentees. As such, the experiences they underwent were diverse, including the traditional academic activities of giving research presentations and preparing posters, as well as non-academic experiences, such as shadowing board meetings and attending community events. These non-academic experiences exposed students to the understanding of complexities faced by Indigenous collaborators within institutions and gave them authentic perspectives on historical and ongoing racial tensions. This wide range of mentorship broadened students' understandings of the multidisciplinary skills and tools critical to work effectively and appropriately in Indigenous health. This flexibility also enabled students to direct the recruitment of collaborators from different stages of their careers, allowing students to also receive many different insights on personal career development and trajectory.

The CEMM also increased the flexibility and autonomy students had with their learning experience. Without the obligation and logistical setup of a traditional full-time placement, students were able to choose how many, as well as which projects they wanted to be involved in. Ultimately, students were more authentically positioned as partners with collaborators in that the distribution of power was more equitable: in contrast to traditional experiential learning experiences, in which a supervisor "hires" a student, it was the students who were empowered to add projects and collaborators as they saw fit with the guidance and mentorship of their navigator, based on specific areas or topics of interest to the group.

Challenges

The CEMM involved multiple different collaborators, each of whom expressed different levels of interest in the model. While some collaborators were very interested in participating in the network of Indigenous health professionals the model intended to create, others were more singularly interested in the relationship with the students. Several others had primary interest in the ability of students to contribute to their projects. As a result, the dynamics of the relationship between the group and each collaborator varied considerably and balancing and navigating these complex relationships simultaneously was challenging for the students. The large number of collaborators and faculty overseers involved in this model also posed a challenge to scheduling large group gatherings or meetings, and several collaborators were ultimately unable to attend the meeting hosted at the end of the CEMM.

This experience was also limited in its length as a semester-long commitment. Given that implementing the CEMM required a significant amount of time to organize logistically, particularly the process of collaborator recruitment, the actual experience itself only effectively lasted three months. The long-term, slow-progressing nature of many Indigenous health projects was thus challenging for students to contribute to within this timeframe, and students made less progress on their work than they had initially hoped. In the future, it is recommended that this model be adopted for longer student placements (or in an ongoing

longitudinal manner), in order that both students and collaborators receive maximal benefit from the logistical cost of organizing the experience.

THEMES OF THE MODEL

The CEMM was built upon key themes that are particularly relevant to teaching and training in Indigenous health in a post-TRC Calls to Action environment. These themes are also resonant with those that have been cited in Students-as-Partners literature, aligning with concepts of reciprocity; realities of partnership outcomes; context of practices; and inclusive, partnered learning with communities (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

First, the CEMM was built upon collaboration and reciprocity—among students, between students and collaborators, and among collaborators themselves. Each of the collaborators possessed different fields of expertise, and student exposure to these different perspectives taught them about the interdisciplinary nature of Indigenous health work and research. The creation of a network among collaborators also enforced the theme of working together within Indigenous health and exemplified the capacity for students, in their role as partners, to bring together those working in the same field.

Second, the CEMM prioritized mentorship of students. This was facilitated by the stipulation that none of the collaborators would be responsible for assigning grades directly to the students. As a result, the pressure frequently placed on individuals in the supervisory position to grade students, and the pressure placed on students to impress their supervisors, was reduced overall. The power imbalance was reduced, and students were more authentically able to become partners in the learning relationship, without the constant pressure of evaluation. This facilitated more organic learning and relationship building—students were permitted to, at times, simply sit aside to observe collaborators' approaches to managing a project, or shadow collaborators' daily activities, for example, without the worry of not constantly producing tangible contributions for student evaluation purposes.

Given that students were established as partners in the mentorship relationship with collaborators, the value of reciprocity was also of great importance. While students were welcome to come aboard to learn from their collaborators through informal ways, formal learning and assignment of specific projects and tasks was also necessary for the collaborators to benefit from the partnership. In the CEMM, the notion of reciprocal relationships was regularly considered in the design of student-led activities. For example, through the CEMM, the students worked to facilitate collaborator networking, which was intended to include collaborators as beneficiaries in the student-collaborator relationship and to establish students as partners capable of making tangible and unique contributions. Increasing the ability for collaborators to benefit from this learning and teaching model continues to be an area of development.

Finally, the CEMM was designed with the goal of capacity building and the formation of future partnerships between students and collaborators. The CEMM enabled students to learn from collaborators, who provided personal mentorship, as well as the opportunity to work on specific projects, which built capacity in students' academic skills. The establishment of these

partnerships between students and their collaborators in this experience also hoped to set a precedent for future partnerships between Indigenous community members and students. In particular, non-traditional mentorship models may benefit Indigenous trainees substantially by helping to facilitate continued development of capacity and equitable representation. Through the CEMM experience, all four students gained additional appreciation and respect for the notion and importance of allyship in Indigenous health work and for collective reconciliation efforts and principles by the nature of the work they were doing, but also through the values the CEMM itself espoused.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The CEMM represented a model of experiential learning that challenged the role of students as passive, primary beneficiaries of learning experiences, and instead placed them in the centre of reciprocal student-collaborator relationships founded on a principle of equal partnership and learning from one another. Through its emphasis on balancing learner, collaborator, and community needs and the creation of equitable benefits for all parties involved in an experiential learning experience, this model was appropriately suited for Indigenous health training and directly addressed the TRC's Calls to Action that call into question the importance of education for building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The CEMM also acknowledged and attempted to address the heavy supervisor burden facing Indigenous teachers in the academy and community that has accrued over recent years. It should be noted that this model must be ultimately used in conjunction with (and not in place of) further Indigenization of institutional hiring and capacity-building practices. Indigenous university faculty members continue to be under-represented and concentrated in certain disciplines as a result of the inadequate creation of space for Indigenous knowledge holders within institutions (Andersen, et al., 2008; Henry, 2012).

In conclusion, our findings show that shared mentorship models like the CEMM are effective as a means of more authentically situating students as partners in experiential learning activities through an emphasis on student-directed programming with reciprocal and collaborative relations with mentors. It is recommended that the teaching of Indigenous health may specifically benefit from models like the CEMM, given its embedded values of collaboration, reciprocity, mentorship, and capacity-building, all of which are integral to understanding allyship and reconciliation in a post-TRC era.

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NOTES

1. Following a year of coursework in the foundations of global health, students in this specialization embark on a self-designed ELE lasting a semester (or more) for the purpose of acquiring direct exposure and experience with global health work. Although the ELE is intended to be an experiential learning experience, it is not a typical experiential learning placement, in that students must look for their own supervisors (should they wish to have any) and are free to select a topic (or multiple topics) of their own interest. Furthermore, students are evaluated by the Assistant Dean of the BHSc program (and not any collaborators or supervisors) and are required to demonstrate evidence of active reflection throughout the experience. The emphasis of this course is on the process of learning, and not the tangible outputs.

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REFLECTIVE ESSAY

The Invisible Line: Students as Partners or Students as Colleagues?

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As pedagogy continues to evolve, some perceptions and institutional conformities of higher education are resistant to change. Professors' relationships with PhD students are one example of this. For years I (Michelle) had been told by my supervisors and colleagues that it was best to keep PhD students at an arm's length. It was explained that my duty was to educate, and not to befriend students. Inviting students to spend time together outside of the supervisor/student relationship could lead to complications, I was warned. This came across to me as a rather archaic approach to supervising PhD students. I have always valued connection and relationships with those I work with (including the students I supervise), which is perhaps why I enjoy conferences so much.

Conferences provide a variety of professional development and networking opportunities. However, it is often difficult to find a conference where you feel a sense of belonging. Coming home from my first International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference in 2015, I felt that I had really found "my conference." You know, the one that you refuse to miss, where you have found your "people"? I decided at that point that I didn't want my current students to have to wait to find "their" conference, so I extended an invitation for one of my students (Corinne), who was embarking on a PhD, to the ISSOTL16 conference. For decades I had attended conferences and made connections that were short lived, and I didn't want this to happen to my student.

I had an established relationship with Corinne that had developed over time (see Figure 1). She started out as an undergraduate student, then went on to complete her Honours under my supervision, became my research assistant, and finally began her PhD in 2017 under my supervision.

At ISSOTL16, we met people from Ireland and the United States with whom we really clicked and began having significant conversations. Inspired by a conference presentation from Poole, Verwoord, and Iqbal (2016), we decided that we would try to use synchronous technology to create a Small Significant Online Network Group (SSONG) with these international colleagues. Our goals were to meet regularly online, continue our initial discussions, encourage collaboration, and then present together at ISSOTL17. Further detail about how we established our SSONG and what it enabled us to achieve can be found in Eady et al. (2019) and Green et al. (2020).

I (Michelle) was keen to include Corinne in the SSONG as a research colleague and co-author. What caught us off guard, however, was how our relationship had evolved over this time into a Students-as-Partners (SaP) opportunity. Crucially, through our continued collaborations, we could see that any separation between us had, in fact, dovetailed into an invisible line (see Figure 1). This essay focuses on our experience of this developing relationship.

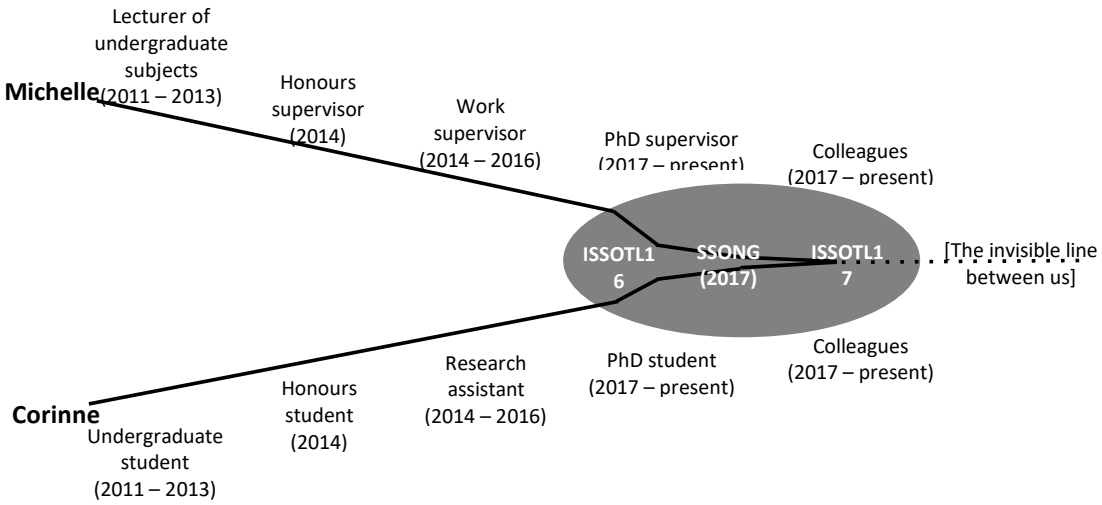

Figure 1: Visual representation of Michelle and Corinne's various roles and developing professional relationship over time. The circle represents the focus of this paper.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PHD STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE (CORINNE)

Michelle invited me to attend the ISSOTL16 conference as a co-presenter of a project I had worked on in my role as her research assistant. This was the first time I had attended an academic conference, let alone an international one, and I was excited about the opportunity it presented. The conference content was immediately intriguing to me as I got a crash course in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as well as SaP—terms I had not encountered prior. I also swiftly made connections with people from around the world, meeting some through workshops and presentations, and others through Michelle's introduction. In particular, I felt an immediate connection with those who would become our SSONG.

The "pinky promise" that we made one another at the end of the conference—that we would meet up online at least once—was fulfilled less than one month after our return home. Michelle was particularly motivated to ensure that this would happen, given her previous experiences of short-lived conference connections, and I was quickly caught up in her efforts. We became the combined co-ordinators of the group, sending out reflective journals and prompts and establishing a common meeting time. The meetings we held via videoconference were incredibly valuable as we explored SoTL together within a small, significant network.

Somewhere along the way, I noticed that Michelle subtly stepped back and handed me the reins for the logistics of each SSONG meeting. I became the chair in what was a rather non-hierarchical group, responsible for keeping our discussions on track and ensuring that everyone's contribution was heard. Although this happened so smoothly that I barely noticed it in the moment, I relished the opportunity it provided. It showed that Michelle had faith in my capacity to lead the SSONG discussions, and made me feel affirmed and valued as a colleague. I knew that I was supported in this role, with Michelle and I continuing to have "think aloud" discussions about what needed to be done.

When it was time to begin planning our SSONG presentation for ISSOTL17, I happily took the lead as an extension of the work I had already been doing within the group. I was

glad to provide direction and collate the contributions of each group member into a cohesive presentation. Meeting again at ISSOTL17 was a joyous occasion, with us all united in our enthusiasm for how the SSONG had brought us together as equals.

I have appreciated the opportunities that I have had to work alongside Michelle over the past few years. When I speak with other post-graduate students, I realise how unique it is that I have such a positive connection with my PhD supervisor. More than that, I know that our working relationship extends beyond my studies and has fundamentally impacted my professional development and career opportunities.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE FACULTY MEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE (MICHELLE)

I think that academics know when a special kind of student crosses our path. These students have research interests and pursuits aligned to our own, and they demonstrate that they are dedicated to the craft, have an inquiring mind, and a passion for their work. While not meaning to suggest that there are other students who should be excluded from the partnership approach we are proposing, I do want to acknowledge that sometimes relationships just "click."

Nevertheless, inviting a student to a conference is both exciting and daunting. At times in my career I have been cautioned about being "too kind," and a raised brow can follow a working bee outside of the university or lunchtime walk and talks. Being passionate about teaching (especially its relational nature) has, I fear, reduced me in the eyes of my research colleagues from the heights of academic royalty to a lowly, empathetic, approachable human being. Now, here I was, with luggage in hand, meeting Corinne at the airport and traveling internationally with a desire to share everything SoTL.

It is a refreshing experience to accompany a student to a conference—it brings the excitement of it all back to the surface. Helping Corinne to register, going through the list of speakers, and proudly introducing her to an international network of colleagues gave me a new angle on the familiar. Establishing the SSONG, alongside Corinne, provided a valuable opportunity to continue the conversations we began at the conference. In the same way that I tell my PhD students that it is our job as supervisors to "give them wings to fly," I decided that I could ease my control of the online group and give space for Corinne to bloom as leader in the online environment—which she did! When we reunited with our SSONG colleagues in person at ISSOTL17, there were familiar faces and hugs all around.

There was a surprise in store for me, however, when after our SSONG presentation a colleague enlightened us by commenting, "You do know that this is an excellent example of Students as Partners, you should consider publishing this work in that context." I turned and looked at our research group, and confirmed four of the seven of us were indeed students. SaP was a new term to me, although it was still curious that not once had I differentiated the students from the other group members. I certainly didn't think of this work as a SaP investigation. It led me to wonder how many other academics find themselves in similar partnership situations and have not labelled it as such, nor seen the work through the lens of SaP.

This experience has really made me think about PhD students in a different way. Students are engaging with literature that is perhaps even more current than we (as overloaded academics) have read ourselves. They are writing, thinking, analysing all the time; they are really a walking, talking, eager, fresh resource by our sides. We need to see them less as students and more as colleagues and the future leaders in our field.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As we (Corinne and Michelle) have been crafting this formal reflective piece, we have been prompted to consider how our experience connects to the body of SaP literature. We have been guided by Matthews' (2017) editorial piece, which outlines five propositions underpinning genuine SaP approaches: fostering inclusive partnerships, nurturing power-sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection, accepting partnership as a process with uncertain outcomes, engaging in ethical partnerships, and enacting partnerships for transformation. Viewing our relationship through the lens of SaP, and Matthews' (2017) work in particular, has helped to frame our understanding of how and why we work together as we do in a new way. It has deepened our insights, which we are pleased to share with you here.

Fostering inclusive partnerships

Pairing "like students" with "like staff" can be an inherent risk in SaP work. In fact, Mercer-Mapstone et al.'s (2017) systematic literature review revealed this type of pairing was evident in most of the literature and cautioned that it "potentially prioritises voices that are already privileged and engaged" (p. 17). We acknowledge that this is a limitation of our partnership—while we have varied life experiences and expertise, our backgrounds and interests are nevertheless broadly similar. Michelle has always made the effort to provide equitable personalised investments for all students she supervises. Even so, after delving into the SaP literature we are both now more aware of the need for partnerships that are inclusive of "unlike" pairings, and we commit to pursuing these in the future.

Nurturing power-sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection

As Matthews (2017) explains, good practice in SaP work involves the sharing of power, recognition of differing expertise, and "ongoing dialogue about expertise and contributions, and continuous reflection" (p. 3). This was absolutely the case with our work together. We have frequently engaged in conversations—sometimes initiated by Michelle, other times initiated by Corinne—about our work, the boundaries of our relationship, and the expertise we could draw on. We have shared and shifted power, such as by alternating lead author for publications and conference presentations related to our work together. While we are both passionate about the work we do together, we are also both committed to ensuring that suitable compensation is provided to Corinne through payment for work completed, subsidised travel to conferences, and authorship on publications. With regards to her PhD study, Corinne has always been the driving force behind its completion—setting goals, directing meetings, pursuing publication opportunities—while Michelle provides support as a guide on the side.

Over many years of working together, we have developed a robust relationship that facilitates these open and reflective discussions. These practices have become even more intentional since ISSOTL16, where we both first learned about SaP and Corinne was formally introduced to SoTL. This paper represents a culmination of these informal reflections, as well as providing us with the chance to reflect more formally on how we work together.

Accepting partnership as a process with uncertain outcomes

Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) argue that SaP "is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself" (p. 7). We believe this accurately describes our ongoing

professional relationship, which has been motivated by our desire to continue working together for the foreseeable future. While we have set certain goals along the way, such as supporting Corinne to complete her thesis, or presenting research findings at a conference, we do not envisage these milestones to be the finish line for our working relationship.

There have been a variety of benefits that accompany this SaP partnership. Some are mutually beneficial, such as bouncing ideas off someone who is like minded, and feeling confident that either one of you could present at a conference and communicate the same underlying message. Michelle has learned a lot from Corinne's commitment to protecting a distinction between her professional and personal life (both with regards to relationships and how she spends her time). Corinne has grown to feel more confident both as a researcher and in teaching large cohorts of undergraduate students. While our relationship is much different from the traditional student-supervisor approach, we have come to realise that what we can accomplish together as partners is greater than what we can achieve alone.

The human element of this relational work can contribute to, and complicate, the nature of SaP (Felten, 2017; Matthews, 2017). The inherent uncertainty with regards to how the relationship will develop has played on our minds at various times over the past few years. We have established and adjusted the dynamic boundaries for our relationship as time goes on, through reflective dialogue of what we do (and don't) expect from each other. There have been a few blunders along the way, such as when I (Michelle) unintentionally strayed too close to a parental role by advising Corinne on a personal matter. Corinne reasserted the boundaries of our relationship by making clear, "You're not my mother, Michelle!" I humbly apologised for this slip, and we were able to work past the inadvertently awkward moment thanks to our resilient relationship. For others looking to engage in a similar approach, we encourage you to embrace this uncertainty and participate in ongoing, open, and frank dialogue to establish and uphold boundaries that work for you.

Engaging in ethical partnerships

Matthews (2017) makes clear the importance of ethical practice within SaP work, stating that "good SaP is good for all involved" (p. 5). Our work together has been founded on ethical principles, with reciprocity, power-sharing, and fair treatment important to both of us. Our ongoing discussions about our practices and approaches, with each other and other colleagues, has ensured the partnership is mutually beneficial and based in proper conduct. We believe that our partnership can impact a broader movement by encouraging collaborative and productive relationships, as demonstrated (in part) by this paper.

Enacting partnership for transformation

Finally, Matthews (2017) talks about the power of SaP as "an act of resistance to the traditional, often implicit, but accepted, hierarchical structure where staff have *power over* students" (p. 6, emphasis in original). I (Corinne) am, at times, caught between these two camps. On one hand, I must navigate the hierarchical structures of our institution as a student and as a casual faculty member. Both roles typically place me at the bottom of the ladder with regards to the power structures of the university. However, on the other hand, I have a strong partnership with Michelle who I know has and will advocate for me when I don't have a voice of my own. I can see a trajectory for our partnership that disrupts the traditional structures for ourselves and for others. Through our work together, and in

collaboration with fellow SaP practitioners, we can be "part of a movement seeking to transform education more broadly" (Matthews, 2017, p. 6).

CONCLUSION

While it was a surprise to discover that we were doing SaP work, it has been delightful and very rewarding to work in partnership together. Upon reflection, we have realised that this is perhaps how the best SaP projects should be. If you can get to the point where the students are equal contributors, where their voices and perspectives are given the same amount of respect and value as anyone else's, and where all parties are viewed as equal colleagues, then you may well have achieved true partnership. This may be particularly pertinent for partnerships with post-graduate students, which Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) identified as an "under-explored or under-reported arena" (p. 16). Our hope is to convince you to rethink the grandfathered or antiquated means of working with PhD students where faculty exert power over students. We would like to suggest that seeing students as colleagues is an extension of seeing them as partners and is particularly appropriate when working with PhD students. In this way, you too can work in such a way that the separation between you is all but an invisible line. This metaphor suggests that while there is still a line that separates us—after all, we are not the same person, and there are institutional policies that apply to us differently—its impact is invisible and imperceptible.

We hope to play a small role in transforming the culture of student/supervisor relationships so that the grandfathered approach is no longer the norm. We hope you will take our accidental discoveries and newfound insights and turn them into intentional actions that lead to fruitful collaborations. We encourage you—whether student or academic—to consider how you can partner with your colleagues in different, creative, and productive ways.

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REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Transforming the Student-Professor Relationship: A Multiphase Research Partnership

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When we envision the classroom, we desire a space where traditional roles are deconstructed to engage all members of the learning environment equitably. This requires critical reflection to inform transformation that disrupts power relations between learners and educators. We embarked on a partnership to try to create a classroom that worked toward these goals. Chanelle was the instructor of record and identifies as a Black American, feminist woman. Her educational journey has taken her from a K-12 practitioner to a teacher educator who is committed to educational equity. Mercedes is a current student of sociology, with a focus in education. She identifies as a Black woman whose first-generation college experience and socioeconomic status inform her perspective and work. Both authors are particularly interested in the intersections of race, class, and gender in academic institutions and combatting educational inequity and injustice. Drawing from Bettina Love's (2019) work, we agree that "the push for justice. . . cannot be done without solidarity and reflectiveness" (p. 112). We chose to structure this essay to acknowledge our different perspectives and to accurately depict the relationship by giving voice to each partner in a collaborative reflection. Given that we are trying to negotiate and mitigate power dynamics, it is imperative to make space for each other; we hope this is apparent in our approach to partnership.

INTRODUCTION TO PARTNERSHIP

Chanelle

When presented with the opportunity to participate in a student-faculty partnership in my qualitative research methods course, I was eager to explore my practice with a student. In my professional journey, most supervisor observations carried an air of anxiety and judgment. A student partner felt less threatening, and her presence and feedback could also provide me a window into my students' experiences.

At the start of the semester, I was committed to changing the atmosphere in my courses. Over my years of teaching and conducting research, I had become attracted to the idea of constructivist pedagogy and creating learning environments where students were active, rather than passive, participants. This required me to deliberately create space for such engagement, and I remember I wanted to "talk less" in class. I initially hoped that my student

partner would hold me accountable to this practice, specifically look for the impact that my communication practices had on the classroom environment and student participation, and serve as a thought partner – one who critically influences another's thinking - in accomplishing this work.

Mercedes

The opportunity to partake in a student-faculty partnership appealed to me because it posits both students and faculty members as learners. My motivation to participate in this partnership arose from my experiences within the classroom and my interest in pedagogical methods. There exists an unsaid hierarchical relationship between students and faculty members, where students are understood only to be receivers of information. I realized that this partnership could have a significant impact on the way that students would experience the qualitative research methods course. Positioned as an informant, I would serve as a resource to students enrolled in the course and to the faculty member by offering a unique positionality in and outside the classroom. My hope for the student-faculty partnership was to take into account students' perspectives and to make transparent the pedagogical methods of my faculty partner.

Partnered with a new faculty member, I was also able to offer insights about the landscape of the college and the student body. Additionally, weekly meetings, observation notes, and feedback from students gave us the opportunity to establish course goals that we would revisit throughout the semester.

DEVELOPING A FOCUS FOR PARTNERSHIP: PHASE 1

Chanelle

Initially, our partnership took the form of observer/informer. Mercedes attended class and observed, and then we would discuss and plan for the following week. I looked to Mercedes as an accountability partner in my initial goal to solicit discussion, rather than dominate it, in the classroom. This was accomplished after a few weeks, and I wanted to deepen Mercedes's and my partnership.

The class was comprised of five students. Mercedes and I both felt that we had to prioritize making people feel comfortable to speak—to ask questions and learn with and from each other—because many students felt intimidated by the idea of conducting qualitative research. I wanted to fight against the hegemonic, competitive nature in traditional classrooms (Summers & Svinicki, 2007). Building classroom community (Booker, 2008; Kay, Summers, & Svinicki, 2011) stemmed from wanting to actively center my constructivist philosophy.

Mercedes's input gave me institutional background on the ways that classrooms in this bi-college consortium (Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges) can stifle student participation. She shared the cultural norm of performing smartness in class, where students primarily speak only if they can display knowledge and stay quiet when they don't understand. Countering this, I encouraged students to bring questions to sessions because I was not going to stand and lecture for three hours. Mercedes and I also considered conducting a qualitative study because it might be helpful for Mercedes and me to practice the concepts as I was guiding students to

understand them. Students were informed of this self-study, but it did not require any additional labor from them, so we received their consent and proceeded.

Mercedes

Our partnership focused on building community among the students enrolled in the course. This focus was inspired by the small number of students enrolled in the course. While participation and engagement can take various forms, we realized that particularly within the context of our educational institution, there is a culture of students being too afraid to speak for fear that what they are saying is wrong or problematic. Acknowledging this, we wanted to combat it directly, so Chanelle and I set out to make sure that students had the opportunity to participate.

In trying to address this culture of fear (Fisher, 2011), we also realized that in predominantly white, elite institutions, students of color are further pushed to the margins of the classroom and university. Our goal grew bigger than just addressing this culture of fear: it became a desire to ensure that the classroom is a place where students could draw on personal experiences and one another as resources.

GROWING THROUGH PARTNERSHIP: PHASE 2

Chanelle

Working in partnership with Mercedes was a new learning experience for me; I had not had the opportunity to work so closely with a student. In many ways, I welcomed this, but I cannot pretend that it was easy the entire time. For example, there was one student who frequently missed class or was very late. I noticed this, but Mercedes forced me to hold the student accountable. There were no times I can remember where I disagreed with feedback Mercedes offered, or when I did not heed her advice. I seriously valued Mercedes' input because as an instructor, I might ignore or forget something that happened in class, but Mercedes brought these things back to my attention: comments that students made, body language, the fact that I forget to take breaks, etc.

Through this partnership, I realized that teaching, though a public act, is something very private; having a partner helped to make the teaching process a collaborative one. Mercedes and I decided to engage in classroom study to understand the dynamics of classroom community in our shared space. Through reflecting on my practice in a structured way, I was benefiting from seeing my classroom space from her perspective and that enriched my experience.

Consequently, I was more transparent with the enrolled students about instructional choices and decisions within the classroom space. Further, I was not afraid to solicit questions and suggestions from the class and respond immediately by changing practices or implementing different strategies. This partnership helped me to practice being the reflective and responsive educator that I wanted to be, inspired by bell hooks (1994), Bettina Love (2019), and Paulo Freire (1973).

Mercedes

Initially, I was fearful of the partnership because I thought that the borders and boundaries around student-faculty relationships were clearly defined and established. When a student does not adhere to these borders and boundaries, there are consequences. Feedback and collaboration were never a part of the traditional student-faculty relationship, unless it was anonymous feedback for the course during mid-semester or end-of-semester evaluations.

Working with Chanelle made me realize that the relationship between students and faculty members could evolve into something more. The classroom did not have to be a space where the professor was the only holder of knowledge and where collaboration was only encouraged between students and their peers (Dewey, 1938). Her openness to learning more about her own teaching style and practices, and her dedication to not take up too much space in the classroom, were foundational in our partnership. Together we could restructure the classroom and transform the student-faculty relationship.

EXPANDING THE PARTNERSHIP BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: PHASE 3

Chanelle

Once the semester ended, Mercedes and I wanted to share what we learned through our self study. We began collaborative reflection on our work with the goal of writing an article together. Continuing this project, we navigated countless challenges from our responsibilities, yet our findings felt meaningful and were also supported by the literature.

Our partnership empowered me to think about how to share our work with a wider audience because in academia, too many instructors do not consider the classroom community. The toxic environment of higher education, especially for students of color, is not one that many academics contemplate in their everyday teaching practice. I was compelled to highlight the necessity for professors to think about what makes the classroom one where students want to be, and one that the professor has some stake in creating. I also knew that Mercedes was interested in a career in academia. The thought came to me to take a draft of our work and submit it for a conference presentation. Even though we had not fully completed data analysis, it was worth sharing.

Mercedes

The earlier phases of our partnership were primarily built around a structured program at our institution, the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program. Although the program provided us with support, we molded and shaped our partnership into one that integrated our interests and pushed us to be reflexive and critical. Our investment in the partnership naturally evolved beyond the classroom study. Chanelle reached out during summer break to ask if I wanted to attend a conference with her to share the data that we had collected. The idea of presenting our work to other professors and instructional leaders illuminated for me that the work we were doing was necessary.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION AS AN ENACTMENT OF PARTNERSHIP: PHASE 4

Chanelle

Preparing to present our work was exhilarating, but also a learning process. At the beginning, I realized that I had made assumptions about the qualitative skills that Mercedes had. I had not worked through research with a student partner before, so some of her tasks carried unrealistic expectations. The first experience where this became real to me was when I realized I assumed she knew how to code data. I was shocked by my own behavior of not scaffolding our work because we were in partnership. It was eye-opening to consider how to teach the skills necessary for qualitative work, while simultaneously engaging in the process.

Presenting together was similar to when we were working in our classroom-focused partnership. I did not struggle with maintaining a position of ultimate authority, and I tried my best to be completely collaborative. I offered suggestions for the direction that we could take and solicited Mercedes's input. But, as this was her first full experience moving through the qualitative data analysis process to reporting out, I did have to take the lead at times to direct our work together.

However, once it was time to develop, solidify, and present our work, I felt that Mercedes and I were equal partners. We had the same amount of airtime, and we both had equal say in content, along with fielding questions. Our partnership shifted as a result of this experience in terms of us being willing and voluntary partners. Though we enjoyed our work together, we still had been assigned, rather than it being our choice, to work together. It was helpful that we both cared enough about our focus for inquiry to move forward and share our learning.

Individually, I also grew as a professional mentor. My mentor work has primarily been to support students' personal goals; I had not yet had the opportunity to share collaborative professional work with a student that would also help them improve professionally. It was a joy to observe Mercedes engage with professional colleagues during the conference and to see her flourish in navigating conversations and feel able to discuss her work and professional interests in ways that left a positive and lasting impact.

Mercedes

Much like the classroom-focused partnership, facilitating a presentation together required us to reflect on our social locations in order to figure out how to move forward and how to inform the work that we wanted to undertake/accomplish. Chanelle and I co-created the presentation. Throughout our research, Chanelle provided tremendous support to me, explaining how to code the data that we had collected, which was something that I did not have experience with. Our partnership grew in a number of ways as a result of co-creation; we became research peers rather than student and professor.

TAKEAWAYS FROM WORKING IN A MULTIPHASE PARTNERSHIP

Chanelle

This multiphase partnership has taught me much about collaboration. The first lesson is patience: in our second phase, Mercedes and I struggled with setting times to meet, sticking with deadlines, navigating life, and feeling like we were moving forward. But, once I prioritized

that the work would get done, and we were both learning how to co-create, having patience gave me peace. Our conference acceptance also gave us a concrete timeline to work within, where our research paper, with a self-defined timeline, is still in progress.

Further, I've discovered that it's necessary to present opportunity to students. As the professor in the relationship, I had access to information that Mercedes did not, and I took the initiative to make this research an option for her. In my own life, doors have been opened for me because people considered me. In fact, my very first conference presentation and publication came from my university supervisor taking my senior honors work and submitting it to a conference, which resulted in a publication. So, the insight I gained is to be a pathway for students to encounter new experiences and capitalize on opportunities that they don't know even exist.

My partnership with Mercedes taught me a lot about the ways that I need to grow as a partner, so I took it to the next level. This semester, I am co-creating and co-teaching an entire course with an undergraduate student. I am excited for all the ways that she and I will mutually grow and benefit from our work together.

My advice to others who are considering multiphase evolving partnerships with students is, first, to do it! The results of work between two generations will have a positive impact on the students' opportunities and the professor's understanding of their own work.

Second, remember to scaffold the work. My work with Mercedes started out slowly because I forgot that in addition to participating in the process, I also had to be teaching and guiding her. This encouraged me to slow down and really understand and appreciate what I was doing, rather than rushing through. It was also more satisfying to share the experience with another person. Sometimes research, like teaching, can become so personal, but in this work, there is another person to share it all with.

Finally, don't be afraid. Some people may be hesitant to engage in partnership because they are apprehensive about dynamics. This is something to consider, but do not get stuck there. Every new experience is one that both parties will grow from, and fear will only get in the way of creating something beautiful together.

Mercedes

This multiphase partnership with Chanelle has taught me that there are professors who care not only about the content that they are teaching but also the ways in which they are teaching it. Within our partnership, there was room for both of us to grow professionally, and we also created a space of listening where we could openly and honestly talk about the structural problems of our educational institution. Most importantly, our partnership required flexibility and passion. We had a deep love for the discoveries made through our study, so returning to the work never felt like a burden.

Chanelle served as a mentor to me and valued my desire to pursue a career in academia. Her experience as a professor gave me insight into a career that I had limited knowledge about. As a gate opener, Chanelle provided me with the opportunity to present at an international conference—an opportunity that otherwise would have not been available to me. From this partnership, I have been able to learn how to collect data, do ethnographic

research, develop an argument, and present findings, while also gaining a mentor in the process.

To others considering a multiphase partnership, I would highly recommend that they do it because the experience invaluable. Each participant can gain a new understanding of the classroom and of the possibilities to transform learning experiences in higher education.

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BOOK REVIEW

An active student participation companion by S. Barrineau, A. Engström, and U. Schnaas.

Uppsala University, Sweden: 2019
ISBN: 978-91-506-2727-5.

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What first caught my eye about this publication was the title. The focus on "active student participation" will draw in those of us who share an interest in partnership, but the choice of the word "companion" intrigued me, implying something to accompany the reader, to complement other sources and ideas.

Co-authored by an educational developer and two recent graduates, all of whom participated in active student participation (ASP) and partnership projects at Uppsala University in Sweden, the companion shares the learning from their experiences and provides food for thought for those embarking on similar work. The diversity of voices—the authors, student contributors, and semi-fictionalised voices of theorists—help the reader understand and situate the authors' ideas in national, institutional, and personal contexts.

The authors frame ASP as both a dimension of student engagement and an umbrella term for other ways of working that readers may be familiar with, such as Students as Partners, change agents, consultants and producers, co-creation, and peer-teaching and -learning. There is much for those of us interested in partnership to take away from this document with the caveat that the authors describe a very active form of student engagement, not just staff-student partnership. They also note the slipperiness of the language around these ideas, describing ASP as a "term in flux" (p. 27). The tension between holding terms open for co-development and the desire to have clear definitions resonated with my own experience and reinforces the need to articulate and discuss these terms as we work together. The authors' model of student engagement (on p.29) is a useful addition to existing frameworks and models, which may be used to inform conversations that unpack these complex concepts.

The tone is conversational with an engaging use of images and stories. The authors also invite and encourage readers to contribute their "voices, ideas and creativity" (p. 4) throughout. It is arranged in three sections: the concept of ASP and how it works at Uppsala, practical tools and guidance, and connections with educational research and theory. In the latter section, I was drawn to the links between the purpose of higher education and ASP. This chimed with my work to develop tools to help people articulate individual philosophy statements for student engagement and partnership. The authors creatively do this using an illustrated "Invented Dialogue" about ASP between key educational thinkers who have

informed their thinking. They invite readers to continue this dialogue imagining what our favourite theorists would add.

The text covers a lot of ground with prompts to help the reader engage with and apply the ideas in their own contexts. I can see this being a useful companion for many audiences (e.g., teaching and professional services staff, educational developers, and students) as they navigate partnership work, with plenty of activities, models, examples, and worksheets that could be adapted to use in individual reflection and workshops. Chapter 5 provides a workbook with questions and space for the reader to note their responses. Especially valuable are sections on how to initially engage students with ASP work and unpacking roles and responsibilities—these are topics that often emerge in conversations about partnership.

What struck me most was that the authors do not shy away from the "unsolved" challenges and tensions that working in this way raises, but instead see these as part of authentically engaging with others. They do not offer simple solutions to these complex issues but provide reflective prompts, ideas from the broader literature, and suggestions and examples from their experiences to help the reader navigate this territory. This is dealt with most clearly in Chapters 6 (practical) and 9 (theoretical). The authors invite us to stay with the trouble (after Donna Haraway) and explore these tensions. I believe working through some of these tensions is what makes partnership such a provocative and creative space with potential for personal and collective transformation. By encouraging us to do stay with the trouble, the authors emphasise the developmental nature of this work, which necessitates space for reflection, missteps, experiments, and ideas that may not lead to concrete outcomes.

The authors close by saying ASP is about acting well and giving "learners the choice of agency" (p. 226). For me, this spoke to a question particularly relevant to partnership: if the choice of agency needs to be "given," what does that tell us about the nature of higher education? This question acknowledges a current reality: that it can be difficult for learners to act with agency without others creating the space or permitting them to do so. In responding to this, it is essential to recognise the ways students are already exercising agency (including some of the examples within this companion) and to learn from these.

This practical and scholarly text contributes to our understanding of the potential benefits and transformative tensions that ASP offers in an engaging and supportive way. It does not provide a simple roadmap but shares the authors' experiences and insights. I welcome this thoughtful, creative, and generous companion on my own journeys in partnership and recommend it to other travellers.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

Dr. Abbi Flint *is an independent researcher and educational developer with a longstanding research and practice interest in student engagement, student-staff partnership, and creative academic writing. She is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.*