

MIETL Summer Institute

Notes from Students as Partners: A Liquid Cafe

Wednesday 4 May 12.45-14.00

Table 1: How can we ensure that our approaches to students as partners are inclusive and engage diverse students? *Lauren Groenendijk*

- Flexibility about when these activities occur (in / out of curriculum, multiple times the activities are available etc)
- Financial incentive – remuneration for time the student may otherwise need to use for a part time job
- Be mindful of the inclusion criteria for participation (e.g. a high English proficiency requirement may exclude international students)
- Involve students in the planning process (pre-partnership) to help identify ways to be inclusive for all students

The group were not able to come up with one single answer. Some agreed with financial incentives, others did not. Some argued for inclusion in the curriculum whereas others maintain that partnership should always be a choice otherwise it is not a true partnership.

“Emphasise partnership as an ethos and acknowledge the role of students as partners in their learning. Partnership can include specific, defined activities but it doesn’t necessarily have to as set activities can exclude due to a range of factors including time and financial.”

Table 2: Students as partners is a ‘State of Mind’. How can we ensure students as partners is an ethos that informs all aspects of the student experience, not just isolated initiatives or individual teaching approaches? *Lucie Sam Dvorakova*

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1. Barriers to making Students as Partners a practice that informed every aspect of student interaction were discussed first of all. The table talked through institutional barriers, as well as resistance from faculty and staff alike. Throughout this discussion, it became apparent that rather these being a set of discrete issues and barriers, all can be summed into a general and pervasive resistance to change and a sense of complacency (we’ve always done it this way/too old to change). All other specific barriers (funding, etc.) can be traced to this particular mindset.
2. Secondly, we discussed how the change can be made. With the conversation on barriers in mind, we opted for small and simple steps and decided that the focus should be on creating a cultural shift rather than necessarily starting more isolated programs without a large, overarching vision.

Table 3: How can we move beyond speaking about or on behalf of students to working with students – as co-creators, co-researchers and co-designers with the potential for transforming teaching and learning? *Sophia Abbot*

Abbot

- Increase visibility/presence of students
 - o Ask students → talk with them and listen to their perspectives
 - o Provide opportunities for students to participate
 - Embedded in everything we do, established as an expectation, include all students [or a range rather than simply some select students]
 - Provide compensation or reward students for their participation? In order to allow or encourage more to participate

- Types of compensation: academic credit, CV addition, pay (bursary vs. wage), grants, publication opportunities
- Opportunities for all students but recognize not all students will want to
- Create vision of university
- Put power into students' hands
- Create and sustain safe spaces for students' voices → they can make themselves vulnerable and openly share ideas
- Who is responsible for making these changes? They catalysts
- How to encourage transparency? So students will know "why are we doing this?"
- Changing state of mind → college vs. student/staff hierarchy
- Changing culture of institution so they are consensus-based/cooperative
- Increase dialogue and connectivity
- Students need to see their ideas being implemented → not just listened to but reacted to)
 - Setting ground rules together
 - Honoring students autonomy
 - Ensuring they have ownership over ideas/projects
- Understanding: stakes are different for students vs. academic faculty/staff
- Have a SaP committee within university structure

Table 4: Why might faculty/staff and administrators be indifferent or hostile toward the idea of engaging students as change agents? What strategies could address this? *Sabrina Kirby*

- One of the primary reasons for hostility that we discussed was fear. Faculty and staff may fear changes to the structures and hierarchies to which they've become accustomed, or around the potential workload and time investment (the notion that it might turn into "another job").
 - This is related to one of the principles of partnership: trust. Initially, faculty may not trust students enough to let them work independently, or at least without oversight.
 - It is compounded by the fact that faculty may have a lot at stake in a professional sense if the project is not successful
 - It is worth noting that students may experience this fear as well. For example, they may fear that they are not equal to the task at hand.
 - *One of the ways that we might be able to work towards overcoming this fear is by pointing out that engaged students are often easier to teach, and that though the work of partnership may seem daunting, it is also often very rewarding. Clear expectations for both staff and students would also address the uncertainty that can make student engagement projects seem risky.
- There is also a need to challenge many common assumptions about faculty and staff, who are a body of individuals equally as unique and diverse as the student population
 - Instructors may seem resistant to engaging students as partners not because they object to the notion of partnership, but because they don't feel that they gave the tools or skills necessary to create a successful one.
 - *Having flexible projects that take advantage of the diverse abilities of professors may help allay these concerns. Scaffolding may also prove beneficial for both professors and students, helping them move through different types of projects, and levels of student control, at a pace that suits them
 - *Using the correct language to communicate engagement initiatives with faculty is also important, as it can help them better understand the potential benefits of the project while still acknowledging their valid concerns

- One of the key solutions that came up was the importance of giving faculty ownership of the project in the form of early engagement. We also acknowledged that while challenging, institutional embedding can go a long way to engaging faculty or staff who may otherwise be indifferent or hostile
- We also discussed the idea of mentorship, in which staff who are very active in projects that engage students champion the initiatives to other faculty and provide them with support and advice

Table 5: How can we ensure that where students work in partnership with faculty/staff all parties have an authentic rationale for working together and there are real mutual benefits for different forms of engagement? *Lucy Mercer-Mapstone*

Many questions about ‘what is authenticity?’ and ‘is authenticity of motivations necessary?’. The answer to the latter was yes, and that there were many answers to the former. A focus was that authentic motivations/rationale did not need to be positive – that anger or frustration was acceptable and often highly stimulating motivations for engaging in partnership as a means to addressing certain issues.

Respect for the motivations/rationales of others was central to authenticity of mutual benefits. Ensuring benefits for all engaged in partnerships was said to be predicated on honesty, transparency, and communication, particularly from the outset and through the early stages of partnership to ensure that people’s ‘goals’ or ‘outcomes’ were on the table. Negotiation and communication throughout the process of partnership was also central to ensuring mutual benefits with the need for flexibility.

The need to think differently about outcomes was discussed. That an assessment piece or publication was one form of outcome, different to process-based outcomes such as the goal of developing trust or relationships rather than something ‘on paper’. Both outcomes were considered valuable, but that it is useful to discuss and think about them differently in the context of partnerships in practice.

Recognition for engaging in partnership was a recurring theme with much discussion of how such recognition influenced authenticity. For example, will paying students affect the authenticity of their rationale for engaging in partnership? Much of this discussion was one-sided focusing on the rationale of students rather than staff. There was agreement that recognition/benefit was necessary but that came in many forms – e.g. learning, adding experience to CV, title or validation of success.

Ultimately, adaptation, communication, flexibility, and transparency were core to the factors required for ensuring mutual and real benefits for all people involved in partnerships.

Table 6: How can we change the perceptions faculty/staff and students may have of one another to enable them to see each other as partners? *Anita Acai*

- Hierarchies exist in many shapes and forms; impossible to completely eliminate them
 - Instead, should think about how we can best learn from one another as opposed to why our voice is more important than someone else's
 - Embrace diversity and multiple perspectives
- Requires BOTH students and faculty to "curb" their egos and display openness towards partnership
 - Need to feel comfortable speaking without fear of judgment
 - Need to be open to change and even criticism (requires a great deal of SHARED vulnerability)
 - Often requires a culture shift
- Need to work to create spaces where open, honest dialogue is welcome and there is a culture of trust and respect

- Choose physical spaces carefully (e.g., cafes/restaurants or lounges as opposed to professor's offices)
- Explain motivations for partnership at the very beginning—honestly!
- Explain reasons for thinking and decision-making to others—we don't always do this, which sometimes lead to (incorrect) assumptions
- Ensure that the team touches base with each other regularly
 - Ongoing, formative feedback as opposed to terminal, summative evaluations
 - E.g., Start-Stop-Continue exercise (<http://www.bu.edu/ctl/teaching-resources/start-stop-continue/>)
 - Learn to communicate feedback, especially criticism, constructively
 - Be okay with and honest about the negative emotions that may arise when negative feedback is given (should be normalized)
- Remember that partnerships do not always exist within courses; they can also exist outside of courses
 - Can remove some of the hierarchies inherently embedded in higher education (e.g., grading)

Table 7: What evidence do we have that students as partners enhances the quality of learning and how can we fill the gap? *Kelly Matthews*

- Focus on 'evidence' as one of the important pieces of the puzzle that is 'students as partners'. Shared sense of struggle around how to evidence the effectiveness and impacts of partnership, while documenting the student-staff partnership process or approach implemented is more straightforward. View of the current situation was that evidence was small-scale, local to specific institutions and reported as case studies based on qualitative methods drawing on self-reported perceptions of those engaged in the partnership initiative.
- The sense was that comparative approaches drawing on both qualitative and quantitative methods was the way forward. The issue of 'comparing' across contexts (with varying models/approaches to partnership) was acknowledged with the suggestion that evidencing was done focused on the values and ethos underpinning partnership generally.
- Questions being asked about partnerships could expand as a means to guide differing approaches to data collection and evidencing.

Table 8: How can we ensure that where students work in partnership with faculty/staff and administrators that all parties have an authentic rationale for working together and there are real mutual benefits for different forms of partnership? *Peter Felten*

- Having an "authentic rationale" is important because partnership challenges traditional higher education structures and practices – without the rationale, partnership probably is not sustainable. And we may need profound changes in higher education might be necessary to make partnership authentic on a wide scale.
- Partnership should be understood as both a practice and a culture, and both should be developed in higher education.
- For partnerships to be authentic, all involved should learn or benefit. The learning from partnerships, however, does not necessarily need to be new disciplinary knowledge or skills – partners also could learn to appreciate or understand different perspectives, or could develop intercultural capacities (beyond a discipline), etc.
- How do we move from isolated partnership projects to partnership "as a way of life" or "as a way of being" in higher education? One important step is to focus on the ways that rituals and spaces (not simply structures and policies) in higher education enable or constrain partnerships. Partnership rituals

are practices that are inclusive and democratic and community-oriented, such as inviting all to attend student presentations, and having spaces that encourage meaningful interactions among people in different roles at the institution.

Table 9: How can we best develop partnership learning communities? *Rafaella Shammass*

Although the focus of our question revolved around the ways in which we can best develop partnership learning communities (PLCs), our discussion initially began with establishing a common definition of a partnership learning community. We defined partnership learning communities as communities composed of motivated individuals who share a common goal. As a collective power, communities are able to push initiatives forward and instigate change.

- We identified key characteristics and principles of an authentic learning community, they are self-generating; not necessarily confined to a particular physical space; possess an effective communication pathway; and are characterized as inclusive. Individuals within the communities share a sense of belonging, trust and openness.
- While a dedicated physical space may enhance the experiences of PLCs, it is not entirely necessary. An opportunity for face-to-face interaction was identified as an important component of a PLC.
- We also identified the effective use of technology as an opportunity to establish and enhance PLCs. The use of technology can encourage students to share resources (e.g. through digital tools).
- You can be part of many communities that are connected by a network.
- Time is a huge factor because PLCs are embedded within an institution. Once students graduate, can they still be part of the learning communities? This question compelled us to think about the possibility of establishing global partnership learning communities.

Table 10: How can we scale-up student as partner initiatives to engage a greater number of students and faculty/staff and administrators? *Kris Knorr*

- Start with understanding of SaP:
 - o Acceptance/value → buy in
- Motivated
 - o Demonstrate mutual impact (positive)
 - o Fun, energy, retention, increase well being
- Providing opportunities → students initiate
- Incentives for both faculty/staff and students
- Large scale isn't always necessary
- Role modeling and disseminate
- Embedded in curriculum – flexible
- Recognition for staff/students
- Time, evidence, and money = problematic factors
- Culture shift – buy in at all levels
- Think about it as a spectrum
- International accreditation framework