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**Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education**

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*“At its roots partnership is about investing students with the power to co-create, not just knowledge or learning, but the higher education institution itself”* (NUS nd)*.*

*“the future of student engagement lies in partnership”* (Bryson, forthcoming).

*“There is a subtle, but extremely important, difference between an institution that ‘listens’ to students and responds accordingly, and an institution that gives students the opportunity to explore areas that they believe to be significant, to recommend solutions and to bring about the required changes. The concept of ‘listening to the student voice’ – implicitly if not deliberately – supports the perspective of student as ‘consumer’, whereas ‘students as change agents’ explicitly supports a view of the student as ‘active collaborator’ and ‘co-producer’, with the potential for transformation”* (Dunne in Foreword to Dunne and Zandstra, 2011, 4).

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Partnership is essentially a process for engaging students. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself. This workshop will explore four ways in which students may be engaged as partners through:

* Learning, teaching and assessment;
* Subject-based research and inquiry;
* Scholarship of teaching and learning; and
* Curriculum design and pedagogic advice and consultancy.

**A. Learning, teaching and assessment**

**Case study 1: Compulsory community-based learning capstone project at Portland State University, USA**

During the final year each undergraduate student is required to participate in a Senior Capstone, the culmination of the University Studies program. The Senior Capstone is a community-based learning experience that:

1. Provides an opportunity for students to apply the expertise they have learned in their major to real issues and problems in the community; and
2. Enhances students’ ability to work in a team context necessitating collaboration with persons from different fields of specialisation.

Each student works with a team of students and faculty. Each Senior Capstone must result in some form of summation, closing project, or final product that puts closure to the students' experience.

For example, in a course on Asset Mapping and GIS students work in partnership with a community organization in need of community-based research. For instance, the Multnomah County Health Department was interested in documenting tobacco advertising in the public realm close to schools. In another example, the Early Childhood Head start program of Neighbourhood House in Portland wanted to explore the physical isolation of recent Somali refugees in light of important resources such as health facilities, grocery stores, access to parks, and social services. After the research phase of the project, two student project managers are either self-selected or selected by the overall team of students to act as the conduit between the partner organization and the students and to make sure that all of the project’s tasks are on track. In addition, students self-select into task oriented teams to accomplish the data entry, analysis, asset mapping, GIS mapping, Google Earth development, writing, editing, document design, and presentation.

*Further information:* University of Gloucestershire (nd)

**Case study 2: Engaging students as partners in assessment**

A key way to bring learning and teaching together through engaging students as partners is through the assessment process. As Bevitt (2012, 4) notes:

Evidence suggests that assessment and feedback processes used with students have a significant impact on ‘what, how and how much students study’ (Gibbs and Simpson 2004, 3) and is therefore an essential element in the learning and teaching process.

For example, one way of attempting to meet the ten conditions under which assessment supports student learning (Gibbs and Simpson 2004), which has been used in several different disciplinary contexts, is the development of patchwork text assessment.

The essence of patchwork is that it consist of a variety of small sections, each of which is complete in itself … a ‘patchwork text’ assignment is one that is gradually assembled during the course of a phase of teaching and consists of a sequence of fairly short pieces of writing which are designed to be as varied as possible to cover the educational objectives of the teaching (Winter 2003, 112).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Bevitt (2012) concluded from the evaluations of piloting the technique in two courses at the University of Derby, that though there were a range of learning benefits not all students liked the experience. She suggested that students might ‘develop their own curriculum of assessments to suit their individual preferences’, or alternatively ‘pursuing a mix of traditional and more novel methods of assessment across a programme may hold the key to enhanced learning for all’ (p. 12). Bevitt goes on to recommend that students (and employers) should be more involved in the development and design of assessments.

Developing students as partners in assessment is part of the recognition of the importance of ‘assessment *for* learning’ (McDowell *et al.* 2009). Feedback on formative assessment is at the core of the model of assessment for learning developed by Sambell *et al.* (2012):

The notion of feedback is expanded to include not only the ‘normal’ tutor feedback on student work but also tutor-student dialogic feedback, which is part of interactive teaching and learning and peer feedback from a range of formal and informal collaborative learning activities. This interaction enables students to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own work, rather than simply expecting tutors to perform that role for them (Sambell 2013, 384).

Self- and peer-assessment are key to this process and are often used to redistribute group work marks between team members (Healey and Addis 2004). Sambell and Graham (2010) give a fascinating case study of their experience of developing and running a module on assessment for learning for students on a non-vocational joint honours course; usually such modules are restricted to courses for teachers.

**B. Subject-based research and inquiry**

**Case study 3: Student as Producer is the organising principle for learning across the University at Lincoln, UK**

Student as producer is the organising principle for the learning landscapes at the University of Lincoln. The focus of Student as Producer is the undergraduate student, working in collaboration with other students and academics in real research projects, or projects which replicate the process of research in their discipline. Undergraduate students work alongside staff in the design and delivery of their teaching and learning programmes, and in the production of work of academic content and value. Staff and students can apply for development funds to the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Scheme (UROS) and the Fund for Educational Development (FED). Student as Producer is making research-engaged teaching an institutional priority. As courses come up for validation staff and students are asked to consider Student as Producer in terms of the following key features:

* Discovery: Student as Producer
* Technology in teaching: Digital scholarship
* Space and spatiality: Learning landscapes in higher education
* Assessment: Active learners in communities of practice
* Research and evaluation: Scholarship of teaching and learning
* Student voice: Diversity, difference and dissensus
* Support for research based learning through expert engagement with information resources
* Creating the future: Employability, enterprise, postgraduate, beyond employability

*Further information:* <http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk/>; <http://researchengaged.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/>; Neary with Winn (2009); Neary (2010; 2011); Ryan and Tilbury (2013, 17).

**Case study 4: Mainstreaming undergraduate research and inquiry at Miami University, Ohio, US**

Miami University is moving from a teaching and learning paradigm to a discovery paradigm supporting the development of students as scholars. The TOP 25 project begun in 2007 has introduced innovative approaches that moves learning away from ‘too much time telling students what we think they need to know, and not enough time using their curiosity to drive their learning’ (Hodge 2006, 3). Over a four year period the TOP 25 Project involved the largest recruiting courses (actually 29 of them) being rewritten as inquiry-based courses. Each course was allocated $35,000 to fund curriculum revision. Learning technologists and educationalists supported the teams of faculty involved. Together the courses account for almost a quarter of total credit hours. Many of the courses were redesigned using the inverted classroom model in which most of the lectures are provided electronically using, for example, videos, iPods and VLEs, while most of the contact time is used for interaction between faculty and students. Some of the physical spaces are being redesigned to provide flexible furniture to encourage discussion.

Responses to survey questions show that the Top 25 courses are promoting active, engaged learning. Compared to students in the traditional sections, students in the redesigned sections report:

* More frequently discussing ideas from class with others outside of the classroom;
* Spending much more time working with other students on projects during class time;
* Spending less time memorizing facts and ideas, and
* Spending more hours on their course work and working harder than they thought they would to meet faculty expectations.

Top 25 courses also have more emphasis on higher-level thinking skills. Compared to students in the traditional sections, students in the redesigned sections report more frequently:

* Supporting their ideas and beliefs with data or evidence;
* Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods by examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions;
* Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships; and
* Working on a project or paper that requires integrating ideas from various sources.

Many faculty not involved in the Top 25 project are also adopting similar changes. Because the redesigned courses are creating new expectations among students they are now arriving in class expecting to be challenged and ready to take more responsibility for their own learning.

The challenges in maintaining this ‘project’ include reduced financial support because of problems in the national and thus institutional economy, in maintaining the momentum. The visibility of the Top 25 project and its support at the highest levels of the university have encouraged the development and expansion of programs that support student engagement. For example, the First Year Research Experience (FYRE) program has been established to offer incoming students an opportunity to engage in research and to establish early contact with a faculty mentor.

*Further information:* Hodge (2006); Hodge *et al.* (2007; 2008; 2011); Taylor *et al*. (2012)

[www.units.miamioh.edu/celt/engaged\_learning/top25/](http://www.units.miamioh.edu/celt/engaged_learning/top25/); [www.units.muohio.edu/oars/undergrad\_research/first\_year\_research\_experience/fyre\_info.php](http://www.units.muohio.edu/oars/undergrad_research/first_year_research_experience/fyre_info.php)

**C. Scholarship of teaching and learning**

**Case study 5: Students are engaged as partners in shaping and leading their own educational experiences through the 'students as change agents' initiative at the University of Exeter, UK**

The key concept is that students themselves take responsibility for bringing about change, based on their own research on aspects of learning and teaching. The approach enables students to be actively engaged with the processes of change, often taking on a leadership role. They are engaged deeply with the institution and their subject areas, and the focus and direction is, to a greater extent, decided by students. The most important aspect is the focus on research, and building change on evidence-based foundations. Students from across the university have contributed to this initiative, carrying out a series of research projects on their learning and teaching environment, selecting concerns raised through student-staff liaison committees, and providing recommendations and solutions to improve their experience. A small amount of funding is available from the University’s learning and teaching budget to support this initiative. Students work as apprentice researchers; their research methods included focus groups, informal interviews and questionnaire surveys. Outcomes are presented at a student-staff conference, which results in institutional engagement with key research findings. More than 30 small projects had been undertaken by 2011, though overall, many hundreds of students have participated in the various projects. Student research has driven organisational change, contributed to student engagement in shifts of policy and practice within the University, and supported students’ graduate skills in the areas of research, project management and presentation of outcomes, leadership and understanding organisational development. For example, student projects in the Business School on the benefits students have gained from implementation of technologies in the classroom have contributed significantly to streamed video being now far more widespread, and 4000 voting handsets being distributed to undergraduate and Master’s students.

*Further information:* Kay *et al*. (2010); Dunne and Zandstra (2011); Sandover *et al.* (2012a); Dunne *et al.* (2013)

**Case study 6: Students undertake educational development projects as academic partners with staff at Birmingham City University, UK**

Launched in 2010, this partnership between the University and Birmingham City Students’ Union aims to integrate students into the teaching and pedagogic research communities of the University to enhance the learning experience. Staff and students are invited to propose educational development projects in which students can work in an academic employment setting in a paid post at the University, on an equal footing with their staff partner. Students negotiate their own roles with staff and are paid for up to 125 hours of work. Each project is designed to develop a specific aspect of learning and teaching practice. Typically, these may result in new learning resources, developments in curriculum design or the evaluation of innovations and changes that have already been made. It’s key to the scheme that students are employed as partners not assistants, co-creators not passive recipients of the learning experience. Some projects are initiated and led by students. The Students as Academic Partners (SAP) scheme is part of a wider University initiative to create a greater sense of learning community at the University in which students and staff view it as the norm, not the exception, that they are engaged in academic discussion about the nature and delivery of their courses. In the first year 23 projects involving 35 students were funded across the University in all subject areas; this increased to 47 projects and 120 students the following year, and 65 students engaged in 200 projects in 2012.

*Further information:* Birmingham City Students’ Union (2010); Nygaard *et al*. (2013); <http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/celt/forming-learning-partnerships/sap>

**Case study 7: 3M National Student Fellowships, Canada**

For many years, 3M Canada has funded scholarships and awards for undergraduates in universities and college across Canada and in 2011, 3M added a student fellowship using the long-standing 3M National Teaching Fellowship for university professors as a model. The 3M National Student Fellowship honours up to ten students who have demonstrated outstanding leadership in their lives and at their college or university. These students embrace a vision of quality education that enhances their academic experience and beyond. Each cohort member:

* Receives an award of $5,000 to be spent at their discretion.
* Joins the others at the June STLHE Conference where they will also participate in a 3M National Student Fellowship retreat.
* Receives a contribution toward the cost of conference travel and accommodations.
* Develops a cross-Canadian collaborative project to enhance teaching and learning at the post-secondary level.

*Further information:* <http://www.stlhe.ca/awards/3m-national-student-fellowship/>

**D. Curriculum design and pedagogic advice and consultancy**

**Case study 8: Students act as pedagogical consultants at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, USA**

Most models of professional development assume that faculty learning is the purview of faculty colleagues or teaching and learning centre staff. A program, called Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT), at Bryn Mawr College challenges that assumption by inviting undergraduate students to serve as pedagogical consultants to faculty members. Between 2006 and 2012, 140 faculty participants and 70 student consultants have participated in 154 partnerships. Feedback from participants suggests that this approach affords faculty and students an unusual opportunity to co-construct a more informed model of faculty development, deepens the learning experiences of both faculty and students, and recasts the responsibility for those learning experiences as one that is shared by faculty and students. Students are not enrolled in the courses for which they serve as consultants. Each student consultant has the following responsibilities: meet with the faculty member to establish why each is involved and what hopes both have for the collaboration, and to plan the semester’s focus and meetings; visit one class session each week; take detailed observation notes on the pedagogical challenge(s) the faculty member has identified; survey or interview students in the class (if the faculty member wishes), either for mid-course feedback or at another point in the semester; meet weekly with the faculty member to discuss observation notes and other feedback and implications; participate in weekly meetings with one another and with the coordinator of SaLT; and visit one or more faculty seminars five times over the course of the semester. For full-semester partnerships, student consultants work approximately seven hours per week and receive $900. For shorter partnerships, student consultants are paid by the hour.

*Further information:* Cook-Sather (2011; 2013); Cook-Sather *et al.* (2014); <http://www.brynmawr.edu/tli/>

**Case study 9: Students act as co-creators of course design at Elon University, North Carolina, USA**

Since 2005, faculty, students, and academic development staff at Elon University have experimented with a variety of approaches to partnering in ‘course design teams’ (CDT) that co-create, or re-create, a course syllabus. Each team’s process varies, but typically a CDT includes one or two faculty, between two and six undergraduate students, and one academic developer. Faculty members initiate the redesign process, inviting the students and developer to co-construct a team. Students usually apply to participate in a CDT, motivated by a desire to contribute to a course they have taken or that is important to the curriculum in their disciplinary home. Once the CDT is assembled, the CDT uses a ‘backward design’ approach, first developing course goals and then building pedagogical strategies and learning assessments on the foundation of those goals. Time is the most important element in the success of a CDT. Successful teams usually meet weekly for two or three months, providing ample opportunities to both accomplish the CDT’s practical purpose of redesigning the course and, perhaps more importantly, to develop a true partnership that welcomes student voices. Students often doubt that they will be taken seriously in the process, and they also need time to develop the language and the confidence to express pedagogical ideas clearly. Many CDTs experience a liminal moment when everyone present recognizes that a fundamental boundary has been crossed, either by a faculty member ceding significant authority for the course design or by students claiming power in the process.

*Further information:* Bovill *et al.* (2011); Delpish *et al*. (2010); Mihans *et al*. (2008)

**Case study 10:** **Students are full members of department curriculum teams in national initiative in the UK**

In 2009 the Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) Subject Centre piloted a year-long initiative to support four GEES departments plan changes to their curricula. All but one team had one or two student members. The main feature was a 48 hour retreat where teams were supported by discipline-based experts in educational development. Roughly half the time was spent working on their own projects, while the other half was spent working with other teams and in plenary activities encouraging divergent and creative thinking and prioritizing of ideas. Teams that comprise a ‘diagonal slice’ across departments, with academic staff, at different levels of seniority and functions, and students, can be very effective in breaking down status and level differences that can impede change. Students are key, providing creativity and new perspectives, and are less bound by departmental contexts. The groups were full of praise of the important contribution they made to their team’s thinking:

“It was essential to our thinking. Having the students with us has been immensely helpful, and frankly they have played as full a part as any other team member and have been just amazing.”

The approach was based on the ‘change academies’ which have been run for several years by the HE Academy where they support institutional teams developing teaching and learning initiatives. Some institutions have run internal academies where departmental teams work on related topics.

*Further information*: Healey *et al*. (2010; 2013)

**Case study 11: Students are engaged as course enhancement officers (CEOs) at Sheffield Hallam University, UK**

As part of the institution’s Academic Quality Framework, course design teams have to evidence how students have contributed appropriately to the design of new and existing courses. Students are commonly asked to comment through e.g. module evaluation forms, questionnaires and focus groups, but this is too late for them to have a significant influence the design of the new and revised courses. In 2012-13 a pilot project titled Course Design Consultancy was undertaken to develop a model and put a structure in place for students to engage 'early on' as active agents, partnering with staff in the course design and approval process. This was supported by the Higher Education Academy Students as Partners Change Programme.

The initiative has evolved in 2013-2014 and has been renamed as Students as Course Enhancement Officers (CEOs). This was done to emphasise the student work on the reapproval of existing courses rather than on the development of new courses. Eight students have been recruited by Venture Matrix™ (an institutional scheme that works across academic departments allowing opportunities for students to develop their employability and enterprise skills through real life work-related projects that are accredited as part of their degree) as CEOs to act as consultants to Sheffield Business School for a reapproval of over a dozen courses. Following training delivered by the University's Student Engagement and Experience Team, the CEOs will contact student course representatives and students on the courses to participate in 'solution-based' workshops to develop ideas for course improvement and assess their feasibility for improving the course. An output of the workshops is a CEO Report which will include recommendations based on student ideas taken from workshops. Critically the CEOs are independent of the courses seeking approval. The day-to-day management of this scheme entails a placement student working for the University who has had prior experience of being a CEO.

The initiative is currently being rolled out across the institution with the appointment of CEOs, which provide a work-based learning experience that is academic credit bearing via Venture Matrix™. Students can participate in this initiative on a volunteer basis. These students have the unique title as Course Enhancement Liaisons (CELs). They are usually keen course and faculty student representatives.

*Further information*: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/change/SAP/case_studies/SAP_case_study_09_SHU_new.pdf>; <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/see/ceo/course-enhancement-for-course-teams/>; <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/see/ceo/course-enhancement-officer/>

**Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education (Draft)**

This publication offers a framework for mapping the territory of students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education (Fig. 4.1). The two axes of the model are from an emphasis on: learning, teaching and research to quality enhancement; and from an emphasis on co-researching and co-inquiring to co-learning, co-designing and co-developing. The complex nature of the different ways in which students engage as partners is reflected in four overlapping circles focussed on: learning, teaching and assessment; subject-based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning (ie researching and inquiring into teaching and learning); and curriculum design and pedagogic advice and consultancy. These circles represent four related *activities* in which students can act as partners. At the centre of the model is developing student partnership learning communities, which emphasises the *processes* by which the four different kinds of partnerships operate. All of these are contained within a larger circle representing the national and institutional context, which includes: National and institutional HE structures; National and institutional HE quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) strategies and policies; and National and institutional HE cultures and practices (draft). Two other dimensions of students as partners are shown below the main diagram to indicate the different partnerships settings (e.g. course, programme, institution, national) and the different levels of student partnership (i.e. extent to which students are engaged in partnership decisions).

The structure of this model is built up over the publication. In the first chapter the context and the case for partnership are outlined. In the second chapter the four different ways in which students engage as partners are investigated and examples of some of the different contexts of partnership are presented, giving particular emphasis to those which are embedded across institutions. The following chapter explores the processes for developing student partnership learning communities and the attributes which characterise initiatives which fully engage students as partners. In the final chapter the model is presented as a whole and the ways forward are discussed.

This publication concentrates on students as partners in *learning and teaching in higher education*, and though we recognise that students may act as partners in many other important ways, including institutional governance, quality assurance activities, research strategies and policies, estates, community engagement, and other extra-curricular activities, and some of these may inter-relate with teaching and learning issues, they are not our focus.

**Fig 4.1: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education: An overview model** 

