THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Equity and diversity in institutional approaches student-staff partnership schemes in higher education

OPEN ACCESS

Equity and diversity in institutional approaches student-staff partnership schemes in higher education

[a] Lucy Mercer-Mapstone [a*] & Catherine Bovill [a]

[a] Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author: lucy.mercermapstone@uqconnect.edu.au

Word count: 7140

Biographical notes

Dr Lucy Mercer-Mapstone is an Endeavour research Fellow at the Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Dr Catherine Bovill is Senior Lecturer in Student Engagement at the Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Equity and diversity in institutional approaches to student-staff partnership schemes in higher education

Abstract

Student cohorts in higher education are rapidly diversifying. Approaches to student engagement in teaching and learning must evolve to meet the changing needs of these diverse groups of students equitably. Student-staff partnership is an approach to student engagement embracing the diverse experiences of both students and staff. Growing evidence shows significant positive outcomes for students and staff. Practice, however, is dominated by small scale initiatives, limiting opportunities for equitable engagement. In institutions where partnership has been scaled-up, little research has explored these institutional partnership schemes. Our research addresses this gap by exploring institutional approaches to partnership across 11 universities in the United Kingdom. Results provide important lessons for improving equity in access to partnership schemes and the need for broader conceptions of scaling up partnership.

Keywords: student-staff partnership, student engagement, students as partners, equity, diversity

Introduction

Student cohorts in higher education (HE) are rapidly diversifying in an era of massification and internationalisation (Weiner 1998). In the United States, for example, the sector is progressing towards a *new majority* of students. This is signified by proportional increases in underserved students – students from historically minority groups including those defined by race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, family composition, age, and economic status (Higher Education Today 2018). Similar trends are seen in the United Kingdom (UK) also (Universities UK 2018).

HE, however, is evolving at a slower rate than student cohorts are diversifying and barriers faced by students are inequitable. Underserved groups face greater challenges than their 'traditional' counterparts in achieving academic success (Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider 2017). In the UK, for example, racial attainment gaps in higher education are a critical issue where, when factors like academic capability are controlled for, black and ethnic

minority students are significantly less likely to achieve a first or 2:1 degree than their white peers (Advance HE 2018). The attainment gap between white and black students in the UK is 24% (Advance HE 2018), indicating the continued prevalence and impact of systemic racism (Bhopal 2018). Having a university degree gives not only economic benefits, but other positive outcomes such as being less likely to smoke, be obese, have mental health issues, drink excessively, and leads to longer life expectancy (UK Government 2013). Despite increasing enrolments from historically marginalised students, we must ask whether our institutions of higher learning are reaffirming discriminatory social divides by failing to meet the changing needs of this new majority. We suggest that it is timely to reconsider how learning and experiences within higher education can be made inclusive to support the success of *all* students. It has been argued that actively engaging students in university experiences should be one core aspect in achieving this goal (Felten 2013).

Engagement for diverse student cohorts

Research in the field of student engagement suggests that one way to equalise access to learning within HE may be to engage students in ways that position them as actors rather than objects in learning (Felten et al. in review). By developing students' agency and empowerment through student-staff partnerships, students can actively shape their own educational experiences (Abbot 2017). Such partnership is a process that re-conceptualises teaching and learning as a collaborative process where responsibility and power to shape decisions, processes, and outcomes are shared with students (Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten 2014, Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2014). Practices show students engaging in partnership with faculty/academic staff, professional staff, senior management, other students, or student unions, as well as with members of local communities or professions. Common examples of partnership might include students working in partnership with teaching staff and their peers to; co-create assessment criteria (e.g., Meer and Chapman 2015);co-design learning resources to support the learning of their own or future students' learning; undertake collaborative partnership projects to conduct pedagogical co-research (e.g., Maunder 2015); co-design aspects of the student experience such as mental health initiatives (e.g., Johinke et al. 2018);or to (re)design and enhance curricula (Mihans, Long, and Felten 2008).

These practices counter hierarchical institutional norms – acknowledging the complex identities and experiences individuals bring to learning and knowledge co-construction (Abbot 2017, Cook-Sather 2015). Studies show partnership practices have the potential to create liminal spaces where roles and identities are less divided, creating an environment

where partners can critically engage with notions of power and inequity (Cook-Sather and Alter 2011, Mercer-Mapstone and Mercer 2017). Emerging research indicates that within these inclusive partnership spaces exclusionary practices may be countered by working in ways that can redress, for example, gender and racial inequities (Acai, Mercer-Mapstone, and Guitman under review, Cook-Sather and Agu 2013). Cook-Sather (2018, 932) found that partnership can contribute to the success of underserved (including racialized, LGBTQ+ and first generation) students, stating that these experiences 'argue for the particular promise of pedagogical partnership in addressing the ways in which higher education is currently failing' to address societal inequities.

Access to partnership beyond the 'elite'

As the evidence of the beneficial impacts of partnership grows, institutions need to consider the approaches they take to making partnership opportunities available. Research indicates that many partnerships are unpaid, small-scale, and extracurricular. This risks partnership becoming an elitist pedagogical approach 'which potentially prioritizes voices that are already privileged and engaged' (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017, p. 17). Bovill et al. (2016, 203) explained that 'staff typically invite students to join the work' which 'raises difficult questions of how they determine whom they will invite and which students have the capacity to contribute', arguing we need to offer more inclusive opportunities.

Addressing these concerns, Bishop (2018) argued there needs to be a 'shift from isolated good practice and projects to a coherent and flexible institutional strategy and approach to partnership, providing opportunities for all students'. Some scholars push back against 'mainstreaming' student engagement (for example, Macfarlane 2016) and yet institutional approaches to partnership are increasing in international contexts. MacMaster University in Canada, for example, have a well-established 'Student Partners Program' to structure the facilitation, support, and reward of students engaging in partnership with staff in pedagogical research and innovation (see Marquis et al. 2017). Similarly, Bryn Mawr College in the United States has a long-running programme to support students engaging throughout the semester as pedagogical consultants with staff to enhance teaching and learning (Cook-Sather and Agu 2013). Comparatively little research has focused on understanding institutional partnership schemes such as those in this study from across university contexts or examining whether such approaches facilitate more equitable engagement from diverse student cohorts.

We aim to explore the approaches taken by UK HE institutions to implementing and sustaining institutional partnership schemes. To our knowledge, this is the first study to explore institutional partnership practices across the UK. This focus is timely as increasing numbers of individuals and institutions seek to implement partnership schemes. Our results detail both practical and reflective considerations for the design and implementation of partnership schemes. These results are then discussed through the lens of equity and diversity to explore how institutional partnership project schemes do or do not seem to foster more equitable means of student engagement. We hope our findings practically inform readers' own current partnership schemes. We also hope to extend current understandings of how partnership schemes contribute to inclusion of a diverse range of participants and provide practical guidance for those establishing similar schemes within and beyond the UK.

Methods

Staff responsible for administering UK institutional partnership schemes – as individuals who have intricate knowledge of scheme functionality – were invited to participate in this study. Participation involved two phases: (1) an online questionnaire to explore trends across schemes; and (2) a reflective narrative to explore in more depth themes arising from Phase One. This multi-phase and multi-method approach was chosen for the benefits of approaching the complex process of administering large partnership schemes from multiple angles. This enabled us to record and learn from both pragmatic, administrative information as well as more insight-based, reflective perspectives. Ethics approval was provided by the University of Edinburgh Moray House School of Education Ethics Committee.

Inclusion criteria

Criteria were developed to define which schemes would be included to ensure the research was feasible and rigorous: (1) **Context**: a UK HE institution; (2) **Focus**: reciprocal collaboration between university students and staff, beyond student voice, indicated by the use of terms such *as students as partners/co-creators/co-inquirers/consultants/change agents, student-staff partnership* or similar; (3) **Scale**: structured opportunities for partnerships across a university rather than, for example, within a single subject; (4) **Institutional support**: support/approval from the host institution indicating it is not isolated practice; (5) **Identifiability**: publicly available information e.g. website, for transparent identification; (6) **Longevity of operation**: running for over one year.

Potential schemes were identified through systematic online research of UK university websites, identified through search engines. Emails were sent to scheme contacts to clarify whether a given scheme met inclusion criteria. Thirteen schemes met the criteria and the person(s) responsible for administering each scheme were invited to participate.

Data collection

Phase One

An online questionnaire was used to collect data. This approach enabled participants the time needed to provide the detailed information requested. In addition, some of the scheme details may not have been easy to remember or access in alternative data collection settings such as, an interview. Items included open-response and multiple-choice questions (MCQ). The questionnaire was distributed via email with an information and consent sheet and was open October-November 2018. Information collected in the questionnaire is detailed in Table 1.

[Table 1 goes here]

Phase Two

Phase One participants were invited to complete a written reflection on their experiences of leading a partnership scheme. The process of designing, overseeing, administering, or sustaining a partnership scheme is complex. Schemes involve the integration of academic, strategic, logistical, and administrative processes. Reflective writing has been found to 'enable creativity and unique connections to be made between disparate sets of information, and to contribute to new perspectives being taken on issues' (Jasper 2005, 247). Therefore, a written reflection was considered an appropriate method to facilitate the uncovering of connections across these multiple and complex processes. Participant reflection was prompted by questions that explored: how support was gained for scheme implementation; how schemes had been sustained; how inclusive schemes were in engaging a diversity of students and staff; and challenges faced and/or overcome.

Sample

Eleven of the 13 schemes identified (85%) participated in Phase One. While 11 schemes may be considered a small sample, over the years they have run, these schemes collectively represent the engagement of hundreds of students and staff and thus our data potentially speaks to a much broader sample in terms of partnership at scale. All schemes were administered outside the assessed curriculum (i.e., through opt-in project-based activities

6

rather than through credited units or modules). Three were Scottish institutions and eight were English institutions. Three schemes had two staff who shared scheme responsibility. One questionnaire was completed for each scheme. Of participants completing the questionnaire (N=11), four held academic roles, six held professional roles with one role classified as 'Other' – specified as 'learning and teaching'. Seven schemes completed Phase Two. Three schemes had two responsible staff. In two cases, staff completed one reflection collaboratively and in one case, two staff completed separate reflections. Thus, this dataset includes eight reflections from ten participants across seven schemes/institutions. Across both phases, the study included 11 women and four men.

Analyses

Quantitative results were analysed using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis within NVivo was used for qualitative results. We employed an approach from Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis, involving reading data, noting emergent themes, close reading and theme definition, coding data according to themes, and compiling results. Results reported below are aggregate data across schemes rather than individual data to ensure institutional and participant anonymity.

Results

Nature of partnerships

Questionnaire participants were asked to describe their partnership scheme. Responses aligned with two themes each with two subthemes (Figure 1). The first theme was how participants described scheme *beneficiaries*: either/both the institution or individuals engaging in schemes. The second theme related to the *focus* of the scheme: on either/both the partnership process or outcomes.

[Figure 1 goes here]

Questionnaire participants described the types of partnership in schemes. Adapting from Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014), we defined five partnership categories to guide the analysis of these responses: *Co-teaching*–students take on/share the responsibility of teaching e.g. peer-assisted study sessions; *Disciplinary co-research*–students co-research topics specific to their discipline; *Educational co-research*–students co-research teaching and learning; *Co-creation / co-design*–students and staff collaborate to co-create the curriculum

(e.g. learning outcomes) or aspects related to the student experience (e.g. mental health apps); and *student consultancy or co-review*: where students consult on or engage in processes of teaching and learning review or evaluation (Figure 2). This adaptation of the original model enabled slightly more granularity in the categories of partnership which better reflected the ways in which participants described their schemes. In this way, this typology was both theoretically- and data-driven. Three participants did not provide enough detail for responses to be categorised.

[Figure 2 goes here]

Relationship to the curriculum

MCQ responses indicated partnerships within schemes were: two within the curriculum only; four extracurricular only; and five both within and extra-curricular. We note that understandings of what constitutes curriculum are ambiguous (Fraser and Bosanquet 2006). The intention of the question was to distinguish between partnerships that occur within the curriculum – teachers working in partnership with students enrolled within their course, or outside of the curriculum – where student partners are not enrolled within the course of focus. However, participants were not asked to define their conceptions of curriculum, so we cannot be sure our intention aligned with responses (e.g., partnership in curriculum planning outside class may be categorised as within the curriculum or extra-curricular by different individuals).

Scheme design

Rationale

Participants were asked: *What was the rationale for designing and implementing the scheme?* Open responses aligned with two themes: to benefit the institution or to benefit individuals (or both). Eight schemes indicated institutional benefits as a rationale, including to strengthen the development of the university learning community, enhance the student experience, address low student satisfaction, drive cultural change toward partnership, for institutional quality assurance, and educational enhancement. Six schemes indicated individual benefits as a rationale, including to empower partners, support student partners' learning, offer student payment opportunities, give students voice, challenge power hierarchies, or support partnership working.

Design process

All participants cited collaboration between units in scheme design including teaching and learning/academic development units, schools or faculties, students' unions/associations, governance committees, or provost offices. Students generally were involved in the design, predominantly through student unions.

Gaining support

Reflective themes indicated that gaining enough support to implement a scheme involved multiple factors: developing a groundswell of university support; consultation with diverse stakeholders to meet community needs; using evidence-based arguments to 'convince' stakeholders of the benefits of partnership or to overcome resistance; existing senior-level advocates; securing funding; leveraging external drivers such as National Student Survey results; linking schemes to institutional policy/strategy; pointing to similar schemes at other universities; running a successful pilot; and ensuring leadership for the scheme lay with trusted individuals.

Scheme administration

Ten schemes were administered from central teaching and learning units and one within the student union. Schemes received a range of annual funding including: one with no explicit funding other than staffing costs; two with £3000 and £7000 respectively; two with £30,000; one with £50,000; and one with £120,000. Four participants did not detail funding. Funding came predominantly from the central teaching or learning unit or the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education (or similar). Staffing of schemes varied, ranging from five or more staff, to – most commonly – a single staff member (often with other job responsibilities) potentially with administrative support.

Sustainability

Reflective data showed several approaches to making schemes sustainable: continuous improvement to keep schemes 'fresh'; demonstrating positive outcomes; ensuring departmental support; continuing financial support; core individual(s) with strong commitment to partnership; maintaining community demand; and ensuring schemes were not attached to one person.

Scheme impact

Reflection results indicated several scheme impacts: institutional awards; curricular enhancement; dissemination of practice; localised impact for individuals or courses; and strategy or policy changes. Institutional cultural change toward partnership was also detailed:

> *[The scheme] has supported a massive shift in [university] culture towards working with students as partners. We've moved from a paternal relationship, where staff always know best, to an acceptance that staff may also have something to learn from students.*

Student satisfaction, while cited as a rationale for scheme implementation, was a complex outcome:

> *...student satisfaction is better in departments with better student engagement ... but satisfaction certainly hasn't improved in the institution.*

Project or topic recruitment

Proposal

Questionnaire participants indicated several ways partnership projects or topics were recruited (Figure 3). Where students could propose projects, six participants stated that this happened relatively rarely (less than a quarter of projects) with one participant indicating that this was '*something we need to get better at*'. One participant stated half the projects in their scheme were proposed by students, and one stated most projects came from students.

[Figure 3 goes here]

Selection

Where recruitment for projects was competitive, six questionnaire participants stated explicit criteria for selection (Figure 4). One participant stated: '*In reality, we try to fund them all as we believe any attempt to work in partnership (even if the project doesn't come to a conclusion) is worth funding.*' Another participant echoed this, stating flexibility was key: '*What I feel makes the scheme work is flexibility and openness to all students. ... We look for the enthusiasm of the student and staff member for the project. Feasibility is important, but unfeasible projects can be refocused.*'

[Figure 4 goes here]

Partner recruitment

Availability

All schemes were available to all undergraduate students and all academic staff, with nine being available to all postgraduate students and all professional staff. In terms of individual partner applications, six had options for students and staff applying separately, and eight for students and staff applying together in self-selected teams.

Selection of individuals

In addition to proposal and selection of project topics, schemes also had selection processes for individuals where projects need additional partners. No participants stated explicit criteria that were applied in systematic ways for selection of individual student or staff applicants. One said student applicants, once successful, needed to recruit staff outside the scheme for their projects and vice versa for staff recruiting students.

Perceptions of inclusivity

Perceptions of inclusivity were mixed across reflections, but some trends emerged. One participant explained: '*We know female, postgraduate research, European, or white students are over-represented– significantly underrepresented are male and home students*.' Another participant also stated that women students were overrepresented, and two others indicated overrepresentation of international students.

Participants saw a diversity of disciplines and year levels (study or career) engaged. One concern raised was the potential of schemes to engage those who are already engaged, for example, in relation to staff: '*there is a possibility that the scheme is only engaging the 'usual suspects' across the institution*'.

A common theme was that many participants stated inclusivity was not a primary focus or had not been considered. One participant gave an example:

> *I spoke to a student when I was trying to recruit students for the scheme and she was interested. I thought she might sign up, but she never did. She described herself as a "Blue haired autistic wheelchair user". ...She was asking about how it would work for her to participate given her accessibility issues. I said something along the lines of, "Of course, we would really welcome your perspective and we would make it work" but then I realised I have no idea how to cater for her and make sure she did feel included.*

Other participants stated, '*There's no reason why the project wouldn't be inclusive*' because schemes were '*open to all applicants*'. Only two participants indicated diversity data were collected.

Scale and duration

Questionnaire participants outlined the duration of a single iteration of their scheme (i.e. length of one partnership): five indicated one year; one indicated six months; and five indicated it depended on individual projects but most of these indicated about six months. Within each partnership, ratios of students to staff were typically low, around 1 staff to 1-4 students. The total number of staff and students that could engage across all projects within a single iteration of the scheme is shown in Figure 5.

[Figure 5 goes here]

Recognition and reward

Schemes had formal and informal ways of recognising students' engagement (Figure 6). The most common was financial payment (n=8). Two schemes listed partnerships as 'only extracurricular' and without financial payment, indicating students participated voluntarily. Participants detailed fewer formal ways of recognising staff (Figure 7).

[Figure 6 goes here]

[Figure 7 goes here]

Training and support for partnership

 Participants were asked about three possible stages of training and support for partners: training *prior* to or in early stages of the scheme; ongoing training or support *during* the scheme; and concluding activities/resources *after* scheme completion. Participants were asked to indicate to whom such support was offered (Figure 8) and for whom that support was mandatory (Figure 9). The trends shown across these two figures indicate that no training is made available for only staff, and where training/support is available, it is rarely mandatory.

[Figure 8 goes here]

[Figure 9 goes here]

Questionnaire participants outlined different foci for training both *prior* to (Figure 10) or *after* (Figure 11) the scheme. When asked to detail what support *during* the scheme included, seven did not respond, three specified support in the form of (predominantly) self-selected meetings or contact with scheme staff, and three offered on-demand training (e.g. if a team requested training on focus groups).

[Figure 10 goes here]

[Figure 11 goes here]

Limitations

This study has limitations that influence interpretation. For feasibility and comparability, we did not include schemes outside the UK. We also faced challenges in representing changes in schemes and staffing over time. Study participants may not have been those who originally designed schemes and therefore certain responses may be based on second-hand information. Similarly, some schemes have undergone redesign since implementation and these changes were not accounted for within participant responses. Also, in focusing on institutionally-supported schemes, we excluded many universities with widespread partnership practices that are not centrally coordinated. We also excluded schemes that were not self-identified as partnership. We may, then, have overlooked schemes which can enact partnership but do not identify as such – for example, peer-assisted learning schemes which, in some literature, are described as student-student/student-staff partnership. This was highlighted in our results in Figure 2 where no participants described 'co-teaching' as a form of partnership within their schemes. The link between these two areas (peer-assisted learning and partnership) would be worthy of future research. Another limitation was that we explored only the perspectives of staff administering schemes. This decision was based on the fact our focus was on how schemes were run and on study feasibility. Our study was not exploring the perspectives of the staff and students engaging within schemes, which have been widely shared elsewhere. However, in order to maintain participant and institutional anonymity, we were unable to cite

13

some of the research outlining these perspectives which would be interesting to explore alongside our study results.

Discussion

Our results provide practitioners with useful details of the complex process of scaling up partnership. Practitioners have argued the need to scale up partnership to offer rich partnership opportunities to more diverse cohorts of students and staff (Bishop 2018, Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017, Peseta et al. in review). This is considered one potential way to address systemic inequities ingrained in HE (O'Shea 2018, Bindra et al. 2018). Our results suggest that scaling-up partnership into institutional schemes offers both affordances and constraints. We discuss these issues through the lens of equity in the following sections, considering how partnership at scale does or does not seem to foster more equitable means of student engagement.

Supporting engagement beyond the privileged

One of the challenges of any partnership scheme is to ensure it is inclusive of all students and staff. This doesn't mean every student and staff member in the institution will participate. Indeed, most schemes here did not envisage that. The challenge, then, is to ensure schemes offer equality of opportunity, acknowledging that, given structural inequalities, certain groups have different privileges or disadvantages. Our data revealed multiple points within schemes – including: application and selection; reward and recognition; and training – where inequities may be redressed or exacerbated.

Institutional partnership schemes tend to fund students who are already super-engaged (Marquis et al. 2018). Our results mirrored this also in relation to engaging staff, where one participant referred to engaging only the 'usual suspects'. This highlights a need to consider how partners are invited to apply for such schemes. The most common form of project and partner application was a collaborative process where partners self-selected before application. This invites partnership from early stages of project design which is important in ensuring partnerships are collaboratively shaped (Garner et al. 2016). This approach is also likely to attract privileged students – whether through self-selection based on high confidence and agency or through staff approaching students they already know through teaching or existing networks (Marquis et al. 2018) or those students most similar to staff socially. Such selectivity is a risk that has previously been identified in the process of fostering inclusive partnerships (Matthews 2017). One scheme accepted and funded all applications and all

schemes, which indicated that they were open to all undergraduate students and academic staff to apply. Participants commonly equated this with being inclusive. Such approaches move toward inclusivity by offering an equality of opportunity but do not consider the disproportionate barriers faced by students and staff from underserved backgrounds. These approaches might best be complemented with targeted methods to ensure that underserved students or staff perceive the scheme as 'for them'.

Our results showed that nine of 11 schemes paid students. This is a much higher proportion than the 35% indicated in other studies which focused on ad-hoc partnerships (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017). This is an important consideration for the inclusion of students beyond the socioeconomic elite, numbers of whom are rapidly increasing in HE (Universities UK 2018). Current students are also more likely to maintain employment throughout semesters than two decades ago (Office for National Statistics 2016). These trends indicate more students are likely to be experiencing financial instability and requiring employment while studying. This means that, where extra-curricular partnership opportunities are unpaid (as was the case for several schemes), engagement will privilege those who can afford to participate.

Our data raises similar concerns about barriers to partnership for staff in schemes offering predominantly informal recognition. Low-reward responsibilities have been shown in related fields of scholarship of teaching and learning and educational development to be disproportionately taken up by women (McKinney and Chick 2010, Bernhagen and Gravett 2017). This suggests the extra unrewarded emotional and professional labour of such work is likely to be inequitably distributed. Indeed, nearly three times as many women participated in this study than men and participants indicated an overrepresentation of women in schemes. We suggest future practitioners seek formal ways to recognise staff in partnership, including, for example: a formal reference to provide evidence for career progression, awards, or grants; financial reward, for example, through contribution to research; recognition of partnership work in workload plans; or through secondments.

Finally, training mechanisms to support partnership were reported to be inconsistently offered within and across schemes, and they are rarely mandatory. Some schemes did not offer any initial training for partners. This could be problematic as partnership is a significantly different way of working. Careful attention is needed in setting up partnerships to include training that supports partners in working in ways that avoid reverting to traditional student-staff hierarchies so as to fully facilitate the meaningful outcomes of partnership such

as, for example, empowerment, leadership, or critical thinking. We suggest, for funded schemes, that engagement with training should be mandatory given these benefits. We also suggest that more detailed data collection within schemes would enable administrators to make informed decisions about equity and diversity issues.

Without attention to inclusivity across all these stages, institutional schemes risk exacerbating inequalities. As Marquis et al. (2018, 76) highlight:

> …partnership can play an important role in augmenting one's self-confidence and sense of the value of one's knowledge. A vicious cycle is thus potentially established, where systemic factors leave particular students less likely to attempt partnership, even while participation in partnership endeavours might be one way of helping to grow their confidence and sense of belonging.

The propensity for partnership schemes to attract privileged students reflects issues elsewhere. For example, 'high impact practices' which, like partnership, involve high degrees of collaboration, have compensatory effects for underserved students and yet those students face greater barriers to engagement (Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider 2017). Even well-intentioned pedagogical practices, then, face the risk of exacerbating systemic marginalisation. These findings suggest that institutional partnership schemes can increase the number of structured and supported partnership opportunities available but careful consideration to equity issues must remain at the fore.

Mixed models of partnership at scale

Our results highlight that numbers of students involved in institutional schemes can be quite modest. Annually, nine schemes involved fewer than 100 students and even fewer staff. This raises questions as to how inclusive institutional schemes can be. However, these numbers indicate a greater scale of engagement than among many individual-led partnership projects most commonly reported in the literature (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017). One reason for these relatively small-scale numbers may be that these schemes appear to adopt a *project-based model* for supporting partnerships. This model views each individual partnership as a unique project, the administration of which happens outside of the assessed curriculum. This model arguably requires high resources per person engaged.

Pedagogical partnerships taking place *within* curricula involving whole cohorts may overcome some of these challenges (Bovill et al, 2016; Moore-Cherry et al. 2016) and extend the reach of partnership beyond this project-based model. A whole-class approach has

16

previously been considered small scale and ad-hoc. Yet one teacher working in partnership with a class of 300 will reach more students in one semester than many of the institution-wide schemes here did annually, with far fewer administrative requirements. It is possible these practices are more widespread than indicated by reviews of partnership literature, as teachers may not have written about their practices. Multiple in-class initiatives in the same institution may collectively create wide-spread impact.

Practices where individual teachers work to enhance relationships with students and to democratise their classrooms can take many forms. Bovill (*forthcoming*) argues this is currently an under-utilised opportunity for partnership. Examples include students writing essay titles in collaboration with teachers, co-designing marking criteria, co-creating module evaluations, or negotiating what topics will be taught (Bovill et al. 2010, Meer and Chapman 2015). The critical factor is that all students in the class are invited to work in partnership thus making the benefits of partnership more widely accessible. This approach still involves teachers needing to consider diversity but potentially goes further towards engaging larger numbers. These curricular partnerships, because they are part of study requirements, also remove the necessity for, and complications of, selection and payment for students, which privilege those in certain social locations. However institutions choose to engage in partnership, it will also be important for students' perceptions and experiences to be meaningfully integrated in every stage of the design and implementation process. We suggest that, where institutions wish to embed a partnership culture, a multi-level approach of project-based and curricular partnership models may be the most successful way to ensure access to partnership is as equitable as possible.

Partnership in neoliberal times

Partnership work historically has been situated as a pushback against the positioning of students as consumers in increasingly marketised higher education contexts (McCulloch 2009). Several authors have articulated fears that partnership will become tokenistic or empty rhetoric when scaled up in neoliberal environments (Wijaya Mulya 2018, Healey and Healey 2018). Such warnings are often framed within the positioning of partnership as a counter-narrative for neoliberalism in HE (Matthews, Dwyer, Hine, et al. 2018), situating the two stances as oppositional binaries. Our results speak to these fears in complex ways. Three quarters of the schemes in this study indicated 'institutional benefit' as a rationale for scaling up partnership and just over half cited the institution as the primary beneficiary of schemes. 'Alignment with university strategy' was the most common criteria for selection of project

proposals. These factors indicate that institutions are aligning partnership with and for their own benefit.

However, all but one scheme described the *process* of partnership to be the primary focus of the scheme. This indicates that, even within an outcomes-driven context, practitioners may not have to sacrifice the authenticity and value of partnership as a process rather than an outcome (Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2014). This is a promising finding for those who caution against the co-option of partnership for neoliberal purposes. This indicates institutional partnership can still offer the relational, process-oriented benefits of smaller-scale practices while also contributing, as exemplified by the variety of scheme impacts outlined by participants, to the attainment of institutional goals.

We suggest, based on these findings, that the common tendency to place partnership and neoliberal discourses in binary opposition may not always be productive. Dollinger and Mercer-Mapstone (accepted) support this finding, arguing:

> …the increasing prevalence of neoliberalism in higher education will be a determining factor in the support and growth of student engagement and partnership practice. Ultimately, it may be up to practitioners and researchers in this space to consider how they can harness the context of neoliberalism to drive change at levels where such narratives resonate…while also ensuring authentic practices on the ground.

This argument is particularly apt in light of findings that senior leaders in HE most often conceptualise partnership "in terms of quality assurance activities, seldom conceived outside of a neoliberal discourse, and often at odds with theorising of [partnership] in the literature" (Matthews, Dwyer, Russell, et al. 2018, 1). This dissonance between partnership practitioners' narratives and those of senior leaders is problematic: where practitioners seek resources to support partnership practices, then those within HE communities must find common ground. Our findings indicate that this may indeed be possible.

Conclusion

Our results provide useful considerations for those wishing to expand partnership practices, for example, in sharing how other established schemes approached the design, implementation, and administration of institutional partnership schemes. Findings also illuminated complex challenges which need addressing to avoid exacerbating existing systemic inequalities. For example, our call for institutional schemes to offer associated

18

training for students and staff might present a barrier if resources for training are unavailable. Similarly, schemes offering extra-curricular partnerships without payment for students might not continue if there are calls for payment to ensure they are not excluding students who need to work. Should these partnership schemes finish if they cannot find resources to ensure more equitable access to under-privileged students? This is not a simple question and people are unlikely to agree about the best way forward.

We make three recommendations for scaling up partnership based on these results. First, practitioners seeking to scale-up partnership will need to carefully consider the narratives and approaches they adopt to find a balance between the needs of neoliberal contexts and processes that foster authentic partnership. Second, research from Carnevale and Strohl (2013) shows that, despite HE being heralded as the 'great equalizer', university systems are exacerbating racial and ethnic inequality. Similar research indicates that students from underserved backgrounds face disproportionate barriers to academic success (Kuh 2008). We thus recommend explicit consideration be given to how students and staff are invited to participate in, are supported in, and rewarded for, partnership in ways that acknowledge the privileges associated with certain social locations and identities. Third, institutions seeking to embed partnership institutionally might best adopt a multi-level approach of project-based and curricular, whole-class partnership models. Finally, whatever partnership approaches practitioners plan, we urge careful consideration of how projects or schemes are accessible to those students and staff who are currently least likely to engage in partnership, so that the benefits of partnership are equitably available to all.

Acknowledgements

References

Abbot, S. 2017. "Book Review of Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom." *International Journal for Students As Partners* 1 (2). doi: https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v1i2.3230.

Acai, Anita, Lucy Mercer-Mapstone, and Rachel Guitman. under review. "Mind the (gender) gap: engaging students as partners to redress gender inequity in higher education." *Teaching in Higher Education*.

Advance HE. 2018. Equality in higher education: statistical report 2018. United Kingdom: Advance HE Equality CHallenge Unit.

Bernhagen, Lindsay, and Emily Gravett. 2017. "Educational Development as Pink Collar Labor: Implications and Recommendations." *To Improve the Academy* 36 (1):9-19. doi: 10.1002/tia2.20053.

Bhopal, Kalwant. 2018. *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-Racial Society*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Bindra, G., K. Easwaran, L. Firasta, M. Hirsch, A. Kapoor, A. Sosnowski, T. Stec-Marksman, and G. Vatansever. 2018. "Increasing representation and equity in students as partners initiatives." *International Journal for Students As Partners* 2 (2):10-15.

Bishop, Daniel. 2018. "Conceptualising the Student-University relationship within a UK higher education university." RAISE Network Conference, Sheffield, UK.

Bovill, C. *forthcoming*. "Whole class co-creation of learning and teaching in higher education:enhancing the relationship between teacher and students.".

Bovill, C., G. Aitken, J. Hutchison, F. Morrison, K. Roseweir, A. Scott, and S. Sotannde. 2010. "Experiences of learning through collaborative evaluation from a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Education." *International Journal for Academic Development* 15 (2):143-154. doi: 10.1080/13601441003738343.

Bovill, C., A. Cook-Sather, P. Felten, L. Millard, and N. Moore-Cherry. 2016. "Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student–staff partnerships." *Higher Education* 71 (2):195-208. doi: 10.1007/s10734-015-9896-4.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2):77-101. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Carnevale, Anthony P., and Jeff Strohl. 2013. Separate and Unequal: How Higher Education Reinforces the Intergenerational Reproduction of White Racial Privilege. Georgetown University.

Cook-Sather, A. 2015. "Dialogue across differences of position, perspective, and identity: Reflective practice in/on a student-faculty pedagogical partnership program." *Teachers College Record* 117 (2).

Cook-Sather, A. , and P. Agu. 2013. "Student consultants of color and faculty members working together toward culturally sustaining pedagogy." In *To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development*, edited by J. E. Groccia and L. Cruz, 271-85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cook-Sather, A., C. Bovill, and P. Felten. 2014. *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty*. Edited by Maryellen Weimer. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.

Cook-Sather, Alison. 2018. "Listening to equity-seeking perspectives: how students' experiences of pedagogical partnership can inform wider discussions of student

success." *Higher Education Research & Development* 37 (5):923-936. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2018.1457629.

Cook-Sather, Alison, and Zanny Alter. 2011. "What Is and What Can Be: How a Liminal Position Can Change Learning and Teaching in Higher Education." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 42 (1):37-53. doi: 10.1111/j.1548-1492.2010.01109.x.

Dollinger, Mollie, and Lucy Mercer-Mapstone. accepted. "What's in a name? Unpacking Students' Roles in Higher Education through Neoliberal and Social Justice Lenses." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*.

Felten, P. . 2013. "Principles of Good Practice in SoTL." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 1 (1):121-125. doi: https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.1.1.121.

Felten, Peter, Sophia Abbot, Jordan J. Kirkwood, Aaron Long, Tanya Lubicz-Nawrocka, Lucy Mercer-Mapstone, and Roselynn Verwoord. in review. "Reimagining the Place of Students in Academic Development." *International Journal for Academic Development*.

Fraser, Sharon P., and Agnes M. Bosanquet. 2006. "The curriculum? That's just a unit outline, isn't it?" *Studies in Higher Education* 31 (3):269-284. doi: 10.1080/03075070600680521.

Garner, W., B. Lees, M. Fletcher, S. Yates, R. Bhatti, and S. Mason. 2016. "Faculty Student Engagement Officers: working in partnership." *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal* 1 (1).

Healey, M., A. Flint, and K. Harrington. 2014. Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. Higher Education Academy.

Healey, M., and R. Healey. 2018. "'It depends': Exploring the context-dependent nature of students as partners practices and policies." *International Journal for Students As Partners* 2 (1):1-10. doi: https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v2i1.3472.

Higher Education Today. 2018. "Meeting the needs of underserved students." American Council on Education, accessed 17 May. https://www.higheredtoday.org/policy-research/meeting-needs-underserved-students/.

Jasper, Melanie A. 2005. "Using reflective writing within research." *Journal of Research in Nursing* 10 (3):247-260. doi: 10.1177/174498710501000303.

Johinke, R., K. Walker, F. Kirkaldy, C. Sinclair, W. L. Cheng, B. Tran, E. Williamson, G. White, and S. S. Pillai. 2018. "Therapaws: A partnership between students, staff, and therapy dogs on a university campus." *International Journal for Students As Partners* 2 (2):96-105. doi: https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v2i2.3575.

Kuh, George. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*: Association of American Colleges & Universities.

Kuh, George, Ken O'Donnell, and Carol Geary Schneider. 2017. "HIPs at Ten." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 49 (5): 8-16. doi: 10.1080/00091383.2017.1366805.

Macfarlane, B. . 2016. "The performative turn in the assessment of student learning: A rights perspective." *Teaching in Higher Education* 21 (7):839-853. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2016.1183623.

Marquis, E., Z. Haqqee, S. Kirby, A. Liu, V. Puri, R. Cockcroft, L. Goff, and K. Knorr. 2017. "Connecting students and staff for teaching and learning inquiry: The McMaster

student partners program." In *Disciplinary Approaches to Connecting the Higher Education Curriculum*, edited by B. Carnell and D. Fung, 203-216. London: UCL Press.

Marquis, E., A. Jayaratnam, A. Mishra, and K. Rybkina. 2018. ""I feel like some students are better connected": Students' perspectives on applying for extracurricular partnership opportunities." *International Journal for Students As Partners* 2 (1):64-81. doi: https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v2i1.3300.

Matthews, Kelly. 2017. "Five Propositions for Genuine Students as Partners Practice." *International Journal for Students as Partners* 1 (2).

Matthews, Kelly E, Alexander Dwyer, Lorelei Hine, and Jarred Turner. 2018. "Conceptions of students as partners." *Higher Education* 76 (6):957-971.

Matthews, Kelly E., Alexander Dwyer, Stuart Russell, and Eimear Enright. 2018. "It is a complicated thing: leaders' conceptions of students as partners in the neoliberal university." *Studies in Higher Education*:1-12. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2018.1482268.

Maunder, Rachel. 2015. "Working with students as partners in pedagogic research: staff and student experiences of participating in an institutional bursary scheme." *Journal of Educational Innovation; Partnership and Change* 1 (1). doi: 10.21100/jeipc.v1i1.162.

McCulloch, Alistair. 2009. "The student as co-producer: learning from public administration about the student–university relationship." *Studies in Higher Education* 34 (2):171-183. doi: 10.1080/03075070802562857.

McKinney, Kathleen , and Nancy L. Chick. 2010. "SoTL as Women's Work: What Do Existing Data Tell Us?" *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 4 (2). doi: https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2010.040216.

Meer, Nicky, and Amanda Chapman. 2015. "Co-creation of Marking Criteria: Students as Partners in the Assessment Process." *Business and Management Education in HE*:1-15. doi: 10.11120/bmhe.2014.00008.

Mercer-Mapstone, L., S. L. Dvorakova, K. E. Matthews, S. Abbot, B. Cheng, P. Felten, K. Knorr, E. Marquis, R. Shammas, and K. Swaim. 2017. "A Systematic Literature Review of Students as Partners in Higher Education." *International Journal for Students as Partners* 1 (1).

Mercer-Mapstone, Lucy, and Gina Mercer. 2017. "A dialogue between partnership and feminism: deconstructing power and exclusion in higher education." *Teaching in Higher Education*:1-7. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2017.1391198.

Mihans, R. J. , D. T. Long, and P. Felten. 2008. "Power and Expertise: Student-Faculty Collaboration in Course Design and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning." *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 2 (2). doi: https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2008.020216.

Moore-Cherry, Niamh, Ruth Healey, Dawn T. Nicholson, and Will Andrews. 2016. "Inclusive partnership: enhancing student engagement in geography." *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 40 (1):84-103. doi: 10.1080/03098265.2015.1066316.

O'Shea, S. 2018. "Equity and students as partners: The importance of inclusive relationships." *International Journal for Students As Partners* 2 (2):16-20.

Office for National Statistics. 2016. "How has the student population changed?". https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/articles/howhasthestudentpopulationchanged/2016-09-20.

Peseta, Tai, Jenny Pizzica, Ashley Beathe, Chinnu Jose, Racquel Lynch, Marisse Manthos, Kathy Nguyen, and Hassan Raza. in review. "A Partnership Mindset: Students as Partners for and Beyond the University." In *The Power of Student-Staff Partnerships: Revolutionizing Higher Education*, edited by Lucy Mercer-Mapstone and Sophia Abbot.

UK Government. 2013. The Benefits of Higher Education Participation for Individuals and Society: key findings and reports "The Quadrants". Department for Business Innovation and Skills.

Universities UK. 2018. "Patterns and trends in UK higher education 2018." https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/data-and-analysis/Documents/patterns-and-trends-in-uk-higher-education-2018.pdf.

Weiner, Gaby. 1998. "'Here a little, there a little˚s: Equal opportunities policies in higher education in the UK " *Studies in Higher Education* 23 (3):321-333. doi: 10.1080/03075079812331380286.

Wijaya Mulya, Teguh. 2018. "Contesting the neoliberalisation of higher education through student–faculty partnership." *International Journal for Academic Development*:1-5. doi: 10.1080/1360144X.2018.1520110.

Table 1. Information collected in online questionnaire on UK student-staff partnership schemes

Category	Items
Individual Details	participant name, contact, university, role
Scheme Design	scheme name, description, design process, rationale
Nature of Partnership	types of partnership supported, relationship of partnership to the curriculum
Scheme Administration	institutional location, funding, staffing
Scheme Logistics	recruitment of partnership projects and participants, access to scheme, duration of partnerships, number of scheme participants
Recognition and Training	recognition for participating, training and support for participants

Figures

Figure 1. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) by primary beneficiary and primary focus.

Figure 2. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) by category of partnership.

Figure 3. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) by ways in which partnership projects or topics were recruited.

Figure 4. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) use of criteria in the selection of proposed partnership projects.

Figure 5. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) showing total number of staff or students that could participate across all projects within a single iteration of the scheme.

Figure 6. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) use of reward or recognition for **students** engaging in the scheme.

Figure 7. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) use of reward or recognition for **staff** engaging in the scheme.

Figure 8. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) offering training prior to, during, or after engaging in the scheme for either only students, only staff or both students and staff.

Figure 9. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) requiring mandatory training/support for only students, only staff, both students and staff, or neither students or staff.

Figure 10. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) that adopted certain types of training for **students and staff** prior to or in the early stages of engaging in the scheme.

Figure 11. Student-staff partnership schemes (N=11) that adopted certain types of summative support/activities for **students and staff** at completion of engagement in the scheme.