Investigating Students as Partners:
Complexities Inherent in
Learning and Teaching Relationships
in Higher Education


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**Abstract**

Contemporary higher education policy in England requires universities to involve undergraduate students as partners in decision-making at the institutional level and at the course level. Furthermore, seeking to engage students as partners in academic governance is stated as a criterion by which degree-awarding institutions are assessed by the Office for Students. Working in partnership with students is now measured by the quality mechanism of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and is included as a major agenda across other political narratives within higher education.

Whilst there is growing evidence available of the benefits of students as partners, the complex dynamics that can arise out of such collaborations are less reported in the available literature. Motivated by a professional dilemma in the context of the researcher's role as an educational developer in a university centre for learning and teaching, this study investigates from within the professional context, when students and staff collaborate through models of partnership working in higher education.

Using naturalistic enquiry, the research methodology is informed by Clarke's (2005) version of situational analysis. Open-ended individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with the aim of understanding the different perspectives arising from partnership examples at the University of Brighton. Taking into account the situated nature of partnership practices, and drawing on observations and supporting documentary analysis, this research provides an interpretive analysis of partnership involving student and staff participants. These qualitative research methods explore the experiences of 15 participants actively working and learning in a partnership.

The study reveals significant findings to be considered by student and staff partners. First, that students can make profound contributions to pedagogical practices in higher education, and that the trajectories of partnership can lead to

transformation at a local level. Second, that there is however an urgent need to turn collective attention to the lack of inclusivity and opportunities for authentic participation, and the importance of learning and teaching relationships which build trust and reciprocity between students and staff. Third, that increased reflection and dialogue in partnership that advocates for inclusion, and addresses power and privilege, has the potential to productively disrupt systemic inequalities. These findings reveal further questions about the extent to which partnership can affect structural change at an institutional level.

In conclusion, this thesis illuminates the tensions and complexities inherent in student partnership working, and contributes a critical analysis of students as partners. It also provides robust qualitative evidence of the disruptive potential of partnership that has both productive and negative outcomes, and argues for policy makers and higher education practitioners to critically engage with the issues of inclusivity, relational dynamics, and power, through collective reflection and individual reflexivity. Finally, this thesis argues that further research and practice-based studies of authentic educational partnership practices are needed to inform the process of inviting students to participate in decision-making on multiple aspects of their learning experience.

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**Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: *CMcConnell*

Dated: *16/08/21*

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Positioning the researcher and the focus of study

This study began with a professional concern. At its core, this arose from within my teaching, but related to many other spheres of my practice. The concern was responding to an increasing need for creative methods of engaging with students, both inside and outside of the classroom. I reflected on the constant adaptation of my practice to accommodate and engage students as partners in the teaching space, and on the fact that in my experience the relationship did not always run smoothly. At the time I was framing this study in 2015/16, research across the sector was underway in the area of partnership, specific to enhancing learning and teaching in higher education. Much of this research however was focused on 'what works', using partnership as a loosely defined method of student engagement. I felt that the research, guidelines, and policy documents did little to capture the complexity and contention I was experiencing in practice. I was beginning to question the literature, to find out if others' explorations of partnership revealed and explored the intricacies and knotty issues I knew needed attention.

As a teacher in further and higher education, and later in an academic role in a centre for learning and teaching, I was interested in the contradictions of partnership: between on one hand seeking to involve and build equal relations with my students, but on the other, needing to exercise power over them; power manifest in the act of assessment, the transmission of expertise and curriculum content, and the established hierarchical relationship of knowledge giver-receiver. I was energised by the concept of partnership, but found myself questioning the implications arising from this mode of interaction with students. I wanted to better understand how, and why, partnership as a term had been propelled into educational discourse, and to examine and critique my assumptions of the term and its application in my practice. I embraced the philosophy behind intentionally subverting the power dynamic in the classroom, handing over some control to my students. But I needed to

acknowledge that this approach involved risk and vulnerability, and felt it was leading me to a shift of perspective as an educator that I was keen to explore, as well as a closer look at the critical issues and consequences and their potentially far-reaching effects.

At the time of this study, and in my role as a principal lecturer in the development of learning and teaching, I also worked with other academics teaching in their own disciplines. This shifted my perspective once again, as I was engaged in my colleagues' reflections on their own teaching practices and how they perceived their role and relationship with students. I would hear stories about the daily challenges many were experiencing, such as handling increasing student numbers in the classroom, as well as attending to students' mental health and personal issues outside of class time. These emotional demands, alongside contractual pressures - such as time for research outputs and publications, and managing increased administration - would cause colleagues to explain that they felt depleted of the energy necessary to engage with students in a partnership model, even though they felt it might be a good thing to try. Encouraging teachers to put themselves in the position of risk and vulnerability, which is recognised in the literature on students as partners (Bryson and Furlonger, 2018; Marquis, 2018; Woolmer, 2018) as a necessary part of engaging in partnership, was therefore a difficult suggestion to make. I was also aware of the arguments that increasing commodification of higher education has positioned students as consumers, and wondered what impact this might have on students' expectations of partnership.

My position in this study was an insider-researcher. An important aspect of this position was the ability to locate my experiences as a practitioner alongside those of my participants. Conducting insider-research enabled me to reflect on the complex issues I had found in my way of working with students, and to expand this body of personal knowledge to involve the experiences of other teaching colleagues and students. I was propelled by a number of further concerns. Progressively rigid managerialism in higher education continued to limit academics' time and freedom to create spaces for partnership. Additionally, where I had observed partnership being explored, it was too often

limited to an exclusive model of students' self-selection, and with concerning affinity biases in the recruitment of 'ideal' students. All of these professional concerns led me to problematise partnership both as a discourse and in practice, and provided a starting point for this enquiry. Through this research I was able to bring discussions about what partnership in learning and teaching means, alongside the role of trust, expectations and inclusivity, into a critical space for reflection and exploration.

## 1.2 The context for partnership

Partnership between students and educators has become central to twenty-first century higher education discourse in the UK and beyond. The evidence of this is apparent in many forms. Governmental policies such as the Teaching Excellence and Outcomes Framework demand scrutiny of forms of student engagement in the development of learning and teaching (Department for Education, 2017). University mission statements position 'students at the heart' of strategic narratives. National satisfaction surveys require students rate their feeling of being a part of a learning community (Ipsos MORI, 2021). However, terms such as partnership and community are often used in educational policy and strategy without clear definition. These politicised discourses have instigated a pedagogical shift toward approaches that reposition learners in HE to that of co-producers, co-creators of knowledge, and possibly even as 'co-conspirators' (Canning, 2017) in university business. But what exactly does the term partnership signify across these contexts? How far does reference to 'partnership' acknowledge alternative models of student participation, such as through student voice mechanisms, and activism through representation in university governance?

There is an important duality of this narrative, beyond the pedagogical framing of partnership. Seen in organisational-managerial discourse, working in partnership involves students as key stakeholders in decision-making, service design, and educational end-user evaluation. Authors Healey and Healey (2019) have reported 'student-staff partnership comes of age' five years after their initial publication of a framework for 'Student Engagement through

Partnership' (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014); stating that, with over 550 publications citing their framework since 2014, a worldwide debate over student-staff partnership had been sparked. A crucial element of this study has been to enquire into the theoretical and socio-historical roots of educational partnership, acknowledging earlier educational practices which preceded this recent surge in interest.

Partnership as a practice and a discourse is socio-historically predicated. In business, legal arrangements often denote partnership in contractual terms. Domestic use signifies a familial relationship. In health and social care for example, patients are positioned as key stakeholders and 'equal partners' in improving services and helping make decisions (NHS England, 2018). Political articulations toward idealised social change projects might also have contributed to the broader interest in partnership in private and public sectors. For example, the coalition Conservative-Liberal Democrat government (2010) manifesto of 'Big Society' used the language of local empowerment and social solidarity. These, and other examples are extended and discussed within the following chapters, as they form important contextual framings for the application of partnership in the English higher education system.

Returning to my position and focus for this study, this introductory chapter has briefly outlined the practical and epistemic concerns I had reflected on for some time leading up to this enquiry. Human relationships have been an inevitable, inextricable part of my educational practice. As such, my research aims to enquire into the subjective experiences of colleagues and students, and to include those insights which exist alongside, or in contrast to, my insider-practitioner understandings of partnership. Adopting a more critical lens on partnership and the complexities which can occur has, I acknowledge, been complicated and uncomfortable at times. Several of my personal-professional identities are manifest in this study: as teacher, staff-developer, researcher, and student; and these influence my perception and ability in both productive and challenging ways. I articulate myself and my involvement in the study through the use of first-person writing in certain parts of this thesis, illustrating my path through the inevitable encounters of practitioner research.

**1.3 The context for this study**

Of acute significance to insider research is the particular context and location at the heart of the investigation. I am based within a post-1992 university in the south of England, and my role involves working across the institution with academic and professional services colleagues. I support and develop learning and teaching practices, specifically leading on student engagement and partnership working, and learning development. A detailed summary of the institutional context, and my role, can be found in Appendix A. My educational approach leans firmly toward advocating for education that is collaborative, emancipatory, and that recognises and respects individual students and their active contributions inside and outside of the classroom. Yet this positionality continues to be compromised by the impact of political refocusing of the student position, in terms of an increasing consumer culture resulting from systemic governmental reform.

The English higher education system has been subject to substantial political change over the past 10 years. Changes involving the increase in annual student tuition fees in September 2012 were made in response to The Browne Report (2010), which required students pay £9250 per year for their degree tuition, a sharp increase from £1000 per year in 1998, and £3000 yearly in 2004. The £9250 fee structure remains in place, which drives much debate over the marketised and competitive nature of English higher education. The political context is highly significant to this study and will continue to be discussed in the literature review in chapter two.

*1.3.1 Key defining concepts of partnership and associated discourses*

The concept of students as partners has developed in the United Kingdom (UK) higher education system, as well as in Scandinavia, Australasia, Canada and the United States most noticeably since 2014. Framed within the discourses associated with student engagement, working in partnership with students is now referenced in UK governmental regulation and guidance documents. These require universities to evidence how students are engaged and encouraged to

work in partnership with their teachers, and at the level of university governance. There is an assumption across political and educational literature that partnership can mitigate the neo-liberal and commodified environment of higher education (Holen *et al.*, 2020). Terms often used interchangeably alongside partnership are collaboration, co-creation, co-production and agents of change, for example. Whilst these terms serve to open up a broad interpretation of the role students and staff could take within partnership, confusion can occur from the implicit assumptions and subjective nature of what is inferred. A concerning barrier to pedagogical progress in this domain has been the lack of clear definition yet mainstreamed requirement of student engagement, and what engaged and partnered practices should involve (Buckley, 2014). Furthermore, student partnership continues to suffer from the lack of a solid theoretical base (Matthews *et al.*, 2019) which, in my institutional context, has contributed to an erratic adoption and uptake of partnership practices.

A frequently cited explanation of student partnership is provided by Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014, p. 7):

> Partnership is framed as a process of student engagement, understood as staff and students learning and working together to foster engaged student learning and engaging learning and teaching enhancement. In this sense partnership is a relationship in which all participants are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together.

Much of the associated literature containing definitions and interpretations of students as partners in higher education has been published since 2014. However, I have been keen to explore the precursors to engagement and partnership in the educational sphere. In chapter two I discuss critical and radical pedagogies that continue to influence the discourses on higher education

pedagogies. I also draw attention to social pedagogy, a broadly European educational philosophy adopted in other social professions such as social work, occupational therapy, and informal learning settings. Whilst social pedagogy is less well known in UK higher education, it shares many of the values associated with students as partners, such as being concerned with relationship-based practice, social justice and inclusion, personal development, and collective growth.

## 1.4 Research problem, aims, questions and contribution

In this introductory chapter I have raised some of the significant issues I feel contribute to the complexities which are inherent in students as partners work: policy mandates that are too broadly defined, and the lack of reflexivity in evaluative literature which hides the necessary intricacies of the student-staff relationship occurring in day-to-day practice. Using these identified gaps in the literature, and drawing upon my experiences of student-staff partnership, this study aims to *qualitatively contribute a practice-perspective to the literature in the field of higher educational development.*

Students as partners, and the complexities inherent in learner-teacher relationships, continues to be a significant area to investigate. The political environment and educational reform in the context of current pan-global events[1] have meant that social hierarchical relations and inequalities have been thrown into the spotlight. The dynamics of power, trust, identity, agency and inclusion are inextricable elements of partnership, including partnership in academia.

The initiating enquiry framing this study has been to investigate *how partnership is experienced by students and staff when working together in learning and teaching in higher education, and what implications there are for future practice.*

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[1] Since 2020, the global Covid-19 pandemic has radically impacted on educational systems around the world, resulting in an increased reliance on remote learning and teaching delivery, use of online technologies, revealing significant disparities in students' access to technology and digital literacies. Equality and social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter have prompted global activism and awareness of racial injustices which, in higher education, have been evidenced to impact Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students through the widely published attainment gap data (OfS, 2020)

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. In a student-staff partnership, how is partnership negotiated, shaped and conducted?
2. What influence does partnership working have on staff and students sense of personal and professional identity?
3. How is staff-student partnership experienced in different circumstances?

In summary, this thesis aims to explore student and staff perceptions and experiences of their partner role, and to discover how partnership is interpreted and conducted within a single institution. The purpose of this study is to contribute new insights and critical analysis of students as partners, and to provide robust qualitative evidence of the potential of partnership that has both productive and negative outcomes. The outcomes of this research will be of relevance to policy makers, higher education providers, teaching practitioners, and students involved in higher education.

## 1.5 Overview of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis comprises of five further chapters.

In Chapter 2 I provide a review of relevant literature regarding partnerships in the higher education context. Highlighting the range of definitions associated with the concept of partnership, the review draws on associated discourses found across a breadth of international scholarship in this field. I discuss the social, theoretical, and historical precursors of partnership practice, drawing attention to the need for critically reflexive practice-based research on partnerships in higher education.

In Chapter 3 I detail the research methodology of situational analysis (Clarke, 2005), a branch of constructivist grounded theory. Attention in this chapter is given to the practical nature of this enquiry, acknowledging my dual position as practitioner and researcher; and I give specific attention to critical reflection and

reflexive practice necessary to insider-research. Finally, ethical considerations are raised and discussed, with attentiveness to the moral dilemmas and implications when conducting research in the workplace with colleagues and undergraduate students.

In Chapter 4 I present the empirical findings from the analysis of data collected on two case studies of partnership. Each case forms a research situation, offering a sense of context and position within the localised setting. Inserted throughout this chapter are participants' quotes, my own reflections, as well as articulations of my developing understanding of participants' partnership experiences, integral to a grounded theory interpretive research process.

In Chapter 5 I provide a discussion and synthesis of the findings, addressing the key interpretations and themes arising from the data analysis. The findings are also discussed in relation to the literature and conceptualisations of partnership presented in chapter two. I also use this chapter to draw conclusions from the research and pose recommendations and priorities for colleagues and students, ranging from academic and professional services roles, to educational development practitioners, students, educational researchers and policy-makers.

I reflect on the original contribution of this work, along with the limitations, scope, and avenues for future research in the final conclusions.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

Understanding student engagement has been a long-standing preoccupation within the field of higher education studies. In the face of increasing student numbers, the introduction of tuition fees, sector-wide financial restraints, and an ever-present customer experience environment, the political, economic and social factors influencing student engagement continue to intensify. Multiple institutional drivers contribute to this situation, ranging from the requirement to evidence course and teaching quality, to the need for quantifiable student success and satisfaction records for the purposes of national data sets and university league tables. At the level of teaching, actively engaging students in their learning is also a significant concern, for multiple and intersecting reasons. Research studies reveal that low student attendance and participation at course or module level can result in poor academic outcomes, poor sense of belonging to the course community, and in some cases withdrawal from university altogether. These types of issues have led to a breadth of literature detailing what works in improving student engagement; yet even with the wealth of practical guides, impact evaluations, and pedagogic strategies, understanding and improving student engagement remains a recurring priority in learning and teaching conversations.

Involving students in a partnership relationship, both in their course and with their university, has become a widely discussed and utilised approach to student engagement, and is the key focus of this chapter. Beginning with a contextualisation of the higher education landscape, this review situates student engagement and partnership within the historical, political and pedagogical context. With several conceptions of student partnership across the literature, it has been helpful to examine the constructions and characterisations of 'students as' in contemporary higher education, and identify the discourses of student engagement, participation and partnership. Later in the chapter, the pedagogical

and theoretical underpinnings of partnership are explored, from the perspectives of radical, critical, and social pedagogies. Using a methodological lens to enquire within the field of educational partnerships, this review incorporates the role of critical reflection, reflexivity and the concept of praxis as central features of partnership practice, providing the theoretical position from which to design this practice-based study.

**2.2 Student partnership in higher education: a contextual overview**

Indicating a shift in expectations of students, the evolving discourse of engagement and partnership indicates a reposition of undergraduate students from passive to active participant in higher education. 'Student-staff-partnership' and 'students-as-partners' in higher education have emerged as terms used over the last ten years to signify one of the several dimensions of student engagement. The types of activities these terms denote are wide ranging: from student voice work, representation, and participation, to active learning, collaboration and partnership (Bovill and Bulley, 2011; NUS-HEA, 2011). The transformational potential of partnerships between students and staff is asserted and increasingly documented (Mihans, Long and Felten, 2008; Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felten, 2011; Cook-Sather and Alter, 2011); frequently focusing on undergraduate students developing an improved sense of belonging, actively engaging in their learning, and experiencing a greater sense of ownership over their university experience. Questions that arise and warrant further investigation of the literature include: what influential factors within and outside of the academy have given rise to the growing interest in higher education partnerships? What is already known about the complexities of the teacher-learner relationship? And, how can this knowledge inform the evolving practice of educational partnerships?

*2.2.1 Historical and political context since the 1960s*

The repositioning of the role and recommended activities of students, and therefore staff, has emerged in part from growing instrumental, individualised, and institutional drivers such as for improved satisfaction scores or graduate

employability targets (Tomlinson, 2014; Matherly and Tillman, 2015). Labelling students as 'consumers' dates back to the 1960s particularly in the United States, but the consumer concept was also introduced during the 1970s in UK (United Kingdom) higher education political commentary (Silver and Silver, 1997, pp163-168). Concern about students' active participation in class, and engagement beyond the formal curriculum, was as prevalent throughout the 1970s/80s and 1990s as it currently is in the 2020s. Similarly, the concept of students assuming the role of partner, or universities endorsing student involvement in academic affairs such as in staff-student course committees, was evident from the 1970s onwards. A good example of this is found in documentation produced by the Nuffield Foundation in 1973 'Making the best of it: reconciling ends, means and resources in higher education' (Becher *et al.*, 1976) addressing improvements to teaching and learning, specifically in terms of resources, people, and ideas. In terms of 'the quality of teaching' (pp3-6) the report recognised:

> Higher education, more than other levels of education, depends on both teacher and student; and it would be appropriate if this shared responsibility were overtly recognised by making discussion about the curriculum an accepted feature of every course.

And in terms of 'the quality of learning' (pp7-8) the report recommended:

> Seeing things through the eyes of the student can of course go a long way beyond making sure that the overall curriculum is coherent and comprehensive. It may mean trying to enter into the learner's psychological frame of reference, and becoming more sensitive to individual and collective problems of mental and emotional adjustment.

In the same report, a section is dedicated to commentary on 'staff-student relations', acknowledging that the incongruity of students' expectations or unpreparedness, and academics' distant and unapproachable demeanour, can exacerbate a dysfunctional learner-teacher relationship. The advice given in the 1976 Nuffield Foundation report - relevant and observable within today's literatures on learning and teaching - recognises the relational dynamic which causes some barriers:

> There is perhaps always a certain tension between a person whose role it is to teach, and another whose role it is to learn. One way in which the relationship between the two can be improved is, paradoxically, by stepping temporarily outside these roles. […] Everyone can work together on a common task; staff and students can see that they are each ordinary human beings. (p19)

Later, the 1990s saw a significant interest and involvement on the part of UK government in shaping the student as consumer role in higher education. Political discourse began firmly positioning universities as public service providers in policies such as the Charter for Higher Education, entitled *Higher Quality and Choice* (DFE, 1993) which explained how universities and colleges should respond to the needs of the customers in higher education, in terms of satisfaction and compensation (pp1-2). The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education produced the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) which responded both to the expansion of student numbers, seen to double between 1989 and 1994, and an economic opportunity to address forthcoming governmental cuts to higher education expenditure by charging student tuition fees to make up the shortfall (Shattock, 2001, p562). Often remembered for the recommendation of tuition fees, and therefore the launch of a highly marketised UK higher education system, the Dearing Report also contained extensive recommendations, for example centring on lifelong learning, widening participation, investments in technology, personalised learning, and teaching

qualifications (Birch, 2017). With growing cohort numbers and an increasingly diverse student body, attention in the late 1990s turned to engaging and retaining students, as well as on measuring the quality of courses and of undergraduate teaching.

*2.2.2 Active learning as a precursor for student engagement*

Active learning, based on constructivist and experiential educational theories, is concerned with learning constructed through individuals' interaction with their environment, and socially co-constructed through their interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1980). Influential to the development of active learning, the notion of andragogy identifies the conception of adult learner (Knowles, 1950). Distinct from pedagogy – the art and science of teaching children in a dependent relationship between teacher and learner – andragogy points to a self-directed, experiential and autonomous concept of adult learning. Still relevant to contemporary discussions on higher education pedagogies, the assumptions and implications of andragogy for educational practice emphasise the learner's self-concept, motivation, and readiness to learn, signifying the responsibility of the student to attend to, and engage in their own learning (Merriam and Baumgartner, 2020).

Pre-dating the widespread use of the term partnership, student engagement has dominated the scholarship on teaching and learning, and has been an ongoing concern for teachers in the classroom, as well as for institutional leaders. Where active learning puts the responsibility for engagement on the teaching concept, student engagement acknowledges that student motivation and behaviour plays a significant role, which is located within the learner self-concept. Scholarship on developing student engagement brought forward definitions that amalgamated work pursued in North America around student involvement, for example, referring to the 'quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience' (Astin, 1984, p528).

Conceptualising student engagement as somewhat of a transactional investment, of 'optimising' productivity and experience, is a problematic feature of several definitions (Trowler, 2010; Macfarlane and Tomlinson, 2017), casting the student as a recipient, and a beneficiary of engagement. Departing from the andragogical view that adult learners are responsible for their own processes of learning, facilitated by teaching which initiates enquiry, curiosity and metacognition; the term student engagement treads a fine line between arbitrary measures of performance such as attendance, satisfaction, or retention rates, and individuals' active participation both inside, and outside of the classroom (Baron and Corbin, 2012).

During the late 1980s and 1990s a spotlight on pedagogical approaches associated with active learning became fashionable in higher education internationally. Much of the early literatures on active learning originated from the United States, responding to the call for educational reform in the secondary, tertiary and university sectors. The American Association for Higher Education published the following highly cited *Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education* (Chickering and Gamson, 1987):

> (1) encourages contacts between students and faculty; (2) develops reciprocity and cooperation among students; (3) uses active learning techniques; (4) gives prompt feedback; (5) emphasizes time on task; (6) communicates high expectations; and (7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

In part, this interest in active learning was in response to the significant expansion of students entering further and higher education in the United States, and was mirrored in the UK in the 1990s following a drive to widen participation to undergraduate education. Learning and teaching guidance focused upon how to handle the increasing numbers of students in the lecture hall, as well as to acknowledge that the changing profiles of undergraduate

students was leading to more complex and intersectional cohorts. The recognition that mature, or part-time, working, parenting, and commuter students in learning, teaching and campus environments placed greater emphasis on the need for more diverse teaching practices necessary for deeper learning experiences (Cross, 1987).

Post-2020, the need to employ active learning strategies came with additional challenges for educators, with the move to online and remote teaching arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. With universities temporarily closed to the majority of physically taught sessions, making the rapid transition from the campus classroom to the online environment caused considerable changes to the way most higher education courses were taught. Whilst the approach of online and distance learning was not a new concept, the ability to actively engage students in the online environment proved problematic in several ways. Contributing factors included the capability of virtual learning environments to facilitate participatory activities, the physical demands and mental capacity of teaching teams to convert their existing materials to the online environment, and the ability of students to access the required hardware and software, whilst feeling confident enough to actively contribute.

Emerging literature on the impact of the move to online and remote teaching and learning indicates a profound and irreversible shift across many educational sectors towards increasingly hybrid educational provision (Maguire, Dale and Pauli, 2020). The acknowledgement of active learning in this context will undoubtedly remain an important element of student engagement beyond 2021, as will the importance of investigating the affordances of, and challenges to students as partners in the post-pandemic educational era (Slick, 2020; Whelehan, 2020).

## 2.3 Contemporary developments and issues in student partnership

Between 2010 and 2020 widespread use of the term 'student partnership' has instigated new practitioner networks, conference themes, books, dedicated

academic journals, and special editions focussing on this area of educational development. Appendix B provides a comprehensive overview of current international activities, networks and publications associated with this field. Early development of the partnership concept was in part influenced by participants attending a *Students as Partners Summit* held by the Higher Education Academy in 2013, identifying a range of motivations for partnership (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014). Included were participants' personal beliefs and values about learning and teaching; the need to develop community and belonging to address student inclusion and access; the need to develop an alternative narrative to the consumerist model of higher education; to align with national policy placing engagement and partnership as central to quality enhancement; and to recognise an ethical educational responsibility to act with integrity. Potential tensions surface between the emancipatory rationale (inclusion, empowerment, developing agency) and the quality enhancement agenda (addressing institutional targets, justifying expenditure on student engagement activities), and engagement as partnership could largely be in danger of representing an instrumentality of institutions and stakeholders, characterising the primary aim of student as 'beneficiary' in partnership.

*2.3.1 Definitions of partnership in higher education*

'Partnership' between students and staff in the higher education context is referred to both as a pedagogical process, and a relationship. In this pivotal publication, Healey et al. (2014, p. 12) state that:

> partnership is understood as fundamentally about a relationship in which all involved – students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students' unions, and so on - are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together. Partnership is essentially a process of engagement, not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself.

Student-staff partnership as a pedagogical process is broadly conceptualised, yet since it has become a ubiquitous term in the broad field of education, partnership must be seen as a significant educational approach. In terms of discourse, partnership is drawn upon substantially for different meanings and purposes, still, empirical studies have found that it is difficult to offer an exact explanation or concrete meaning (Marquis, Black and Healey, 2017). Used as a shorthand to refer to characteristics of a relationship, partnership is articulated through various sets of values such as authenticity, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment, trust, challenge, community, responsibility (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014, pp13-14). Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten (2014, p. 6) define students as partners in learning and teaching as:

> a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants
> have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily
> in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization,
> decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis.

Despite the burgeoning literature base, partnership remains a contested term in terms of theorisation and implementation (Matthews *et al.*, 2019). The expansive applications in higher education policy of 'working in partnership with students', together with subjective interpretations of meaning in practice, have caused widespread variations of approach in practice (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2016; Anthony Cliffe *et al.*, 2017). Whilst there is a level of understanding about the value statements set out by Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014) and Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten  (2014) which may be taken for granted, theoretical clarity about the concept is lacking in educational literature (Wenstone, 2015; Jarvis, Clark and Stockwell, 2016). Some argue that the result of this lack of clarity could, in some instances, lead to an uncritical adoption of partnership working leading to divergent outcomes and disruptive consequences (Bovill *et al.*, 2016; Matthews *et al.*, 2018; Martens *et al.*, 2019; Martens *et al.*, 2020), which this research reveals.

*2.3.2 Inequalities and exclusionary practices*

Personal accounts from partnership participants are widely published across practice-based qualitative research, yet a recent systematic literature review of students as partners in higher education identified that a diverse range of voices and examples are lacking within available literatures (Mercer-Mapstone *et al.*, 2017). This absence of diverse representation raises concerning questions about which student and staff groups are affected, and the consequences of being excluded from partnerships, whether implicitly or overtly, and how exclusionary practice plays out. The persistent focus on 'mutuality' in partnerships of unequal power distribution is more likely to disguise, even suppress, inequalities which are present (Roper, 2016) and the emphasis on ideals in terms of values such as reciprocity, trust, and alignment are for some uncomfortable and alienating. Drawing uncomfortable parallels between students-as-partners and service-user/ health-provider engagement schemes, de Bie (2020) outlines the perpetuation of positions of power, paternalist systems of correction or resocialisation, and eventual coercion of service-users into existing organisational norms. Raising awareness of, and critiquing the positions taken by institutions and individuals operating partnerships within a power structure is a crucial and ongoing debate in terms of ethical partnership practices.

The culture of small-scale, by-invitation, and self-selection projects has similarly devastating effects on inclusivity, as affinity biases can drive recruitment practices which are based on favouritism or a less-than-level playing field in competitive interview processes. Well networked, articulate, 'strong' students may be seen as safe potential recruits who can 'hit the ground running' in a partner role, and positively represent the staff member or department – especially if funding demands evidence of 'success' outcomes, or externality involves presenting at conferences for example. The call to expand inclusive student engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning (Felten *et al.*, 2013) campaigns for far greater awareness and careful examination of our individual and collective practices through reflexive scrutiny, in order that

uncritical student engagement activities do not lead to the continual silencing of some students' voices (Robinson, 2012).

*2.3.3 The drive to evidence 'success'*

There is an assumption within the field of partnership literature specific to the higher education context, that by design, it is inherently a 'good thing'. Frequently publications exclusively report on the benefits, improvements, and impact for involved partners, yet rarely on the complexities and 'messy human relational processes' of partnership (Matthews *et al.*, 2019, p280). Partnership is repeatedly portrayed as a desirable position for the intended recipients (partners), with an assumption that staff and students will profit from attaining a partner status. In the United States, the drive to focus on positive stories and 'high impact practices' (e.g. 'NSSE 2015 High-Impact Practices', 2015) is symptomatic of a wider movement across westernised higher education sectors towards solution-focused interventions and 'success' initiatives. This systematic collection of evidence: of quality, improvement, good practice, and 'What Works' (Thomas, 2013), has given rise to a culture of 'evidence-based practice' primarily linked to testing interventions and the quantitative measurement of their efficacy (Pampaka, Williams and Homer, 2016, p231). There is a danger when taking a reductionist approach to the analysis of interventions such as partnership, that it can lead to superficially assessing effectiveness through quantifiable results such as: how many students engaged, did they achieve higher grades, and did it improve their graduate destination. This tendency to focus on positivist methods of evaluation can create a culture of strategic engagement and individualism, therefore missing the authentic relational experiences that are complex, human, and experiential in nature.

## 2.4 Discursive constructions of 'students as __'

The multiple discourses associated with student engagement and partnership involve politicised and economic ideologies, and implicate intersecting issues such as power, academic hierarchy, identity, and expertise. Evident in the literature across many western systems of education, Barrineau, Engström and

Schnaas (2019) found in the Swedish context these involve: the power of students as consumers; diminished academic expertise and perceived threat to HE teachers' professional status; widening participation to HE, addressing disadvantage, improving inclusion; student involvement in quality measurement and assurance; growing concern for 'evidence-based' engagement practices, based on measurable data; student engagement for personal growth and development, aligning to the concept of *bildung*[2]. I would argue that missing from this list is an emancipatory discourse of engagement for the greater good. Conceptualising engaged learning as contributing to communities can shift the focus from individualised forms and beneficiaries of engagement, to collective forms of knowledge creation, where students and teachers learn alongside one another. Many students who take up voluntary positions of peer supporter for example, do so to 'give something back' to their course community and to make a meaningful contribution, despite the usual framing of instrumental gains such as for future employability.

Framing "students as __" certain types of actors within HE is frequent across educational literature over the past decade (McCulloch, 2009; Regan, 2012; Schreiber, 2013; Tight, 2013; Gravett, Kinchin and Winstone, 2019; Holen *et al.*, 2020). National policies and think-tanks are significantly influential in shaping particular constructions about students. For example, the governmental white paper 'Students at the heart of the system' (BIS, 2011) fundamentally changed students' financial status, bringing competition between institutions and supposedly greater student consumer choice within this market. Students as consumers was further reinforced in the 2016 white paper *Success as a knowledge economy: teaching excellence, social mobility, and student choice* (BIS, 2016) in which the notion of value for money for students, employers, and for tax-payers was a central focus. As a result, the creation of a new regulator in England, the Office for Students, designed 'as explicitly pro-competition and

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[2] Bildung, a neo-humanistic concept introduced by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) "which emphasizes a process of holistic growth, self-realization of the individual as an entirety, freedom, and self-understanding as well as a sense of social responsibility, and which puts the development of the individual's unique potential and self at the center of educational processes" (Hu, 2015, pp. 17–19)

pro-student choice' (BIS, 2016, p. 16), continues to monitor and regulate the HE market and act as a protector of student interests (UUK, 2017).

"Students as __" discourses have important and problematic implications for both students and institutions. These concern dominant normative metaphors that characterise particular relations and actions of those involved in 'producing' or 'consuming' higher education. Alternatives to overly simplified characterisations of students as __, are models of 'co-production' (McCulloch, 2009) and 'co-creation' (Bovill *et al.*, 2016), which express the active involvement and contributions that students make, bringing together shared goals in a participatory relationship which seeks to encourage individuals' contributions, and to value co-production in education as a process rather than merely a product or outcome. Sfard (1998) had previously discussed two main metaphors relevant to educational participation in the 1990s: metaphors of *acquisition* versus *participation* (Figure 2.1). Whilst the two metaphors are in apparent opposition, neither should be used exclusively as each model has its advantages which the other cannot provide, along with the imbued dynamics and unequal distribution of power, which permeate both representations of learning and teaching (p10).

The emergence of several further "students as __" phrases attempting to counter the consumer/ acquisition narratives include *student as producer* (Neary and Winn, 2009; Streeting and Wise, 2009), *change agents* (Kay, Dunne and Hutchinson, 2010), *co-generators* (Healey, O'Connor and Broadfoot, 2010) and

| Acquisition metaphor | | Participation metaphor |
|---|---|---|
| Individual enrichment | Goal of learning | Community building |
| Acquisition of something | Learning | Becoming a participant |
| Recipient (consumer), (re-)constructor | Student | Peripheral participant, apprentice |
| Provider, facilitator, mediator | Teacher | Expert participant, preserver of practice/discourse |
| Property, possession, commodity (individual, public) | Knowledge, concept | Aspect of practice/discourse/activity |
| Having, possessing | Knowing | Belonging, participating, communicating |

Figure 2.1 The Metaphorical Mappings, Sfard (1998, p7)
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*members* of learning cultures or communities of practice (Coffield, 2008, p29). The diverse and frequently changing terminology of 'partners' to 'co-producers', or 'change agents' for example, can be confusing in practice, not least for students but also for staff. Explicit constructions made of student as simultaneously 'client', 'customer' and/or 'partner' in learning and engagement at university creates pressure for students and staff to take on multiple roles.

Labelling students often reinforces deficits and homogeneity, and can be reductive binary categories, such as young/ mature, traditional/ non-traditional, engaged/ apathetic, partner/ adversary, deep learner/ surface learner, and so on. Such metaphors can also serve to perpetuate existing cultures, privilege, and disadvantage, and convey the sense that some students are in greater need of additional socialisation in order to be able to navigate the existing rigidity of academia. Schreiber (2013) encourages us beyond "students as __" because it promotes passivity and consumerism, towards an alternative framing which involves strength- or resource-based narratives such as inviting students to share their prior experiences or cultural backgrounds. Overcoming the perpetual othering of students which creates marginalisation, or exclusivity, is a very real issue for student partnership practices which can exist undetected through forms of cultural and social biases in the selection of 'suitable' partners (Mercer-Mapstone, Islam and Reid, 2019).

The recent analytical framework put forward by Holen *et al.* (2020) identifies different ways of understanding student partnership utilising a "student as __" / ideal types matrix approach (Figure 2.2). Their framework (based on Olsen, 2007, p30) utilises two axes, the first to reflect upon the internal and external institutional drivers toward student participation in partnership, and second to consider the alignment of the actors involved, either as aligned through consensus, or unaligned and conflicting. Analysing "student as __" narratives in this format surfaces the discordant aspects of the partnership relationship, for example where actors have conflicting norms and objectives. Considering how students might address a problematic experience on their course, is different
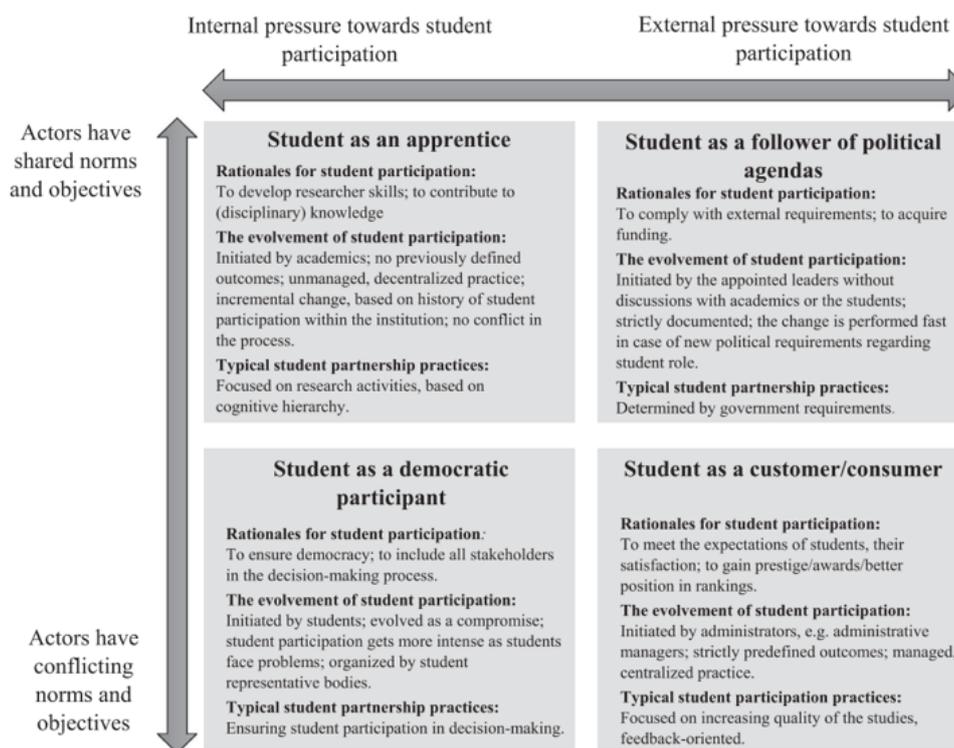
Figure 2.2 The student partnership framework (Holen *et al.*, 2020, p4) based on
(Olsen, 2007, p30). Reproduced with permission from the author

when posed 'as partner' than 'as customer'. Holen *et al.*, (2020, p10) identify the complexity of partnership in multi-faceted institutional contexts, and conclude that multiple models are needed to understand highly dynamic and subjective partnership practices. Their framework is a helpful reflective tool for use at the institutional level, to look closely at the vision and culture of an organisation. However, when using this at the micro level the relational elements and student-staff dynamics are limited, and the four binary categories fail to represent some of the issues that I identified in the introductory chapter, such as trust, power, risk, and inclusivity. The authors state further research is necessary to investigate the 'boundary areas' within their model, and where the four characterisations overlap, or are moving back and forth along the continuum axes.

## 2.4.1 Resulting 'teacher as __' narratives

A consequence of using "student as __" metaphors in practice is the resulting construction of 'teacher as __' narratives. In the higher education environment,

academics have a degree of freedom to position themselves in relation to students, bringing personality and attributes into their teaching. Further and higher education professionals are increasingly encouraged to teach in a highly reflective and enquiring approach, to develop self-awareness and self-observation of their teaching process (Brookfield, 2017). Posing several 'teacher as __' scenarios, Mortiboys, (2013) suggests some provocative metaphors to prompt reflection on the qualities and attitudes teachers enact. For example, teacher as: 'law enforcer to the potentially criminal; carer to the vulnerable; advocate to the jury; salesperson to potential buyers; […] tour guide to occupants of a tour bus; explorer to fellow explorers' (p17). In any relational scenario, the particular role enacted by one person (i.e. teacher or student) creates an opportunity for others in the relationship to act either in consensus or opposition.

Parallel to charting the implications of policy on student identity construction is an important body of literature reflecting on the changing conceptions of the role identity of teaching. The International Survey of the Academic Profession (Boyer, 1994), outlined the necessity for academics to be equipped to adapt in a massified HE system, as well as the need to innovate pedagogical approaches in this context. Academic roles are increasingly complex, with the demands of research and teaching fragmenting the time and distributing the effort involved in academic work (Locke, 2014). Compounded further by uncertain and short-term funding models, ranking cultures and emphasis on quality compliance, the vulnerability of the staff role and fractured working environment unquestionably presents intersecting factors within the nature of the role of 'educator' which require attention. Systemic pressure on staff role and identity is a significant and influential factor for student partnership, in terms of staff time and capacity to fully engage with students despite the stresses of everyday academic life. Consequently, students will react consciously or subconsciously to the role taken by the staff member, which crucially shapes the partnership in terms of the power dynamic, communication styles, democratic cooperation, and establishing trust.

Student-centered teaching methods arguably attempt to address instructor-centered or didactic forms of pedagogy, to redress the balance of power, and to challenge the function and creation of instructional 'content'. Reflection on such issues in teaching requires consideration of who takes responsibility for learning, and challenges the tensions of staff then having to evaluate, assess, and allocate grades (Weimer, 2013). The principles of student-centered learning resonate with much of the literature describing partnership principles, yet a significant barrier remains. Based on their prior educational experience, some students tend to expect a passive role in learning and in partnership, and rely on the teacher to make decisions and deliver content (Wright, 2011). This can lead to a confused role identity and possibly dissatisfaction when student-centered approaches are adopted, at a time when the teacher is attempting to hand over a level of control to students involving increased democracy within the relationship.

*2.4.2 Personal discourses and their role in partnership take up*

An individual's decision and ability to actively engage is shaped by, and even dependent on, a complex web of influencing factors. Students' expectations of their role within higher education are formed in part by how university is depicted by their previous education providers, mainstream media portrayals, and wider societal characterisations of being a university student. To add further complication, students' efficacy about their ability to engage and learn will be built on prior learning experiences, previous relationships with teachers and the curriculum, and their personal values and goals. Staff may also find engaging with the partnership concept difficult if for them it is associated with wider radical or consumerist discourses. Staff perceptions of partnership are not widely discussed in the literature available, yet it is seen as an important area to better understand in practice (Marquis, Black and Healey, 2017), including in my own.

An emerging yet under-examined area of higher education research is a deeper understanding of the integration of person-centred factors impacting on engagement, and in particular the barriers which persist (Wang and Degol, 2014). Incorporating more insights from research into learning-related emotions, personality characteristics, individual motivation, prior learning experiences, influence of parental expectations, or peer pressure for example, may offer a richer picture of students' decisions and abilities to take up opportunities for active engagement. Pickford (2016) takes this up in her proposal for an embedded multi-dimensional student engagement framework incorporating 'body, mind and heart' as crucial conditions for holistic engagement strategies.

**2.5 The pedagogical case for partnership**

Learning and teaching in partnership draws on a range of pedagogical methods to inform a multi-dimensional educational approach. Activities such as enquiry-based collaborative learning, research-engaged teaching, interdisciplinary projects, and problem-based learning (Crawford *et al.*, 2015) are highly cited examples of embedding partnership within the curriculum. Relating not only to student-staff interactions however, student-to-student relationships are also crucially important to highlight in the partnership context, such as providing opportunities for mutual peer learning within and beyond the classroom (Topping *et al.*, 2017). Common across all of the approaches described above, are the emphases on social, experiential, and applied learning.

Body, mind and heart features in pedagogical theories, and topics like compassion, kindness, and empowerment increasingly feature in contemporary literature on higher education pedagogies (See Gibbs, 2017). Highly relevant in the context of partnership working and learning, compassionate pedagogies also draw upon notions of the ability of bringing the 'whole-self' to teaching, and to learning, making time and space amidst the crowded subject-content curriculum for dialogue, reflection, and emotion-based work. Encompassing an ethic of

care and respect, the social learning spaces of partnership actively pursue critical conversations, invite challenging and problematic issues, and can go as far as to make time and space to engage uncertainty in the pursuit of *making a difference* (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020).

*2.5.1 The influence of critical, radical, and social pedagogies*

Critical pedagogy is widely understood as a philosophy of education that views teaching as a political act, heavily influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (1921/1997). The ideals of student-staff partnership undoubtedly draw on Freirian concepts of transformative education and anti-oppressive principles, advocating more humanist and emancipatory practices in relationship-focused teaching. Focussed on removing oppressive barriers to learning among marginalised groups, Friere (1972) argued against the pervasive 'banking' analogy of traditional education systems involving the deposit of narration (e.g. information) by teachers into the receptacles (students) of content. In order to overcome increasing teacher dominance and student passivity, Freire proposed a radically alternative libertarian education founded on reconciling the 'teacher-student contradiction' – to reconfigure the relationship so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students. Taking critical pedagogy further, radical pedagogy, also founded in Freirian educational principles, does not rest at a simple reordering of the teacher-student relationship, but attempts to actively engage and develop critical awareness of cultural practices and social structures which reaffirm privilege and domination (Sweet, 1998).

The ideals of radical educational practice could involve eradicating lectures in favour of making opportunity for dialogue and debate; removing teacher-led testing and grading, alongside incorporating personal reflection and reflexivity into learning and teaching, particularly in terms of applying critical perspectives towards social change. Centring all or part of the curriculum, assignment briefs, and assessments on topics such as societal inequalities, anti-oppression, and democratisation across all subjects requires commitment from whole teams and departments. Those wishing to adopt radical teaching and learning practices

face both implicit and overt institutional discouragement towards radical pedagogies, for example existing processes such as course and module validation, or implicated actors such as external examiners need to be appropriately prepared to understand the different learning outcomes arising out of radically and ethically focussed methods.

Examples of pedagogic practices in the literature which are more conducive to radical outcomes include engaging in critical co-investigation of social justice issues, shared reflection and reflexivity through contemplative and mindful pedagogies (Berila, 2015), and culturally responsive education in which teachers are attuned to their own social, educational and philosophical identity, and consider students' lives outside of the classroom as part of the curriculum context (Gay, 2018). Existing methods of appraising teaching practice and the student experience, such as mid- or end-of-module evaluations, might lack appropriate indicators which commend radical teaching approaches. Contemporary higher education faces a compromising position when high value is placed on the skills and competencies derived from fact-based curricula, such as through examinations and rote learning assessments, in spite of the growing need to equip graduates with critical awareness and the ability to understand and critique social structures.

Social pedagogy, an orientation to participatory practice in professions such as social work, community-care, family support, and youth-work, is a widely recognised approach to human development and lifelong learning across many central European countries (Kornbeck and Jensen, 2009). At present there is very little exploration of social pedagogy in the UK higher education context, yet having studied the similarities between the guiding principles underpinning partnership and those of social pedagogy, it is possible to see the potential for knowledge-exchange between the disciplines of health and social care, educating children and young people, and higher education. Social pedagogy is primarily concerned with well-being, learning, and growth, focusing on the strengths and meaningful contributions every individual can make to their wider

community (ThemPra, 2015). Creating a nurturing environment for learning and growth is a primary concern, as opposed to shaping individuals according to our own practitioner ideals. This does present challenges within higher education similar to those identified in adopting critical and radical pedagogies, such as the constraints of the prescribed curriculum, navigating existing institutional structures and processes, and culturally inherited expectations of what education should involve. However, social pedagogy is also concerned with taking an ethical position on policy decisions that are made about how best to support and educate others; therefore, our individual moral orientation, known as *Haltung,* is an essential component of practice in this context, and is discussed below.

Deriving from the German concept, *Haltung* (which has no direct word in English translation) roughly translates as stance, ethos or mindset and relates to how people guide their actions by their moral or ethical values in their everyday life, including in their professional practice (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011). Partnership as an approach to pedagogic practice and co-creation in higher education might usefully be thought of as an orientation toward relationship-centred education (Bovill, 2020), and therefore *Haltung* provides a way to express our philosophical alignment through particular teaching practices. A range of factors contribute to the way an individual's *Haltung* is conceived (such as upbringing, cultural context, prior education, life experience) and is subjective yet not necessarily straightforwardly 'good' or 'bad'. An important part of social pedagogy involves empathetic understanding and positive regard for others, not just those people who we can relate to easily, or are drawn to through mutual affinities. Whilst this presents the challenge of actively recognising our biases and acting with integrity according to our *Haltung*, ongoing self-reflection can enable at least an increased awareness of the impact of our interactions and assumptions of others.

Often referred to as involving head, heart, and hands, social pedagogy advocates bringing one's whole self to practice that involves caring for and educating

others. The head signifies how we use our practical or theoretical knowledge and experience; the heart reminds us that emotions and feelings are woven throughout relationship-centred practice; and hands signify the practical, hands-on nature of learning and how we provide opportunities to learn through occupational activities which bring meaning and purpose in life. Earlier in this review I discussed some of the considerable constraints and challenges within higher education such as cuts to resources, emotional and physical demands of teaching, increasing student numbers, and the impact of these factors on the capacity of academics in a teaching role. Being able to maintain additional attention on the emotional, relational and psychological aspects of learning and teaching is increasingly challenging, on top of the high levels of administration, marking, meetings, evaluations and course reviews regularly reported within my own university. As an educational developer, I am interested in how institutional structures and systems could more readily facilitate a teaching culture which can accommodate the principles of head, heart and hands, in an orientation towards social pedagogy.

### 2.5.2 Haltung, praxis and reflection

The critical, radical and social pedagogies I have discussed in this review involve a particular kind of action orientation towards morally-committed, ethically underpinned practice. Exploring my own *Haltung* through critical reflection has steered me to conceiving students and teachers as learning partners in the process of discovery, through actions that align with relational pedagogy (Bovill, 2020, p. 3) including dialogue, co-creation, and active participation as collaborative teaching methods. For me, *Haltung* influences many aspects throughout my life; it is not simply restricted to my professional persona, but runs through my parenting, personal life, and social relationships. As previously mentioned, *Haltung* is an individual life philosophy, shaped by many factors such as upbringing, cultural context, prior education, and life experience. Personally, this has involved for example supporting several family members since my early childhood with acute mental health conditions, caring for a sibling with severe learning difficulties, and later in life being first in

family to attend university. I believe these and other experiences have significantly influenced the outlook I hold, particularly towards lifelong educational opportunities, treating other people with respect, and a belief that no matter what background or neurological profile, that everyone should be treated as an individual with potential for growth. Having a philosophical awareness of one's own *Haltung* however is not enough. *Haltung* has to be rooted in practice and demonstrated through aligned actions and behaviours (Charfe and Gardner, 2020). The subsequent paragraphs in this section follow my exploration of the relationship in the literature between *Haltung*, *praxis*, and the concept of *holistic reflexivity* which guided me towards the methodological approach taken in this study.

Across different occupations and professions such as education, social work, health care, and medicine, the term *praxis* is understood broadly as the practical application and thoughtful action taken in a given situation. Informed by particular traditions in a field, theoretical knowledge, an individual's *Haltung*, and the context of application, *praxis* necessarily infers a moral stance concerning careful consideration toward other people who are involved or affected by our practice (Kemmis and Smith, 2008). Paulo Freire's philosophical and political theorisations of the relationship between pedagogy and practice involved recognition of the active relationship between subject, student, and teacher, and the democratising actions which can be taken to redress control and domination by those in positions of power (Freire, 1972). Across higher education literature, involving students as partners is frequently associated with certain values and principles such as trust, courage, plurality, responsibility, authenticity, honesty, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment (Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten, 2014; Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014), ostensibly acting as ethical guidance in *praxis*. Matthews et al (2019) go further to argue that, following a rapid surge in practice-based literatures on students as partners, scholarship and literature which more explicitly theorises partnership is necessary, if this field is to move towards generating theorised partnership praxis.

Pursuing *praxis* requires several levels of awareness: internal critical awareness/ thinking (intrapersonal), interpreting and responding to other people's responses (interpersonal), interpreting and acting within a wider situation (extrapersonal). Yet having the time, space and creative resources to think, reflect, plan, and act in a conscious, caring, compassionate and critical manner has become idealised in many caring professions (Saltiel, 2010, p. 130), and relied upon *'despite question marks over the rigor of the concept'* of reflective practice (Clegg, Tan and Saeidi, 2002, p. 131). Bleakley (1999) goes further in problematising the *'aesthetic value complex'* of critically reflexive practice, drawing into focus the danger of narrated descriptive reflection, as well as the need to carefully analyse the purpose of reflective practice through an examination of its socio-historically situated discourse. In presenting a model of 'holistic reflexivity', Bleakley (1999) reformulates reflection from simply retrospective, or introspective accounts of a situation (i.e. Schon's (1987) model of reflection-*on*-action, or reflection-*in*-action), to reflection-*as-action* and radical act, explaining

> The locus for reflection is then not 'in' the individual
>
> (decontextualised), but 'in' the total event, involving the embedding
>
> of act in a context that itself guides or moulds the act. (1999, p. 323)

Recognising and integrating Bleakley's *holistic reflexivity* in this study provoked me towards a methodology that could allow for a professionally situated enquiry, in the context of pursuing insider-research. Being able to take into account a wide range of elements found in the research situation(s), beyond purely narrative accounts from participants, and naturalistic observations, led me toward Clarke's (2005) version of situational analysis, a branch of constructivist grounded theory detailed in Chapter 3: Methodology.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In introducing this thesis, I explained my professional concern around the intricacies and contentions I had experienced in my role as an educational developer, specific to the relationship between students and staff. This research proceeds from the view that it is timely to examine the complexities inherent in learning and teaching relationships, for at least two reasons. First, to provide original insights into the situated nature of partnership, and the influencing elements; and second, to address the gaps in the existing evidence base that highlight a lack of information for education practitioners about the complexities of working in partnership.

In this chapter, and within the scope of the Education Doctorate, I have presented a review of existing evidence in relation to the approach of staff partnering with students on a wide range of aspects of higher education, including in professional service provision, learning and teaching, curriculum design, and quality assurance processes. The literature presented demonstrates an evolving educational context over several decades, which has continued to create opportunities to reflect and reassess the nature of what it means to be a student, and the resulting impact on how staff conceptualise their position and role. The pedagogic rationale for partnership is made clear in published research and scholarship on teaching and learning since at least 2014, with higher educational policy and guidance incorporating explicit instructions aimed at institutions to involve students in partnership in their organisations. Whilst this literature provides a clear mandate to practitioners across the UK HE sector to engage with students in partnership, I remain convinced that the challenges which arise in practice should be better acknowledged, constructively discussed, and reflected upon, in order to learn from and enhance practice.

The next chapter details the methodology selected, and outlines how I addressed the aims, guiding questions, ethical considerations, and research design.

# Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In this study I have used situational analysis (Clarke, 2005), a grounded theory methodology, to develop original understandings of the interpretations of partnership in the context of a single higher education institution. Generating theory which is grounded in the data, and situated socio-culturally, politically, and discursively, has provided me with the opportunity to enquire into unconsidered or new insights about partnership, as well as the complexities, nuances, and relational issues; all of which are entangled within lived experiences of learning and teaching but often under-reported in research literature. By using a grounded approach, the traditional format of identifying, applying and testing particular theories through the research design is rejected, instead this research aligns to the philosophical position of symbolic interactionism, the sociological perspective which focuses on the symbolic meanings people ascribe to the process of social interaction (Chun Tie, Birks and Francis, 2019). Furthermore, the distinguishing feature of Clarke's situational analysis from that of traditional grounded theory, is the recognition of the holistic and complex situation as the fundamental unit of analysis, and the incorporation of human and non-human contextualising constituents such as discourse materials, surrounding environments, discursive constructions, contemporary issues, participant accounts, and observations. I felt that this methodology aligned with the notion of *Haltung* discussed previously, and enabled me to approach the study with the holistic reflexivity (Bleakley, 1999) I outlined in chapter two.

Through an inductive analysis of the data using the constant comparison method, meanings, patterns and theories were thematically developed from the ground up; and analytical mapping and diagramming was used to tease out the relationships between categories found in the analysis. This chapter details the research design, rationale, ethical considerations, methods, and decisions taken

in order to investigate students as partners, and the complexities inherent in learning and teaching relationships in a higher education setting.

## 3.1 Rationale for the research approach

This study is concerned with the social process of partnership. Social processes are characterised by the ways in which individuals and groups interact, adjust, establish relationships, create and share understandings, and form patterns of behaviour. Deeply situated in context, social processes such as partnership working involve the development of reciprocal meanings and shared values, through symbolic interaction – the exchange of meaning between people through language and symbols. In order to study the social process of partnership, I looked to methodological approaches which could incorporate the examination of subjective experiences. I wanted to explore how people make sense of these experiences, whilst also paying attention to the broader social surroundings such as the political, cultural and historical contexts. I investigated the potential of phenomenological research which focuses on the study of human action, yet felt that I needed an extended method which could encompass a more complete picture of a complex situation, such as influential discourses, power dynamics, and implicated structural and relational elements.

Situational analysis, aligned to constructivist grounded theory, was developed by Clarke (2005) to pursue the development of a methodological perspective able to view socially and culturally produced knowledges not simply born of Western Enlightenment or scientific positivism, but that include the humanities, and natural and social sciences. Clarke describes the relationship of knowledge production as aligned to locations or 'situations', and is concerned with situatedness and situated knowledges (Clarke, Friese and Washburn, 2018, p. 12). Researching partnership from the perspective of the students and staff involved, alongside the situational analyses of the surrounding ecologies (see Figure 3.1), enabled this study to acknowledge the broader landscape in which those partnerships were operating. A key focus of the research questions was to enquire as to how partnerships might be shaped or mediated by contextual and
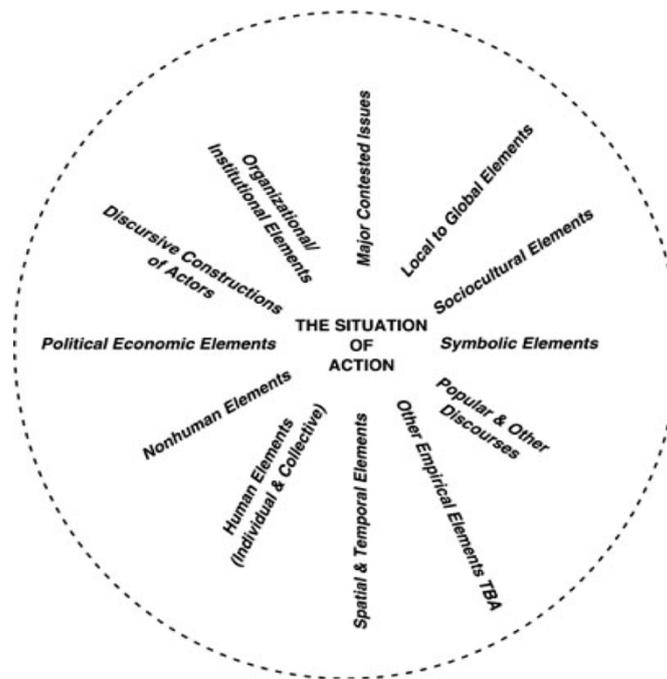
Figure 3.1: Clarke's Situational Matrix (2005, p73)
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situational factors, as well as how personal involvement in partnership has an effect on participant identity. Situational analysis provided a mapping method to respond to the research questions, and record internal and external influences arising within the organisational and cultural context.

The main strategies of situational analysis are three types of maps that address different levels of analysis. *Situational maps* are intended to record all of the major elements contributing to the research situation, for example people, documents, equipment, discourses, symbolic or cultural elements. *Social worlds/ arenas maps* constitute the major collective actors and categories at the heart of the enquiry, to determine commitments, relations, and sites of action. *Positional maps* lay out the major positions taken and not taken in the data or site of concern, allowing for the analysis of variations, differences, contradictions and complexities (Clarke, Friese and Washburn, 2015, pp. 13–15). Alongside the situational analysis mapping, I followed the process of reflective memoing about each map, and after major waves of data collection

and analysis. The following list summarises types of data produced in this study (a full inventory can be found in Appendix C):

- Three types of situational analysis maps (situational, social world, positional maps)
- Transcripts from participant interviews, and focus groups
- Observational field notes
- Reflective research memos (across the mapping, analysis, and interpretive processes)

A key feature in situational analysis includes an explicit acknowledgement of researcher positionality. Since my position in this study was an insider-researcher, I was interested in the opportunity to address reported shortcomings of traditional grounded theory whereby researchers are advised to bracket themselves to avoid bias or interference in the data, and maintain analytical distance (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 18). Bringing my position into the arena for discussion, to reflect on my background, professional status, potential privilege and bias, was an authentic place from which to critically enquire into the consequences of my insider position. den Outer, Handley and Price (2013) conducted situational analysis as a reflexive methodology for educational research in their study on local assessment practices, and the meaning of assessment criteria and standards in higher education. Concluding that the process of situational analysis prompted a radical rethink of what usually constitutes acceptable data in education research, den Outer *et al* described feeling challenged by using this method in both productive and daunting ways. I would agree that generating several different types of data felt overwhelming and difficult to prioritise at times, however I also found this a creative and experimental prompt to reflect on this discomfort, and my involvement in the process.

### 3.1.1 Research problem
The initiating enquiry framing this study was to investigate: *how partnership is experienced by students and staff when working together in learning and*

*teaching in higher education, and what implications there are for future practice.* Through conducting a naturalistic enquiry using situational analysis, I set out to address the following research questions:

1. In a student-staff partnership, how is partnership negotiated, shaped and conducted?
2. What influence does partnership working have on staff and students sense of personal and professional identity?
3. How is staff-student partnership experienced in different circumstances?

The thinking behind research question one was to enquire into the processes followed, the positions taken, and the influencing factors which are present in the partnership situation. Research question two introduces the construct of identity, and an exploration of the impacts of partnership involvement at an individual level. Research question three enables a comparative account of partnership, to draw out commonly experienced issues, as well as divergencies which may be unique to certain partnership situations. To tackle these questions, I chose to focus on two separately situated cases of partnership within a single institution (outlined in section 3.2.3). In order to grasp how each partnership was framed, how each functioned, and how each was experienced by partners, I used the three situational analysis maps to build a 'rich picture', capturing a multi-faceted representation of these as complex systems (Checkland and Poulter, 2006).

As well as descriptively mapping what can be seen through observation, in documentation, or information which is discussed by participants, Clarke (2005) clearly instructs the situational analysis researcher to unmask, reveal, and analyse those voices marginalised in situations of enquiry. Distinctly feminist and emancipatory, the careful analysis of absent positions and analyses of power can attempt to address complexity, ambiguity, and inequity found in the data. In order to incorporate this process of 'helping silences speak' (Clarke, 2015, p.15) across the analytic process I tried to pay active attention to power dynamics, and subtle differences of opinion or action. I used the reflective

process to enquire into my assumptions of the situation, as well as to question who was present, speaking, participating, or not, and regularly reflect on the inherently political nature of practice-based research. In section 3.2.8 I explain my process of reflection using Moon's (1999, p. 180) schema to guide reflective activity.

## 3.2 Research design

Based on Tweed and Charmaz's (2012, p. 133) diagrammatic representation of a grounded theory study, Figure 3.2 describes my research strategy involving seven key stages, decisions, and situational analysis mapping activities across this project of two case studies of students as partners.

The key thinking and decision making behind stage one – framing the research questions, issues, and initial concept - has been discussed in section 3.1. Before progressing to stage two 'sampling and recruitment', submitting an ethical application and seeking approval following university protocol was crucial in this process.
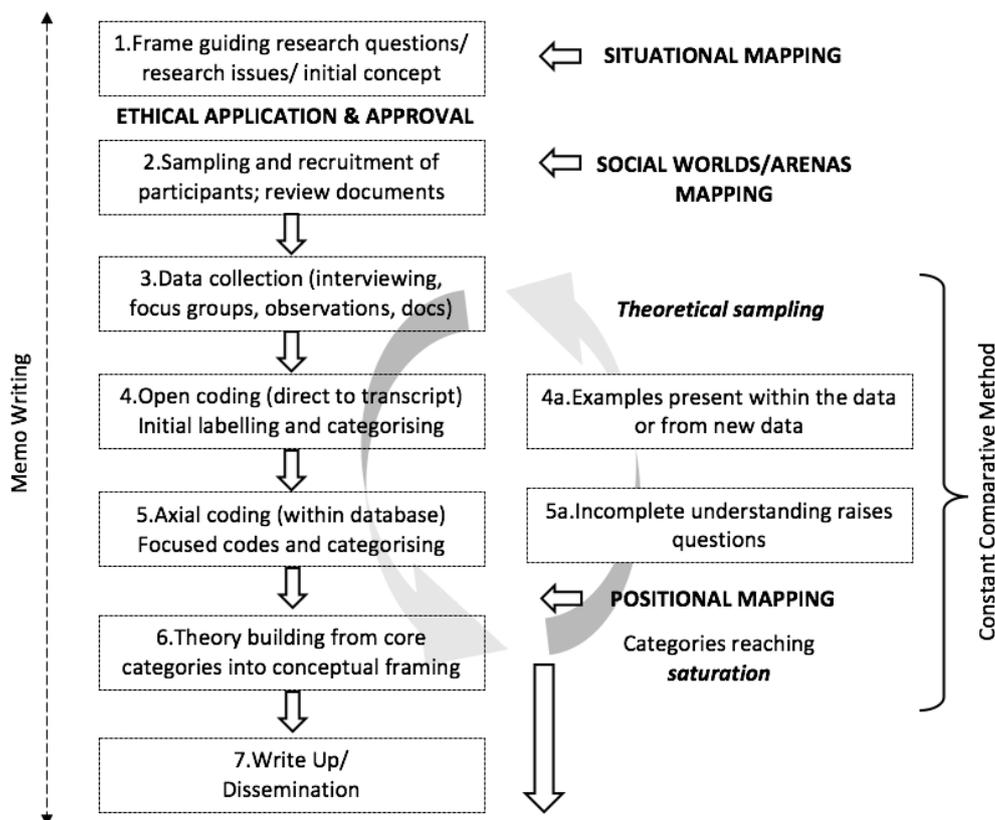
Figure 3.2: Research design in this study

## 3.2.1 Ethical approval

Following the University's Research Ethics Policy, I wrote a detailed application for ethical review and approval (Appendix D). The University of Brighton has a three-tier framework and process for review, which is aligned to five broad underpinning principles of ethical research practice:

- Integrity and transparency in the design and conduct of research, including making explicit partiality or conflict of interest.
- Fully informing participants regarding the aims, purpose, methods, risks and benefits of research, and the storage, use and dissemination of results.

- Participation should be voluntary, free from coercion or penalty for not taking part; and withdrawal from participation and data should be made possible without needing justification.
- Participant confidentiality, privacy, and right to anonymity should be respected.
- The ethical review process should be independent, consistent and transparent, and should facilitate and support ethically sound research.

There were several considerations made during the ethical application process, and these were discussed with the review panel. This study involved human participant research, including interviews, focus groups, and observations *in situ*. The site of this research was the institution where I was employed as an educational developer in a central learning and teaching department, and potential staff participants would be professional colleagues based in other departments. Potential student participants would currently be studying at the institution, and affiliated with the staff participants who volunteered to take part in this project on their work in partnership. Consideration was made to the political and social sensitivity of this project, such as the inherent power or control staff may have over the student participants, such as through degree assessment and marking, or through payment such as wages or employer references. My position of insider-researcher within my employing institution raised the possibility of an additional level of advantage, such as implicit coercion of participants, the desire for reputational benefits, and issues related to institutional and participant anonymity. With this raised level of ethical risk, the ethical application was subsequently considered by a Cross-School Research Ethics Committee at the level of Tier 2, which recommended ethical information be submitted to the heads of each department constituting each case study.

Given the issues raised during the ethical approval process, the research design strategy, and rationale for situational analysis I presented was considered an appropriate methodology, with some additional guidance from the ethics panel.

Naturalistic enquiry, i.e., visiting participants in their locale to conduct interviews or focus groups, was deemed an ethical method to protect privacy and anonymity. I took the panel's advice not to video or audio record observations in order to reduce intrusion and to mitigate the 'observer effect'. Instead I watched and listened during observations, and made a mind-map of key points when necessary, following up with field notes afterwards. In all of the observations, I was introduced to participants, and sat nearby to group members rather than creating any unnatural distance between the group and myself. Finally, the ethics review panel discussed the need to check with participants that the data, and interpretive findings, provided a fair representation of their situation and experience; to meet this need I emailed the participants password protected transcripts and extracts for review.

### 3.2.2 Ethical practice

Focusing in on some of the complexities present, such as issues of identity, power and positionality, was a crucial and dynamic process of being ethical and reflexive as both a practitioner and researcher. Conducting insider-research within the professional setting has the potential to raise unexpected ethical tensions, particularly as power relations may vary in different contexts, such as the dynamics in committee meetings, contrasted by those in impromptu café conversations, or in the semi-formality of classroom teaching. Therefore, understanding the complexities of my positionality in this research became, as Brooks et al (2014, p. 115) suggest, at times an ethical conundrum. In the following memo excerpt I explore the influence of my positionality, and the implications for this study, in relation to the '4M' framework (Friberg, 2016) namely the micro, meso, macro and mega. Highlighting ethical considerations at these four levels helped me to reflect on the potential impact (both positive and negative) of my actions, and how these framed the design, conduct and research outcomes:

Micro: At the level of individuals, relationships, dynamics.

I acknowledge that I have access to some people (certain colleagues, certain students) within my existing sphere of influence and networks. Therefore, this research cannot be truly inclusive to potential participants in the broadest sense, if I choose to recruit using theoretical and purposive sampling. The implications of which could result in skewed data towards positive experiences, beneficial outcomes, and a lack of diverse research findings. The benefit however is that I have some existing relationships to begin with, and certain insider insights with which to ground my situational knowledge.

My existing knowledge is limited to what I currently know about partnership practices, and how I conceptualise partnership. Therefore, partnership in this study is constructed according to my beliefs and judgements about education, interactions, and relationships. This could have an effect on how I interpret different expressions of partnership, and what I regard or disregard in the data. My professional expertise in student engagement and partnership however has helped to foreground the case examples, and bring institutional experience and understanding to the project.

Meso: At the level of team/ department/ course.

As a colleague within a central learning and teaching department, the implicit or explicit influence of my position within the institution creates a power dynamic. Participants may choose to talk about their work in a particular way, for example to promote or showcase their efforts for recognition. Participants may choose to disclose

professional opinions to lobby the university, or personal matters that may not otherwise be disclosed in usual circumstances.

As an educational developer situated between senior management, professional services, and academic schools, there may be unspoken pressure for me, or participants, to hide or remove findings that may be critical of the team, department or course. It may also be challenging to disguise some participants who would become identifiable if aspects of their identity or role are reported.

Macro: At the level of the institution

My attendance and involvement at university decision-making committees has contributed to the institutional mandate for partnership in internal strategies and policies. Therefore, the duality of influence from my professional role and researcher role creates a level of complicity and closeness to the topic.

The institutional networks and groups to which I belong have collective influence and work towards political agendas (for example, meeting Office for Students requirements, governmental targets, student satisfaction scores, improving league table results). Therefore, having to address institutional and political agendas influences my ability to achieve neutrality within my research, yet affords me increased awareness of internal and external imperatives.

In my professional role I have a responsibility for ensuring that partnership is supported and taken forwards within the university, to meet the needs of key strategy documents. My explicit need to

progress the partnership agenda in my professional identity is likely therefore to play out in my research identity and decisions. Further, my department and institution is supporting my doctoral studies, and therefore the topic represents a professional allegiance.

Mega: Beyond the institution

I attend and actively contribute to national and international communities of practice which discuss and influence the conceptualisation of partnership in higher education and progress this agenda. The conceptualisation of partnership to which I have contributed, continually frames and reaffirms the construction of acceptable practices allied to partnership. Maintaining reflexivity and openness to different perspectives is crucial in trying to work against the reproduction of mainstream, culturally appropriated practices, in order to think and act inclusively in this research, and in practice.

National and international conceptions of partnership are taken up by national governmental mandates (e.g. the Teaching Excellence Framework), and embedded within policy directives. Having to address national governmental politicised agendas influences my ability to achieve neutrality, yet taking a researcher perspective enables me to observe these influences with increased criticality and scepticism.

Exploring some of these ethical issues involved in practitioner research when involving colleagues and students, has brought both specific and generalised problems to the surface. Whilst it may not be possible to overcome, or solve, all existing ethical tensions, being aware and alert to the privilege of positionality,

and the power inherent in my position as an insider-researcher gives the imperative to constantly try and ask myself questions about how this research can be conducted in a moral and respectful manner (Iphofen, 2009).

### 3.2.3 Sampling and participant recruitment

Following successful ethical approval, I was able to pursue methods to initiate theoretical sampling. In grounded theory, once the research topic and questions have been agreed, a small handful of people who have experience or knowledge of the research area can be identified. I began with a series of research conversations between Nov 2016 - Jan 2017 with four academic colleagues across four Schools (these are not considered as part of the participant sample). These interactions were intended to generate initial staff and student contacts whom I could then formally invite as participants. From the four research conversations about my aims for the research, and to seek varied partnership examples, I was able to follow up on two further academic staff and two professional services colleagues. This resulted in securing phase one interviews with two colleagues: one academic Course Leader, and one Professional Services manager. From this point, two potential case studies of student-staff partnership were identified (see Table 3.1), dependent on the agreement of student participants from the respective partnerships.

Alongside the theoretical sampling and recruitment of participants, I reviewed written documentation in which participants made available information about their partnerships, and associated policies and strategies. This informed the construction of a *social worlds/ arena's map*, which laid out the collective actors and the arenas of commitment (Clarke, 2005). Mapping the stakeholders, influential political discourses, communities of practice, and associated policies became an iterative process. As the project gathered more information and insights throughout the waves of data collection and analysis, situational analysis maps quickly became sprawling and complex. A social worlds/ arenas map enabled an overview of the social and political influences, as well as a

| Case study 1: | Case study 2: |
|---|---|
| Professional Services Partnership | Course-Based Partnership |
| **Student Learning Technology Ambassadors** | **Students as partners in learning and teaching** |
| Centrally located service department, operating a cross-university student partnership project. | A course-based partnership, situated within a subject discipline, at undergraduate level. |
| *An example of partnership in which students are recruited and paid to work alongside staff technologists to support the use of learning technologies in the classroom.* | *An example of partnership between course leader and students in the everyday practices and interactions of learning and teaching, inside and outside of the classroom.* |

Table 3.1: Overview of each partnership case study

quick reference tool to look at the existing partnership agenda, mapping also helped to connect local practices with the national picture (Appendix E).

*3.2.4 Data collection*

Theoretical sampling was necessarily an unfolding process, yielding different modes and types of data from each partnership situation. Three activities took place simultaneously across this stage of the research: data collection, open coding, and memo-writing. It was useful to develop the data inventory which captured these activities (Appendix C), to document the timeline, stage, mode, and type of data item. This also assisted me in the decision making about whether 'saturation' of the data and sampling was being achieved. Judging saturation is, as Thornberg and Charmaz (2012, pp. 63–64) describe, tricky and somewhat open-ended, insisting that researchers 'act on their data as active, reflective, and conscious analysts'. Figure 3.3 sets out the iterative procedure for data generation, sampling, collection, annotation, analysis and comparison.

**Theoretical sampling**
Based on partnership concept
To establish representativeness
and consistency

**Data collection**
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Observations
- Document review

**Open coding**
- Conceptual labelling data items, transcripts, notes, documents. Categorising

**Axial coding**
- Finding relationships between categories (using database)

**Selective coding**
- Selection of a core category
- Checking concepts for density

**Memos and Field Notes**
Compiling and assimilating conceptual details

**Constant comparison**
Between incidents, data and theory
For accuracy and consistency
To reflect on bias and interpretation

Figure 3.3: Iterative research procedure

The period of approximately 16 months available across which to conduct the theoretical sampling and data collection allowed for an unfolding and emergent research design, accommodating different 'types' of data, as well as different collection formats. Whilst this presented an opportunity to be flexible and responsive, it also presented further ethical considerations I had somewhat pre-empted within the initial ethical application; in terms of obtaining explicit consent from colleagues and students whom I interacted with in formal research terms. Blurring of formality and informality however was problematic at times, such as when I might be approached by a participant to chat in the queue for coffee, or after a meeting. These interactions were considered as part of the research situation, and opportunities to build trust and reciprocity. However, I limited my documentation of ad-hoc interactions to anonymised personal field notes and observational memos when it was not possible to get explicit participatory consent.

In summary, the naturalistic data collected *in situ* comprised of:

| Case study 1: Professional Services Partnership | Case study 2: Course-Based Partnership |
|---|---|
| Student Learning Technology Ambassadors<br><br>• Three 1:1 interviews: 2x staff partners, 1x student partner<br>• One observation: 2x staff and 12x students | Students as partners in learning and teaching<br><br>• One 1:1 interview: 1x staff partner<br>• Two focus groups: 1x first-year undergraduate, 1x final-year undergraduate<br>• Three classroom observations: first-year, second-year, and final-year undergraduate induction classes |

Table 3.2: List of naturalistic data collected for each case study

### 3.2.5 Interview and focus group schedules

Of the interviews conducted, I began each with a semi-structured approach, using an interview prompt sheet (Appendix F), before following a more open-ended structure becoming more conversational and exploratory. The prompt sheet was designed to enable interviewees the choice to respond on a range of topics, or in some cases participants added their own topic as it felt important to them to discuss.

The focus group schedule (Appendix G), applicable in the course-based partnership situation, was designed to guide the students through a series of broad questions, and to allow participants the opportunities to contribute their experiences and comments if they chose to. The same questions were used across both focus groups, and it was interesting to reflect that some of the richest data about partnership enablers and inhibitors was drawn from the first three questions which were designed to allow for introductions and rapport.

*3.2.6 Recordings and transcription*

Interviews and focus groups were recorded using a Dictaphone recorder, and the recordings were transferred into a password-protected mp3 file and deleted from the Dictaphone. All data files were kept within a password protected folder within my personal storage allowance on the password-protected laptop only I use, not accessible through online cloud storage providers as this would have breached the ethical protocol approved at the start of data collection.

Recordings were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews and focus groups, and all names or references to personal identities were anonymised using pseudonyms or abbreviated role descriptors – never a person's full job title. Transcriptions were then stored in the same password protected folder as the mp3 recording files on my password-protected laptop. These files are due to be deleted on completion of this research, following ethical protocol stated to participants in the Participant Information Sheet that: *Only the researcher will have access to the data and it will be stored in a password-protected file only, for a maximum of 10 years,* extracted from the Participant Information Sheet, approved 19th January 2017.

*3.2.7 Observational field notes*

In this study, based in the interpretivist paradigm, the unstructured observation was utilised to acknowledge the importance of the naturalistic research context and environment. Observations took the form of an unstructured record, for example observing interactions, the environment, and the nature and content of group meetings. Utilising unstructured observations is about not having a predetermined idea about what might be observed, and in some cases it required me to adopt a different role from that of impartial observer. The adaptation of my required role as observer was particularly relevant to my position when I was invited to informally sit in on teaching. As a visitor to taught cohort sessions, I was introduced to students as a 'colleague' and as a visiting member of the teaching team, raising ethical considerations that were documented and reflected upon within my field notes. For example, I noted how the students

may adapt their behaviour and interactions in my presence, and/ or modify their responses in class, or even be less likely to speak up in the informally observed situation. Ethically however, it was crucial I was introduced and my identity made transparent to the students, and that the course tutor and I gave them the opportunity for informed consent. I did not audio record or visually document the observations with any recording device, and I tried to minimise my note taking within each observation. Instead I made a keyword map using headings that would prompt more thorough notes and reflections straight after the observed session to which I could refer back to.

### 3.2.8 Document analysis

Included as part of the situational analysis mapping method, extant materials such as documents, policies, reports, and evaluations contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the two partnership case studies. Using 'extant' data – i.e., sources that the researcher has not had any involvement in shaping – is common in grounded theory, and advice to researchers is that sourcing and analysing materials should be both systematic and reflexive (Ralph, Birks and Chapman, 2014). Establishing the contextual position of each document analysed was important, for example to ascertain the status, authorship, audience, purpose, and time sensitivity. Approaching extant data reflexively was a similar process as when encountering other forms of elicited data, such as the interview and focus group transcriptions, or my observational field notes. I used the process of memoing and reflecting when reading and analysing documents, anchoring my interpretations in an awareness of the context and source, as well as reflecting on my interactions with the materials gathered.

The documented materials gathered in this study were in the form of a student partner job description, job advert, a publicly available partnership project description, an internal evaluation, an internal curriculum review document and publicly available university strategy documents. These have been included in the Data Collection Inventory which is found in Appendix C.

*3.2.9 Research memos*

In order to fully incorporate reflexivity in the research process, both Clarke (2005) and Charmaz (2006) advocate for the full utilisation of memoing to sustain researcher awareness and productivity across the project. Memoing is not simply an activity that is carried out at the analytic stage, it can and should be used across the whole study. I adapted Moon's *Schema to guide reflective activity in professional development towards improvement of professional practice* (1999, p. 180), regularly revisiting this framework within my field notes and in memo writing. The schema consists of the four phases below, and italicised below the phase I outline the type of questions I used to prompt the reflective process:

Phase 1: Develop awareness of the nature of current practice.

*What is my current work practice, in terms of utilising partnership?*

*What skills do I associate with partnership working? What are my*

*expectations?*

Phase 2: Clarify the new learning and how it relates to current understanding.

*What is it that I have learned from this data that impacts on my*

*understanding of partnership practice? What concurs or what*

*contradicts my understanding?*

Phase 3: Integrate new learning and current practice.

*How does this new learning relate to what I knew and did before?*

*(i.e., what are the implications of this new knowledge for my practice,*

*and for this research?)*

Phase 4 Anticipate or imagine the nature of improved practice.

*How will I act in such a way that my practice, in the context of these research findings, is improved? What will I do differently?*

The orientation towards reflexivity in practice is not only pertinent to the qualitative methods I have selected for this study. Reflexivity strikes at the heart of what has been found about the 'praxis' of partnership (Matthews *et al.*, 2019) and the interplay between thought (theory), and action (practice). In social and radical pedagogies, as with situational analysis methodologically, praxis enables transformation at the levels of the individual, and crucially through developing a heightened critical awareness of structural and social injustice.

In practical terms, memos took the form of first-person written prose, and were written into a single Microsoft Word document, dated, and given a title to assist with keyword retrieval using the search facility. Memos were written across the research process, from the creative process of situational analysis mapping, to reflecting on my observational field notes, transcript and documentary analysis.

*3.2.10 Open-coding, initial labelling and categorising*

This first stage of initial open-coding involved studying fragments of data (example in Appendix K). Looking at segments, phrasing, sentences, individual words, or discreet descriptions helped me to direct the subsequent data gathering towards the definitions and issues that appeared to be arising. Practical methods for this stage of inductive analysis included annotation directly onto the printed transcripts, field notes, memos, or document (pen and paper); digital annotation using Microsoft Track Changes (comments); tabulation and abstracting single word/ code phrases; physical concept mapping using Ketso tools, a visual-tactile mapping method (examples in Appendix M); and Microsoft Excel tabulation for thematic categorising (Appendix N).

This intricate process of line-by-line open, initial coding, alongside the situational and social-world mapping enabled tentative codes and associations to arise, linking participants' actions and descriptions to wider social processes. Employing the feature of constant comparative grounded theory methods extended the emerging analysis beyond quick assumptions of the immediate participants and their specific setting, into a contextual interpretation to make analytic sense of the situation unfolding within the data. Constant comparison involved looking first for similarities and differences, or contradictions, within the same interview transcript for example, and then broadening this to observing similarities or differences between participants. Conducted over the course of 16 months, this iterative process achieved a level of granularity and detail laterally across the data sets, first identifying codes and categories for individual participants. The next level of analysis – axial and focused categorisation – took the comparisons beyond the individuals to allow for a cross-participant analysis and comparison between perspectives.

*3.2.11 Axial codes and focused categorisation*

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding enables the fragmented and distinct codes that are generated initially in open coding to be brought back together around an axis, or a central organising concept or major category. This process of reassembling the data is described by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 204) as a synthesising procedure, focusing on understanding the narrative of emergent themes as a social process, rather than using analysis to explain individual's actions, behaviours or situations. My methods for this stage of synthesis included gathering initial codes generated into a database using Microsoft Excel; and modelling a series of central organising categories using Strauss' coding paradigm for social science research questions (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 98): *causes, contexts, strategies* and *consequences*. This stage of analysis, which brought together the different types of data, analysis, observations, memos and reflections, took a considerable time to contemplate and construct. Rather than a spontaneous analytic process seen in initial open coding activity, this stage of focused categorisation needed to lead to

comprehensive understanding and 'saturation': the point at which categories are saturated with information from the data that no longer adds to the understanding of the category (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Theoretical saturation is frequently referred to in the grounded theory method, and there is some variance reported as to how to achieve this (Aldiabat and Le Navenec, 2018, p. 247). In this study, the limitation of timeframe also provided some constraints on saturation method, with constant comparison analysis conducted across an available 16-month period. Achieving prolonged engagement with the research situation, ongoing professional dialogue with staff participants about the emergent themes arising, documentary analysis and triangulation of themes with extant materials, provided saturation within the scope of this study. However, I acknowledge the limitations specifically with regard to the lack of opportunity to have equivalent professional conversations with students, and the lack of access to, or observation of, student-generated documentation. Triangulation with themes that were persistent for students meant that the saturation was predisposed towards staff participation. My awareness of these limitations emerged whilst I memoed and reflected across the research process, and are revisited within the discussion in chapter five.

Before moving on to the theory building stage in the constant comparison method of analysis, the use of *positional maps* helpfully visualised the major positions taken, and not taken, in the data. Clarke, Friese and Washburn (2015) suggest that it is helpful to locate particular axes of variation and difference, focus, and controversy found in the situation of concern (pp. 13 - 15). Positional maps were particularly helpful within this study when considering the positions of 'staff' and 'students', and how taking different positions affords individuals with these identities more or less power, autonomy, or agency. Appendix H provides an example of how the positional map was used to integrate existing theory and provide an explanatory framework using power distance, in terms of teacher-student power relations in partnership.

### 3.2.12 Theory building from core categories

With multiple types of formal and informal data (e.g. transcripts, observations, maps, memos) collected and analysed, it was necessary to bring the sprawling analysis back into coherence, to 'reassemble' and synthesise each partnership situational analysis within a theoretical framing to achieve readability and enhanced understanding of the interpretation being made. This final stage of data analysis is described by Charmaz (2014, p. 150) as moving your 'analytic story in a theoretical direction', involving integrative, conceptual codes that show relationships and build a picture across the data. While the individual partnership case studies yielded their own storyline, the overarching grounded theory was constructed through a synthesis and culmination of both partnership analyses. Allowing for variation, such as contradictory categories or instances, was as important as building consistency so as to surface the complexity, depth and dimension of the situated findings. The process of writing the final storyline of findings identified gaps in the developing theory which inevitably warrant further investigation. I acknowledge and discuss such limitations within the discussion in chapter five.

### 3.2.13 Write up/ dissemination

The written dissemination of this research study has been designed to meet the requirements of the professional doctorate, in particular the need for transparency of process, method, and analyses drawn. This has led to a more granular presentation of detail, in the form of examples of raw data (quotations), reflections, tabulated codes and categories, alongside thematic interpretation, to allow for the central role of theory-building from the data (Urquhart, 2012, pp. 148–175).

The presentation of findings that follow this chapter are set out to illustrate how the grounded theory and situational analysis has emerged from each of the two case studies of partnership.

**3.3 Conclusion**

The grounded theory methodology of situational analysis, using theoretical sampling and constant comparison analysis, has framed the decisions and research strategies taken to enquire into *how partnership is experienced by students and staff when working together in learning and teaching in higher education*. Beginning with guiding questions outlined in section 3.1.1, the importance of my researcher reflexivity has provided a critical foundation from which to build outwards towards the theorisation of the research data and supporting materials in all their forms: interviews, focus groups, reflective observations, field notes, documentation, and memos. The next chapter begins with vignettes of the two situated cases of partnership, followed by the key codes and categories which emerged from the data, supported by participants voices and my own reflections.

# Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter is presented in three sections, following the situational analysis mapping and naturalistic methods informed by the methodology described in chapter three. In sections 4.1 and 4.2 each partnership case study begins with narrative vignettes introducing the participants and setting; the subsequent findings that have been informed by the situational maps, memos, and supporting information. Section 4.3 addresses research question one, *in a student-staff partnership, how is partnership negotiated, shaped and conducted?* through a presentation of the core categories developed through open and axial coding. Section 4.4 address research question two, *what are the effects of working or learning in partnership on participants' personal and professional identities?* Across each section, excerpts of the coding procedures and supporting evidence of the analytic process is provided in the appendices. For example, each section is supported with diagrams or maps where it is useful to visualise the relationships between codes and categories. Additionally, where there are extensive extracts from the interviews and focus groups, these are tabulated and included in the appendices for illustrative purposes.

Note: the third research question, *how is staff-student partnership experienced in different circumstances?* is addressed in chapter five, discussion.

Overview:

| Case study 1:<br>Professional Services Partnership | Case study 2:<br>Course-Based Partnership |
| --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Technology Ambassadors**<br>Centrally located service department, operating a cross-university student partnership project. | **Students as partners in learning and teaching**<br>A course-based partnership, situated within a subject discipline, at undergraduate level. |

## 4.1 Case One: Student Learning Technology Ambassadors

> The Student Learning Technologies Ambassador (SLTA) role is to work alongside the Learning Technologies Advisers to support the use of learning technologies in the classroom. SLTAs provide support for events and conferences and support academic staff and their students in their use of learning technologies in the classroom. (Source: SLTA Summary Report)

The nature of the partnership activity in this case study is students as partners working *alongside* learning technologies staff. The Student Learning Technology Ambassadors (SLTA), advertised as a bookable service, are facilitated through the allocated school learning technologist. This raised the significance of the role of staff as negotiating and shaping the nature of SLTA work in the partnership.

The defining features of this student-staff partnership were that:
- it was a timebound project (SLTAs recruited for one or two semesters)
- it focused on the problem/ solution (supporting academic staff)
- it addressed departmental and institutional factors such as resourcing
- it was initiated and led by staff
- the partnership was located within a central department (non-academic)
- it engaged a small number (<20) of students each year
- the student partners were paid, trained and supervised
- the job description and advert were posted onto the Careers Service website for an open recruitment process, rather than 'head hunting' students in existing roles

Constituting this case example of student-staff partnership are three participants: Jennifer, Nicole, and Amanda[3]. They are part of a broader scheme

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[3] All names and course titles have been changed to protect the identification of participants.

of partnership involving 20 students, and a team of eight learning technologists. The following vignettes introduce each participant and extracts of their biographies and experiences shared within the interview process, and how their presence has influenced the inception and evolution of the partnership. This is followed by a research memo written during the data collection process, reflecting on the positionality and representation of participants in this case.

*Jennifer*

Jennifer currently leads a small team within a professional service department at the university. Having been employed within the institution for several years at the time of participating, Jennifer has worked her way up through the department and has seen a lot of structural and political change across the institution over the years. She has an active interest in gamification and the role of technology in learning, and is active on social media to promote her work and that of her team. Jennifer is a representative member of several university-level strategic committees, and in terms of positionality, it is appropriate to assume that she is in a position of seniority. Jennifer described having a certain degree of autonomy within her role, with line management responsibility as well as influence to affect decisions and introduce change projects. Expertise in her specific domain affords Jennifer authority in this field which overlaps with learning and teaching enhancement.

Jennifer took the decision in 2015/16 to pilot a project involving recruiting and employing six undergraduate students within her team. As illustrated in the opening case study quote above, taken from the project website, the student partners (SLTAs) have a remit for supporting academic staff with technology in the classroom. The inception of this project arose out of two key catalysts; first, Jennifer's previous experience in working with students on other projects such as Student Helpers and Computer Helpers within the libraries, and the student leaders involved in a peer assisted study (PASS) mentoring scheme; and second, following attendance at an Association for Learning Technology Conference presentation by two student eLearning leaders on the Student

Digital Champions project at the University of Southampton (Harvey and Rogers, 2015).

*Nicole*

At the time of this study, Nicole (22) was in her final year of an undergraduate degree within the Business School. As well as being employed as a Student Learning Technology Ambassador, she had been a Course Representative during her studies, representing her cohort peers to give feedback to the academic course team, and lobbying for changes to be made through the Students' Union. Nicole's discipline is BSc Business Studies, and she went on to achieve a first-class degree shortly after taking part in this study. Her degree spanned four years, with one year spent on an industrial placement with a global life sciences company with a focus on delivering healthcare solutions. The placement presented Nicole with an introduction to widening access to healthcare for patients in developing and industrialised countries, a cause Nicole felt strongly aligned with her values. In addition, she conducted a second 5-month placement with a local tech company, specifically working on engaging students through physical and digital marketing channels. Since graduation she has secured two graduate level positions both within a social intelligence company, which builds software solutions to meet the needs of retail corporations worldwide.

*Amanda*

Amanda is an academic lecturer based within the Business School, having worked in the institution since 1998. At the time of this study, Amanda held a senior School role. Amanda cites her industry background as very influential to her identity, having spent six years prior to lecturing within corporate sales and business development in the private sector. Outside of academia she currently holds a training role with a youth organisation specialising in educating apprenticeship providers in how to prepare young people with life skills, a community cause she feels passionately about. Early in her academic career, Amanda completed a master's degree in academic practice, and latterly has a

keen interest in developing learning, teaching and assessment strategy within the school, as well as leading on innovation in digital technology. She became involved with the Student Learning Technologies Ambassador project early on in its inception, as she was keen to partner with SLTAs to co-teach a particular piece of software that enables students to build professional online portfolios.

In terms of positionality, Amanda has a School management role, and 20 years of teaching experience within the Business School. Sitting on several cross-university committees, and with an ability to report directly to the Head of School, her position of authority is visible to both colleagues and students.

> Reflective memo, June 2017
>
> Most stark in the observation of these participants' profiles are the similarities between them as a grouping, in terms of gender, ethnicity, social/ cultural/ academic capital, as well as being high achieving individuals and influential to their peers. It is not possible to conclude on the basis of these three participants that there has been a conscious effort on their part to marry their epistemological, methodological and philosophical actions to create an 'inclusive' partnership. However, I am interested in the implicit actions that may have affected decisions and impacted on the shaping of the partnership. Through the application of situational analysis, specifically to explore the hidden or silenced voices within the research, I was drawn to reflect on something I've noted as the 'mirror' effect within partnership, whereby staff are implicitly drawn to working with students (and probably colleagues) who are most like themselves. Indeed, I cannot be absent from this unconscious complicity, as I also 'fit' a similar profile to these participants.

*4.1.1 Situational mapping case one*

Used to provide a visual depiction of the research case study, the situational maps I recorded captured an array of elements found present in the setting (see Appendix J for initial 'messy' maps). The observable elements constituting the partnership ranged from direct involvement (i.e., individual people), to physical artefacts (i.e., technologies, environment, infrastructure), collectives (i.e., groups of people) and discursive constructions (i.e., language, behaviours, organisational culture(s), policies, communications). All of the elements captured within the maps were framed by those present in the situation (i.e., the participants), and from what I knew as an insider-researcher. Publicly available institutional policy documents and internally shared reports such as the SLTA summary project report (Appendix I) served as other major sources of data. Supplementary sources that contributed to the construction of the maps included my local knowledge of the learning environments, infrastructure, and organisational arrangements such as departmental structures and quality processes. The following represents the situational map constructed for case study one, with each of the elements explained in more depth in the next section.
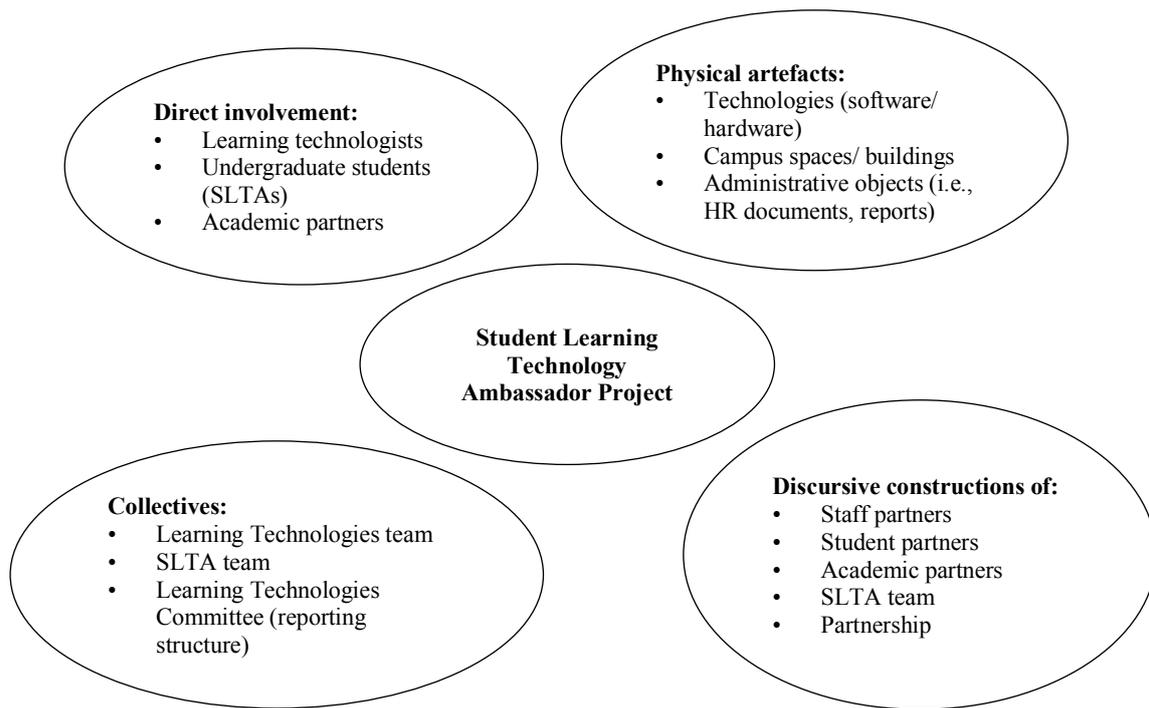
Figure 4.1: Situational Map Case Study One

Direct involvement. In the first year (2015-16), the pilot SLTA project sought to investigate the value and impact of employing six undergraduate students to work alongside both the learning technologies team and academic staff, to support the use of classroom technologies. Following this pilot year, the project evaluation made a key recommendation:

> To recruit 4 SLTAs for each of our five main campuses on a casual contract but to extend the scope of their work to include more student focused projects. To adjust the job description to include this, and to recruit much earlier to ensure the SLTAs are in post at the start of the academic year. To identify one of the SLTAs recruited to have a co-ordinating role, recompensed with additional paid hours. (Source: SLTA summary report, Appendix I)

Therefore, in the second year (2016-2017) the direct involvement in the project was upscaled to 20 undergraduate students, working alongside the same number of learning technologists.

Collectives. Once recruited, the SLTA partners became peripheral members of the learning technologies team, as well as forming a unique SLTA team of students. Jennifer explained that in the pilot year (2015-16) the team of six SLTAs were able to collaborate well, keeping in regular contact, and working together on a range of learning technologies projects:

> [In] the first year when we had six, we knew, you know the first year you do something you put a lot more time and effort into building the relationships and training, as it's the first time you've all done it. It really felt much more like they were working for us, they were part of a bigger team, we had trust, we had relationships, we would, six you could talk to them and work [it] out. (Jennifer)

However, when the number of SLTAs was increased in the second year (2016-17) to 20, group cohesion and team working was less effective, posing a dilemma for Jennifer who spent time reflecting in our interview about the implications of growing the SLTA scheme:

> Now we're onto 20 and we're doing everything electronically and we're saying 'here's a list of all the work, sign up and then we'll confirm', you've lost such a lot of that relationship stuff, so both sides suffer. (Jennifer)

Scale and numbers within the SLTA partnership therefore raised an interesting complexity. On the one hand, when six student partners worked well, the logic of upscaling to involve more students in a successful project led to institutional

agreement for further funding to employ more students. However, the implications of a larger group of SLTAs meant that it was harder to manage the group, and have the same kinds of relationships.

Another important collective directly impacting on the SLTA project was the internal Learning Technologies Committee, a sub-group of the institution level Learning and Teaching Committee. The Learning Technologies Committee, constituting professional services and academic staff, had oversight of the SLTA project. This involved agreeing funding, receiving project updates, and some strategic direction for the focus of SLTA projects, which included:

- **eLearning pop ups**. The SLTAs set up and demonstrated a variety of teaching technologies in the new meeting spaces and teaching spaces, and invited staff to come along and find out more. Alongside demonstrating the technologies this gave the students and staff an opportunity to meet each other.
- **App swap**. SLTAs ran an app swap on the theme of presentation apps. Delegates consisted of academic staff and professional library staff and provided an opportunity to share experiences and gain knowledge of apps available to support presentations.
- **Student placements fair.** Two of the SLTAs attended and presented on the use of StudentFolio (an online portfolio presentation tool) to support and document the placement journey at a placements fair. They also ran a workshop for the students attending to respond to any queries the students had about using StudentFolio.
- **Nearpod support.** SLTAs assisted academics in their use of Nearpod (an online student engagement platform), setting up the presentations and supporting staff in the classroom, ensuring students had access and knew how to use it.
- **Visualiser/ Reflector4 support.** SLTAs supported academics in their use of an iPad Visualiser in combination with Reflector4 (wireless screen mirroring). An SLTA attended the lectures to set up the visualiser

and laptop so that they could display and annotate maps whilst streaming to the teaching space projector.

- **12 Apps of Christmas**. One of the SLTAs worked alongside the learning technologies team on the 12 apps of Christmas, presenting the first app via Periscope (live streaming app for smartphones).

- **Student pop ups**. Pop up events were run on two campuses targeting students around particular themes to improve their use and understanding of technologies available to support their studies. *The idea of the pops ups came about as a result of discussions between the learning technologies team and the SLTAs about their own understanding, and their frustrations with the provision and their lack of knowledge on policies of use.

- **Baseline agreement research.** One SLTA worked alongside the learning technologies team, auditing core modules within Blackboard (virtual learning environment) across all schools to see how they measure against the university baseline agreement.

- **Staff awareness event**. SLTAs presented their work at the Information Services department internal conference.

- **Teaching space documentation**. SLTAs created support documentation for each of the new teaching and meeting spaces on campus, to help staff in the School use and understand the technology available, as well as to access details about how to connect their own devices to the hardware installed.

- **Student use of technology research projects.** Three SLTAs worked with the learning technologies team to gather information from students about how they use technology to support their studies. The SLTAs helped develop the questions in the survey, based on discussions around their own experiences of using facilities and technology.

- **Design Week project.** SLTAs supported the use of Edublogs (educational blogging tool) with staff and students on an outreach project involving staff and students from the university, a local secondary school and a local further education college.

- **StudentFolio support.** SLTAs ran further drop in sessions to support the students' use of StudentFolio (an online portfolio presentation tool).

The above project list was informed by an appendix to the SLTA Summary Report, submitted to the Learning Technologies Committee at the end of the project pilot (2015-16).

<u>Physical artefacts</u>. In situational analysis, including the non-human/ material elements is important to record and reflect on. This partnership case study included a broad range of technologies, both in the form of software that the SLTA student partners needed to become familiar with, and various hardware installed across different learning environments on campus. As well as technologies, the physical spaces that SLTAs were working in were influential, and were places which SLTAs were co-located with staff members and other students. The administrative objects were relevant to include in the situation, as there was an element of their facilitative quality, for example when students had to physically meet the learning technologies administrator to have their timesheet signed. Jennifer commented on how this helped the SLTA students to have informal conversations and build rapport:

> They [SLTAs] are dealing with us administratively, and if they've got a job they'll go and talk to somebody, have those chit chats […] dropping off the timesheets is when it happens […] almost inevitably [conversations] will be about "what else could we be doing to better support staff and students?" (Jennifer)

The act of partners physically connecting in person presents an interesting point of reflection, linking to the issue of scaling and increasing numbers of SLTA partners. In our interview, Jennifer described how in the second year of the project she had introduced an online timesheet submission process, instead of SLTAs having to travel in to campus. This was introduced to reduce the need

for physical contact with the higher number of SLTAs, however this also reduced the opportunities for informal interaction.

Discursive constructions. One of the first things I realised when exploring the SLTA project through mapping, and in conversation with participants, was that the project consisted of multiple meanings, and diverse, converging and sometimes opposing agendas surrounding the partnership. These ranged from a problem-solution situation (i.e., lack of support staff, and under-resourcing), to a characterisation of academic staffs' fear of technology, and therefore a deficit model of support-need. The rationale, articulated within an internal project report for the introduction of the SLTA role was:

> Learning technologies are seeing rapid development resulting in an opportunity to develop teaching and learning methods to improve engagement and enhance student learning. There are some barriers to this, and one of those identified by academic staff, here at the university, was their fear of technology failure. When surveyed, staff felt they would better engage with the technology and develop their teaching if they had better in-classroom support for both them and their students. (Source: SLTA Summary Report)

This rationale, written as part of an internal funding justification, set out the need for additional sources of support for academic staff and their students. It poses the primary driver for recruiting students as partners as a resource issue (i.e., labour), substantiated in my 1:1 interview with Jennifer who explained that her team was significantly stretched to meet the needs and demands for technology support in learning and teaching. The secondary driver observable in the above rationale was the 'fear of technology failure' held by academic staff, which presented a barrier to staff engagement with learning technologies. These present two contextualising issues informing the rationale for students as partners in this case study. I struggled to identify the initial motivation for

introducing students as partners into this area of professional services, apart from Jennifer's knowledge of similar partnership projects in higher education, for example the Association for Learning Technology presentation by two student eLearning leaders on the Student Digital Champions project at another university.

In addition to the discursive constructions present in the rationale for partnership, there were several characterisations of groups and individuals circulating, such as learning technologists as 'grown-ups':

> So, we started with the SLTAs because the grown-ups, the learning technologists, were not resourced to be able to go and support staff in their lectures. (Jennifer)

and the resulting characterisation of students as children:

> Out of 20 there are 2 or 3 that have, basically everything they have signed up for they've then cancelled at short notice. And we can't do that, we can't work that way, and I'm afraid they don't get offered the work because we need people, we can't mother them. (Jennifer)

> She [staff partner] didn't just see me as an SLTA she also saw me as, because I'm quite young, I'm 22, so she saw me as a child in that sense and she helped me through quite a lot. (Nicole)

> I was giving her an admin account, which meant, had she been able to do so, she could have looked up and changed all the grades for her and her friends. Now she wouldn't, but she could have done, and I felt a professional responsibility there to babysit her while she did that work. (Jennifer)

Interesting characterisations arose about academic staff, in terms of their relationship with technology. Nicole's expectation was that lecturers should be confident to use the platforms that are specified within the curriculum:

> Of course, the lecturer is the person of authority. If the students go 'okay can you help me with this [technology]?' and they go 'no, but don't worry we will have a session with people that do know' then you [students] start to think 'okay if my lecturer doesn't know how to use it, how can I?'. The lecturers should be trained on it so that they know StudentFolio takes a lot of time. (Nicole)

And Jennifer's characterisation of academics as fearful and risk averse in terms of technology:

> They [academic staff] just didn't want it [support from SLTAs], they didn't want to ask students. I think actually that's more the academic staff, they like an excuse to not try a new thing, us resolving that problem just gave them a different excuse to not try that new thing. (Jennifer)

Key institutional processes were also prevalent, as were labels and categories which hold political, cultural and historical significance within what it means to be situated in this partnership, in this department, this university, impacting on 'the way we do things around here'. Specific to this case study, the symbolic significance of formality and hierarchy had a pervasive influence on the characterisation and everyday functioning of the project, from the recruitment of SLTAs, to the service agreement between staff and students, to the chain of command from academic staff to student partner. An example of the SLTA

'booking' arrangement presented to staff was found on the departmental website:

> Student Learning Technologies Ambassadors work alongside the
> Learning Technologists to support the use of learning technologies in
> the classroom. SLTAs provide support for events and conferences
> and support academic staff and their students in their use of learning
> technologies in the classroom. If you are interested in booking some
> of the SLTAs please speak to your learning technologist.

This offers some initial insights into the discursive constructions of the nature of the partnership activity between SLTAs as 'working alongside' the learning technologists. The rationale given here is of 'support' to academic staff and their students, specifically for the use of learning technologies in the classroom. The SLTAs are offered as a bookable service, introducing the significance of the role of learning technologies staff as mediating and shaping the nature of the partnership project.

*4.1.2 Additional situational elements*

Situational analysis includes mapping an array of additional elements, building a holistic picture of the temporal/ spatial, and political/ economic components, relevant to the research situation. For example, the notion of time surfaced in discussion with Jennifer, and whilst the SLTA role was introduced to reduce demand on the learning technologists, different demands on her time were activated:

> I'm sure this is common across all people working with students, the
> administration and coordination and communication aspects can be
> so time consuming. (Jennifer)

Seen as an essential need, time was recognised as an important element to be able to nurture the partnership, however, time was simultaneously lacking for staff participants in this case study:

> I would say because of the [management] role I've had, I haven't had as much time as I have in the previous years to really develop those relationships as well as I would like. Therefore, I think it's [SLTA project] not gone quite as well as I would like to because it does take time. (Amanda)

Similarly, the spatial elements were important to capture within the analytic process, denoting the physical space, mental space and conceptual distance between staff and students. Amanda explained her experience of establishing and maintaining relationships with students, and student partners:

> If you're not close enough to someone, either because they don't see you enough, because either they've missed the class you're teaching them, or they're not there, then you can't develop a relationship with someone that isn't there if that makes sense. […] Physical distance makes it harder to influence, and also larger numbers make it harder to influence. (Amanda)

Amanda's comment above highlights the fundamental tension between the initial rationale for the pilot SLTA project: to provide additional resource to meet increasing demands for technology support; and the reality of partnerships which need other types of time investments to function well.

The political and economic influences on the SLTA partnership involved the institutional perception and influence on the projects deemed suitable for the SLTAs to work on. As an example of a political tension, Jennifer described

having to discuss concerns which had arisen among the Learning Technology Committee members about the tension of recruiting students into roles that were historically undertaken by staff employed in professional services:

> The criticism I've had, and this came up at the Learning Technology Committee actually, was that my team wasn't resourced to hand-hold everybody [academic staff] every time they wanted to use a new technology. And we weren't resourced [to support] StudentFolio, for people using that for the first time is quite resource intensive, students have a lot of questions, and we can't go to every teaching session. So, we'd come up with this [students as partners] model, we are paying students to do it, and we were criticised. The fact that the university had to resort to paying students to solve what staff are crying out for - more help and support - and we're resolving that by providing students, shouldn't we actually address that properly and staff it properly? (Jennifer)

And, the pay and grading of student partners:

> We got criticisms as well when we were grading because we graded [the SLTA role] as a grade higher than library shelvers. As I said, I'm asking them to stand up there potentially in front of 200 students and tell them how to use an app or something. I wanted higher, I wanted grade 3, but I couldn't go grade 3 because we have staff in Information Services on grade 3, and everybody was super uncomfortable with the fact that I might be paying student partners the equivalent to what we pay some of our staff. (Jennifer)

These institutionally contextualised political and economic elements manifested for Jennifer in a dilemma, between her professional composure in understanding her colleagues' concerns, yet her philosophical *Haltung* in wanting to offer students paid partnership opportunities within her team, and to remunerate them fairly.

*4.1.3 Major issues, debates and discourses*

The previous political and economic elements captured within the situational mapping process involved major issues, debates and discourses exerting influence or pressure upon the SLTA project. This area of observation and therefore interpretation refers to more implicit or tacit issues expressed by participants, or through the way decisions had been made and therefore enacted. The example of scaling up previously mentioned, from six SLTAs to twenty in the second year, presented Jennifer with a major issue to reflect on, and she described the relational loss within the partnership when the numbers of student partners increased. Following our interview and as part of the analytic process I wrote a reflective memo in which I was trying to tease out the issues I was hearing:

> Reflective memo, March 2017
>
> The complexities inherent in this case example demonstrate the tension between a small-scale partnership and expansion. The size of the pilot project enabled participants to nurture relationships and create belonging for a small number of student partners. There was subsequently a trade off when the partnership project was deemed a success and therefore scaled up to involve larger numbers of students. Individuals' investment of time, forming emotional connections, and building rapport fostered trust among the student-staff team, and this was put at risk as the number of student partners increased.

I examined issues of trust and favouritism arising from my analysis, which I was interested to explore in view of Clarke's (2003) encouragement in situational analysis method towards hidden, silenced, or implicated actors. Trust in this partnership situation appeared to be a vulnerable concept. For Jennifer, trust was compromised when SLTAs did not show up for pre-arranged meetings with academic staff, for example:

> It's got to the point now where we send them a text the night before, to remind them of the thing they said they'd do. We shouldn't have to do that. But we've had some [situations] where the students failed to appear, and that… anything that reflects badly on the team makes us feel bad, makes us feel nervous. (Jennifer)

The erosion of trust appeared to have a long-lasting effect, and impacted upon how future SLTAs were viewed as reliable and trustworthy. For example, Jennifer also explained a situation experienced with the loan of some equipment:

> We gave them [SLTAs] all an iPad, and were very clear that the iPads were for the duration of the job, to do the job, and that felt like a trust thing. Five of them came back at the end of the year without any issue. The sixth, the student kind of went off radar with the iPad, - that really surprised me, I thought we had built trust, I thought we were a team here. We did get it back eventually but it was like 'ooohhhhhh, I feel a bit disappointed now' that, where I thought we had a trusting relationship they've just vanished with our iPad. And that's only one, but it does make you.. you know. This year we didn't give them all an iPad, we couldn't afford to buy them all iPad anyway so we've got a much more secure: 'you can have one, but you have to come and book it out and bring it back and..' So, we've

had to kind of tighten up on that, and again that diminishes trust, it was unexpected. (Jennifer)

The issue of favouring certain students was raised verbally with both staff partners, for example, Jennifer explained:

I'm almost more comfortable with my favourite ones from last year where actually, they wanted a career in the area, they would have done it without the money. They wanted to be part of the conversations and wanted to be involved in it, that's lovely. [On the other hand] the ones who think they're getting a part-time job, and I'm saying 'well.. there might be some work, and there might not'. (Jennifer)

A similar issue of headhunting student partners was raised in the interview with Amanda, who explained her thought process when inviting student partners to co-present at a conference:

I went to the What Works project [conference] and I was aware that it would be nice to have students to come with us, so who did I pick, I picked Bryony. I knew she would say yes, it's simple as that, and also, she had done a good piece of work as well, they had to have done a good piece of work, because we're illustrating how you use StudentFolio so it couldn't just be students that I knew, the work had to be good as well. So, who else did I pick, I picked James, because James was my placement student, I was his placement supervisor. (Amanda)

The steer in situational analysis method to map those actors not present, hidden or silenced prompted me to reflect on these critical incidents impacting, in this example, trust and inclusivity:

> Reflective memo, May 2018
>
> I'm interested in the role of critical incidents which appear to have had a transformative role in partnerships – for example – a negative incident that Jennifer experienced had a long-lasting effect on trusting future students. Her emphasis is on trust, both trusting students, and trusting herself. This resonates with my experience as a staff member in partnership situations with students. More than simply trust, this concept might be broken down further into distinct elements that feature (positively or negatively) in the critical incident, for example, students or staff: breaking boundaries, not meeting expectations, being reliable, being accountable, betraying confidentiality, demonstrating integrity, being non-judgemental.

What I found interesting was the knock-on effects of the breakdown of trust with one student, on perceptions of future student partners. The implications of these, and other issues of trust, inclusivity, exclusivity, and in-groups are surfaced again in findings section 4.3. I return to discuss these actions in relation to how they inhibit, or perpetuate certain behaviours in partnership.

*4.1.4 Summary*

To conclude this section, situational mapping has surfaced several discursive constructions circulating within the SLTA partnership, and has revealed the influence of Jennifer and the learning technology team, as well as some of the institutional processes and structures. From the recruitment of student partners, to departmental cultures and organisational norms, the students evidently join an existing community of staff and are introduced to the inner workings and

prevailing practices of the technologies team. The work of the partnership, initiated and directed by the staff partners, arose in response to a departmental and institutional need. In one respect the SLTA role calls in to question the potential that employing students could be masking the need for technology support to be properly resourced by the institution. However, the benefits of involving student partners in technology support and provision were acknowledged within the SLTA project report (Appendix I), explicitly linked to student partners' employability skills development.

This case example has revealed multiple aspects of partnership which often are undiscussed and surreptitious in nature. Situational analysis has encouraged me to 'lift the lid' on an example of partnership, to have a close look at the intricacies that are inherent in this example. Whilst these results might not apply universally to other unique examples of partnership practice, the problems these findings pose are crucial to reflect on, develop meanings from, and to critically understand. The discussion in chapter five presents a synthesis of these, and further findings, to draw attention to the implications for educational practice.

## 4.2 Case Two: Students as partners in learning and teaching

> What he did really well and I don't think we had from any other lecturers was, he wasn't teaching off a script. We would come to his lessons and he wouldn't be telling us what he wanted to teach us, he would be asking us what we want him to teach us. (Joseph, final-year student)

This case study involves an examination of the learning and teaching relationship arising between a course leader, and the students across an entire undergraduate course of study. This instance is of an emerging partnership approach, akin to relational pedagogy (Bovill, 2020, p. 3) discussed in chapter two of this thesis, between an academic staff member and students in their everyday practices of teaching. Contrasting with the partnership example found in case study one, this case focuses on the pedagogical approaches taken, rather than any separate project or intervention. The types of pedagogic approaches which were described by participants as fostering early partnership through relational pedagogy involved:

- In-class debates on contemporary issues, actively involving students in agenda setting, speaking, and listening activities in taught sessions.
- Personal academic tutoring which takes a *coaching* approach to individual progression.
- Professional learning opportunities such as partnering with employers on 'live' briefs and work placements, connecting the curriculum to the professional context.
- Peer assisted learning, involving students as partners from higher levels of the course facilitating student-led small group learning for first-years.
- Weekly informal course leader drop-ins located in the campus café, to promote informal discussion and increased interaction opportunities.

- Weekly one-to-one and small group dissertation supervision, encouraging students to set the agenda for these sessions based on their academic needs.

As well as these activities, there were underlying values characterising the relational approach taken by the course leader:

- Respectful dialogue, treating students with humility and dignity;
- A strengths-based approach in teaching, mirroring the discipline of sports and coaching; drawing on students' existing knowledge and skills, rather than deficits or assumptions;
- Creating a learning community within and across cohorts.

The constituent participants in this case include Robert, the course leader of BSc Sport and Leisure (S&L) and eleven students from the course[4]. The student participants were interviewed in two focus groups, six first-year students (level four), and five final-year students (level six). The following vignettes introduce the participants, involving extracts of their biographies and experiences shared within the interviewing process.

*Robert*

Robert was relatively new to course leadership at the time of participating in this study, having over 15 years of teaching in higher education in two different institutions. Robert took early retirement from public service and made a career change into academia in his early 50s. Having seen a substantial shift in governmental education policy and rhetoric over the years, Robert described his motivation to try and make a difference to the lives of young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Robert is an amateur athlete and prides himself on competing in regional and sometimes international competitions; something he passionately talks to his students about.

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[4] All names and the course title have been changed to protect the identification of participants.

Towards the end of the 2015/16 academic year Robert approached the learning and teaching centre where I work, for advice and assistance about how to improve student engagement and outcomes on the sport and leisure degree. With several factors contributing to poor student engagement, retention and progression, Robert identified two key areas that could be addressed: 1) a focus on developing students' academic skills in an introductory module; and 2) a focus on improving staff-student relations across the course and within the classroom, the latter of specific relevance to this study. At the time of our discussion Robert had not heard of students as partners, and did not consider his teaching methods as novel; but he was open to self-reflection and pedagogic enquiry. Two months after our initial conversations, a university-wide Curriculum Design Initiative (CDI) was launched, requiring all teaching faculty to engage with a new framework (Appendix L) for alignment of the undergraduate curriculum to consistent course requirements (e.g. 20 credit modules, minimum and maximum number of learning outcomes, variable modes of assessment). The CDI is highly relevant to include in the contextualisation of this case study as, alongside the design elements, course teams were also required to address five thematic principles within curriculum content and/ or delivery:

- Practical Wisdom[5]
- A curriculum structured for learning
- Enquiry- and research-led learning
- Staff and students working in partnership
- Inclusivity

Given this visible institutional focus on student-staff partnership from a top-down, cross-institutional directive, it was a timely opportunity to conduct a closer inspection of perspectives on partnership in the early stages, as well as gaining insights into the issues arising for those involved. The CDI directive,

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[5] In the context of the University of Brighton strategy, Practical Wisdom is defined as 'high quality, practice-based learning' to 'create, apply and put knowledge to work'. (UoB, 2016) Further explanation of Practical Wisdom is contained in Appendix L.

suddenly omnipresent in the case study as it unfolded, prompted an analysis of the associated guidance documents. The CDI documentation was useful in order to contextualise and locate the partnership practice within the institutional discourse of partnership:

> The curriculum will be developed and enhanced through staff and students working in partnership, promoting values of respect and inclusivity, and encouraging strong learning communities to develop. This will be through: - Student involvement in the development of their course curriculum; - Staff and students working in partnership in creating learning activities. (University of Brighton, 2016)

Recruiting Robert to participate in an initial interview was the starting point for this study from which student participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Robert contacted two cohorts of potential student participants to ask if they would volunteer to offer their perspectives within a focus group setting. Naturalistic focus group data were collected from the following students:

*First-year student focus group members*
Toby had come through a traditional route into higher education, completing a BTEC in a college of further education before joining the course. At the time of this study, Toby expressed his interest in taking a practical 'hands-on' course to pursue his career aspiration of sports business.

Seb, also having undertaken a BTEC at a further education college, had moved from another region of England and was living in university halls. With a keen interest in football, Seb shared his experience of coming from a minority ethnic background, and explained that his family were supportive of his studies and working towards his career goals.

Holly had joined the course having taken A-Levels at a local college, and was commuting to university whilst still living with her family. An active member of several sports societies as part of the students' union, Holly shared her experience of the course being overly 'football centric', something that she wanted to change.

Chloe had come through a traditional route into the degree, having studied a BTEC in her home town in another region of England, and was living in university halls. Chloe shared Holly's keenness to try and overcome the dominant football-centred nature of case examples in the course content, and had already raised this with Robert the course leader.

Jacob described his route into the course as fairly typical, having completed A-Levels in History and PE, leaving home to get the 'full university experience'. Jacob acknowledged that he felt in a somewhat privileged position in the sport and leisure industry, as his father held a senior position at a professional football club in England. He felt that despite this being a potential advantage, he sometimes has to work harder to prove he can achieve good grades in his own right.

Caden took a non-traditional route into higher education, returning to study for a BTEC, followed by a degree, in his mid-twenties. Caden identifies as a mature student, the oldest in the first-year cohort, and felt his experience of having had a job before deciding to take up a degree put him in a good position to understand the professionalism and commitment required for higher education studying. Caden has an hour commute to and from campus each day.

*Final-year student focus group members*
Jack chose to share his keenness on the policy and theory aspects of his studies, and important to his identity was pursuing topics that were focused on levelling inequalities in the professional sports sector, the focus of his dissertation. He

was applying to continue his studies through a Master's degree in policy at a research-intensive institution.

Milo was most enthusiastic about the practical elements of the course, particularly the live briefs and the placement experience. Milo explained that he felt he had struggled with the course as the academic side was not his strong point, but that he was just about getting through the dissertation thanks to Robert, his dissertation supervisor. He described feeling worried that he didn't know what career to pursue after his degree.

Joseph also had a positive placement experience in the second year of the course. He described the dissertation process as a struggle, he had requested to change supervisors as he was finding it difficult to talk to his original tutor which had disappointed him.

Ellis was an active sports team member, a society organiser, and had taken the position of course representative throughout his final-year. Despite describing himself as self-motivated and enjoying a full university experience, he explained that he didn't know what to do after completing the course, and was worried he hadn't got anything lined up.

Georgia was happy to be completing her degree soon after participating in this study, and explained that even though she had mostly enjoyed the course, she had found it difficult as one of only a few females in a cohort dominated by a male orientated sports culture. For her dissertation she was focusing on pursing gender equality in sport marketing.

*Observations*
In addition to the interview with the course leader and student focus groups, I conducted three observations of teaching sessions with each of the three cohorts across the UG programme. The findings from the observations were written as field notes, and are included in the form of research memos in Appendix O,

providing supporting evidence for the situational mapping presented in this chapter. Within the observational notes I reflected on the physical environment, and how it contributed to the relational dynamics, such as in the teacher-controlled space, as well as the interactions between Robert and the students. The observational notes have helped to inform the emergent themes which are also analysed and discussed within sections 4.3 Partnership trajectories, and 4.4 Identity and emotion.

## 4.2.1 Situational mapping case two

In this study of a partnership approach in learning and teaching, the elements captured included the human and non-human actors, discursive constructions, organisational and local practices present in the situation. The elements included in the map were framed by those present in the situation, and from my existing understanding as an insider-researcher. In addition to the naturalistic empirical data, observations, institutional policy documents and internally shared reports such as the Curriculum Design Framework (Appendix L), associated course materials also served as sources of supplementary data. Auxiliary sources of information included my local knowledge of the
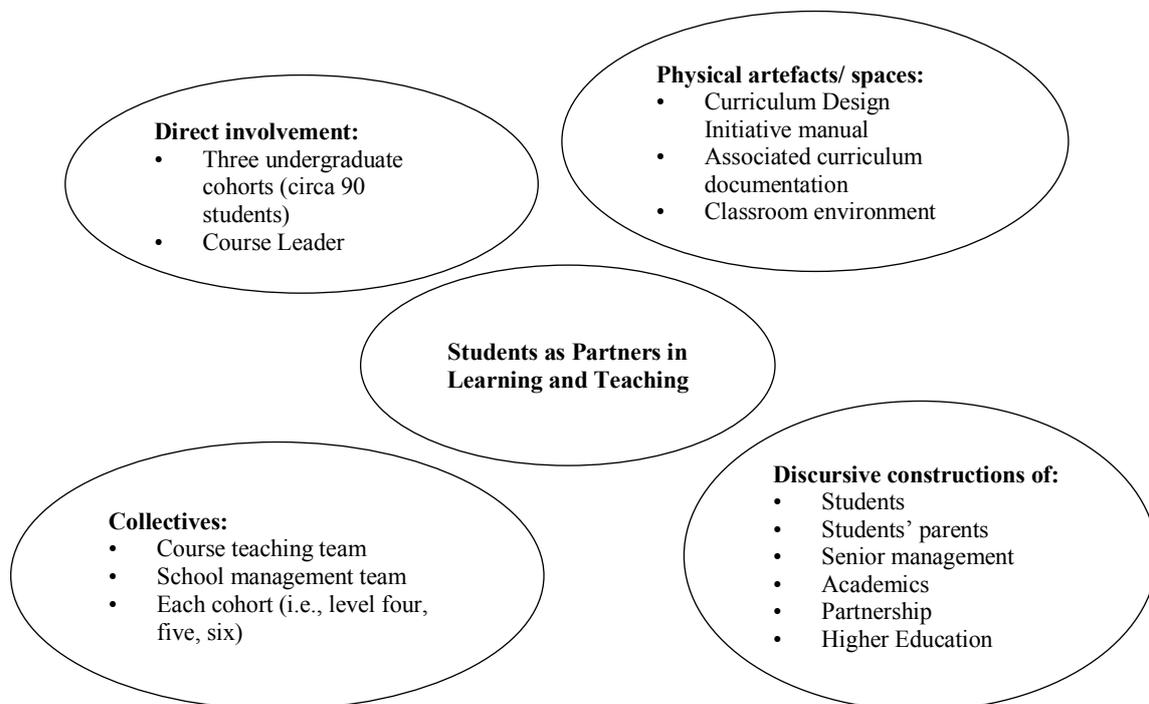


Figure 4.2: Situational Map Case Study Two

department, the campus environment, infrastructure, and organisational arrangements such as course and module structures.

Direct involvement. The individual actors directly involved in this example of partnership included three undergraduate cohorts (approximately 90 students), and Robert the course leader. Within our interview Robert explained that he was trying to initially pursue the relational partnership approach on his own, without overtly involving the wider course team. Responding to whether he had introduced partnership across all of the course teaching, Robert explained *No. I haven't been doing this that long as you know*. I inferred from our discussion that talking about improving relations, and relational teaching approaches with his colleagues was a difficult conversation to have. This may have been symptomatic of the course team constituting a disparate group of colleagues who teach large modules across the School, not necessarily dedicated solely to the Sport & Leisure degree. It could also have been a cultural issue within the discipline of sports, which Robert described as *typically hierarchical* and *competitive*. The issue of course team cohesion came up in the final-year student focus groups, with cross course communication and alignment identified as an issue:

> I think it [the course] could be improved with all the teachers, all the lecturers speaking to each other more (Georgia)

> What you were saying about the communication I think that's really important because with a lot of the tutors, a lot of the lecturers they are very different with how they mark and opinions in general. It's not a bad thing at all, but I think there needs to be a general foundation with all the lecturers on the course to what, they need to have a shared value and opinion. (Ellis)

I had the opportunity to speak informally with two other staff members teaching on the course, but these conversations were not recorded as part of the case study due to non-consent, and did not form part of the formal research data. I could deduce however that they also cared about student engagement, but had not had a collective discussion as a team about the partnership approach being driven by the course leader.

Physical artefacts/ spaces. The Curriculum Design Initiative document was a public statement of the ethos and principles that the university wished to achieve consistently across the undergraduate portfolio of courses. However, the presence of the CDI and associated documentation had a direct bearing in this partnership situation, most overtly for Robert who described them as an 'anxiety-inducing edict' in which he felt his professional expertise being called into question:

> The CDI is just a ridiculous example of that [top-down] even down to this [shows me] the frameworks within your work, and this will be populated in this way, and we've got manuals! I'm carrying a manual around with more of what I have to achieve as a course leader, of what I have to achieve with my colleagues. (Robert)

Leading to a sense of vulnerability, and threatened academic autonomy, Robert felt the design decisions and teaching methods the course team had previously developed were being undermined. The timing of our interview for this research was perhaps a critical moment for Robert as the CDI was following a rapid timeline, requiring course revalidations and review, leaving many staff feeling destabilised[6]. Situational analysis encourages research toward the inclusion of contextualising factors such as institutional policies and agendas helps to gain a deeper understanding of the tensions and complexities present. In this case study, situational analysis illuminated an interesting contradiction. The desire

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[6] An observation and reflection I had made in my professional context, outside of this research.

on the part of Robert to foster a relational partnership approach in his teaching, and on the course, which seemingly aligned to the clear mandate for partnership made in the institutional CDI documents. Yet, positioning partnership as a policy directive along with a list of other directions about course design appears to dilute the mandate for partnership for Robert, and cause some scepticism about the CDI process, illustrated by Robert's earlier quote.

The physical environment. There was an observable connection between the learning environment, which was to a certain extent a fixed layout, and the quality of interactions between the students and Robert. With the teaching spaces resembling traditional classrooms (chairs in rows, teacher positioned at the front next to a screen) the different actors (students and staff) assumed the typical role of authority-subordinate, which didn't appear to get either party in the mindset for active learning. I recorded in my observational notes:

> The energy levels in the room were not as high as I'd previously
>
> observed. Students were in there, but no lights on, grey day, sitting at
>
> the back. The room was arranged in rows facing the front. Not a lot
>
> of room at the front for the teacher – and the teacher is forced to
>
> stand in this particular classroom. (Observational notes from final-
>
> year welcome session)

In the focus group with the final year students they explained that Robert will often arrange smaller group meet ups in the campus café outside of the timetable, which has a more relaxed atmosphere:

> He did a group tutorial in the middle of the Easter holidays. He didn't
>
> have to do that. Instead of cancelling the tutorial he would do them at
>
> 6 o'clock in the café. It's that extra bit that makes you feel like you
>
> want to give something back for him. (Georgia)

<u>Discursive constructions</u>. The discursive constructions found in the situation revolved around several references across the data to the cost implications of higher education. Implicit contradictions arose in the student accounts where on one hand they expressed an expectation for a service provision, mainly in terms of the availability of tutors, but on the other hand were keen to have a friendly rapport and cited the importance of feeling cared for.

> I think what you've put as a student working relationship between us and the staff now I think is probably one of the most vital things in contemporary university, since tuition fees being free to then £3000 to then where we are £9000 now. We are paying so much money now and it's not a thing as we come to university now to be taught, it's our choice and our payment, it's a service we pay for now. (Ellis)

> Some people like lecturers here, and some of the other college teachers, think they're there just to teach. But it's nice when you do have that relationship where they actually help. (Georgia)

Highly prevalent among the first-year data was the opinion that fellow students who do not attend timetabled sessions should be disciplined and penalised. Seen as affecting course community and collective responsibility, this indicated that student-to-student relationships and co-accountability is as important to this group of students as the student-staff relationship.

> It should be a group thing and if you're not there and you're not turning up then you shouldn't be given a mark; but they still will and I feel like that's not fair. (Seb)

There are a few people that don't turn up to lectures and they still

pass modules. I think there should be some sort of implication put in

place if your attendance isn't up there; you shouldn't be getting the

same grades as someone who is (Chloe)


There should be 70% attendance or you are under review. If it

doesn't improve, you're gone. (Caden)


*4.2.2 Additional situational elements*

The political, economic, sociocultural and symbolic elements identified in the

research situation and among participants revolved around neo-liberalist ideals

such as market-driven, and individualised notions of higher education. This was

surprising given the foregrounding partnership approach that Robert was trying

to foster, yet the concept of 'value for money' appeared to exert a passive-

aggressive pressure on the learning and teaching relationship. The discourse of

consumerism was omnipresent in the situation a lot of the time, for both students

and for Robert, explaining his experience of questions from prospective

students' parents at open days:

I've only been doing open days here for just a year now [and] the

overwhelming feeling is they [students' parents] want value for

money, whatever that means to them. And one of the key questions

that comes, even though we address it in the literature and in the

presentation, is: What are the contact hours? So there this notion that

education is contact driven and it's didactic in principle, because

that's what most of them have experienced, so: What are you going

to do for my son or daughter? (Robert)


Impacting upon the students' implicit expectations of their role in the teacher-

student relationship, there was a notable assumption from the student

participants that tutors should be available as a resource, alongside valuing staff who displayed empathy towards students' individual situations. Yet within our focus group discussions, students reflected on whether Robert was doing too much:

> We all see more of Robert but he's not our personal tutor, so then that then leads to: is our personal tutor actually doing enough as our personal tutor? Or is Robert doing too much? (Georgia)

Further to this, the students expressed gratitude to staff who encouraged them, through displaying passion for the subject, and who demonstrated high energy and enthusiasm in their teaching methods. This was seen by some students as a reciprocal relationship, as Jack explained:

> I think it works two ways. For me the people that, both at university, with Robert, I really wanted to look at doping, and I knew Robert would be the person to speak to about that. I said already that I really liked policy and he was the best person I could have spoken to about that, and I ended up building a really close relationship. You have to take an interest in what they're interested in. (Jack)

The temporal and spatial elements of this case study emerged and were a recurring theme in terms of distance, which included physical proximity, temporal distance (age), and conceptual distance such as differing expectations between individuals and groups. For Robert, the age/ generational 'gap' surfaced several times over the course of our interview, both as a barrier but also as a point of potential enquiry:

> One of the first things to do is sit down and start talking to them [students] because there is a big generation gap; there is a big

expectations difference; there is an understanding and comprehension gap; and who am I to turn around and say what an 18 or 19 year old might think or want? (Robert)

Robert's perspective was that spending more time with students helped in some ways to bridge the gap, and being in the same space reduced the emotional distance he regularly experiences. Describing his pragmatic approach to course leading, he referred in the above quote to 'sitting and talking to people' indicating positionality, and the recognition that sitting together could indicate a way of interacting with students on their level.

### 4.2.3 Major issues, debates and discourses

The major issues arising revolved around the need for commitment needed by both parties. Robert was careful to explain that the course ethos develops over the trajectory of the undergraduate degree, and that by final-year the students have built a greater understanding of what it means to be in a partner relationship. Described as a maturity issue, the first-year students were seen in his eyes to lack emotional maturity and did not have a prior experience of partnership to base their involvement on. This was not entirely congruent with the findings from the student focus groups, where both first-year and final-year students described positive relationships with school teachers when asked about their previous experience of educational partnerships:

> It's a big shock when you come to university, I don't know if anyone else is the same but I went to a school where, it wasn't small, but it was close so you do have a relationship with the staff. Sometimes the staff [here] seem a bit distant and are sometimes a bit difficult to talk to. (Milo)

> At school I really got on with the PE staff than most of the other staff because that was again what I was really interested in, naturally I

think you have a lot more in common. To expect the other staff to

want to build a relationship with you is unrealistic unless you can

offer something back. (Ellis)

The complexities inherent in this case example demonstrate enduring tensions that exist when trying to move beyond the traditional roles of 'student' and 'lecturer', in an institutional culture which remains largely hierarchical - spatially in the form of the teaching and learning environment, structurally in the arrangement of organisational policies and chains of command, and systemically through normative customs and practices. Situational mapping and analysis have revealed strong political undercurrents in this example of a learning and teaching partnership, in terms of institutional policies, as well as influential societal discourses.

*4.2.4 Summary*

To conclude this section, situational mapping has revealed the influential nature of discursive constructions and neo-liberal discourses on this example of pedagogic partnership. From the institutional culture and policy implementation, to the characterisation of the role and purpose of higher education, students evidently join an existing course community. The approach of partnership is clearly initiated and driven forwards by the course leader, arising from his educational philosophy or *Haltung*. This prompted Robert not only to reflect on *what* is taught, but to involve students in discussions about *how learning takes place*, using this to inform future taught sessions and the delivery of modules. A significant challenge revealed in this case study was the lack of collective course team alignment to partnership in the delivery of teaching, and the limited opportunities made to explain this approach to students. The physical environment for teaching and learning proved a challenging space to navigate in terms of changing the relational dynamic from didactic to collaborative. A major discursive construction emerging from the student focus groups was the expectation that, on one hand, their relationship

with staff is that of service provider-receiver. This contrasted however with their recognition that Robert might be going above and beyond their expectations, acknowledging the energy and emotional investment in his approach. Again, these results might not apply universally to other unique examples of students as partners in learning and teaching, however the issues these findings pose are crucial to reflect on, develop meanings from, and to critically understand. The discussion in chapter five presents a synthesis of these, and two further findings sections which are presented next.

**4.3 Partnership trajectories**

The research question stimulating the findings in this section was to discover how each of the partnerships studied went through the process of negotiation, and how they were shaped and conducted. The aim was to reveal implicit as well as explicit actions, behaviours, or consequences that influenced the evolving nature of the partnership situations. Roles and positions taken within the partnerships studied, and within the data, revealed the relational aspects that were either important to, or assumed by participants. Both partnership case studies are combined in this section, with examples of participant experiences highlighted through quotes illustrating personal understandings of their partnership trajectory. Extracts from an iteration of the cross-comparison analysis, from the initial use of the Ketso tools, to digitised methods using Microsoft Excel, can be found in Appendices K, M, and N.

*Trajectories* (plural) is used to acknowledge the multiple directions that the partnerships took in this study. The concept of trajectories takes a journeying, or life-course perspective on the evolving nature of partnerships. Identifying trajectory/ies as the unifying or binding category enabled the visualisation of the subcategories as inter-related. For example, figure 4.3 illustrates the flow through the phases, and the mutual-influences of each within the partnerships studied. Illustrating the complexity and subjectivity of participants' experiences is difficult to represent in figure 4.3, therefore individuals' experiences are presented in the following paragraphs to add richness to this thematic storyline.

The six sub-categories, expressed as 'phases' of partnership, are:

- Establishing
- Inhibiting
- Facilitating
- Perpetuating
- Transforming
- Accelerating
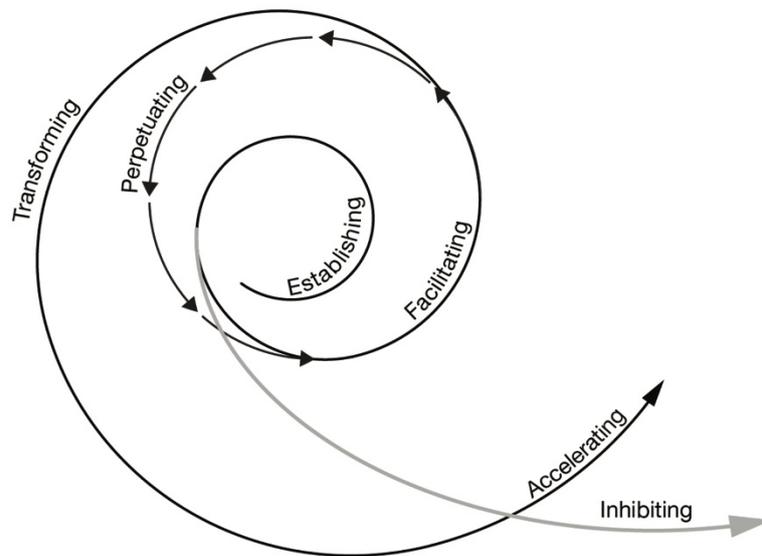
Figure 4.3: Six phases of partnership trajectories

It is important to point out that I did not always observe a well-ordered or linear process of moving neatly on from one phase into the next. In some cases, partnerships were hovering in one phase, or moving back and forth across phases slowly or speedily. Fluidity of movement between the phases indicates several transitional points, and not straightforwardly either; individuals within the same partnership might have been at a different phase or transition to other partners. Points on the trajectory were not static, and in the figure presented, there is not an end point or completion phase. An end point of partnership did not feature in these findings; however, the concept of partnership 'closure' is undoubtedly significant and warrants exploration in further studies.

### 4.3.1 Phase 1. Establishing

The establishing phase is placed at the centre of the spiral in figure 4.3, signifying its centrality to both partnerships as a foundational phase. At this

early point in the partnerships, emphasis was placed on the creation of core conditions for well-functioning partnerships, such as through the establishment of a relationship, a connection, trust, and intentions.

Relationship. A significant preliminary phase of both partnerships was the intense need to foster a meaningful relationship with the other partners. Staff tended to describe more practical intentions to 'set-up' the partnership project, or partnership learning environment, such as to meet a specific aim such as an event or create a resource. Whereas students tended to express their need for a more emotional connection with the staff partner, in terms of gaining friendship or mutual respect. These relational conditions, such as building rapport, being authentic, bringing one's whole self to the partnership, appeared to significantly impact on this establishing phase for students. In the course-partnership, the first-year students explained:

> I feel like Robert, he'll come and he'll have little meetings with people [students]. […] I feel like he's really involved with the students, […] so I feel he does work closely with the students, and he's trying to do that more, and I think that works really well because then he knows [us] and what we like. (Jacob)

> I think it's just the interaction, […], in the first [meetings] he would tend to say like 'high guys, just letting you know, this is what we're doing today. Can you just try and read this if you have time to be prepared', […] I think it would be good for other tutors to be like that, to be like 'I hope you're getting on alright? Here's what we're going to do'. (Seb)

Crucially, the resilience and longevity of the relationship was framed by these early experiences and interactions which strengthened the following conditions found to be prevalent: establishment of connection, trust and intentionality.

Connection. Establishing rapport and developing empathetic understandings through dialogue was identified in multiple instances across the data. This vital activity of talking, listening, and incorporating non-verbal communications created an open and warm environment, allowing students and staff to connect with one another. The level of informality of this space for dialogue was noteworthy, such as students and staff 'sitting down next to each other', breaking down the hierarchical nature of teaching and learning spaces. As previously discussed in section 4.2, the additional presence of 'care' was particularly important to the student participants:

> I think it's about, as well forming some sort of relationship with the lecturer, being able to know that you can go and speak to them about the smallest problem. It makes it easier to communicate. Whereas some lectures are I think, I don't know if standoffish is the right word to use, but patronising. (Georgia)

> In a sense it's not just a working partnership but it's also sort of like a friend partnership, you feel as if they actually care about you. (Nicole)

For the staff participants however, greater emphasis was placed on being able to rely on and establish student accountability in the partnership. Demonstrating commitment through professional behaviours such as participating in discussion, good attendance at project meetings or taught sessions, being punctual and organised, were characteristics valued highly by staff. Both students and staff described the value of communicating frequently, both in face-to-face meetings and asynchronously. However, opportunities for ad hoc

or informal conversations were also described as extremely beneficial for strengthening connections, such as in social areas on campus, in corridors, and cafes.

Trust. Trust surfaced over and over in the data as an integral component for effective and sustained collaboration. Judged across a longer initial time period than simply at the start, trust in each other was continually assessed across several phases of the partnership trajectory. Trust became a conflicting concept for Jennifer in the SLTA partnership, when comparing the level of trust she has for the students in the partnership project, compared with colleagues:

> I'm sort of making you [the students] staff, but I'm not really trusting
>
> you in the way I would actually trust a member of my team.
>
> (Jennifer)

Diverging needs for trust between individuals were observed. For example, Jennifer and Amanda both spoke about needing to trust the SLTA students in terms of their reliability to attend events and represent the department. There was also an issue with the non-return of a piece of technology that had been loaned to a student partner. This had the consequence of reflecting negatively on future student partners who were not loaned any equipment due to the breakdown in trust that had been created. In the same partnership context, Nicole reflected on how long she thought it took her to gain the trust of staff:

> I think when they see that I am engaged and I am signing up to things
>
> […] like in a month or so, I think they see 'okay we can sort of trust
>
> her', but it wasn't up until the audit that they were like 'she's a really
>
> good worker, she brings a lot of points and she does the analysis
>
> really well'. (Nicole)

Staff were more likely to talk about trust building in terms of students demonstrating reliability, accountability, commitment, maturity and professionalism. For students, trust was framed in terms of respect, recognition, being treated as an individual, transparency of information, fairness and equality.

Galvanising trust at this early phase of establishing partnership provided security and stability for the partnership relationship. The processual work at the beginning phases was however only foundational work, as the need to involve opportunities for continual mutual trust-building remained across all subsequent phases. Without the opportunity to discuss one another's trust needs and expectations the trajectory of the partnership, or an individual's ability to contribute across the phases, appeared to be put somewhat at risk. The consequences of misaligned or miscommunicated expectations are discussed in 4.3.2 *Inhibiting*.

<u>Intentions.</u> Establishing the purpose and aims within each partnership, and how individuals could participate and contribute their ideas, was expressed as a significantly enabling factor – however the evidence of this taking place was weak in my observations. It was as though the participants knew that establishing individual and mutual intentions would lead to positive outcomes, but they struggled to find ways to have these conversations. I observed motivation diverging sometimes, such as when the partnership was driven by staff intent, or for structural causes such as purely to improve the NSS, or when the motivation on the part of student partners was solely strategic in terms of CV building.

### 4.3.2 Phase 2. Inhibiting

The factors explained so far have been heavily reliant on interpersonal interactions, building rapport with one another, and establishing human connection. Within the data, it was evident that some student-staff relationships might have never quite got off the ground before the opportunity for any

interaction. For example, Jennifer described certain implicit expectations of students during the recruitment process (see non-verbal factors below). These factors have potentially profound effects for the individuals involved, or for those who had unknowingly been excluded because of a lack of access to the recruitment process.

Non-verbal factors. Sometimes the inhibiting factors were based on non-verbal interaction, before an establishing phase could take place. For example, if students were being interviewed for a partner role in the SLTA example, there were unspecified pre-existing expectations and assumptions, particularly made by staff partners. Placing a strong emphasis on professionalism, commitment, and reliability, Jennifer reflected on the high standard she expected of student partners to reach in their dress code and behaviour on an interview day:

> We felt that at the interviews as well, we did these big group interview sessions. That was an interview for a job. I expect you [students] to show up in a suit. But some of them obviously read it completely differently, and it was just like a recruitment session, students at university are just in their jeans and t-shirt; and some came in suits. And it's like, you don't know how to be.. and of course we're [staff] all in jeans and t-shirts, because we're just doing our normal job, we're not thinking… and that's horrid, what's my expectation 'you have to wear a suit, and I don't?' What's that about? (Jennifer)

Both staff and students expressed negative perceptions associated with what was deemed 'poor' behaviour, such as low-attendance rates, lack of participation or engagement in group work or team meetings, or tardy time keeping. In the course-based example, the first-year students became very

animated when conveying their frustration with peers who were serial non-attenders:

> I think if the university related then a little bit more like that, not necessarily more ruthless but less tolerant to inadequacy and people doing just the bare minimum, you shouldn't tolerate you should expect a lot more and if people aren't doing it and they don't have a legitimate excuse then they should be punished or thrown out of the university. (Caden)

> There's a few people that don't turn up to lectures and they still pass modules. I think there should be some sort of implication put in place if your attendance isn't up there you shouldn't be getting the same grades as someone who is. (Jacob)

This raised a question about the tendencies present among the group towards 'othering', attributing negative characteristics, and labelling those peers who did not fit their ideals or norms of the group. Constituting a significant theme arising within the inhibiting phase, othering contributed to a creation of an 'us and them' dynamic, posing a threat to the potential for a whole-cohort partnership community.

Expectations. Staff often described a range of competencies, abilities and skills that potential student partners should already possess for the partnership to get off to a good start. Confident communication skills, particularly verbal skills such as being 'articulate' were highly regarded by staff in both partnership examples, and similarly exhibiting 'maturity' was talked about.

> There are certain students […] who are really good at understanding what we kind of mean by employment; of commitment and working,

and having grown up conversations, in a different way than some of the others, where they, it almost feels [are] younger. (Jennifer)

The biggest challenge I face today even with really mature adults and quite strong-minded people is trying to get them to understand that actually I want you to participate in a debate. […] I think it is a maturity issue, and its emotional maturity and educational maturity, and I think it's also individual maturity. (Robert)

There were examples, particularly across the staff interviews, where certain biases were implicitly, and explicitly, described; or where certain behaviours deemed appropriate in academia were recognised and rewarded:

I'm almost more comfortable with my favourite ones [students] from last year, where actually, they wanted a career in the area. They would have done it without the money. They wanted to be part of the conversations and wanted to be involved in it. That's lovely. (Jennifer)

If I didn't sign up for the [project] the first time, I wouldn't have had the chance to do the second one [project] because they wanted someone who actually does the work, and is not just in it for the money. (Nicole)

Pre-conceived expectations or implicit assumptions that students should already possess certain competencies was evident and openly discussed by both Jennifer and Amanda, the SLTA staff partners. Characteristics, abilities or skills that were cited included confidence, pre-existing knowledge, technical know-how, practical experience, polished communication skills, preparedness, readiness,

and the ability to fit straight in to the group. These types of expectations dominated the SLTA recruitment process, which raised questions within the research about the implicit affinity biases at play when recruiting student partners. Students who mirrored the staff personalities, or who were perhaps able to confidently navigate cultural and academic norms were in a stronger position to be selected as partners:

> I went to [present] the What Works projects, and I was aware that it would be nice to have students to come with us, so who did I pick, I picked Bryony. I knew she would say yes, it's simple as that, and also, she had done a good piece of work as well. (Amanda)

Such expectations of students were present, but less dominant, in the discussions that took place with participants in the course-based example.

Undermining actions. Both students and staff described instances that, for them, felt antithetical to the partnership environment and orientation. Undermining actions provided a blunt contrast to how individuals had been treated in partnership (e.g. with respect, trust, familiarity) and made the concept of what felt like being in partnership (or not), all the more salient. For example, the first-year students in the focus group were upset that some lecturers would 'put them down' in front of their peers if they were late for class, or if they answered a question incorrectly in a seminar:

> There is a bit of a power trip with a couple of the tutors that I've observed. When you're trying to have a group discussion in class, and you're trying to make a point that's necessary, and you're not trying to be stupid or funny, then they shut you down like 'raise your hand', then they move onto the next person. Then you kind of sink into your seat, and like you don't want to raise your hand again, I don't want to engage I don't want to come to your lessons. (Caden)

Navigating the range of staff personalities and approaches was challenging for the student participants from both partnership examples, and as noted within the situational analysis, amounted in some cases to a perception of a lack of cohesion among staff. What students perceived as a disrespectful interaction may or may not have been the staffs' intention, but for the students this became a confusing power dynamic. When some members of the course team were orientating towards a partnership approach with students, the hierarchical nature of other teacher-student relationships is brought into sharp focus. The impact of this experience on students' transitional identities is discussed further in section 4.4 Identity and Emotion, later in this chapter.

Perceived deficits were influential in terms of how partners viewed themselves or others, and how they felt they were treated. Any lack of communication, preparedness, lack of time, of mental or physical capacity, or emotional investment, was detected by participants. This contributed to a sense of less commitment to the relationship, and diminished trust. In terms of communication style and frequency, presented previously in 4.2, the final-year students explored their experiences and thoughts within the focus group, explaining:

> I think it [the course] could be improved with all the teachers, all the lecturers speaking to each other more. (Georgia)

> What you were saying about the communication I think that's really important because with a lot of the tutors, a lot of the lecturers they are very different with how they mark and opinions in general. It's not a bad thing at all, but I think there needs to be a general foundation with all the lecturers on the course to what, they need to have a shared value and opinion. (Ellis)

Students' perceptions of 'effort' arose within the focus groups, which became entangled with expectations and the discourses surrounding consumerism in higher education:

> I think it works two ways, like, the student is making the effort and then the staff have to make the effort back. Sometimes I feel I'm doing that and I'm not getting the effort back, and you're paying all this money and everything. Sometimes you don't get it back and you just feel disappointed really. (Joseph)

> Some people [staff] seem there just to read a PowerPoint and send you on your way. (Jacob)

As raised in 4.2, one final-year student commented about his perspective on the working relationship between students and staff. This quote is included here again to illustrate the inhibiting effects of value for money discourses. Perhaps laden with disillusionment, and with certain expectations that are difficult to meet, Ellis explores a possible clash between partnership and marketisation, the influence of positionality and who holds power is, for him, an undermining factor:

> I think what you've put as a student working relationship between us and the staff now I think is probably one of the most vital things in contemporary university, since tuition fees being free to then £3000 to then where we are £9000 now. We are paying so much money now and it's not a thing as we come to university now to be taught, it's our choice and our payment, it's a service we pay for now, it's an expectation now that if we want something we should get it, if we go the right way about it to seek it, and yeah. I think it shouldn't be an issue at all, there shouldn't be a problem that we think we can't go to

a lecturer about it. At the end of the day we're paying a fee that should be the minimum we expect is their ability to teach us or ability to go and see them. (Ellis)

### 4.3.3 Phase 3. Facilitating

Actions or behaviours found to facilitate partnership practices were those built on the core conditions established at the beginning. Staff partners were more likely to set up facilitative opportunities or use resources to enable this phase, such as guiding a conversation towards relevant current affairs, or orienting a discussion to reflect on group boundaries. The techniques and skills observably contributing to this phase included active listening, having a flexible agenda, encouraging inclusive dialogue, and engaging with contemporary issues. Attending to the debriefing process to develop meta-understandings of learning or working together contributed to an environment of acceptance, and cultivated a sense of trust and shared ownership of learning, as opposed to an atmosphere of individualism.

Collective problem solving. There was a strong sense within the SLTA partnership that students could contribute in meetings and put forwards suggestions that would be taken seriously. When talking about the experience of being in staff-student meetings, Nicole explained:

I felt very comfortable expressing some of my ideas and improvements that I felt would actually benefit all the departments and module leaders. (Nicole)

Jennifer described holding a 'debrief' with the student partners after a particular student engagement event which involved surveying students in the cafeteria about the problems they were experiencing with technology at university. This had not been a successful approach, and she prompted a group reflection on what had happened. During the debrief the student partners vocalised several

reasons for the failed event and Jennifer realised that she would have struggled to think of such solutions. This led her to radically changing the way her department approached this event in future, involving informal games and fun interactions that the student partners had suggested. The students felt their ideas were valued, and the staff team felt revitalised by new ways to design student-facing technology events.

Involving multiple stakeholders in collective problem solving was also the preferred approach for Robert. He described trying to create a less hierarchical space to include different groups in collective problem solving about curriculum enhancement, not only students and teaching staff, but also support tutors and administrative staff. When talking about his rationale for partnership Robert explained:

> I'm convinced of it [partnership], because in education, the greatest asset of any institution is the intellectual property of the people who work within it. (Robert)

When students were involved in collective problem solving, their awareness of the complexities behind certain recurring structural issues increased, and in some cases translated into a sense of empathy and insight into the work of their staff partners. Likewise, staff talking to students about their experiences, and hearing about their personal situations developed greater mutual understanding and appreciation of the contemporary issues university students are facing.

The pedagogic approaches to collective problem solving in the course-based example included enquiry-based and problem-based learning, whereby the tutor facilitated group debates and learning scenarios around particular topics in the news. Both first-year and final-year students were keen to describe their positive experiences in classes that incorporated controversial issues in the discipline:

Every week we would always talk about current issues in the sporting

world, so you really felt up to date and really engaged. We were

covering issues like law and stakeholders, marketing, the golden

triangle, media. (Toby)

Creating an environment in which ideas could be aired gave the opportunity for all to benefit from different perspectives and hear a range of solutions. Several participants talked about how they had developed skills when in collective discussions, such as verbal communication, confidence to make mistakes and gain feedback on early thoughts and ideas, and a more holistic understanding of the course or department and the people involved.

Communicating. A great deal of communication relied on verbal interactions such as in project meetings, and in-class discussions. In both partnership cases there were notably no observable opportunities for students or staff to express themselves or ideas non-verbally, such as through visual methods; however, this may have been evident outside of my observations.

Facilitative techniques such as active listening, scaffolding discussion through redirecting questions, and group reflections such as debriefs fostered an open atmosphere for collaboration. This space appeared to gradually develop into a forum for discussing more complex issues, such as talking openly about what improvements could be made to a module, or deeply sensitive personal experiences such as an incident of racism discussed in a partnership meeting. In some instances, it was evident the staff partners felt that if the students were communicating a mandate for change, that staff had to act upon this:

Working and listening to what they [student partners] were telling

me, and what we needed [to do] meant that we [the School]

developed and adapted, and responded to the students every single

year to try and make it a bit better. (Amanda)

In other instances, the students were more accepting of their role and responsibility to be an active agent in the changes they communicated:

> When I brought these [ideas] forward to Jennifer she was very open, she said 'yes that's a very good thing to do' and 'why don't we expand this a bit more' and 'we can include this' […] It was just a very open approach like a peer to peer approach in this instance. (Nicole)

Communicating informally was discussed, particularly by students, as important in facilitating an emotionally warm environment for getting to know one another. Being able to share personal experiences and situations, such as student accommodation issues, or aspects of social life, was valued by the students and contributed to a growing rapport between one another. Elements such as humour, fun, and team building games had a momentary, yet relieving effect of taking pressure off of the task or problem the partnership was there to solve. Incorporating this type of relaxed group time appears to be very important for group regulation and bonding; when reflecting on her partnership experience Nicole explained:

> It was a very nice learning process because it wasn't just: 'sit down, do this' it was a very welcoming environment, very open and very friendly. You can talk to them about anything that you want regardless of if it's personal or not, you can joke around as well and it was just very fun to be there. (Nicole)

In terms of making time for informal interactions, this seemed to also present a potential barrier, as it involved planned 'downtime' which was often superseded into task-oriented activities and more 'serious' discussion.

Additional sub-themes that were associated with the facilitating phase across the data included the ability of the group to be flexible when new information or perspectives were introduced, to actively seek to include a diverse range of perspectives, and to be consistent to a certain extent in terms of temperament, mood, and the emotional atmosphere. Finally, where discussions took place about the processes, or the lived experiences of partnership, this facilitated reflection and introspection that benefited both individually and collectively.

### 4.3.4 Phase 4. Perpetuating

A phase particularly evident in the data generated from the SLTA project, also found but less prevalent in the course-based example, was the notion of perpetuating certain inclusive or exclusive behaviours. Attending to positions taken in the data, and to marginalised, silenced, and absent voices through situational analysis pointed clearly to this phase in terms of the replication of structural and social norms within the two partnerships. Examples of inhibiting factors which contributed to the perpetuation of inequality have already been presented in the previous section, such as the recruitment of student partners using established organisational structures and traditional processes which implicitly exclude some student groups from applying. Additional perpetuating factors illustrated below include the existence of in-groups and biases, favouritism and privileging.

In-groups and biases. Observing group behaviours, and interpreting the participants' narratives, gave rise to this theme of partnership practices that inadvertently exclude other staff or students. When reflecting on the students and staff outside of the partnerships studied, there may have been other people who would like to know more and to become involved, particularly about the SLTA partnership. However, when the group had formed it appeared to be hard for others to penetrate a closed group because of pre-existing relationships:

We know, and this is not to speak badly of our students, but a lot of the students we employ are also PASS[7] leaders, they're also library shelvers, they're also ambassadors for Student Services, the same group that sign up for everything. (Jennifer)

When I was responsible for it [student engagement] again which was three years ago, my first thing was to find my student partners. So, I identified some students I taught in the first year because I had already built that relationship with them, so they already knew me they already knew that I was interested. (Amanda)

In another example, this time in the course-based case study, the students described feeling anger towards peers who were not attending classes, and how frustrated and let down they felt by their actions. Whether this is right or wrong, this was a form of othering and perpetuated forms of ridicule, stereotypes, and stigma which probably made it harder for those students to attend and get back in to the group.

Favouritism and privileging. There were both overt, and implicit examples across the data of favouritism and an unequitable playing field for students to become involved in the SLTA partnership. Students with a 'good track record' or who came 'recommended' by staff colleagues were actively invited back to new opportunities that were not advertised, or new partnerships that were slightly more emergent in scope. The sense that 'one project leads to another' privileged students holding a good reputation among colleagues, and who had already demonstrated reliability through established student-staff relationships. For example, Nicole explained:

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[7] Peer Assisted Study Sessions

It just shows that when you do a good job the first time, then you get
requested for a few other things, like I did with the audit, like I did
with the StudentFolio sessions for that particular cohort. (Nicole)

Both staff partners corroborated this point in their separate interviews, saying why they had approached students already known to them to take on a partnering role:

I'm comfortable with my favourite ones from last year where
actually, they wanted a career in this area, and they would have done
it without the money. (Jennifer)

I picked Jet, because Jet was my placement student, I was his
placement supervisor. (Amanda)

Favouritism and privileging were less evident in the course-based partnership, however there was an undertone of students favouriting certain lecturers, particularly when thinking about dissertation supervisors, or which staff member they preferred to approach for personal tutorials. However, a final-year student made an interesting reflection on his relationships with staff, explaining that for him, building a mutual interest as a two-way process involved taking an interest in staffs' research and areas of specialism, and:

To expect the other staff to want to build a relationship with you is
unrealistic unless you can offer something back. (Jack)

### 4.3.5 Phase 5. Transforming

Transforming was found to be characterised in three forms across the data. First, the transformational effects for individuals working and learning together; second, a transforming effect on the dyad or group relationship held between

members; and third, transformations of the project or work that the partnership focused upon. When partners actively acknowledged that they were involved in a transforming process, it created an atmosphere of recognition that transformation was taking place. For example, in the observations conducted within the course-based partnership, Robert asked the second-year and final-year cohorts to reflect on their experiences of the previous academic year. They spoke about realising that they had learnt a great deal more than they appreciated, and had grown personally and academically. Taking regular opportunities for individual and group reflections also prompted the SLTA project participants to recognise how they had experienced transformation. They talked on a personal level, such as for Nicole and how she had experienced her university 'journey', or for Jennifer and her reflections on what the SLTAs and staff had achieved together. Further activities and actions appeared in the data which facilitated transformation, such as acknowledging and discussing gaps, demonstrating commitment, collectively reflecting, and moving beyond the typical positions of staff and student.

Acknowledging gaps. Of the staff partners interviewed, all acknowledged gaps in their skills, knowledge, understanding, or experience, which had become a driver for them to work closely with students to bridge the gaps that existed for them. For example, Robert identified his desire to reflect on his gaps with students, either individually or in smaller tutor groups:

> One of the first things to do is sit down and start talking to them [students], because there is a big generation gap, there is a big expectations difference; there is an understanding and comprehension gap. (Robert)

Other gaps (also outlined in the situational analysis) included age, maturity, technological ability, and an expectations gap. The student focus groups revealed that hearing different perspectives helped students to set the stage for

transformational thinking, to realise and accept that there are other ways to think about their subject, for example.

Being honest about topics, skills, or knowledge which was unfamiliar or unknown territory was difficult for both staff and student participants, and perhaps viewed as confessing a deficit. For the staff, traditionally held views on being an educator assumed that lecturers or managers should be the informants, the people with knowledge. For the students, it was difficult to reveal their gaps because they are typically assessed and graded on what they do and don't know, and possibly judged by their peers, and themselves. Jennifer and Nicole described some SLTA partnership meetings which opened up a space for honest, reflective conversations between members to explore what gaps exist. In the classroom setting however, I observed this as the most stifling environment for revealing personal gaps.

I noticed that many of the implicit assumptions held by staff are not at all clear to students. For example, how modules connect, how skills are built across a course, or how departments interrelate. In some instances, the staff perceived that they had told the students, but that the students had not listened. From the students' perspective, they felt slightly alienated or stupid for not knowing. Students in both case studies were keen to know more about why a course is designed in such a way, or about what other services exist at the university and how they offer support. In the process of the focus group discussions, the students learnt from each other about new ideas, such as additional academic support that their peers had accessed, and other services at the university.

Commitment through attendance. Establishing and revisiting the purpose of the partnership, and building on the individual and mutual intentions established in phase one, appeared to strengthen and transform the groups dynamics. In the SLTA example, regular project meetings and informal interactions reinforced the partnership relationship really well for those able to attend. It was notable that when students did not attend, that they were more distant from the group,

and therefore socially isolated from the main partnership. One staff partner in the SLTA partnership acknowledged that this was a problem, but struggled to know what to do to improve engagement of students who did not attend meetings. Similarly, a significant area of focus group discussion with both groups in the course-based partnership covered students' anger, frustration, and disappointment with other students who do not regularly attend timetabled classes. Their view was that their non-attending peers should be penalised in some way, either by reflecting non-attendance in module grades, or through other possible punitive measures.

Collective reflection. Collaborative engagement with reflection appeared in the data mainly as an informal exchange of ideas, reflection on the successes or challenges of previous events (in the SLTA example), or on modules or placement experiences (in the course example). Sharing reflections involved actively listening, looking back on past activities and assessing whether objectives had been achieved, what had been learned, what challenges had been experienced, and a group effort on planning for the future. The exchange of individual reflection towards collective learning and problem solving created an atmosphere of mutuality, respect, and empathy for others in the group.

Moving beyond 'students' and 'staff'. The collective space for students and staff in the SLTA partnership gave Nicole the opportunity to develop her personal identity, and she spoke about newly viewing herself as 'more than just a student'. Findings relating to the theme of identity are presented in greater depth in the next section of this chapter, however, a thematic overlap is found to be relevant within this transforming stage of partnership trajectories. Most salient for students in both case studies was the opportunity to develop their confidence to speak in a group, and make valid contributions. For example, Nicole also described:

> With the student staff partnership, I didn't really see it as that. It was
> more like a peer to peer and I think that's because it's university, and

even though tutors and lecturers are persons of authority I didn't

really see it as that. In my mindset we all have the same aim that we

work towards, and I'm not afraid to voice my opinions and my

recommendations, because I've always been told that they're

welcome so I take that encouragement and I bring it forward.

(Nicole)


Arguably, all students arrive at university with lesser, or greater degrees of confidence before becoming involved in partnership work. Indeed, more confident students might be the ones putting themselves forward for formalised partner roles. Staff transformation was less easy to identify within the data, more prevalent was the indication of transformation to their practice. Staff described, and I observed, adjusting and evolving teaching methods, and a change to the way they traditionally viewed themselves as the people needing to be 'in charge'.


*4.3.6 Phase 6. Accelerating*

This final phase of partnership trajectories involves the notion of momentum, facilitated by particular activities and types of discussion. *Accelerating* signifies moving *beyond* the expected interactions, tasks, or learning outcomes of the partnership situation. For example, incorporating the unexpected, or debating contemporary issues appeared to shift the internal focus of the partnership towards externality, 'looking outwards' or, bringing an outside focus within. A safe space and adequate time was needed to be able to experiment with ideas, explore failures and challenges, which led in some instances to a reimagining of solutions to previously held problems.


Acknowledging wider issues. Students in the course-based focus groups appreciated the opportunity to discuss current affairs, often aligned with their course of study, but also wider issues reported in the news media. The ability for them to talk in a group about societal matters that were concerning them

outside of university increased their engagement, and had the effect of feeling more connected to each other and the staff by the contemporary issues important to them.

Actively engaging dissenting views. Discussing social and political affairs occasionally caused disagreement, or brought dissenting perspectives into consideration. Actively engaging with opposing views meant that the group had to learn to self-moderate, and develop skills such as negotiation, listening, and appreciation of other people's opinions. In the course-based case study, it fell to the staff member to mediate differences of opinion, facilitate respectful group discussion, role model diplomacy, as well as notice and address micro-aggressions tactfully. In the SLTA case study, accelerated discussions were evident in a one-to-one capacity between Jennifer and Nicole who described an informal lengthy conversation about politics, and an incidence of racism that she had experienced. Having the opportunity to talk about issues outside of the official remit of the partnership appeared to shift the previous hierarchical dynamic toward more equal ground. This also pointed toward being able to be authentic and display some level of emotional involvement.

Amanda described having in-depth discussions with two students about difficulties they were experiencing in their student accommodation. These conversations are examples of moments, or situations, where the student partners felt reassured that it was ok to share their interests, difficulties, and experiences, and that the staff member would listen and offer their views. I noted within this sub-theme the vulnerability of partners who contribute dissenting views, particularly within the formalities of being employed in their partner role, and also when part of a large cohort. Previously established social norms in the group might not be accepting of dissenting opinions, or actively discourage the 'over sharing' of personal or emotional matters. The partnership context in both case studies might not have felt safe for individuals to share dissent or bring discord, without the potential for negative consequences;

however, this is difficult to conclude as participants did not talk overtly about having had this experience.

### 4.3.7 Summary

This section has introduced the concept of 'trajectories' to provide an organising framework for six phases emerging from the data. Whilst the two case studies were unique, and characterised partnership very differently, it was useful to make a cross-comparison of the overlapping themes of establishing, inhibiting, facilitating, perpetuating, transforming, and accelerating. These have revealed particular conventions, assumptions, and contradictions that need to be critically reflected upon, regarding issues of inclusivity, organisational norms, structural barriers and facilitators of partnership. Next, this chapter turns attention to the role of identity in this study, and how identity was found to be inherently linked to emotion.

## 4.4 Identity and emotion

The research question stimulating the findings in this section was to discover the influencing factors of partnership working on staff and students' sense of personal and professional identity. The aim was to enquire with participants about any perceived change, development or growth they had experienced individually or collectively. The descriptions and expressions found within the data revealed an indivisible link between identity and the influence of emotions on personal and collective dynamics within the relationships present. The two case study data sets are combined in this section due to the cross-cutting themes found in axial coding, and example quotations are included to illustrate the significance of emotions as an emerging theme. Examples of the cross-comparison analysis, from the initial use of the Ketso tools, to digitised methods using Microsoft Excel, can be found in Appendices K, M and N.

The instability of students' identities in this study was evident, and repeatedly surfaced as the sub-theme *identities in flux*. At each level of undergraduate study represented, students were in several transitional phases, whether experiencing first-year (level four) and envisioning second-year (level five), or experiencing final-year (level six) and envisioning life beyond graduation. Other life transitions made their presence felt within the data, such as descriptions of 'becoming more adult' (student comment), or remarks about 'emotional maturity' (staff comment). Staffs' developing identities were mainly described in the context of their professional life, with two out of the three staff partners recounting their previous career outside of academia as extremely influential to their current identity. The mutual influence of individuals' identities on the partnerships was as significant as the effect of working and learning in partnership on participants' identities, and I described this in my analytic memos as a virtuous circle (figure 4.4).

partnership        identity
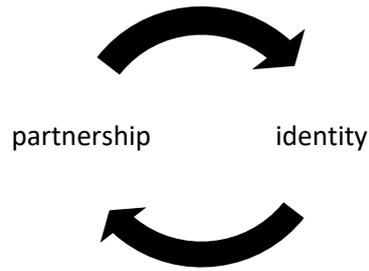
Figure 4.4: Mutual influence of identity and partnership

A vast range of sensory and emotional states appeared in the data, from high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction, excitement and anticipation of future shared activities, to anger directed towards absenteeism, or students' feelings of shame when reprimanded in front of peers. Derived through the process of axial coding and categorisation, the findings allied to identity and emotion are divided into three main categories: 1) intra-personal 2) inter-personal, and 3) extra-personal. Illustrated in figure 4.5, these three levels of the 'personal' co-exist in the data, and were found to contribute to participants' experiences of their sense of self identity. The category of 'extra-personal' encompasses a broad sphere of external influential factors, found at the level of the course or department (micro), the institution (meso), and at the level of society (macro).
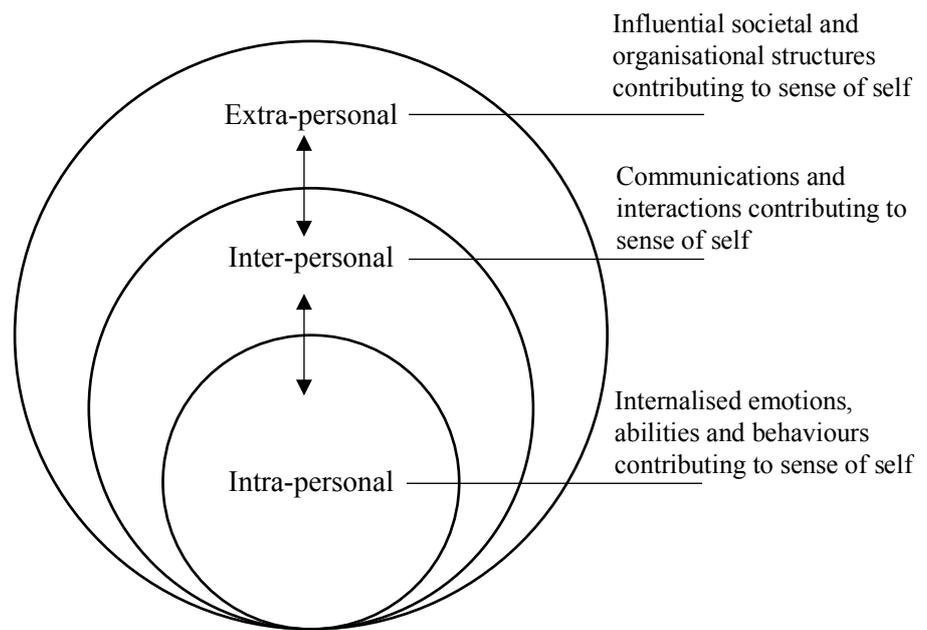
Figure 4.5: Three categories of personal: intra-, inter- and extra-personal

## 4.4.1 Intra-personal

Relating to 'within the self', reference to intra-personal in this context was identified as the internalised emotions, abilities and behaviours which were consciously expressed by participants within the data. Intra-personal awareness, or self-awareness/ self-regulation, manifested across a wide spectrum for students and staff. From negative feelings such as shame, embarrassment, confusion, stress, and fear, through to more positive feelings such as inspired, enthused, passionate, and caring; intra-personal awareness had an influence on individual participants, and their self-perception in relation to other people. Table 4.1 illustrates the category 'intra-personal' and the three codes of 'identity in flux', 'emotion states', and 'self-concept', generated from second step axial coding, whereby codes generated in open coding were grouped into clusters.

| Core Category: Identity and Emotion | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Category** | **Code** | **Examples** |
| Intra-personal | Identity in flux | Feeling in-between parental control and independence; Transition from youth to adulthood (first-year students)<br><br>Ability to reflect on past-self, and first-year identity; Trouble *'switching on'* in first-year, lack of focus, motivation, maturity; Regret for not taking first-year seriously (final-year students)<br><br>Awareness of age (22) and perception of still being a child in staffs' eyes (Nicole)<br><br>Feeling a newcomer to teaching, even after 11 years (Robert) |
| | Emotion states | Excited by current issues and debates; motivated by field-trips – they *open your eyes* to what the course is about (first-year students)<br><br>Demotivated going from A-levels to first-year, feels like a step down; confusion around assessments, *what's expected of me?*; stress at exam and assignment submission time (first-year students)<br><br>Bitterness about group work, and lack of peer participation; anger at the injustice of grading when students don't attend classes (first-year students) |

| Code | Examples |
| --- | --- |
| Emotion states | Scared to attend lectures when could be told off; embarrassment and shame when negatively singled out in front of peers (first-year students) |
| | Loss of faith in second-year, feeling an uneasy realisation of how quickly time goes; feeling rushed and shocked when starting final-year (final-year students) |
| | Worry about teaching being good enough; hopelessness about the curriculum design initiative, feeling raw emotion (Robert) |
| Self-concept | Going on placement was a turning point, made us realise why we are doing this and who we are (final-year students) |
| | I'm not afraid to voice my opinions and recommendations (Nicole) |
| | I know I would have struggled if I had a different dissertation tutor (Jack, final-year student) |
| | I was a weak personality back then [on placement], I had an awful time, I think I cried a lot (Nicole) |
| | Feedback from others in the partnership boosts my self-esteem; I know the things I can't do, but I know more about what will get me there (Nicole) |

| Category | Code | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Intra-personal | Self-concept | In my professional career as a manager, before becoming an academic, I learnt about emotional intelligence, and it just seemed logical that I made that my approach with my students (Amanda) |

Table 4.1: Axial coding table illustrating 'intra-personal'

The term self-concept was identified in the cross-comparative analysis to denote individuals' self-identity in relation to the partnership situation. Several identifiable characteristics in the data contributed to the construction of the sub-theme *self-concept*, such as beliefs about academic ability, physical or sporting interests, disciplinary alignment, professional identity and career aspiration. The students in both case studies emphasised that the types of interactions they had with course tutors and other students impacted on their self-belief system, and this stretched as far back as experiences in their secondary education. The resonating interactions described by students, such as being talked down to, disrespected, or dismissed, were viewed as antithetical partnership behaviours, and gave an increased salience to what they understood as being in partnership with other staff. For example, Caden, Holly, and Seb explained:

> Sometimes there is a valid excuse why you're late [to class.] The other day I emailed the tutor [in advance], and he still jumped on my back in front of the rest of the class. […] So, then it's hard to engage with the actual lecturers themselves and get yourself the help. (Caden)

> I feel like sometimes people will be like 'I don't want to go to that lecture, like I'm scared to go, or not "scared" to go, but I don't want to get jumped on or attacked or whatever' - so you'll just feel like oh

I'm not going, it's embarrassing sometimes, and then it's like oh why would I turn up to someone who's going to do that to me. (Holly)

Based on that, people wouldn't be willing to go to a tutorial with that tutor […] and go face-to-face with them behind closed doors. (Seb)

Conversely, positively perceived interactions contributed to feelings of encouragement, warmth, motivation and self-belief. How people interpret and internalise the actions and behaviours of others is not often explicitly talked about in terms of learning and teaching. However, the sensory environment, particularly interoception - the sense of internal state or bodily sensations providing the basis for emotional experience – are critical to an enhanced understanding of the complexities inherently present, and which have been described here by participants.

The following vignette is taken from one of my reflective memos written after the second student focus group, illustrating the early emergence of this theme about the intersection of emotion and identity:

Reflective memo, June 2017

It was evident in my discussions with students that understanding and coping with their changing learner identity was difficult to process. Particularly for first-years, straddling their prior experiences of school or college, and stepping into the expectations of university and adulthood, whilst still being a late teen, presented an incongruence in knowing how to relate to their 'teachers' (lecturers) and to each other. The first-year students described feeling confused by the contradictory expectations of them. In one example, a student explained their embarrassment and shame when reprimanded by a lecturer for being late to class, and being 'told off like we are kids in

front of other people'. In another example the students recounted being told to behave and converse in a professional and mature manner, but ultimately, they described feeling like some lecturers do not speak to students as adults. These conflicting expressions from lecturers evoked strong feelings of anger, frustration, demotivation and even fear for the students when attending classes.

In contrast, both first- and third-year students voiced their sense of inspiration and enthusiasm invoked by the curriculum and by lecturers who engaged them in contemporary topics, current affairs, and 'real-life' learning. Activities such as debates, case studies, field-trips, and placements were cited as highly motivating as they contributed to a growing sense of purpose and meaning in their learning and to their future. In these examples, their ability to participate and make a valid contribution to class discussion, or 'making a difference' in the world was rewarding and led to increased confidence and positive self-concept, and was considered by the students as learning in partnership with each other, with the lecturer, and with people outside of the university such as employers. The third-year students specifically described their second-year work-placement experience as an identifiable tipping point in their maturity, and in their understanding of the course and the way it had been designed to scaffold their learning – something they admitted they had felt frustrated by in their first-year.

In writing this reflection I became attuned to the prevalence of *feelings* in the data, suggesting that the affective elements of identity such as feelings of connection through forming meaningful bonds to the course, content, each

other, to the teacher, all added richness and complexity to the dynamics within the relationships the student participants described. Viewing emotions as essential features of the partnerships studied, enmeshed with identity rather than seen as a separate issue, enabled a greater sensitivity to the individual internal systems contributing to the partnership situations.

A great deal of focus has been on the students' reports of intra-personal factors; however, this theme was as applicable to staff. Within their accounts, staff participants surfaced several negative emotion states in the descriptions, such as relating to professional teacher identity, feelings evoked by the perceived threat of internal scrutiny of teaching, of their curriculum design decisions, and the conduct of the partnership project:

> For me at the moment it's time. There isn't enough time, and it's where I'm being pushed and pulled. (Amanda)

> I'm carrying a CDI manual around with me, with what I have to achieve as a course leader […] I understand you've got to have consistency, but I'm sorry to say but I'm quite disillusioned. (Robert)

> There's some uncomfortableness there, it's the casual contract nature […] I feel bad that I'm not offering them a guaranteed wage […] they're not being treated like proper members of staff. (Jennifer)

Staff accounts which demonstrate emotion were as highly charged as the student accounts, but for significantly different underlying reasons. Dichotomous examples of extreme feelings included Robert's love of teaching and facilitating the learning of his students in stark contrast to his contempt for the organisational structures bearing down on his sense of professional autonomy. Similarly, Amanda described the constant feeling of being stretched in different

directions, and the guilt which ensues from spending time on the seemingly unending administrative aspects of academic leadership, when her professional nourishment comes from her time spent alongside students. Finally, Jennifer expressed her moral feelings about the treatment of the SLTA student partners, and the inner dilemmas she regularly experiences. Contrasting her belief that SLTA students should have rights to a guaranteed part-time wage, consistent hours, and access to employee development, Jennifer also described the tension in how involving and employing students was simultaneously seen by colleagues as enriching to the department, yet a threat to the case for increasing the number of full-time learning technologist roles.

The data in this sub-section relating to the intra-personal elements of identity and emotion indicate that the students experienced wide ranging short-term emotion states, such as anger, shame, embarrassment, alongside longer-term affects such as a sense of becoming and maturing, enjoyment and purpose. For the staff, a different emotional assortment resulted in the highly charged and politicised nature of emotional responses found in the data. The next section turns attention to the inter-personal elements present within the findings, and how these facilitated or inhibited the partnership trajectory.

### 4.4.2 Inter-personal

Relating to the types and qualities of interactions between group members, inter-personal in this context was signified through elements in the data such as care, recognition, mutuality, and authenticity. The tendency in positive relationships was towards the amount of time spent together, the accessibility and perceived commitment of others to the partnership, and how participants felt supported by one another. In contrast, interactions that were seen to be antithetical to a partnership approach revealed long-lasting adverse effects on the relational dynamics. Table 4.2 illustrates the category 'inter-personal' and the four codes of 'care', 'recognition', 'mutuality' and 'authenticity', generated through second step axial coding.

| Core Category: Identity and Emotion | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Category** | **Code** | **Examples** |
| Inter-personal | Care | I care about developing others, and sharing a collective responsibility for each other (Robert)<br><br>You feel like you can go and speak to him about the smallest problem; it's ok to approach him outside of lectures (Georgia)<br><br>Is he doing too much, he's always here for us, maybe that's why it's easier to connect with him (first-year students)<br><br>Now that there are 20 SLTAs, they haven't had that 1:1 time, so I feel like I don't know them as individuals; we used to be able to have chit-chats and we'd all feel we were part of something (Jennifer) |
| Inter-personal | Recognition | We recognise that staff put the effort in; lecturing is 'a skill and a half'; some staff go 'above and beyond' (final-year students)<br><br>Students' maturity and ability to contribute as a partner develops over the three years of study (Robert)<br><br>Students need to be talked to and respected as adults if they are expected to behave like adults (first-year students) |

| Category | Code | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Inter-personal | Recognition | A partnership is the little things, like when the lecturer says 'thank you' for coming to class (first-year students)<br><br>The feedback I got was that I worked very fast and well; it just shows that when you do a good job the first time, then you get requested for other things (Nicole) |
| Inter-personal | Mutuality | It's a two-way relationship, students being interested in what staff do (e.g. their research specialism) and staff being interested in what students are bringing (final-year students)<br><br>If it's one-way effort, you just feel disappointed; but when you can have that relationship, it makes you feel you want to give something back (final-year students) |
| Inter-personal | Mutuality | I'm trying to engage students actively in the process of learning; but I'm frustrated with some students' lack of participation in class (Robert)<br><br>You're still nervous (when presenting), but throughout the process the entire team is relaxed, it was very nice to be a part of that (Nicole) |

| Category | Code | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Inter-personal | Authenticity | Partnership requires an ethical framework, which is sustainable and realistic; bringing people on-board in this way requires trust and understanding (Robert)

We're engaged by teaching which is 'not scripted', and when staff have enthusiasm for their modules (final-year students)

We're never really 'lectured at', it's more interactive; I didn't really expect that coming to university, that you would be that engaged and close with your tutors (Toby)

It's taught me that the informal conversations with students are so valuable, the students' 'real' opinions, I never usually hear that bit (Jennifer) |

Table 4.2: Axial coding table illustrating 'inter-personal'

The types of interactions that students felt demonstrated 'care' involved being given the opportunity to speak and be listened to without interruption, in particular being treated like an adult through respectful verbal exchange. A balance between formal and informal environments for dialogue appeared to facilitate an enhanced feeling of care, denoting that occasions where students and staff could get to know one another informally enabled the formation of an authentic relationship. Being able to 'be yourself', and bring your 'whole-self' to the group increased Nicole's sense of belonging to the SLTA team, and accelerated her feeling of group identity within the partnership. The

reciprocation of care and empathy from students towards staff was present in the learning and teaching partnership, in which participants reflected within the focus group on whether Robert, the staff partner, was 'doing too much' – a recognition of the emotional investment he made.

The notion of empathy was important to surface across all four sub-themes (care, recognition, mutuality and authenticity), as the ability to empathise with one another was perhaps an implicit need and expectation on the part of students. They expressed their need for staff to understand what they were going through, such as Nicole explaining to Jennifer that she was struggling in her student accommodation; and Caden in the first-year focus group thought that course tutors could take into consideration his hour-long commute to campus. Students' perceptions of receiving empathetic signals from staff partners highlighted the effect of emotion on their engagement, on their self-concept, and their sense of attachment and rapport. Interpersonal communication infused with empathy had a powerfully stabilising effect on the relationships between staff and students, demonstrating an intersection with the theme of partnership trajectories, in particular where the quality of interaction facilitates or inhibits the course of the partnership.

> Jennifer helped me through quite a lot in that sense, and she helped me through. She made me see things a bit more rationally, but she was very caring in the sense that she asked how I'm doing, and yesterday she asked that again so it didn't leave her mind because she was still worried because I am part of her team. (Nicole)

Amanda illustrated her need for frequent physical presence in relationship creation, and the potentially damaging effects of student (or indeed staff) absence:

It's the same as human interaction generally; if you're not close

enough to someone either because they don't see you enough, either

they've missed the class you're teaching them, or they're not there,

then you can't develop a relationship with someone that isn't there if

that makes sense. (Amanda)

Situational analysis encourages the researcher to draw attention to those hidden or silenced in the situation of enquiry. Whilst analysing the data for inter-personal interactions, I speculatively wrote about my concerns in terms of inclusion and exclusion in a memo:

Reflective memo, June 2017

The students in this focus group mentioned their approval of building

good communications with the course leader through 'little

meetings', 'working closely', and perhaps the informality of

conversation e.g. 'hi guys just letting you know…'. The level of

intimacy here gives rise to considering the inclusivity of these

interactions, and whether some students are included, and some are

excluded, and for what reasons? The issue of accessibility arises as a

consideration to those hidden or marginalised in the social group, in

this case study, the rest of the student cohort.

Considering the 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' factors that might be present here; issues of students' cultural or social capital are important to consider, in terms of possessing pre-requisite inter-personal resources such as the language, maturity, conduct, knowledge, skills, and educational background to hold a conversation with their course leader.

At the time of categorising participants' accounts of inter-personal relations and the relationship with identity, I was also conscious of an emerging concern over

students' mental wellbeing and self-perception. The following vignette is taken from my professional reflective journal written in parallel to the analytic process, which I felt connected this research with my professional practice as Bleakley's notion of *research as action* introduced in chapter two.

Reflective memo, July 2017

I feel compelled to write a memo that reflects and summarises on a theme that is becoming very prevalent in my professional practice, in particular when I have run academic development workshops on student-staff partnership recently for staff. The issue of students' social, emotional, and mental health is arising across all of the discussions within the workshops, even when the topics of conversation aren't necessarily related to mental health.

For instance, during a staff-facing student engagement workshop in the division of service management (relating to case study two), this issue of staff having to provide emotional support to many more students than they are used to, came up very early on in the session.

Yesterday at a different workshop I delivered on 'changing mindsets', academic staff were also extensively discussing the challenge they are facing in the increasing numbers and severity of mental health issues, causing a barrier for students to embrace risk, experiment – indeed some of the workshop content was around perception of failure and mistakes – which can compound anxiety for students when credits and modules are high stakes – and costly in terms of tuition fees, and in terms of employability. This led to a plenary in both sessions around societal pressures, and tendencies by staff and students to 'play it safe' in times of adversity, anxiety, and

austerity. It got me thinking about partnership, and the associated conditions that are present/ or necessary for 'partnership' to flourish.

Whilst the reflection I have included here digresses somewhat from the theme of identity and emotion I interpreted from the data, I felt it important to represent the wider attention being given to some students' declining social, emotional and mental health, and the associated emotional caregiving on the part of staff. I decided to include this reflection as it contributes situationally to this analysis, and to think about the potential implications of students' and staffs' emotional wellbeing in the context of this study.

To summarise, this sub-category has focused on the nature and impact of inter-personal interactions, and their importance to the relationship between staff and student partners. More broadly, it was evident that positive interactions enabled student participants to feel they belonged to a collective effort, that they were appreciated by the other partners, and that they had a sense of valued contribution. Staff participants recognised the importance of the inter-personal level interactions; however, their focus was on their expectations of students' interactions, and less so on reflecting on their role in the interactions.

### 4.4.3 Extra-personal

Elements in the data that related identity to emotion, but that were beyond the personal domain were categorised as extra-personal. These elements were seen to have an effect on participants' identity and/ or emotion, yet were mostly outside of their control. Three levels of external influential elements were found, at the level of the 'course or department', the 'institution', and at the level of 'society'. The sub-category extra-personal sees an explicit link between the individual participants and many of the situated factors revealed in the situational analysis of each case study. Table 4.3 illustrates how these factors surfaced in the categories and codes generated from second step axial coding.

| Core Category: Identity and Emotion | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Category** | **Code** | **Examples** |
| Extra-personal | Course/ department level | Feeling concern that proposed staff cuts will mean combining more and more students into large groups on generic modules, which will negatively impact the students and staff (Robert) |
| | | The problem you suffer when any team grows when scaling up, is that you lose so much; at small scale you can build relationships, but at larger scale both sides suffer (Jennifer) |
| | | Students need to understand how all the modules on the course inter-relate; students feel confused about what course content is relevant and necessary, and what is not (first-year students) |
| | | The second-year placement gives you a 'wakeup call'; it's really exciting and helps students to see the relevance of what they learnt in the first-year (final-year students) |
| | | Students get frustrated with conflicting messages from different tutors, there is a perception that the course team does not share the same educational values (final-year students) |

| Category | Code | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Extra-personal | Course/ department level | When working in a close relationship with students it becomes a bit harder, because of the time and emotional investment; and students and colleagues who are not close become even more distant (Amanda)<br><br>When I was working as an SLTA in the Business School I felt the difference between mature and young students, the younger students were like 'of course I can do x' or 'why are you teaching me this' (Nicole) |
| Extra-personal | Institutional level | Feelings of sadness about working in a dysfunctional organisation; having to separate out the day job - working together with colleagues and students, from the irritants of organisational politics (Robert)<br><br>Student perception is that the whole university has a laid-back attitude towards non-attendance; the university should be less tolerant, and have some sort of penalty system (first-year students)<br><br>The university obviously needs more students in larger cohorts for financial viability, but students are frustrated by large group sizes (final-year students) |

| Category | Code | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Extra-personal | Institutional level | I think what is missing is technology training for lecturers; that's why students aren't confident, because if they need help, but the lecturers don't know the answers then the student starts to doubt themselves (Nicole)<br><br>Students and staff need to have pride in the place, in their institution; I find that difficult when I feel disillusioned that my institution doesn't trust academics to design and deliver courses (Robert) |
| Extra-personal | Societal level | Managerialism and economic models of HE are the antitheses of partnership; I regret that higher education is still very hierarchical (Robert)<br><br>Students should be treated as young professionals (first-year students)<br><br>The course needs to prepare students for the reality of the job market; the employability factor is driving student concern (final-year students)<br><br>The feeling overwhelming me is that students and their parents want value for money; I am feeling under threat and constant scrutiny by the consumer culture (Robert) |

| Code | Category | Examples |
|------|----------|----------|
| Extra-personal | Societal level | Students can bring a new perspective, they are a new generation, it's to do with how they see the world, and their ability to be more involved (Amanda) |

Table 4.3: Axial coding table illustrating 'extra-personal'

Within this sub-theme, the extra-personal elements discussed by participants appeared to manifest in inner pressures, such as worrying about the future, external scrutiny, and judgements made by other people or groups. The major factor that all staff participants described was the continual increase in workload, coupled with retraction of resources and funding, resulting in stress and overwhelm. For the students, concerns about knowing what to do in assessments, and future career direction were two of the main extra-personal factors affecting their emotional determination.

At a course level, the external factors affecting participants' identities at an emotional level contrasted between students and staff. For students, particularly first-years, they appeared to feel vulnerable because they didn't understand why elements of the course content were designed in certain ways, such as combinations of core and optional modules, and assessment types; resulting in feeling more reticent about the course content and its relevance to them. However, the second years had recently returned from a professional placement module, and the consensus within my classroom observation among these students was that the placement helped to contextualise the subjects studied in the first-year, and how it had prepared them for the workplace. Similarly, the final-year student participants were able to reflect on the majority of their undergraduate course, and explained that they had increased in confidence, and understood what the course team had tried to achieve in preparing their cohort for employment. Across the three cohorts of participants, the students

commented they felt the course team perhaps had divergent educational values, interpreting this as a lack of course team cohesion.

As a department lead, Jennifer described the challenge of needing to increase the number of SLTA student partners, to meet the demands of an increasing number of staff needing support with technologies. However, she spoke of her sense of loss when scaling up this partnership, as it became harder for her to build the strong interpersonal relationships that she had with the first SLTA cohort of six.

At the level of the institution, in the SLTA case study, working in partnership revealed to Nicole the inner workings and inner politics within the department, and at a university level. Nicole described that her experience as a partner helped her understanding of local structures, the reasons behind decisions, the bigger picture, how it all fitted together. Feeling a part of that decision making and planning process helped Nicole to realise that, despite being exposed to some of the politics and deficiencies that exist at the university level, she could better understand the functions of learning technologies staff and their role within the institution; in turn, helping Nicole to figure out how her role fitted within the system.

The students in the learning and teaching partnership case study described frustrations with the institution and the perception that it took a 'laissez faire' attitude towards student attendance. The first-years in particular voiced their opinion that attendance should affect module grades, and that this was exacerbated by the fact that first-year grades do not count towards the final undergraduate degree classification.

When considering the impact of societal attitudes, discourses, or agendas, the perspective that university should provide 'value for money', and promise a 'graduate level job' resulted in a conscious tension for Robert. As course leader, he explained that he internalised this pressure as stress, leaving him feeling like

he could never meet the expanding expectations of students, their parents, and other stakeholders who make high expectations and demands of higher education. Amanda on the other hand described feeling exhilarated by partnership and the potential in society for authentic change, when diverse groups and different generations work together to find new solutions to existing problems.

**4.5 Summary**

The three preceding sections in this chapter have presented the key findings, relating in 4.1 and 4.2 to the mapping of elements found through situational analysis, the conceptual framing of partnership trajectories in 4.3, and the interconnectedness of identity and emotion in partnership in 4.4. The voices of participants interspersed through this chapter have illustrated the nuances of their experience, and the subjective meanings drawn from their accounts of being a member in partnership. Carrying out research observations provided contextualising information, and helped me to understand the rich and complex dynamics within and surrounding the course-based partnership. Writing research reflections enabled a critical and creative window within which to contemplate, interpret, and revisit the data over several iterations of analysis, to stay close to the data and identify emerging themes.

The next chapter provides the necessary discussion of findings, where I return to the professional concern prompting this enquiry and the research questions. The discussion will draw upon theoretical and pedagogical perspectives to make sense of the findings, in light of the literature presented in chapter two.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

This study was designed to investigate a professionally situated concern surrounding the complexity of the student-staff relationship in higher education. Using the lens of students as partners, I explored the experiences of students and staff involved in higher education partnerships, recognising the situated nature of partnerships, and the potential influences of the contextual whole. Mapping the major elements, discourses, and discursive constructions found within the two partnerships studied revealed complexities, dependencies and contradictions that will be discussed in this chapter. Situational analysis enabled this research to examine what structures, conditions, constructions and actions co-constitute the situations of partnership, rather than viewing these as merely outside of, or influencing from afar. Naturalistic enquiry was used alongside situational analysis to enquire into the perspectives of the different persons present, and the discursive constructions circulating within and between participants in the situation. The analytic methods of constructivist grounded theory revealed issues of inclusivity, implicit expectations, human needs in relationships, and the inherent emotions tied to individual identities. Acknowledging my position as an insider-researcher was integral to this study, and explicitly incorporating my reflective voice and interpretation became another form of action comprising the partnership situations.

This chapter will provide a discussion of the findings presented in chapter four, focusing on the interpreted meanings theorised from the data. Incorporating cross-comparison analysis from across three components: 1) the partnership situation, 2) partnership trajectories, and 3) the role of identity and emotion, this chapter revisits each research question in turn and provides insights into the significance of the results, and how this study makes an original contribution to scholarship and literature in the field of students as partners. Consideration is given to the scope, limitations, and the generalisability of findings, along with vital reflections on the methodological processes and decisions. Using the

analysis and evaluation of evidence gathered in this study, this chapter considers how these discoveries are of relevance to key members of the higher education community, and concludes with a consideration to the implications for practitioners, policy makers, students, and professional services colleagues who are involved in current, or planning for future, partnership initiatives.

## 5.1 Findings in relation to the research questions

The central aim of this study was to investigate concerns identified and arising from my own professional practice surrounding the complexities in learning and teaching relationships, utilising the concept of students as partners. The findings in chapter four provided qualitative interpretations from others' experiences of such relationships in order to address the three main research questions (RQ), and in relation to existing literature in the field.

### 5.1.1 RQ1. How were the partnerships negotiated, shaped and conducted?

The nature of each partnership was found to be highly defined by the context in which it was situated, and crucially by the individual staff members involved. At the point of inception, the staff members in both case studies were the catalysts, defining the overarching rationale for how the relationship would operate. Staff members used their professional influence to steer the project, with students being 'brought on board' through forms of recruitment (to the project) or introduction (to the course). It was difficult to avoid the fact that across the findings, forms of control resided at a majority of times with the staff, and ultimately within the confines of institutional authority. The power to *negotiate* therefore, was unevenly distributed between staff and student partners, despite the desires expressed to empower students to become active agents in the respective processes of each case study.

Individual and institutional power and status dimensions were distinct features of each partnership, revealing observable traces of asymmetry between the staff, and the students co-opted into partnership. Paradoxically, the staff partner participants identified feelings of asymmetry, through subordination and

suppression manifest in institutional norms and treatment of staff. Contributing factors included top-down edicts, 'ridiculous manuals telling me how to do my job' (Robert), and conflicting inter-departmental politics on the threats posed by SLTA student partners occupying jobs traditionally held by staff. These, and the substantial range of discursive constructions circulating within the partnerships studied had deeply pervasive effects on the *shaping* of each partnership. The replication of traditional hierarchies such as adult/ authority/ expert vs. youth/ neophyte/ inexpert manifested most saliently in the data as the recognition of certain 'gaps', such as age/ generation, expectations, experience, and maturity gaps. Working actively to acknowledge and address such gaps, such as through collective reflection and individual reflexivity, was found to be a pro-active way to recalibrate the roles automatically assumed by staff and students, and contributed to constructively moving forward through the course of the partnership trajectory (in figure 4.3).

Despite the predetermination of power distance and authority positions in each partnership (see Appendix H), the congruent features experienced by student partners were collegiality, respect, and recognition. For the SLTA student participant, this involved feeling valued as a team member, and being enabled to contribute as a semi-equal to the existing dynamic. For the course-based student participants, being able to trust the tutors, and being spoken to with care and dignity was highly regarded and imbued their partnership experience. Instances in which the course-based students had experienced antithetical partnership interactions, such as being admonished, or receiving inconsistent treatment from different tutors, exposed contradictions in course-team cohesion. Comparatively, the SLTA student partner described feeling distant and subordinate to the academic colleagues she came into contact with (compared with the learning technologists) which could be explained by the distributed nature of the project and infrequent interactions with academics which led to fewer opportunities to build rapport and trust. Crucially, the chance to interact frequently and engage in mutual dialogue increased students' feelings of involvement and likelihood that partnership was being *conducted*.

*5.1.2 RQ2. What were the effects on personal and professional identities?*

Conceptualised as a mutually reinforcing cycle (figure 4.4), the findings demonstrated that whilst active involvement in partnership did have an effect on individuals' identity formation, the influence of individuals' identities on the partnership was of equal significance to report. The data showed that the students built their identity around their transition, reflecting on who they were (in prior education, or as younger self) in relation to who they are now. Indicating the salience of *becoming*, for the SLTA student this centred on 'becoming more professional' in her partner role, through gaining workplace understandings alongside 'insider' knowledge of the university functions usually hidden from student view. For the course-based students, identity was expressed and inextricably linked to transition, and the emotional processes involved in adjusting to their nascent academic identity. From a temporal viewpoint, students articulated their identity as a first-year, or final-year, in relation to their future adult self; with some students indicating this through phrases such as feeling like they were 'being treated like children', or needing to 'man-up'. Additional accomplishments which contributed to students' sense of (be)coming of age involved gaining professional experience through the work placement opportunity, receiving positive and constructive feedback on their academic work, actively being able to contribute to academic discussions in taught sessions, and interacting in a respectful dialogue with tutors and peers.

For the staff participants, identity was suffused by previous careers and life experiences, and deeply intertwined with their current practice and craft of being a teacher, or a staff developer. A sense of *becoming* in teaching might generally be more associated with new, and early career teachers, however, at mid- and late-career status, the staff participants described their desire to engage, try new methods, and to progress their practice, providing their source of motivation to pursue partnerships with students. Conversely, professional identity came under threat in relation to institutional scrutiny, managerialism and cooperation, when staff felt their professional judgement went under the spotlight.

Research question two explicitly focused attention on individual identity development as a result of involvement in partnership, yet across the data the acute presence of emotions could not be ignored. At three different levels of attention (intra-personal, inter-personal, and extra-personal) the involvement of emotions appeared to either regulate or disrupt relations, revealing that emotions were an intrinsic aspect of the partnerships studied. The need to incorporate space for collective reflection was evident in the transforming phase of partnership trajectories, which helped to create a stimulating and emotionally positive environment, contributing to participants' wellbeing and ability to work and learn effectively in partnership.

*5.1.3 RQ3. How is partnership experienced in different circumstances?*

The context and background of each of the two partnerships in this study were deliberately divergent in scope in order to enable a comparison of the similarities and differences found in each situation. The Student Learning Technology Ambassadors (SLTA) case presented a project-focused example of partnership, whereby student partners were recruited and employed to work alongside professional learning technologists. The course-based example, highlighting 'students as partners in learning and teaching', presented a pedagogically-focused example of the relationship between a course leader and the undergraduate cohort. The use of situational analysis to acknowledge the surrounding ecologies of each case of partnership (see figure 3.1), enabled this study to bring into focus the broader landscape in which both were operating. The analysis revealed challenges common to each situation, such as the negative consequences of the lack of time to invest in relationships, low levels of institutional resources, reductions in funding, and materials constraints. Additional features common to each partnership were the phases experienced in partnership trajectories, in particular the crucial phase of establishing positive social relations through creating student-staff and student-student connections, building trust, and setting purposeful intentions.

The discursive constructions present in each case study gave an indication of the way partnership was conceptualised. In the SLTA example, constructions (by both students and staff) of students as children, and sometimes as inexpert and unreliable, pointed towards a legacy of hierarchy present in their enactment of partnership. This unfolded into uncertainty about the identity of student partners and whether they were staff or students, or how they should be viewed in a new hybrid role. In the course-based example, several constructions were present and influencing the learning and teaching relationship, such as that students want value for money, and expect education as a resource; the staff member felt disenfranchised by the institutional culture, and was viewed by students as trying to pursue partnership on his own, without a cohesive course team approach.

Partnership ideals were often implicit assumptions and expectations which were not necessarily transparent to participants. Values typically associated with students as partners, such as Healey, Flint and Harrington's (2014) *trust, courage, plurality, responsibility, authenticity, honesty, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment* were implied throughout the data but most not explicitly discussed. Trust was by far the biggest concern for staff participants in the SLTA case study, accentuated through the employment of student partners who then have a job description, accountability, and are expected to act in certain ways alongside professional learning technologists. The staff and students' combined regard of reciprocity was more prevalent in the course-based partnership, with emphasis on the expectation that group members should be physically present, actively participate in discussion, exchange ideas, and support one another collegially.

The common value expressed by student participants across both case studies was 'care'. The narrative of care was associated with empathy, in particular that they wished staff to understand certain aspects of their personal situation such as life outside of university. Some student participants went to their staff partners to talk about housing issues, incidences of discrimination, academic

struggles, or low confidence levels for example. This indicates that for students, a partnership relationship with staff can often be more than simply the functional aspects of 'the job' or purely academic aspects of the course.

## 5.2 Theory building

In this section, I conceptualise partnership as a metaconstruct, consisting of three components interpreted from the situational analysis and naturalistic enquiry. Taking each component individually, the table below sets out the definition and outline of my application of each:

| Key component | Definition | Application |
|---|---|---|
| The partnership situation | The recognition and integration of socio-cultural, political, discursive, symbolic and organisational elements constituting the partnerships studied. | Locating the partnership within the broader system; acknowledging macro-level influences. |
| The partnership trajectory | The concept of trajectory (plural used in chapter four findings to acknowledge multiple phases and directions the partnerships took in this study) takes a journeying, or life-course perspective on the evolving nature of partnerships. | Conceptualising the process of partnership; acknowledging co-dependencies within the collective activity that can affect partnership outcomes at the local level. |

| Key component | Definition | Application |
|---|---|---|
| The role of identity and emotion | The identification of the role of emotion in learning and teaching relationships, as connected to individual and collective identities. The role of partnerships as facilitative of emotionally receptive practices. | Located at a micro-level, the socio-emotional factors for individuals (intra), between individuals (inter), and beyond individuals (extra), and their effects. |

Table 5.1: Key partnership components, definitions and applications

*5.2.1 Key components and their integration with existing theoretical works*
This section explains the key components in greater depth, and their relationship to existing theoretical works found in educational and social science literatures.

The partnership situation is a recognition and integration of socio-cultural, political, discursive, symbolic and organisational elements constituting the partnerships studied. Rendering what was present in the situation in the form of maps provided cartographic illustrations, such as the perpetual relations of power in the positional maps (see Appendix H), and the ecological work of the social worlds/ arenas maps (see Appendix E). These types of diagrams helpfully revealed complexities, dynamics and dependencies that were otherwise hidden, implicit, or that had remained unquestioned; for example, the pervasive influence of institutional agendas on the Student Learning Technology Ambassador (SLTA) project, and the political discourses and institutional hierarchies omnipresent in the course-based learning and teaching partnership.

Viewing the partnership situation develops two *ecological* notions of partnership. The first, constitutive of a partnership ecosystem, such as the complex network of relationships and interconnections forming the unique

partnership. The second, that partnership is situated within and influenced by the broader organisational ecosystem. Taylor and Bovill (2018) explored a theorisation of student-staff co-created curricula as an 'ecology of participation'. Surfacing the fluid and dynamic nature of process work such as in curricula co-creation, their ecology analogy symbolises *an always emergent, never finished, relational and ethically experimental process*, one which *speaks directly to being and acting, to reason and emotion, to thinking and doing, not as separate acts but as intrinsic to human becomings in relation* (p 126). Kek *et al*., (2019) envision an 'agile ecology for learning' in which student engagement and curricula is conceptualised more holistically, in a way that

> moves away from institutional and disciplinary convention that often still shapes staff reality in important ways. In other words, it requires us to imagine a blurring of such conventional boundaries so that both staff and student creativity can be harnessed and indeed leveraged, and student-centeredness truly moves centre stage. (p. 139)

Using their 'agile ecology for learning' framework to analyse a students-as-partners pilot project, Kek *et al*. identified four systems that could effectively leverage creativity (the focus of their study): micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems. Across these systems students and staff were encouraged towards continuous dialogue, informality, academic facilitation as opposed to teaching, and metacognitive reflection on the processual aspects of learning in partnership.

The findings from my own study, and in the two examples of ecological framings within educational literature, suggest that further explorations of ecologies and situatedness would enrich future understandings of partnership. This would provide a practical method for mapping and attending to positionality and relations between students, peers, and staff, as well as other

components manifesting in the ecosystem such as curriculum, assessment, technology, research, administration, and management.

The partnership trajectory. The use of the term trajectory signifies partnership as following a process or journey in a longitudinal manner. The limitation of adopting the notion of a single trajectory in this study was the inference of a necessity to follow an 'ideal' path; however, in reality it was certainly not found to be as straightforward. I highlighted in section 4.3 that I did not always observe a well-ordered or linear trajectory. Sometimes partnerships lingered in one phase, or moved between phases in a non-linear fashion. Fluidity of movement between the phases indicated several transitional points, and individuals within the same partnership were sometimes at different phases or transitions to other partners. Points on the trajectory were not static, and in this study, I did not observe an end point or completion phase. As such, the concept of partnership 'closure' warrants exploration in further studies.

Trajectory, as a construct in educational research, traditionally focuses on individuals, such as students' trajectories on a continuum as they transition into, through, and beyond higher education; or the individual career trajectories of academic and professional services staff. Conceptual parallels with 'life-course' in sociological research have been found to provide a useful framing in terms of higher education trajectories (Haas and Hadjar, 2020). Life-course is a theoretical perspective and approach in the behavioural sciences such as in developmental and social psychology, acknowledging the temporal nature and societal influences on individuals' health, wellbeing, vocation, life-decisions, across their existence. Trajectories in the context of life-course theory are described as a sequence of roles and experiences, made up of transitions which can involve changes in status or identity; and within trajectories are 'turning points', points of substantial change in the direction of a life-course (Elder Jr., Kirkpatrick Johnson and Crosnoe, 2003, p. 3).

Looking at student-staff partnership through the lens of life-course can provide a structured reflection on past or current activity, and help to identify which activities or actions lead to turning points or facilitate collective growth. In this study, actions such as opportunities for informal discussion led to the demonstration of care and empathy, leading to improved trust. This can advance our understanding of the conditions that are shaping partnership successes, and crucially, more explicitly the critical incidents contributing to barriers and perpetuating inequalities. Such reflective action might helpfully respond to several of the five propositions Matthews (2017) sets out for genuine students as partners practice[8], highlighting the continual attention needed in fostering inclusive partnerships. From the perspective of trajectories, it is also conceivable to use a trajectory model to design new actions towards alternative trajectories for the future. Thinking and planning collectively and with intentionality about those practices necessary for effective partnership working will have greater scope to evolve and align partnership to the needs of forthcoming generations of students and staff.

The role of identity and emotion in partnership acknowledges the affective elements and emotional dynamics inherent in learning and teaching relationships. This key component found in the present study of partnerships advocates for an active involvement and responsiveness to individuals' feelings, emotions, and attitudes within social relationships in the educational environment. Disappointingly, scholarly works in the field of students as partners rarely acknowledges the role of emotion, evidenced by a recent literature review (Felten, 2017) which concluded that *[s]ystematic absence in the scholarly literature suggests that emotion is not a commonly studied facet of partnership* (p. 1). The presence and articulation of emotions deep-rooted in the data in this study indubitably steered the analysis and interpretation towards serious consideration of the role of emotion in partnership work. This

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[8] Good practice should aspire to: (1) Foster inclusive partnerships; (2) Nurture power-sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection; (3) Accept partnership as a process with uncertain outcomes; (4) Engage in ethical partnerships; (5) Enact partnership for transformation. (Matthews, 2017, p. 2)

corresponds with a small number of more recent empirical studies which have encountered emotional presence in partnership, and how the incorporation of emotion work can support resilience and wellbeing (Hill *et al.*, 2019) as well as fostering appreciation and the sense of feeling accepted and valued (Hermsen *et al.*, 2017).

## 5.3 Reflecting on emotions, complexity and reflexivity

> It is now widely acknowledged that the researcher's values, feelings, culture and history shape and define the enquiry, and that research is often a personal matter (Wilkins, 1993), cited in Herman (2010, p. 283)

Research is emotional and embodied; my own research journey has proven this. From the choice of enquiry topic, to my quest to find a methodology congruent with my professional and ethical motivations, and to the ways in which I have emotionally interpreted the data, I cannot (and do not wish to) escape the emotional matters entwined in this research. Insider-researcher positionality presented me with many benefits, such as an enhanced rapport and capacity for empathy with participants, as well as personal and professional growth directly beneficial to my educational developer role within my institution. However, the emotional investment associated with insider-research presented challenges, concurring with Ross (2017), to do with managing boundaries, self-disclosure, and reflexively recognising my influencing role in this enquiry. In relation to understanding critical and feminist research practice, I found Letherby's (2003, p. 6) remarks particularly salient:

> When we enter a field we make footprints on the land and are likely to disturb the environment. When we leave we may have mud on our shoes, pollen on our clothes. [...] Thus, when doing research (fieldwork) we need to be sensitive to respondents and to the

relevance of our own presence in their lives and in the research process.

My doctoral research journey and associated student identity added to the complex nature of this insider-research. I was investigating students as partners through several difficult periods of institutional change, such as successive departmental restructures, voluntary redundancies, and wholesale curriculum reform. The research spanned four and a half years, two dedicated to fieldwork, one year spent on the analysis, and the remainder writing up. I was simultaneously immersed as a part-time doctoral student, and a full-time professional in learning and teaching, sometimes experiencing dissonance where the two traditionally conceived 'student'/ 'staff' identities conflicted. Relatively early in the fieldwork stage, I collaborated with two students as partners scholars in non-European contexts to explore in greater reflective depth the identity dissonances we had each experienced. We discovered a 'partnership threshold', an implicit personal boundary where our ethos of partnership contradicted the traditional hierarchies in which we continued to function (Mercer-Mapstone, Marquis and McConnell, 2018). This reflexive process has taught me that, whilst traditional academic writing typically 'writes out' the personal from publications or research, partnership demands contributions that are inextricably personal.

When bringing together literature on emotional reflexivity and emotions in social research, Lumsden, Bradford and Goode (2019) citing Bloch (2002, p. 113) found that *emotions and academic research are more often than not viewed as 'incompatible entities'*. Similarly, in the learning and teaching domain emotion circulates in the relational space, and is present for individuals, and in communal learning. Yet emotion is frequently under-discussed in pedagogic literature and arguably a feared notion within academia, leading to divisions between what is regarded as 'rational' as opposed to 'emotional' orientations towards knowledge (Burke, 2015). Neoliberal imperatives that have flooded

higher education in the forms of employability, excellence, commercialisation and competition, reinforce notions of individual performance and rationality (Furedi, 2010), resulting in uncomfortable tensions for staff who do not wish to suppress aspects of care and emotion from practice. The competitive aspects of the current academic environment present a potentially unresolvable dilemma for staff trying to balance their personal philosophy, or *Haltung*, with career progression and professional recognition. This situation is a particularly salient point of reflection in my ongoing role as an educational developer in a learning and teaching department, which is focused on academic and staff development.

## 5.4 Conclusion

The previous chapter provided a discussion of the key findings, in relation to the research questions, and in view of existing theoretical and pedagogical literatures which helped to make sense of the study and its results. I now move on to present the conclusions I have drawn and the contribution of new knowledge to this field of professional practice and research. A critique of this thesis is provided, considering the scope, limitations, and different approaches I might have taken in light of my retrospective reflections. Furthermore, I shall discuss the implications of this study with particular attention to the significant changes that have occurred across the higher education landscape following the Covid-19 pandemic.

### *5.4.1 Contribution to the field*

There are three key contributions from this study which I believe have value in terms of the practice of teaching, academic development, and pedagogic research. 1) the conceptual model I proposed (in figure 4.3) of partnership trajectories provides an applied tool that can be used to plan, monitor, and reflect on partnership in practice; 2) the identification of the role of identity and emotion in partnership, specifically the call to expand current literature in view of acknowledging the role of identity and emotion in partnerships (see section 5.2.1); and 3) the use of situational analysis methodology in an insider

organisational study, exemplifying a novel research method which maps elements and encapsulates the situated nature of activity.

Whilst situational analysis is a unique and well documented strand of constructivist grounded theory, there are very few studies in educational research that have been published using a situational analysis approach. I would advocate other qualitative educational enquiries consider a situational analysis, particularly to encompass a critical overview and understanding of the social world elements which are contributing to and shaping the phenomenon in question. Pertinent to the rising call for decolonial practices in higher education (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu, 2018), I believe situational analysis meets this call:

> With roots in radical democratic pragmatism, broadly conceived, it
>
> engages contemporary feminist, antiracist, social justice,
>
> decolonising, queer, and related concerns. (Clarke, 2018)

### 5.4.2 Scope and limitations of this study

Reflecting on the limitations of this research involves recognising the decisions made during the process and how they have shaped the findings and conclusions. The formulation of research aims and questions, the sampling and data collection methods, the proposed findings and their relevance have undoubtedly influenced by my position in the research, as has my professional role, my cultural background and implicit assumptions. I described in chapter three, rather than 'bracket out' my experiences and understandings, in line with situational analysis I intentionally incorporated my position as an insider-researcher, which I feel gave strength to the insights and situatedness of findings. Rather than 'evaluate' the benefits of partnership and to whom, which I am often asked to report on in my educational role, my aim through this naturalistic enquiry was to surface the tensions, nuances and complications which so often go unspoken in evaluative work.

Aspects of this study could have been different, such as the use of alternative methodologies and these would no doubt have yielded other possible outcomes. For example, when designing the research, I looked at phenomenological methods which would have focused closely on the narratives and life worlds of the participants. I felt however that I wished to draw on more of the contextualising elements representing the environment in which the partnerships were situated. I was drawn to situational analysis methodology for its explicit sensitivity to *capturing complexities rather than simplifying,* and *encouraging attention towards marginalised, silenced or hidden aspects* (Clarke, Friese and Washburn, 2018, p. 14) Furthermore, supplementing the analysis with the cartographic methods of mapping, and reflexive writings through memoing, enabled me to locate myself and my role within the research, whilst conducting a multi-case enquiry.

There were limitations, as there are in any study. These included the time available to conduct empirical research, not just my own time constraints, but that of my participants. Due to the nature of this professional doctorate, I conducted the research alongside my full-time academic role, which at times impacted on the breadth of perspectives I was able to include and analyse. More cases of partnership could have been included, or more participants, and the study could have been strengthened by the ability to revisit each case study over a longitudinal timeframe. However, I decided to focus the time available on gaining an in-depth understanding of the participants involved, and by analysing situational elements, supporting documentary materials, and contextualising information.

Due to the scale of this study, which included 15 individual participants across two case studies of partnership practice, the findings offer a subjective representation of partnership within a single institution. Given my focus on the situated nature of partnership, and particularly in response to research question three (*how is partnership experienced in different circumstances?)* it is appropriate to acknowledge that the findings and conclusions I have presented

are not necessarily generalisable to other partnership contexts. However, I believe the integrity and validity of the data and analysis has surfaced three key aspects and issues that are both original and of significance to further studies in this field. Specifically, I have presented the conceptual framework of *partnership trajectories* as a practical tool for collaborative reflection by groups pursuing partnerships of their own. In order to continue to test the integrity of the outcomes of this doctoral study, I have already begun to discuss the findings with students and staff whom I work in partnership with, in an attempt to respond to Bleakley's (1999) call for reflection-as-action raised in chapter two, section 2.5.2 in which I discussed the role of *praxis* in higher education.

### 5.4.3 Implications of this research

The results of this research have a range of implications for different groups of stakeholders, including students, academic and professional services colleagues, institutional policy makers such as heads of departments, senior managers, educational researchers, and academic developers.

For students, if they are working or learning in partnership already, the affordances of collective critical reflection using the partnership trajectories framework across the six phases has the potential to raise awareness and bring challenging concepts into practice. Through increasing consciousness of the enabling and destabilising factors that contribute to their partnership experience, students would be able to develop their sense of agency, advocate for change, and challenge perpetuating practices such as marginalisation, misrepresentation and in-group behaviours. However, for students who have not yet participated, or who are already excluded, I anticipate that introducing the trajectories framework to staff will productively prompt staffs' reflection on those practices which enhance or diminish opportunities for students to become more inclusively involved. This study did not explicitly address the experiences and implications of partnership from the perspective of neurodiverse participants. Attention to the inclusion or exclusion of students with specific learning differences such as dyslexia, or those identifying on the autism

spectrum, would be an important area for further consideration in view of the reliance in partnerships on mainstream forms of communication such as dialogue and writing, and implicit non-verbal interactions.

<u>For academic staff</u> who wish to bring a partnership approach into their educational practice, the findings and tools that I have presented through this study offer additional insights based on the real-world experiences of students and staff in partnership. Becoming attuned to the complexities, and the emotional elements present in the learning and teaching arena, will support staff to build enhanced relationships with students, addressing appeals in contemporary literatures for compassionate pedagogies (Gibbs, 2017) and relationship-rich higher education (Felten and Lambert, 2020). Through the use of the partnership trajectory framework, I anticipate that academic colleagues will become cognisant to the responsible actions that they can take to enhance authentic partnerships with students, as well as the inhibiting and perpetuating practices that can result in exclusion or inequality of opportunity.

<u>For professional services</u> colleagues, working in partnership towards the co-creation and co-delivery of university services is an increasing area of interest. This ranges from library provision, student support departments, and learning technologies, to the involvement of students in quality assurance processes. Across all domains, the contribution of the findings from this study will provide staff with tools that encourage the consideration of inclusive recruitment practices, enhanced team working, and skills and attribute development that can be incorporated into staff and student training when preparing for and undertaking work in partnership. The tools I would propose, such as using the trajectories concept, would support staff in addressing and making transparent some of the arising challenges and complexities, such as power dynamics, professional standards, or unarticulated expectations in the working relationship.

For institutional policy makers, including senior managers, the findings from this study point toward the need for a clearer understanding of the complexities inherent in student-staff partnership, and an appreciation of the time and resource investment needed to support effective work in this area. There are cross-cutting implications for example from human resourcing (i.e., recruitment, working conditions, staff development), to structural and systemic processes (i.e., quality processes such as course validation, committee meetings, student-staff forums, virtual learning environments). The outcomes provided from this research are not yet directly aimed at institutional policy makers, however these artefacts could form the basis of briefing papers, case studies of practice, or recommendations. Senior and departmental managers should be encouraged to recognise the time and effort that is necessary for colleagues to invest in order to sustain effective partnerships with students, as the human cost of this work is significant. With partnership increasingly featuring in university strategies and mission statements, and in order to demonstrate commitment to this important area of university work, strategists need to be more thoroughly attuned to implications concerning complexities and socio-emotional dynamics, and cultivate a culture of authenticity at every level.

> Values such as respect, empathy, equality, and solidarity should be at
> the core of future higher education institutions and their missions.
> (UNESCO IESALC, 2021, p. 37)

For educational research. The findings generated by this study begin to address some of these questions which have resulted from the process of comparing and connecting the three partnership components identified (see figure 5.1). However, further research is needed in order to explore the relevance and implications of partnerships, ideally in different types of departmental arrangements, and in contrasting higher education institutions. In order to advance the possibilities of constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2014, p. 218) encourages researchers to visualise relationships between categories and

themes; this process provided the catalyst in my conception of partnership trajectories. Exploring the inter-relationship between the three distinct components of partnership in the Venn diagram in figure 5.1 has prompted additional reflection on the connections and dependencies, as well as further research questions, which could extend this thesis into future avenues for research. For example, how does each component influence another, which components have contingencies, or are dominant in terms of power and scope? The resulting questions are listed below figure 5.1.
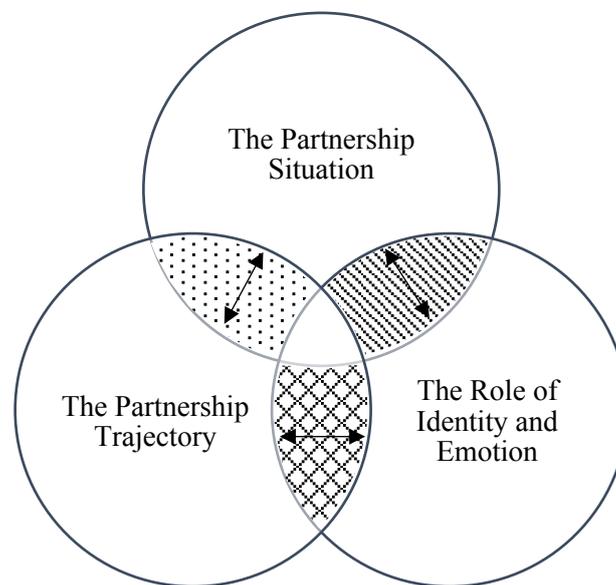


Figure 5.1: Inter-connections between partnership components

Questions arising from the consideration of inter-connections between partnership components, for future enquiry:

a) How do the structural situational elements co-constituting a partnership affect its trajectory? Who experiences these effects, and in what ways?

b) How might the trajectory of a partnership influence transformation at the organisational level? What structural changes can, and can't, be influenced by partnership, and why?

c) How does being a part of a partnership trajectory influence individual identity and emotional experience?

d) How do individuals influence partnership trajectories, and in what ways do these influences affect a partnerships' outcomes?

e) How do individuals influence structural change, and in what ways can these transformations be seen in organisational arrangements?

f) How do the structural situational elements co-constituting a partnership affect the individuals involved? In what ways does the organisation regard individuals as agents of change?

These questions may form the basis of my own future educational research and professional enquiry.

For academic developers, the implications of these findings impact on the type of enhanced development and support which could be offered to academic or professional service departments. First, informing colleagues of the benefits of co-constituted student-staff teams will advocate for increased consideration to the experiences of students in pedagogic and service design. Enriching educational development practices by paying attention to a more diverse range of voices speaks to the call for promulgating socially-just pedagogies (Ruksana Osman and David J Hornsby, 2017; Braidotti *et al.*, 2018), and inclusive academies (Stewart and Valian, 2018). Educational developers can offer third-party support in the case of introducing diverse pedagogic approaches such as critical, radical, relational and social pedagogies into more traditionally conceptualised academic practices, particularly into professional development courses such as the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Having an enhanced understanding of the complexities of partnership puts educational developers in a good position to facilitate group reflection on such challenging issues, and in professional conversations with colleagues to think about the ways these might be addressed in context.

*5.4.4 Implications in light of the Covid-19 pandemic*

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the temporary closure of all educational establishments in England, beginning in March 2019. Since this time, and through successive national lockdown periods, almost all university teaching has been delivered online using collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams. The pandemic caused uncertainty in the higher education sector on many levels, for individuals (staff, students, prospective students, graduates) and for institutions, for example in terms of reduced financial stability, and the necessity to rapidly design and deliver remote teaching and online learning. At the time of writing the concluding chapters of this thesis, new 'hybrid' models of learning and teaching were shaping pedagogic discourses, and in emerging news media some commentators called this situation a 'revolution in educational delivery', and 'a new educational paradigm' (Dolton, 2020; Kandri, 2020).

Questions continue to be raised as to what the student experience will look like by 2030 and beyond; often these questions centre on how technology is reshaping the landscape for flexible, asynchronous, interactive, 'on-demand' learning (Maguire, Dale and Pauli, 2020), which I believe have serious implications for future partnership working. Departing from traditionally static, uni-directional, teacher-paced environments, the call is being made for higher-level education to more adequately prepare young people to face uncertainty, in the face of future political, economic and environmental global challenges (UNESCO IESALC, 2021).

The implications of this study become magnified in the context of 'hybridity', 'flexibility' and 'on-demand' learning in higher education, for several reasons:

Establishing authentic relationships in exclusively online or hybrid environments. This study involved two case studies which were based on the face-to-face model of partnership, and the findings within the partnership trajectory framework evidenced the importance of establishing well-functioning

relationships. During the early stages, opportunities for informality, building connection, trust and intention were integral to the groups' effectiveness, and feelings of inclusion. When partnerships begin online, the opportunity to design-in these informal mutual spaces for conversation become vital. Further research that investigates the efficacy of online student-staff partnerships is needed, and the partnership trajectories framework could be used as a tool to set up, monitor, and reflect on participants' experiences.

Students' social, emotional and mental health. The findings and discussion chapters relating to identity and emotion explored the role of emotion in learning and teaching partnerships. I made the proposal that emotion be considered as an integral element of the learning and teaching experience, to address the lack of attention and acknowledgement of emotions in academic development literatures. Student mental health, which includes social and emotional wellbeing, is rapidly becoming an area of potential crisis in higher education, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (The Insight Network, 2019; Office for National Statistics, 2021). The implications of this study point to the increasing need to develop both students' and staffs' emotional literacies, and bring values such as empathy, respect, and the equalising of power dynamics into learning and teaching discussions. Recognition of the emotional practice of teaching is increasingly supported in the compulsory education sector (Sutton and Wheatley, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005); yet the issue and impact of emotion in higher education teaching is still limited (Hagenauer and Volet, 2014; Mendzheritskaya and Hansen, 2019). This thesis makes an explicit call to bring the topic of emotion into more discussions on higher education academic practices, an appeal especially for those in educational development centres such as where I am positioned.

Staff capacity, workload, emotional load. This study raises sobering implications for academic and professional services staff regarding the required time, availability, emotional investment and energy, if partnering with students is to work well. The call to create and maintain partnerships with students, on

top of an already overwhelmed workload, may for some staff be a step too far. Recent research conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic evidenced a sharp increase in academic staff referrals to occupational health, wellbeing, and counselling services; identifying an 'epidemic' of poor staff mental health in higher education, resulting from excessive workloads, compliance and performance management (HEPI, 2019, 2020). The additional stressors ensuing from the rapid and radical shift to teaching online due to national lockdown have meant learning new technologies and getting to grips with different pedagogic approaches. Finding suitable spaces to teach-from-home, whilst coping with domestic and personal circumstances certainly exacerbated the existing levels of poor wellbeing among staff; a situation that students also find themselves in (NUS, 2020; Accenture, 2021).

Inequalities and disadvantage. The Covid-19 pandemic brought into sharp view existing societal inequalities, such as access to healthcare and social deprivation, with minority groups and people with disabilities facing multiple barriers in accessing essential services. Specific to educational provision, the removal of face-to-face teaching, lack of access to technology and to an adequate study space at home, on top of existing income inequalities, revealed widening learning and attainment gaps across all ages for a significant number of children and young people (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021). This study highlighted an already fragile student 'identity-in-flux', with transition and progression affecting learners emotionally as well as cognitively. Future generations will enter university with considerably different educational experiences, expectations, and graduate prospects. The implications for partnerships in learning and teaching in higher education are extensive – for example involving students in the co-design of curricular that can flexibly adapt to a diverse range of entry levels, mutual discussions about the changing nature of student engagement (online and face to face), the need for staff and students' digital fluency development, and involving students as well as staff in a critical rethink of traditional modes of assessment. Emerging literatures make an appeal to involve students as partners in these reconceptualisations of academic

practices (Whelehan, 2020; Cowell, 2021) including in shaping future institutional policies as well as in more democratic learning and teaching relationships.

*5.4.5 Concluding remarks*

I introduced this thesis with a professional concern, to better understand my relationships with students in the learning and teaching environment. In the process of enquiring into the framing of students as partners, and with the generosity of my participants in sharing their experiences and partnership spaces, I have learnt significantly more than I originally anticipated. I have envisioned the outcome of this thesis as a practical offering, to conceptualise partnership as a journey that inevitably traverses obstacles and hazards, as well as beautiful vistas and vantage points. I have proposed tools that my colleagues might find beneficial in their own practices with students, as well as emotive provocations to prompt critical reflection and reflexivity. This study has shown that further work is needed in order to surface and understand the complexities inherent in learning and teaching relationships, but that my contribution in the form of theoretical and empirical insights offers another voice from the field.

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# Appendix A: Role and institutional context

The University of Brighton is a post-1992 multi-campus university, situated on the south coast of England. A part of the city of Brighton and Hove since 1859, the university started as a School of Art in the kitchens of the Royal Pavilion. Merging with the Brighton College of Technology and Brighton College of Education in the 1970s, Brighton Polytechnic was formed, with an emphasis on professional or vocational qualifications. Polytechnics were granted university status in 1992 and under the Further and Higher Education Act the institution became the University of Brighton. An additional merger with Sussex and Kent Institute of Nursing and Midwifery in 1994 led to a firm establishment of the campus in Eastbourne, alongside the Chelsea College of Physical Education which had already joined the Polytechnic in 1976. The most recent partnership saw the University of Brighton and University of Sussex establish the first medical school in the South East of England outside of London.

The University of Brighton (UoB) is now a member of the University Alliance, which represents large and mid-sized institutions focused on professional and technical qualifications. With over 20,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students, and 2,600 staff, the University is a major employer and partner within the local community in Sussex. Partnership is a significant part of the institutional culture, with a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) set up in 2003 to nurture and reinforce the mutually beneficial relationship between community organisations and the university, involving research, student volunteering and work experience, and knowledge exchange. The current University Strategy 2016-2021: Practical Wisdom centralises 'practice' as a core mode of knowledge creation, underpinned by four institutional values of inclusivity, sustainability, creativity and partnership.

Our students are part of a dynamic, diverse and creative community
that embraces partnership working and that makes a positive
difference to society.

Partnership is stated throughout the mission and values of Practical Wisdom, in
relation to formal partnerships with external organisations, work with
professional bodies and through research partnerships, and between the
institution and students to improve the quality of the educational experience.

Through our partnership with our students we will broaden and
deepen student involvement in decision-making across the university
by developing a student engagement plan and a cooperation
agreement with their Students' Union. We will actively listen to
feedback from our students about their educational experience by
implementing consistent evaluation mechanisms; working with them
on a relentless process of improvement. (p10)

This statement highlights several cross-cutting uses of the term partnership,
such as student involvement in decisions, student engagement, a cooperation
agreement between students and the institution, as well as students giving
feedback in order to improve the quality of education and the student
experience. Enacted through the Education and Student Experience Strategy
2019-2025, led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students),
partnership between students and staff is less visibly articulated in the current
priority area of 'putting students at the heart of everything we do'. Instead,
emphasis is towards student academic success, employability and civic
responsibility, student engagement in their own learning, student involvement
in shaping the wider student experience, and the professional development of
academic teaching staff. Arguably partnership is an approach that students and
staff can adopt in order to improve these areas of student engagement and

involvement. The expression of how, and why, partnership could be used in learning and teaching across institutional strategy documents remains implicit, and on the fringes of mainstreamed pedagogic priorities.

The Learning and Teaching Hub (formerly the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT)), responsible for the implementation of the Education and Student Experience Strategy, is a centrally located academic department working with all Schools and Professional Services. I am one of seven academics employed by the CLT, focussing on higher education learning and teaching development through cross-institutional consultancy and support. The department is responsible for delivering the PGCert in Academic Practice and the UKPSF (United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework) AdvanceHE Fellowship scheme. In 2019, the CLT was involved in an institutional strategic review of the Education and Student Experience infrastructure, with the aim of addressing renewed priorities to support university-wide strategic developments and innovation in learning and teaching. As a result, the CLT has been remodelled to involve an enhanced business partner model of pedagogic consultancy between educational developers and colleagues in Schools. Through the priority area of strengthening student engagement in their own learning and in shaping the wider student experience, my role is to contribute to developing opportunities for students as partners and co-creators of curriculum enhancement, in quality processes, and in learning and teaching (UoB, 2020).

As an educational developer, the approaches I recommend to course teams wishing to encourage student partnership are located both within, alongside or outside of the curriculum. Within class-based teaching, this might include active learning strategies such as enquiry-based or problem-based learning, as well as collaborative and experiential assignments based in real-life or professionally focused scenarios (HEA, 2015). Outside of course-based partnership I have co-led the development of three extra-curricular programmes which involve students as partners. These programmes include: peer assisted learning, where existing undergraduate students are trained typically to voluntarily facilitate

study groups with a small number of first-year students, focusing on course orientation and subject content; graduate internships within the department, involving the annual salaried employment of a UoB graduate to enhance and inform learning and teaching developments from a recent students' perspective; and curriculum advisers, where hourly-paid students take a partner role with the staff on their course to develop activities or resources based on decolonising the curriculum, wellbeing, and inclusive practice. I also hold an international role as a co-chair for the Academic Peer Learning network, a community of practice focused on developing the practice of peer learning, and supporting staff through a shared online space for mutual exchange of ideas. These programmes and practical approaches to partnership frame my position as a researcher of partnership within my institutional context. I have been attentive to the importance of professional self-awareness throughout this doctoral project, through reflection on my reactions and interactions with participants.

# Appendix B: International activities, networks and publications on *students as partners* (non-exhaustive)

| Selection of terms retrieved in searching 'students as partners in..' | Selection of policy & sector guidance incorporating students as partners/ partnership | Selection of dedicated books & chapters on students as partners |
|---|---|---|
| <ul><li>learning</li><li>teaching</li><li>assessment</li><li>curriculum design</li><li>quality</li><li>research</li><li>evaluation</li><li>service design</li><li>community</li><li>supporting students</li><li>pedagogic scholarship</li><li>technology</li><li>enhancement</li><li>knowledge exchange</li></ul> | Department for Education Teaching Excellence Framework<br><br>Office for Students (OfS) Strategy for engaging students in OfS work<br><br>Office for Students (OfS) Student engagement and consultation briefing for providers<br><br>QAA Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Student Engagement<br><br>National Students Survey Core questionnaire 2021<br><br>Advance HE Knowledge Hub Engagement through partnership | BOOK: Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty (Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten, 2014)<br><br>BOOK: An Active Student Participation Companion (Barrineau, Engström and Schnaas, 2019)<br><br>CHAPTER: The Pedagogy of Partnership (Peters and Neary) in *Hopeful Pedagogies in Higher Education* (Seal, 2021)<br><br>CHAPTER: From the 'Micro' to the 'Mega': Toward a Multi-Level Approach to Supporting and Assessing Student-Staff Partnership (Marquis, Black, Guitman, Healy and Woolmer) in *A Handbook for Student Engagement in Higher Education* (Lowe and El Hakim, Eds, 2020)<br><br>CHAPTER: Students as partners in learning (Healey, Bovill and Jenkins) in *Enhancing Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (Lea, 2015)<br><br>CHAPTER: Students as partners: a three-layered approach for enhancement (Brand, Millard, Bartholomew and Chapman) in *Student engagement handbook: Practice in higher education* (Dunne and Owen, Eds, 2013) |
| **Journals dedicated to the scholarship of student partnership within journal scope** | **Selection of journal special issues dedicated to students as partners**<br><br>*International Journal for Academic Development*: Engaging students as | **Selection of dedicated journal articles on students as partners/ partnership in disciplinary or specific contexts**<br><br>A whole cohort approach to working in partnership between students and |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| International Journal for Students as Partners | partners in learning and teaching: Implications for academic development (Vol 21, 2016) | staff: problematising the issues and evaluating the outcomes (Bryson and Callaghan) in *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal* (2021) |
| The Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership & Change | *The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*: Student Engagement and Partnership in Ireland (Special issue in 2022) | Conceptions of students as partners (Matthews, Dwyer, Hine and Turner) in *Higher Education*, 76 (2018) |
| The Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal | *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*: Student engagement: A multidimensional perspective (2018) | Students as partners: Our experience of setting up and working in a student engagement friendly framework (Zdravković, Serdinšek, Sobočan, Bevc, Hojs & Krajnc) in *Medical Teacher*, 40 (2018) |
| | *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* (Vol 4, 2, 2016) Special section: Students as Co-enquirers | Students as partners in evaluation: student and teacher perspectives (Giles, Martin, Bryce & Hendry) in *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 6 (2004) |
| | | A student–staff partnership approach to course enhancement: Principles for enabling dialogue through repurposing subject-specific materials and metaphors (Chilvers, Fox and Bennett) in *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 58 (2021) |
| **Selection of websites providing resources on students as partners**<br><br>https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/student-engagement-through-partnership<br><br>https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/resources/students-as-partners/<br><br>https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/<br><br>https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/the-student-engagement-partnership-tsep | **Communities of practice specialising in students as partners**<br><br>International Institute on Students as Partners<br><br>RAISE Network – Researching, Advancing & inspiring Student Engagement<br><br>RAISE Special Interest Group for Partnership<br><br>Change Agents' Network A network of staff and students working in partnership to support curriculum enhancement and innovation<br><br>Students as Partners Network in Australia | **Selection of conferences/ symposia with an explicit focus on students as partners**<br><br>RAISE Partnership Special Interest Group Pandemic Partnerships and Power 2020<br><br>Students as Co-Creators Seminar Series, hosted by University of Westminster 2021<br><br>RAISE International Colloquium on Partnership 2017<br><br>RAISE Network Conference Annually since 2011<br><br>Change Agents' Network Annual Conference since 2014<br><br>Annual Students as Partners Roundtable since 2015 |

# Appendix C: Data inventory

| Case Study One: Student Learning Technology Ambassador Project | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Timeframe for data collection: Jan 2017 – Apr 2018 (16 months) | | | |
| Research source | Description | Types of interaction/ outcome | Date & location |
| Jennifer (staff) | Direct contact, sustained, professional relationship before/ during/ after participation | Informal email exchange and face-to-face discussion. 1x formal research interview and follow up discussions; interview transcription. | January 2017, University |
| Nicole (student) | Direct contact, collegiate relationship only during the research project | 1x formal research interview, 2 follow up email discussions, 1x observation field notes. Interview transcription. | May 2017, University |
| Amanda (staff) | Direct contact, sustained, professional relationship before/ during/ after participation | 3 informal email exchanges and 2 face-to-face discussions. 1x formal research interview and follow up discussion. Interview transcription. | May 2017, University |
| Student Learning Technology Ambassador Project Summary | Extant document analysis | Internal report authored by Learning Technology Manager, to Learning Technology Committee (29/02/16) | Jan 2017 – April 2018, University |
| Researcher | Research memos | Reflections on analysis, observations, reflexive accounts. | Jan 2017 – April 2018, Personal files |

| Case Study Two: Students as partners in learning and teaching | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Timeframe for data collection: Jan 2017 – Apr 2018 (16 months) | | | |
| Research source | Description | Types of interaction/ outcome | Date & location |
| Robert (staff) | Direct contact, sustained, professional relationship before/ during/ after participation | Informal email exchange and face-to-face discussion. 1x formal research interview and follow up discussions; interview transcription. | March 2017, University |
| First-year cohort | Focus group, six undergraduate students | 1x formal research focus group interview. Focus group transcription. | May 2017, University |
| Final-year cohort | Focus group, five undergraduate students | 1x formal research focus group interview. Focus group transcription. | May 2017, University |
| First-year cohort | Lesson observation | Field notes | Sept 2017, University |
| Second-year cohort | Lesson observation | Field notes | Sept 2017, University |
| Final-year cohort | Lesson observation | Field notes | Sept 2017, University |
| Curriculum Design Initiative document | Extant document analysis | Internal report | March 2017 – April 2018 |
| Researcher | Research memos | Reflections on analysis, observations, reflexive accounts. | Jan 2017 – April 2018, Personal files |

# Appendix D: Ethical approval and documentation

**School Research Ethics form and checklist**

**Section A:      Applicant details**

| | |
|---|---|
| Project working title | Student-staff partnership: working in learning and teaching in higher education. |
| Proposed start and end date of project | Jan 1st 2017 – Sep 30th 2018 |
| Name of researcher | Catherine McConnell |
| School | Centre for Learning and Teaching |
| Level          (UG/Taught PG/PGR/Staff) | PGR – Education Doctorate |
| Email | C.McConnell@brighton.ac.uk |
| Funder (if applicable) | n/a |

**Section B:      Student details (where applicable)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Course/Module/Unit name/number | Stage 2 Thesis, Education Doctorate |
| Name of supervisor/tutor | Nadia Edmond, Etienne Wenger-Trayner |

**Section C:      Description of project**

Please provide a brief outline of the proposed project, including the research methods to be used, the types of participants that will be involved, and how they will be recruited (maximum 500 words).

This research project has been designed to gain an in-depth understanding of partnership working between staff and students in higher education, specifically at the University of Brighton. The focus of these partnerships is within the scope of Learning and Teaching projects, and participants will be recruited from projects in operation between the period of 2014-16. This research is contextualised by the current policy agenda and literature around 'Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching' (e.g. Healey et al, 2014), and theoretically concerned with issues around identity formation, power relations, and the development of learning communities. The research questions have been framed to elicit the perspectives and experiences of participants, in particular: How is 'partnership' experienced by students and staff when working together on higher education learning and teaching projects, and what implications are there for future practice? And:

1. In a student-staff partnership HE L&T project, how is partnership negotiated, shaped and conducted?
2. What influence does partnership working have on staff and students sense of personal and professional identity?
3. How is staff-student partnership experienced in different contexts?

The methods proposed include in-depth interviews with students and staff who are involved in a learning and teaching project together, and (with permission) observations of meetings, documents, artefacts that are associated with the project. A minimum of two case studies, possibly three, from different contexts will be sought.

**Tier 2 Additional Information:** Ethical approval has previously been granted at Tier One, by Sara Bragg in January 2017 to conduct qualitative interviews, observations and focus groups with participants.

This extended ethical application requests access to institutional documentation, pertaining to the Curriculum Design Framework, in order to look at institutional learning and framing of 'Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching'. The documentation I wish to analyse is:

- **The Curriculum Design Initiative (CDI) guidance and policy documentation**
- **School Review Panel documentation, including Critical Review Documents, and online Panel Discussion Board for 'Staff and Students working in partnership'.**

Access to and analysis of these additional extant materials will enable the researcher to include contextual information, and triangulation between the existing qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations and focus groups. **Permission to access to the documentation pertaining to the two case study Schools will be sought from the Head of School or Dept – for Case Study 1, and Case Study 2. Should the researcher deem it necessary to access further School Review Panel Documentation, permission to access additional material will be sought on a case by case basis from the individual Head of Dept or School.**

This research will take the form of a qualitative study, and an important dimension is attention to my position as both researcher, practitioner, and to some extent participant in this study. I have designed two stages of data collation, whereby the first stage is iterative and informs the next, through early interaction with the data and dialogue with the participants.

The interviews will be based on open-ended dialogue rather than questions that result in one-way communication, in order to encourage and explore participants' perceptions, expectations, needs and experiences. By interviewing at varying stages of their partnership projects, this will allow me to reflect on the descriptions and discourses that have developed over time. I intend to draw upon narrative participatory methods (Aldridge, 2015) to 'obtain a richness of data through a small number of participants', allowing for creative or imaginative approaches that allow for personal expression, contextualised by the disciplinary setting.

I will ask participants whether I could conduct observations of partnership activities, and/ or gain access to any artefacts, documents, resources or outcomes that would support the case study data. The benefit of participant observation as distinct from interviewing, is the generation of data in the 'natural setting' (Denscombe, 1998, 2003) which can contextualise the culture and processes of the groups being observed. There are risks

associated with observation, such as the disruption of the natural setting, along with the issue of the researcher's perceptions and interpretations of a situation that may not necessarily be accurate. I will attempt to address these considerations through my own reflexive notes, and the cross-checking of themes with participants when appropriate in the data collation stages.

Aldridge, J. (2015) Participatory Research: Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice. Bristol: Policy Press.

Denscombe, M. (1998) The Good Research Guide: for small-scale social research projects. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

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

**Section D:    Ethical risk assessment checklist**
Please tick YES or NO for each question. If you have answered YES to any of questions 1 to 15, please provide a brief outline of how these risks will be addressed in the relevant part of the box in Section E, or give details of any existing protocols within the School that already cover these specific issues.

| No | Question | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Will participants be likely to undergo vigorous physical activity, prolonged or repetitive testing, or to experience physical harm, more than minimal pain or discomfort or exposure to dangerous situations/environments as part of the research? | | No |
| 2 | Does the study involve any physiological or psychological interventions with the potential to be invasive, intrusive or harmful (eg administration of drugs or other substances; taking samples of blood, saliva, urine etc; use of equipment to monitor bodily performance; manual handling of participants; techniques such as hypnotherapy)? | | No |
| 3 | Will the study involve participants who could be considered vulnerable (for example due to age, psychological or medical condition, social inequality), or where possible coercion or feelings of obligation to participate may exist (eg when recruiting ones own students or colleagues)? | Yes | |
| 4 | Will the study involve the discussion of sensitive topics (for example, painful reflections or traumas, religious or other beliefs, sexual behaviour, experience of violence, abuse or bullying, illness, illegal or political behaviour, people's gender or ethnic status, detailed financial matters, issues relating to body image)? | | No |
| 5 | Could participants experience psychological or emotional stress, anxiety, humiliation or other negative consequences, beyond what would be expected to be encountered in normal life? | | No |
| 6 | Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge at the time (eg covert observation or recording of people in non-public places), or involve deception or conduct of the research without participants' full and informed consent? | | No |

| 7 | Will the research require the co-operation or permission of an individual or gatekeeper in order to gain access to participants (eg a teacher at a school, a manager of sheltered housing, the organiser of a self-help group etc)? | | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Will the research involve access to records of a confidential or personal nature, or documents of a sensitive political, moral, medical or religious nature? | | No |
| 9 | Will the research involve collecting visual information of a personal nature, such as taking photographs or making video recordings of participants? | | No |
| 10 | Will the research involve accessing participants or data of a personal nature via an online environment or internet setting (eg chat rooms, social media, instant messaging etc)? | | No |
| 11 | Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? | | No |
| 12 | Does the research have the potential for causing significant negative impact on the environment (including animal or plant populations, or rare or protected species, habitats or sites)? | | No |
| 13 | Might the research raise specific ethical issues regarding cultural/political sensitivities (eg local customs or gatekeepers, political sensitivities)? | | No |
| 14 | Might the research involve the disclosure of confidential information beyond the initial consent given? | | No |
| 15 | Are there any other ethical issues that are not covered in the questions above? | | No |

**Section E: Addressing potential risk (to be completed only if one or more questions in section D above have been answered as 'YES')**

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the questions in Section D above, please provide an outline of how the potential risks will be addressed against the question number. The School Research Ethics Panel will use this information to assess whether the risks are insignificant enough, or could be mitigated, in order to enable the research to proceed with Tier 1 ethical approval, or whether the proposal needs to be referred to a College Research Ethics Committee.

| Q in section D above | Please outline potential risks and how they will be addressed |
|---|---|
| 3 | • This study is proposed to involve staff members and students at the university. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure that participants are fully aware of the project details (through a participant information sheet), and have the right to withdraw without any adverse consequences. Particularly for students who may have concerns about the negative perceptions of staff, and the potential impact on any future course work assessments. <br> • This study may raise internal political issues (e.g. around local working practices, gatekeepers of information, political sensitivities). The mitigation of risk in this instance will be to ensure confidentiality of participation and data (through the participant consent form), unless participants expressly wish |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | to be publicly identifiable for a specific reason, e.g. to promote their partnership practices. Also to ensure transparency between the researcher and participants through open channels of communication, and attention to building trust early in the data collection period.<br>• This study will take place in a workplace setting, and discussions about working practices might reveal instances of bullying, harassment, discrimination or illegal behaviour by colleagues or students. In such instances, I will provide participants with contact details for the appropriate support services, or in the case of participants who have been recruited through another person or gatekeeper, that safeguarding procedures are followed within the context of the School or Dept. | | |

Some Schools may carry out research that involves particular types of risk on a regular basis (eg taking blood, manual handling of participants or working with specific hazardous substances), and may already have protocols that cover procedures and guidelines for dealing with these risks. If the proposed study falls within such a protocol please indicate the name of the protocol below. Where the research is covered by such a protocol and does not raise any additional ethical issues it does not need to be considered at Tier 2.

| |
|---|
| |

**Section F: Checklist for ethical issues relating to research participants**

Please use the checklist below to confirm that ethical issues regarding research participants have been identified and addressed appropriately.

| | | Y | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Participants will be fully informed regarding the purpose of the study and their participation in it | Y | |
| 2 | It will be made clear to participants that their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason | Y | |
| 3 | Consent will be obtained from participants for taking part in the study | Y | |
| 4 | Recruitment materials (including posters, leaflets and emails), information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires or letters provide sufficient and accurate information, and have been clearly written and presented in a format suitable for the target audience | Y | |
| 5 | Where the research is likely to involve participants who might not understand English, arrangements will be made for translation of materials and/or provision of interpreters as appropriate | Y | |
| 6 | Appropriate arrangements have been made to consider anonymity, confidentiality and privacy of participants | Y | |
| 7 | Appropriate arrangements have been made for the collection, handling and storage of electronic and/or physical data | Y | |

**Section G:    Supervisor sign-off (for student research only)**

I confirm that I have checked the application and that:
- the student has addressed the relevant ethical issues
- the student has the necessary skills and experience to carry out the proposed research and has been trained in ethics as part of their course
- this is a practicable and worthwhile research project, appropriate to the level of study

Supervisor:    N. Edmond    Date:   14<sup>th</sup> Dec 2016

**Section H:    Checklist for accompanying documents**

Please ensure you have attached copies of any of the following documents where relevant:
- ✓ Information sheets *Appendix 2
- ✓ Consent forms *Appendix 3
- ✓ Advertising or recruitment materials *Appendix 4
- ✓ Sample questionnaires or interview questions *Appendix 5
- ⊘  Risk assessment forms
- ⊘  Letters of support from external organisations involved in the research
- ⊘  References

If you have answered 'no' to all the questions in Section D, or the work is covered by an approved School protocol, this form may be submitted with the student dissertation or project outline. For staff projects, a copy of the form should be kept on the project file, and a copy sent to the chair of the School Research Ethics Panel.

If you have answered 'yes' to one or more of the questions in Section D, please return this form and all accompanying documentation to the School Research Ethics Panel.

Participation Information Sheet

**Title of Study:** Students and staff working in partnership in higher education

You are invited to take part in a research study that is towards a doctorate in education (EdD). This sheet will help you decide if you are able to take part, and what will be involved. I will be happy to go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. This should take about 15 minutes. Talk to others about the study if you wish, and ask me if there is anything that is not clear. You will be given time to think about whether you wish to take part before making a decision, and you may take this sheet away with you.

**What is the purpose of the study/project?**
The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding from staff and students in higher education, of what it is like to work in partnership on projects focused on learning and teaching.

**Why have I been invited to participate?**
You have been contacted as you may currently be working on a student-staff partnership project, or maybe in the future.

**Do I have to take part?**
It is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If there are likely to be any issues of influential relationships, power, or authority, I will reassure all participants that a decision not to take part will not have any negative consequences in terms of your study or work.

**What is expected from participants?**
Interviews: You may be asked to attend a minimum of two 60 minute interviews at key points in your partnership project, in a location convenient to you. Within the interview you will be asked to answer some questions and have a general discussion about your experiences of partnership working. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed, and this data will only be used for the purposes of this study.

Observations: You may also be asked if it would be possible to observe some of your partnership meetings or events. This would be with the permission of all members present, and the data will only be used for the purposes of this study.

**Will I be paid for taking part?** There is no financial incentive for taking part in this study.

**What are the potential disadvantages or risks of taking part?**
This study will involve staff members and students at the university. Therefore, every effort will be made to ensure that participants are fully aware of the project details, and have the right to withdraw without any adverse consequences. Particularly for students who may have concerns about the negative perceptions of staff, and the potential impact on any future course work assessments.

**What are the potential benefits of taking part?**
These may take the form of future joint presentations of the evaluation of partnership practices, either through conference presentation and/ or article publication. There may be opportunities for you to use this project as a networking opportunity, and discussions with the researcher may lead to identifying future development opportunities that the Centre for Learning and Teaching could help you with.

**Will my taking part in the study/project be kept confidential?**
Yes. You will be required to sign a consent form, which outlines confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research project, however if you wish to be identifiable, the potential risks will be highlighted. Only the researcher will have access to the data and it will be stored in a password protected file only, for a maximum of 10 years.

**What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**
You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and without any adverse consequences. It may not be possible for data already collected from you, up to the point of withdrawal, to be removed or destroyed, but every effort will be made to reduce any adverse effects that have been raised.

**What will happen to the results of the project?**
The results of this research will be published in the form of approximately a 50,000 word thesis, assessed as part of the Education Doctorate programme. There may also be the opportunity to present the findings at internal and external conferences, and through journal publication. Where possible, participants will be offered the opportunity to see the results of the study.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**
Catherine McConnell, an Education Doctorate (EdD) student, is organising and conducting this research. It is unfunded; however, Catherine's participation in the EdD programme is supported by her professional role in the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Brighton.

**Researcher contact:** Catherine McConnell, Centre for Learning and Teaching, C.McConnell@brighton.ac.uk

**What if there is a problem?**
If a problem arises during the research, this should be raised in the first instance with the researcher. However, if it would be more appropriate to raise concerns with a person independent of the study, the contact details are provided below.

**Independent contact:** Dr Nadia Edmond (Supervisor), School of Education, N.Edmond@brighton.ac.uk

**Who has reviewed the study?** This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, in January 2017.

**Participant Consent Form**

Student-staff partnership working in higher education.

| Education Doctorate study; researcher: Catherine McConnell | Please initial or tick box |
|---|---|
| I agree to take part in this research which is to *investigate the experiences of staff and students working in partnership on a learning and teaching project.* | |
| The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and the possible risks involved. | |
| I have read the information sheet and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved. | |
| I am aware that I will be required to take part in a minimum of two 60 minute interviews, and with my consent, the researcher may observe our partnership practices (such as meetings or events). | |
| I agree to the researcher taking photographs of artefacts and resources with my permission, and making audio recordings during the project. | |
| I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else. | |
| I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so. | |
| I agree that should I withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet. | |
| I agree that data collected may subsequently be archived and used by other bona fide researchers, which will be anonymised and undated. | |

Name (please print) …………………………………………
Signed ……………………………………………………… Date ……………

Participant Recruitment Email [template]

Dear [name]

I am embarking on a research project as part of my Education Doctorate, which is a study into the experiences of students and staff working in partnership in learning and teaching projects in Higher Education.

I am aware that you have recently been conducting your own partnership project which involves students as co-researchers or co-participants. I therefore would like to invite you to participate in my research. This could involve a minimum of two interviews of up to 60 minutes, at two key points within your project timeframe.

I would also like to interview the students you have been working with, to gain their perspectives on partnership working. If there are any forthcoming occasions to observe your partnership practices, I would welcome the opportunity, but there would be no obligation to agree to this.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and there will be no adverse effects if you decide you are not able to commit to participation at this time.

Thank you for considering my request, and If you would like more information, I have attached the project information sheet to this email. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions, and whether you would like to participate.

With best wishes
Catherine McConnell

[email signature]

---

Head of Dept/ School Email [Tier 2 Ethics Procedure]

Email Subject: Permission to access CDI School Review Panel docs

Dear [name]

I am conducting a study into *Student Staff Partnership in Higher Education*, specifically towards a doctorate in Education (EdD). I have previously received tier one ethical approval from the School of Education.

I am writing to seek your permission to look at the [Dept/ School] Review Panel documentation, as part of a data set focusing on how partnership practices are described. Please could you let me know if you are in agreement, or not, for me to include your [Dept/ School] documentation in my analysis, by return email?

I have enclosed detailed ethical information below.
Thanks, and best wishes
Catherine McConnell

[email signature]

# Appendix E: Partnership social worlds/ arenas map

**Social Worlds/ Arenas Map – indication of extant data**
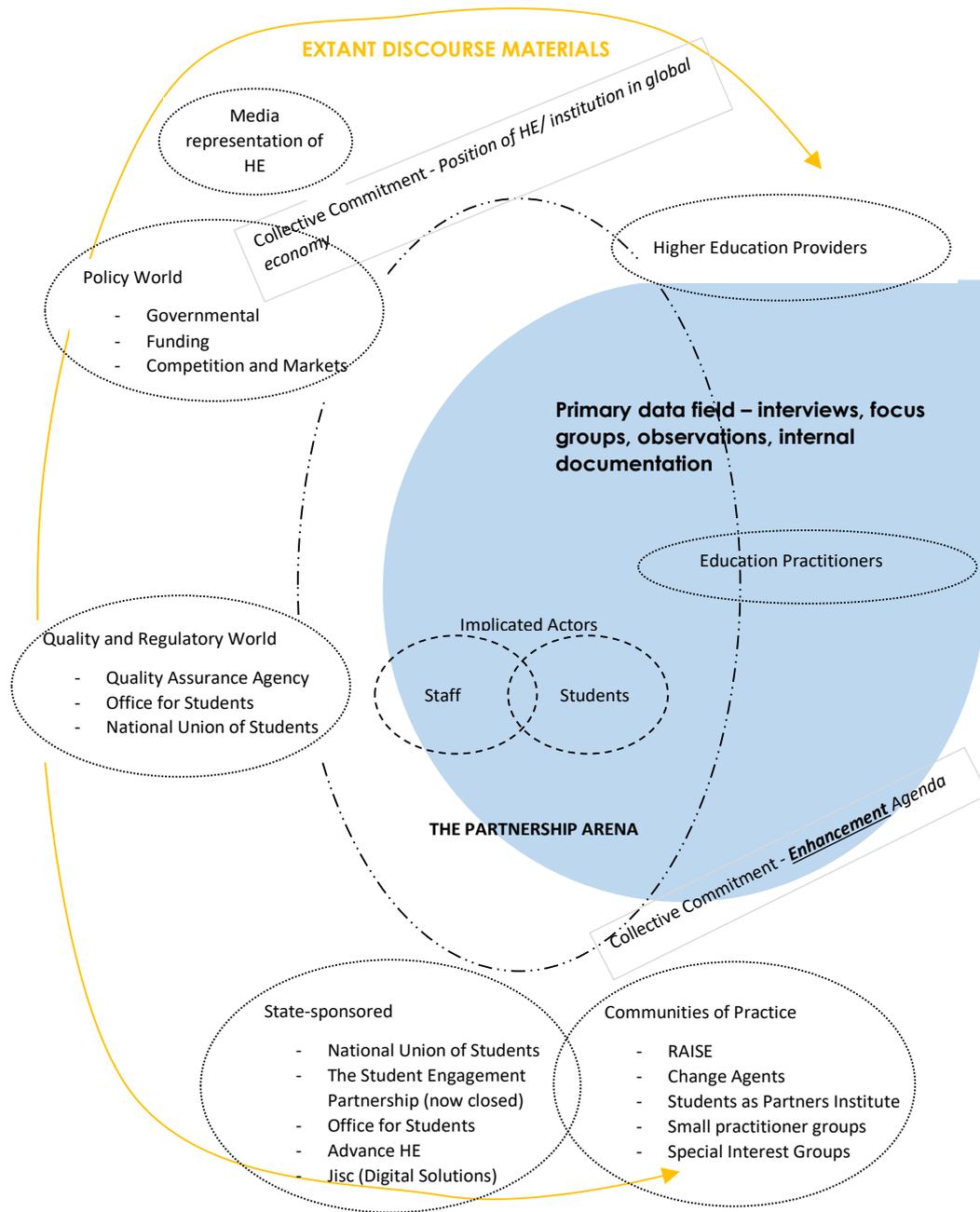


Appendix Figure 1: Social worlds/ areas map – the national partnership arena

# Appendix F: Interview prompt sheet

EXPERIENCES

Personal

Transformation     Professional

Influencing moments

The unexpected

PRACTICES

Insights

Negotiations

Boundaries

Connections

Team learning

**Students as Partners**
Your practice / the project / what has been learnt

Disciplines

Dynamics

Individuals

Encounters

CULTURES

Control

Power

Limitations

Challenges

POLITICS
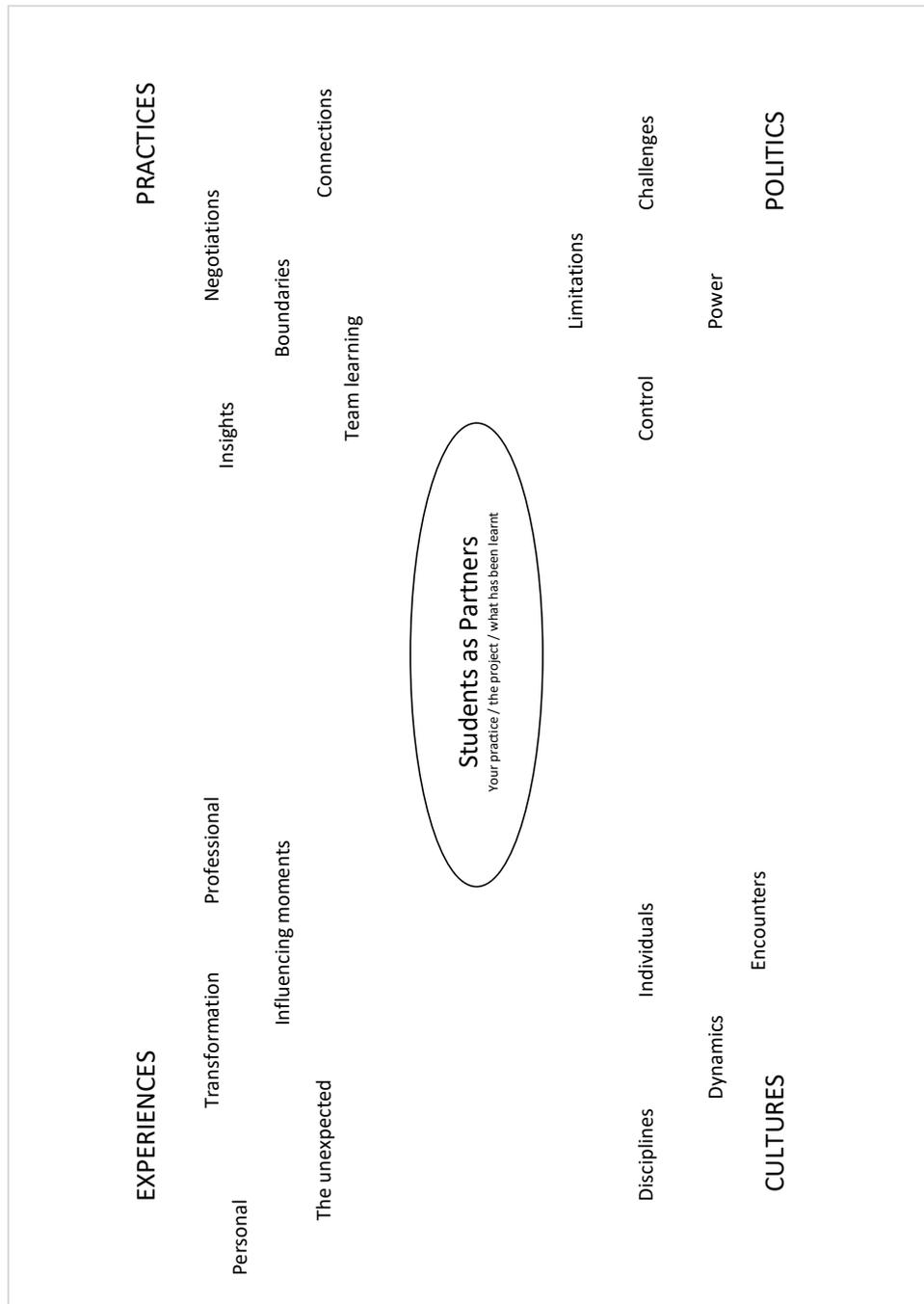
Appendix Figure 2: Interview prompt sheet

# Appendix G: Focus group schedule

**Student Focus Group Schedule**

Date: Wednesday 17th May 2.30pm-4.30pm (meet Course Leader 2.15pm Cafe)

Participant List Level 4 students: 6 students (Full attendance)

Date: Wednesday 24th May 2.30pm-4.30pm (meet Course Leader 2.15pm Cafe)

Participant List Level 6 students: 9 students (5 in attendance)

**Context for focus group part 1**

Facilitator notes: Introduce students to the four themes that the university has prioritised in the Curriculum Design Initiative: 1. Inclusive practice, 2. Sustainability, 3. Enquiry-led learning, 4. Student staff partnership. **It is the final theme of Student Staff Partnership that I wish to discuss with you today.** Of course, if you would like to comment or ask questions about the other themes you are welcome to do so here, or after the focus group.

Q1: Do you have any thoughts or comments about your current course?

Q2: Are there aspects of the course that you really enjoy, and could be built on?

Q3: How could some areas of the course be improved?

Partnership specific questions:

Q4: What do you/ students understand by students working in partnership with staff?

Q5: What do you think of this proposal to work collaboratively with staff?

Q6: Is this kind of activity something you have been involved with before coming to uni?

Q7: Are there any other comments you wish to make before we finish?

**End**: Thank you very much for your contributions today. It was very nice to meet you all, and your comments and suggestions are of great value. If there is anything that on reflection you do not wish to be shared, please let me know now, or by email (this is on your Participant Information Sheet), and I can arrange this. *reminder about confidentiality and ethics.

# Appendix H: Partnership positional maps

**Power Distance Index** *(vertical axis, low to high)*

**high**

- Teacher in authority
- Education is teacher-centred
- Knowledge is imparted as personal wisdom
- Visible and accepted institutional hierarchy

- Student is subordinate
- Teacher is unchallenged
- The quality of learning is highly dependent on the excellence of teachers.

E.g. Policy Arena mismatch – TEF 'Value for Money' discourse

*Positioning of partnership is a 'low power distance' situation:*

- Teachers are supposed to treat students as basic equals
- Age is a factor – younger teachers are more equal
- Education is student-centred
- *Invisible but accepted hierarchy?*

- Students expected to find their own intellectual path.
- **Education places a premium on student initiative.**
- Quality of learning is determined by the excellence of the students

**low**

Position of teacher            Position of student

---

**Importance of partnership in Quality Enhancement** *(vertical axis, low to high)*

SLTA Partnership:
Problem-focused partnership

**high**

POSITION A
Staff have to initiate partnership activities, or else how would students know what to partner on?

Alternative:
Relationship-focused partnership

POSITION C
Staff and students can find mutually interesting partnership activities

Course level partnership
Learning-focused partnership

POSITION B
Students have to initiate partnership activities, or else they will always be directed by staff in power positions

**low**

Low        Importance of partnership in L&T Enhancement        high

Positional map exploring the importance of student partnership in quality versus student partnership in learning and teaching enhancement.

# Appendix I: SLTA Project Report

Summary Report on the Student Learning Technology Ambassador Pilot Project (2016) Authored by Learning Technologies Adviser (a staff partner)

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To recruit 4 SLTAs for each of our main campuses on a casual contract but to extend the scope of their work to include more student focused projects eg. Inductions, enrolment and further 'pop up' events alongside supporting the use of technologies in the classroom. To adjust the job description to include this and to recruit much earlier to ensure the SLTAs are in post at the start of the academic year.

To identify one of the SLTAs recruited to have a co-ordinating role, recompensed with additional paid hours.

We anticipate the extension will cost £XX (approximately 3 times the cost of the pilot to cover all 5 campuses).

SCOPE

The aim of this report is to summarise the initial findings from the feedback on projects where the Student Learning Technology Ambassadors were involved and to determine the value and impact of their work. The report will draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the analysis of staff and student experiences. The findings of the report will focus on Impact and Sustainability.

BACKGROUND

Learning technologies are seeing rapid development resulting in an opportunity to develop teaching and learning methods to improve engagement and enhance the student learning. There are some barriers to this, and one of those identified

by academic staff, here at the University of Brighton, was their fear of technology failure. When surveyed staff felt they would better engage with the technology and develop their teaching if they had better in classroom support for both them and their students.

INTRODUCTION

The pilot sought to investigate the value and impact of employing 6 of our students to work alongside both the eLearning team and academic staff to support the use of classroom technologies.

METHODOLOGY

The pilot aims to look at the whether the perceived need exists by evaluating each of the projects, what impact those projects have on the use of technologies in teaching spaces. We will also look at the impact on the eLearning team and how best we might manage the students and projects.

FINDINGS

Through discussions with the SLTAs we very quickly identified an additional need so extended the planned use of the SLTAs beyond the pilot school and involved them in a number of staff and student eLearning projects on additional campuses.

The eLearning team has seen benefits with partnership of the SLTAs. They have provided a better insight into the technology needs of our students, helping us to identify the gaps in our service and re-evaluate the pilot.

There are benefits on both sides of this partnership, so for the SLTAs the work and training opportunities it provides can develop their skills employability skills, build confidence and encourage personal development.

# Appendix J: Messy Situational Maps

Preliminary (messy) situational map based on SLTA project background

Learning Technologies (team) COLLECTIVE HUMAN ACTANTS

Learning Technologies NON-HUMAN ACTANT

Technology failure NON-HUMAN ACTANT

Technologies are 'seeing rapid development' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION of innovation and the need to act

Engagement IMPLICATED NON-HUMAN ACTANT the act of engagement

Student body IMPLICATED HUMAN ACTANT

Teaching and learning methods IMPLICATED NON-HUMAN ACTANT

'resulting in an opportunity' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION arising from technology

'to improve engagement and enhance student learning' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION and MAJOR ISSUE/ DEBATE

(Silent) Decision-makers – funding, resourcing SILENT HUMAN ACTANTS

'at the University of Brighton' ORGANISATION and SPATIAL ELEMENT

'There are some barriers to this' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION of T&L incorporating technology

'to develop teaching and learning methods' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION of the rationale to develop T&L

'One of those identified by academic staff' IMPLICATED HUMAN ACTANTS of staff as protagonist

'was their fear of technology failure' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION of staff fear

'classroom support for staff and students' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION AND IMPLICATED HUMAN ACTANTS staff and students

'when surveyed staff felt they … need better classroom support' IMPLICATED DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION of staff feelings

'better engage[ment] with technology DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION of the conditions staff want

'development of teaching using technology if there was better classroom support' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION around the needs of academic staff

(Silent) Professional development of academic staff POLITICAL/

(Silent) Lack of resource for classroom support POLITICAL/ ECONOMIC/ INFRASTRUCTURE

Classroom SPATIAL ELEMENT, MATERIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Illustration of some of the relational aspects based on SLTA project background:

Academic staff

Fear of technology failure in front of students..?

Assumed accessibility to learning technologies/ devices to learn on

affordability

Needing to keep up with the 'rapid development' of technology

Students

'when surveyed staff felt they … need better classroom support' IMPLICATED DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION of staff feelings

Lack of resource for classroom support

Time investment of keeping up with technology developments

Look to staff as experts?

Professional development of academic staff

Appendix Figure 4: SLTA messy situational map

Students as partners in learning and teaching

**social groups/ collectives**
- wider school staff body
- course team
- professional support staff
- 'mature' students
- 'young' students
- student cohort

**hot issues - level of partnership**
- mutual expectations setting
- 'staff need to spend more time with students'
- maturity
  - educational
  - emotional
  - individual
- disenfranchised academic/ professional staff
- underestimation of staff expertise
- lack of individual staff agency
- staff isolation
- student/staff expectations gap
- age/ generation gap

**key events**
- facilitating partnership
  - field trips
  - teaching
  - dissertation supervision
  - personal tutorials
- viewed negatively by staff
  - curriculum design review
  - quality assurance committees
  - 'surveillance' and 'regulation'

**hot issues - level of institution**
- 'resource constraints'
  - equipment/ facilities
  - staff cuts
  - lack of modernisation to estates (campus)
- perceived lack of ethical leadership
  - hierarchy
  - top down edicts
- [cur]riculum design framework
- micro-management
- lack of collective problem solving

**discourses**
- 'partnership is on a spectrum'
  - can galvanise your biggest asset
  - collective agency and responsibility
  - have to accept that it is opt-out for some
  - a process not product
- 'students are spoon fed'
  - 'value for money'
    - commodity
    - course manual
    - content driven
    - contact hours
    - didactic
    - outcome driven
  - prior educational experience
  - lack of engagement/ accountability
  - skills deficit

Appendix Figure 5: Students as partners in course messy situational map

# Appendix K: Data Analysis Excerpt

| | Case Study 1 – Interview with Jennifer – open coding | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Line** | **Text** | **Initial comment/ theme** | **Open codes** |
| *8* | *Well let's start with your power politics* | Salience of 'power politics' | Micro-politics |
| *10* | *so we started with the SLTAs because the 'grown ups' [are] the Learning Technologists* | Staff are referred to as 'grown ups'. Positioning of staff and students, parent/ adult/ child. | Positionality of staff and students |
| *10* | *the Learning Technologists were not resourced to be able to go and support staff in their lectures* | Existing resources are not sufficient for LTAs to be able to support academic staff. | Needing a solution<br><br>Insufficient resources |
| *11* | *So lecturers wanted to try new technology,* | Academic staff want to try new technology (v. LTA wanting staff to try new technology) | Meeting academics' needs<br><br>New technologies |
| *14* | *They [academic staff] told us they were too nervous to do something for the first time,* | Academic staff nervous about using tech for the first time | Nervous about using technology |
| *16* | *so we provided the students to the School* | Students are 'provided' as an alternative/ additional resource. Acting as the | Brokering arrangement |

|   |   | facilitator in the relationship – brokering, negotiating, shaping, defining, 'providing' a commodity/ service. | Central team facilitating the project |
|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | *to be that 'holding hand' to go with them* | Students (SLTAs) 'holding hands' with the academic staff member, potentially disrupts the usual dynamic of teachers holding power and expertise in the classroom.. | Disruption of existing hierarchies |
| 18 | *We thought we were solving a problem there; actually, they didn't take us up on it. We thought originally it was because they were uncomfortable having a student.* | The plan (hand holding) did not result in academic take up of this service. | Did not go to plan. |
| 19 | *It wasn't one of their students, and we made it clear that any students who were supposed to be in that lecture didn't also get to work that lecture.* | Trying to mitigate existing relationships – creating new relationships by employing students NOT from that discipline. | Removing existing relationships |
| 23 | *They [staff] just didn't want it, they didn't* | Academic staff did not want to ask for help | Reluctance to ask for help |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *want to ask students. I think actually that's more the academic staff, they like an excuse to not try a new thing, us resolving that problem just gave them a different excuse to not try that new thing. So they didn't end up solving it.* | from students. Resistance/ barrier/ perception | Excuse not to try new things |
| 24 | *'they' like an excuse not to try a new thing.* | Some form of barrier/ resistance two-fold – to technology and to accepting help from students. Participant 'othering' academic staff – | 'Othering' academic staff – tribes within the university. |
| 27 | *So there was that uncomfortableness about having a university student who knew more about the technology than they did to come and help stand next to them in a lecture.* | Uncomfortableness. Again, disrupting the usual power/ expertise dynamic between students and staff. | Disruption of usual power-expertise dynamic |
| 30 | *Some did take us up on it, and where people were brave enough to try that* | Identifying that academics needed to be 'brave' to try it (working with a student). Willingness | Bravery Risk-taking |

| | | to take risks, admit inexperience or lack of expertise | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 30 | *Some did take us up on it, and where people were brave enough to try that, they ended up building a relationship with the student, so we made sure the student met with the academic in advance, they didn't meet for the first time in the lecture theatre, they met to talk about what they were going to be doing.* | Building a relationship – involves meeting in advance, talking about the need (in this case, technology support) | Building relationships (communication) |
| 41 | *She [SLTA] didn't enjoy the lecture at all, but she got it all set up, it was engineering and she studied something else, so she had no interest in it, but she was there and she made sure it worked.* | Student's lack of enjoyment of the lecture material that they were supporting. No disciplinary interest. Talking about the student 'enjoyment' of the lecture – but that doesn't seem to be the objective anyway. Highlighting the students' motivation, even though she wasn't interested? | Students' motivation (is the technology) |

| 43 | *The lecturer really liked that, valued that, and asked for her back again* | Lecturer asked for the same student back again. Some form of relationship, trust, assurance, like-mindedness | Relationship building (over time) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 43 | *And I think that's what I've observed is that where a trusting relationship has been built up, where [she] came and helped once, and he liked that experience with [her], he was more than happy to have [the SLTA] back again.* | Trusting relationship, built over time | Building relationships (trust) (longevity) |
| 48 | *Which I think is changing our model, because, originally we hired in the first year we had 6, this year we've got 20* | Scaled up. Scalability. Changes the dynamic. The number of student partners involved in a project for the central organising team. | Scale of project |
| 49 | *A 'pool' of SLTAs'* | Denotes a resource, team, hoping for increased flexibility and readiness to meet demand | 'Pool' (team) |
| 51 | *'They don't work like a pool'* | Dysfunctional | Scaled up = dysfunctional pool |

# Appendix L: The Curriculum Design Framework (Extracted)

**Statement of purpose**

The Curriculum Design Framework sets out the principles that will underpin all of the University of Brighton's undergraduate courses. Its purpose is to create a distinctive, vibrant and up-to-date curriculum based on some of the excellent practice that already exists across the University. It will meet the needs of our diverse student population and prepare students for putting their knowledge into practice in the wider world. It will focus on improving the consistency of students' academic experiences and will support the creation of a strong university learning community, based on practical wisdom, staff and students working in partnership, and students experiencing professional practice and undertaking research.

**Aims**

- To create an innovative curriculum distinct to the University of Brighton, in partnership with students
- To increase the consistency of student experience
- To facilitate the effective use of staff time
- To act as a catalyst to staff and student partnerships
- To generate staff development opportunities
- To encourage ongoing enhancement of course design

**Principles**

- Practical Wisdom
- A curriculum structured for learning
- Enquiry- and research-led learning
- Staff and students working in partnership
- Inclusivity

**Practical Wisdom**

Practical Wisdom is the ability to create knowledge, have a critical understanding of how to apply it into practice, and use that experience to develop further knowledge and create change in the wider world. It embodies values of professionalism, inclusivity, reflection, creativity and action.

- Course teams should reflect on what Practical Wisdom means in their discipline, and will be supported to think creatively about how this could be implemented in their subject areas.

**Themes (relevant to this study)**

Enquiry and Research-led learning

The curriculum will be up-to-date and dynamic, incorporating current disciplinary and staff research, and centred on early opportunities for students to actively gain experience in their discipline and profession, as academic researchers or practitioners.

- The curriculum is up-to-date and incorporates current research.
- Enquiry-led/ research-led pedagogies are at the core of student learning.

Staff and students working in partnership

The curriculum will be developed and enhanced through staff and students working in partnership, promoting values of respect and inclusivity, and encouraging strong learning communities to develop. This will be through:

- Student involvement in the development of their course curriculum;
- Staff and students working in partnership in creating learning activities.

Inclusivity

The curriculum will be accessible to all learners, highlighting issues of equality and diversity and embedding inclusive practice. It develops skills and values that support students in working in diverse cultural environments within the University and in their future careers. The curriculum will:

- Be accessible to all learners;
- Promote awareness of equality, diversity and inclusivity in course content and in learning activities;
- Prepare students to promote inclusivity in their professional lives.

# Appendix M: Ketso Visual-Tactile Thematic Mapping



Appendix Figure 6: Example of early stage thematic grouping of partnership trajectories

Ketso Visual-Tactile Thematic Mapping

Appendix Figure 7: Using Ketso tools to arrange thematic findings using the concept of a trajectory



Appendix Figure 8: Using Ketso tools to order thematic findings according to 'intra, inter, extra personal' emotion and identity.

# Appendix N: Cross-comparison analysis using Excel

| | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Location | Code | Text | Notes | Secondary codes/ comments | Tertiary comments |
| 2 | P1. L37 | prior experience | So my experience of before i came to university was working and you can replace students with people that reported to me or people that were my colleague or my people I reported in to | Prior experience before academic role | | |
| 3 | P1. L39 | interested in other peoples' development | and I had learnt that if you are genuinely interested in other people and what they need to develop and be successful then you will achieve your goals out of that and I learn that in a work environment where we were set targets | Genuine interest in people – helps achieve goals | being successful | achieving goals, targets,, in a work environment |
| 4 | P1. L41 | giving encouragement and support | so i had a very direct result of seeing that if I spent time with the people that were reporting to me and I gave them what they needed and I encouraged them and supported them, I recognised training needs and I showed interest and support and gave feedback appropriate feedback, then they would achieve their targets and then if they achieved their target I would achieve my targets so there was a very direct cause and effect | Cause and effect – investment in people = achieving targets | Time, encouragement, support, recognise training needs, show interest, appropriate feedback | |
| 5 | P2. L47 | emotional intelligence | I happened also at that time to be working with [company] and it was [company] who first started some of the practical work around emotional intelligence, so some of the original case studies that were done in the early nineties came from [company] | Emotional intelligence | previous work place | |
| 6 | P2. L50 | personal development | so that was in part of what I had learnt if you like. So when I left that environment for a bit when [my daughter] was born I did quite a bit of research and found the books and the theory to explain in more detail the phenomenon that I had experienced, does that make sense? | Interest in learning more about emotional intlligence, theorising | | |
| 7 | P2. L57 | becoming a 'conscious expert' | so I was much more aware of the process rather than perhaps just having become an expert but unconscious expert, I became a conscious expert in  that side of things so fast forwards to when I came to university to | Becoming a 'conscious expert' in emotional intelligence – through engagement with the theory | | |

Jennifer Interview | Nicole Interview | Amanda Interview | CS1 Code Table and Instances | Robert Interview | L4 FG

/cont. Cross-comparison analysis using Excel

| | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Jennifer Codes** | Instance | **Nicole Code** | Instance | **Amanda Code** | Instance |
| 2 | Access to information | | assertive personality | 1 | Ability to influence | 2 |
| 3 | assumptions about students skills | | authenticity | 4 | Ability to influence | 1 |
| 4 | assumptions about academic staff | | awareness of boundaries | 4 | access | 3 |
| 5 | authenticity | | awareness of self | 2 | barriers | 2 |
| 6 | beginning | | awareness of belonging | | challenges | |
| 7 | belonging | | becoming like a staff member | 4 | becoming a 'conscious expert' | 1 |
| 8 | boundaries | | being asked back | 4 | being a manager | 1 |
| 9 | assumptions about students skills | | being asked back | 4 | being asked back | 3 |

Jennifer Interview | Nicole Interview | Amanda Interview | **CS1 Code Table and Instances** | Robert Interview

# Appendix O: Observational Field Notes

**1. Observation memo: First-year cohort welcome session, 25 Sept 2017**

The first observation session was the course leader induction for new first year students, on day one of welcome week. The classroom space was laid out formally, with rows of tables, front facing, lecturer at the front with a powerpoint of student central on screen. The décor was standard, but a bit tired. Projector blind, no smart screen, cramped, not much natural light.

When I arrived there seemed to be lots of laughter, the lecturer had asked them to do some chatting in pairs or threes to find out 'Who are you?' 'Where are you from?' and one 'exceptional' fact about your partner. This icebreaker was encouraging interactions between students, and there was a genuine ease in the room.

Robert debriefed the activity, asking why did we just do that?, and asked people to volunteer to talk to the whole group about their conversations just had. Where students didn't want to speak up, Robert tried to reassure the group by saying "come on, I've had 60 years of being the biggest pratt on earth" – perhaps trying to reassure the students that we all feel uncomfortable talking in front of each other.

Robert did thank students for participating, and was encouraging about what the students were sharing in front of the whole group. This led onto a talk by Robert emphasising the social aspects of university – especially sports – but also other skills that can be developed through socialising and employability.

Looking around the room, there were about 25 students, perhaps five females, the rest males. There were only male students in the back row, some seemed a little nervous (fidgeting, low eye contact).

Robert debriefed the ice breaker activity and stressed the importance of friendship groups, and that 'we need to help and get to know each other, to get through the next 3

years'. 'We are building identity, and tutors are in on that; we are quite good friends (staff) but we do disagree sometimes, but we get on well'.

Robert spent a bit of time talking about employability, explaining that the students on this course graduate and get good jobs, are prepared for and perform well at assessment centres. Robert went on to talk about not having an inferiority complex about being at Brighton, "the ex-Polytechnic". (*My note: do students even know about ex-polys now?) 'No one is better than us, just because we are small and we are an ex-poly. We are going to push you, we call it the + 20% "you get stuck in". 'We need you to think about what you want to get out of university'. Addressing the whole group from the front like this became a bit of a monologue.

Robert asked "How many of you have heard from someone else that the 'first year doesn't count?" – almost all students raised their hands. He explained the cost implications of failing the first year – either retaking the year will cost another £9250, or students could be asked to leave. Robert explained "Your learning experience comes from what you do now. The skills developed in the first year get taken into the second year. There is too much to get to grips with in second year."

This was beginning to feel like a "pep" talk. Next, Robert asked them to divide into small groups again and discuss what he had just said. I listened in to two males sharing experiences… One student explained he was very drunk last night, he was unwell, and had to get helped home. He lived in halls and some people brought lots of alcohol to their flat. He was still hungover in the session.

Robert got everyone back together – 'why did I just do that?' question addressed to the whole group. One female student responded – to help each other? One male student responded – for reinforcement?

Robert explained 'Learning is not a competition, we need each other, to learn. You've got to take responsibility for your learning.' 'There are 4 staff on the course, we don't

have time to teach you all 1:1' – Robert tried to impress on the students, that students have to initiate engagement with staff and with each other.

Robert posed a question to the whole group: What one thing do you want to improve on? Discuss in pairs. This time the same student who had explained about his hangover.. 'Sometimes I'm not 100% bold, I prefer to sit back and listen' he then went on to ask what football team his discussion partner supports.

When the whole group returned to have a discussion on one thing you want to improve on. One female said: developing my concentration when working – I get distracted by my mobile phone' Robert replied 'Yes this will be a problem for you guys, your generation'. Another female said: I need to learn to say 'no', as I like to please people – mainly no to partying and socialising. Robert also identified with that – he recognised that trait in himself and explained an example of time pressures because of being a course leader.

The next part of the talk was on course essentials: studentcentral, timetable, email, group texts. Checking – has anyone visited the library? 3-4 students indicated they had – Robert praised these students 'good' with emphasis. What about journal articles? – no students admitted to reading journal articles. Robert explained journals are difficult to read, but there would be support with academic skills development.

Robert directed a question to the group: Are you going to register with the doctor/ nurse here? No one really wanted to engage in that conversation! So Robert asked some rhetorical questions – where will you register? Think about it, if you register here, they are more geared to student life, more immediate care. How many of you are in halls? About 2/3rds of group.

Robert gave out a yellow A5 booklet "referencing guidelines" – impressed upon students about reading it, in the first 7 weeks that they will be tested on it, it will be in their exam, and the regulations. He then suggested to the whole group: start forming

study groups, in threes or fours. 'You're going to hate this yellow book and love it, because it's quite tedious, but if you get it right it's easy marks'.

Robert: Any questions? (no-one answered)

What are you doing tomorrow? Robert recapped to check they know tomorrow's timetable. What are you doing tonight? – Robert joked 'will there be hangovers tomorrow?' At the end of the session lots of students held back at the end to ask a question 1:1. Overall the rapport seemed good, a fairly parental position adopted by Robert.

**2. Observation memo: Second-year cohort welcome session, 26 Sept 2017**

I bumped into the group, with the course leader, in the campus café, 10 minutes before the session. This was an informal interaction, chatting, relaxed. Some of the second years had just assisted Robert with a first-year student campus tour. Robert explained that having sent out a message asking for volunteers to help with the campus tours, he was overwhelmed with 15 replies offering to help.

After a bit of confusion with the room (timetable had a typo, should have been room 215, not 125), the group settled and was relaxed and chatting – seemingly enjoying being back and seeing each other. There were 17 students present – though apparently this was not the whole group, indicating some non-attendees. The classroom was small room, cramped with too many tables and chairs arranged in groups, with all chairs facing the front projector screen. Robert switched between standing and sitting throughout the session.

Robert flagged the placement session that is taking place at 1pm, and said to those present "could you assert a bit of peer group pressure on those peers missing?". "This is where we stop teaching, and start facilitating now you are in the second year. If you don't engage, and that's your choice, tough. You are in level 5 now"

Robert gave an overview of the second-year modules. Power, politics and sport: and the module leaders. These modules cover key issues such as racism, sexism, how UK

sport is tackling this now, links to current affairs, attitudes and cultures, bullying, harassment, safe guarding, in a £5billion industry.

Robert tried to appeal to the students by saying "instead of complaining that it's not engaging, because students have struggled with this in the past, instead think – "how can I use this?""

Explaining another module Human Resource Management Robert suggested using this module as an opportunity to do literature reading for dissertation, rather than blaming the module content as a reason not to engage.

Robert also explained a Reflective Practice module, explaining that this element of the course is unique only to this Sport & Leisure course in this country. Robert: "The HRM and RP modules, we are trying to make them practical and student led. Tasks will involve you preparing and reading. We're going to do more practical's than previously, to bring the subject content to life. For example – interview practice – will lead into the research skills module. Observations – also research skills. Questionnaires – for assessment and appraisals in HRM – also link to research skills module. Ultimately, this is preparing you for your placement. This is it guys, this year counts 25% of the value towards your degree. Points mean prizes. And you're paying for it so get good value out of it. If you don't engage, more than 3 times, I will not chase you anymore. Any questions, concerns? Because you're the good guys."

Robert introduced a small group discussion task:
'Let's set out a teaching contract for the year. Things we want to do as a course? Things we don't want to happen?' (Students had discussions on their tables) Mark sat down with a pair of students briefly. Students were chatting about issues outside of the course, it took them a little while to settle into the activity.

After about five minutes, Robert asked the students to feedback. Two students who were in a discussion pair said they wanted more active lessons, and the opportunity to teach each other. None of the other groups came forwards to feedback from their

discussions. Robert then referred to some of the student feedback reported in the NSS this year, explaining that there is a major student frustration among students that some students do not turn up. He asked the group "how can we all address that collectively?" The next task set by Robert was to talk in groups about: what DO we want from this year/ and DON'T want? After about 10 minutes, the students were invited to feedback. They spoke about wanting to:

- book more tutorials

- get involved in opportunities – extra-curricular – anything on offer

- form study groups

- be punctual

- have more reflection between staff and students (example: recap on lectures from the last week to make more links between sessions and modules)

- have group activity in lectures (active learning)

- cooperate and do work outside of teaching hours (independent learning and taking responsibility for their own learning)

- seek regular feedback – both from staff and students – trying to make it a two-way process

Robert thanked the group and responded by saying: "they call it 'student voice'; i.e., a dialogue. We welcome you to give us more feedback." Robert explained that students can be in the driving seat, especially with two modules in particular (reflective practice, and HRM) saying "you can throw it up in the air; and in the final year you can choose how you want it [module content in Law] to be".

Next came the students' list of 'don'ts' from their discussions: (student comments:) Don't:

- leave work until the last minute

- be late

- distract class mates

- be lazy

- fall into bad habits

Robert remarked: "We call it realising your potential. Remember the course mantra: *plus 20%*"

Robert set the next task: Discuss in your groups – what do you want from the staff? As the students began discussing in small groups I overheard one student saying to his course mates "I want staff to be available, enthusiastic, caring."

After about five minutes, the students fed back to the group that they wanted staff to:

- Be engaging in lectures, keep our interest, not students just sitting there and listening
- Be available for tutorials
- Be motivated and motivating
- Have passion and enthusiasm
- Equality – the student explains - 'Treat pupils how they treat you'

Robert responded by saying thank you for their feedback, and that he would take their points to the course staff meeting that week. Responding to the comment about equality, he said: "We [staff] get treated rather shabbily by a small number of students. We hear from students sometimes only when things are going badly. We want to stop treating you like kids. Instead let's collaborate, let's do it together'.

Robert asks everyone to stand up for a few moments as an energiser, then sit back down again.

Attention turns to the need to recruit some Course Reps. Robert explains the university protocol for recruitment, but explains that this course wants to extend that role, to be more about building course identity, and working as leaders, not just with staff, but amongst yourselves (students). Eight students volunteered and Robert explained that they would work as a team.

Robert drew the session to a close by asking if there were any final questions, or comments from the group. A student asked "how many students are on the course this year? (my note: wanting to find out how many had to leave after the first-year. And/ or perhaps wanting to feel satisfied that those students in the room, including himself, had 'made it through') Robert explained "I can't answer your question with a specific number, but I know that the attrition rate is too high, there are too many who are not achieving." Robert ended with asking "how did this session go?" and a small message about having a positive mindset.

**3. Observation memo: Final-year cohort welcome session, 29 Sept 2017**

Room layout in lines, it was hard for me to know where best to sit. I ended up away from the students, I was more like part of the teaching team, than an autonomous observer. I wasn't introduced in this session, whereas I had been in other sessions.

The energy levels in the room were not as high as I'd previously observed. Students were in there, but no lights on, grey day, sitting at the back. The room was arranged in rows facing the front. Not a lot of room at the front for the teacher – and the teacher is forced to stand in this particular classroom.

Robert began by talking through structure of the final year. But first "is there anything that any of you wish to raise?" – one student asked about two of her modules which are overlapping in the timetable.

Robert explained: "the final year is a hard year, because of the volume, intensity, it counts for 75% of the degree classification, it's stressful, especially at Christmas, requires time management, and the balance between life and studies needs to increase. I'm not being a grumpy old man, but… You need to learn humility, seek help, there is not time to hold negative emotion. We want to see you get the best degree outcome possible, and make you as employable as we can. This can only be done if you participate with it, engage, and seek all the support you can. It's an offer, take it up!"

Robert explains about the module options this year, they should add up to 30 credits, are there any clashes? Robert seems quite sombre and serious, no smiles around the room today.

Moving on the the first task, Robert asks everyone to move around and work with someone different. Under duress the students eventually move. He asked them to discuss: What is it that you want to get from this year? (gives an example – higher grade point average?)

The students start discussing in pairs/ groups. The types of discussions include: knowledge/ employability/ job/ skills/ balance/ managing my time/ balancing my life better. Another student (female) was describing to her pair that she is living at home and commuting in to uni. One student sitting at the front is shaking his head, another very fidgety at the back.

Robert asked the whole group – "Why is it important? How are you going to do it? Why have I asked you to do this exercise?" One student replied "to organise us" another laughed and said "so we wake up and smell the coffee"

Robert: "You need to consider the how/ what/ when/ time/ priorities/ tangibles/ your own aspirations and wants". Next task, to discuss: "What is it you need to do to get that? Come on! Get the most for your buck!"

Suddenly there was lots of intense talking in pairs now. Robert wanders around to talk to some of the pairs, and the students visibly cheer up when he interacts with them directly. One pair says three points to him:
- we want to improve the connection between tutors and students. Robert asks how, and how often? Student says through tutorials, weekly.
- we're going to do the readings set for us.
- we're going to try and sleep more – Robert encouraged the student to say that point to the rest of the group in the whole group discussion.

After a few more minutes of intense small group discussions, the noise levels continued to increase, along with the level of animation among the students. Robert asked the students to share their discussions. One student offered: "I want to get the best possible degree" Robert asked: How? Student: "by putting in more effort".

Robert refers to a business analogy: "You are business students – we work to the power of 3. You wish to get a first presumably? Where is your breaking point? (2:1); he draws on the board: 1st ☺ / 2:1/ PASS ☹".

Robert explained the coaching approach to individual personal tutorials, their tutor will work out their personal profile/ GPA, and they will get more of a detailed understanding of what grades/ classification they can aim for.

Robert: "Picking up on time management, this is a critical factor, and I'm not patronising you, but how many of you keep a diary?" Two students of the nine put their hands up. Robert: "You need structure, now more than ever, however you chose, use an iCal, google, hard copy… In the first year we went through time management and making a timetable with you and you said it was patronising, and that you knew it already – but you DON'T! You have to be structured, you do it for your sport, do it for your education". Robert wrote and boxed on the board:
Sleep - Living/ hygiene – Sport - Travel time – Food - Work

"Very few of you factor these in. These all take time. Now is the time to get structure in your life this term – because next term will be worse".

Robert set the next task – discuss in pairs: How are you going to organise yourselves? I overheard a couple of comments: 'buy a diary', 'go to the library at every opportunity'. Some students at this point were frantically writing on their own, some students didn't quite know what to do or what talk about in pairs, some were yawning or checking their phone.

Robert wraps it up – "Can I have some feedback on what we've just done? Has it been useful/ not useful?" Students don't say much apart from nod and agree.

Turning to the final matter of recruiting Course Reps, Robert explained "This is student voice, and I want everyone to pitch in and raise issues. None of you can criticise your opportunity for the student voice". Four students volunteered to be Course Reps, with Robert explaining "we will meet at least once a term, more often I hope, and I'll get in touch to arrange that."

Final points that Robert raises to the group:

- See your personal tutors
- We will move heaven and earth for you
- I hope you have a tremendous year
- The last Friday in July is graduation day
- Your dissertation is 25% of your degree, a 40-credit module.

"Have a short break now, and then John and I will take you through your dissertation module next". The students left for a break.