Chapter 4

A partnership with students in learning and teaching

INTRODUCTION

Do you think you have a good working relationship with your students? Are they enthusiastic, responsive and enquiring learners: essentially, are they engaged? If the answer is yes to all of those questions, then well done! But do you consider them your partners in learning? Working in partnership with students is a hot topic. Any online search in this area brings up a range of academic papers and information on this subject from institutional, student and sector perspectives, and a whole raft of publications from bodies such as the National Union of Students and Advance HE. But what do we mean when we talk about ‘working in partnership’? It has to begin at one level with student engagement, as without this there could not be any kind of partnership working. But what do we mean by this phrase? Philippa Levy, in Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014, foreword) notes that: “Student engagement” has become a core aim for the sector and, increasingly, is being linked to ideas about students’ roles as partners in their higher education communities.’

Student engagement as a sector-wide aim reflects a broad spectrum of activity including national student surveys and institutional student partnership agreements, through to engagement at the cohort and individual level where teaching and learning related activities are potentially co-constructed by lecturers and students together. ‘Engagement’ is in itself a contested term (Carey, 2013; Buckley, 2018) and, as Kahn (2017: 61) notes, we need to distinguish between ‘students undertaking a partnership with their educators’ and other forms of engagement such as ‘giving a response to a consultation . . . or by [students] taking a lead of their own’ in order to be clear in what we mean by engaging with our students in partnership working.
For Healey et al. (2014: 7): ‘partnership represents a sophisticated and effective approach to student engagement because it offers the potential for a more authentic engagement with the nature of learning itself and the possibility for genuinely transformative learning experiences’. In this chapter we’re going to look at two specific areas of potential partnership working that have the potential to develop such ‘genuinely transformative learning experiences’ and to help you to think about how these approaches might support you in developing your teaching: students as co-creators of curricula and students as teachers. This will be situated within a discussion around student learning in order to reflect on how you can support your students in a ‘more authentic engagement with the nature of learning itself’, contextualised within your own area of practice.

New spaces for practice and potentially new different educational paradigms need to be created in order to support us in moving into this territory. Working in partnership in this way with our students is not something that can be entered into as easily as developing a new seminar structure or introducing a blog into an online course. In supporting you in identifying these spaces for teaching development we’ll also consider the opportunities presented and the challenges raised if you are to employ a successful partnership working approach to developing your teaching.

**STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS**

In order to get maximum benefit out of the idea of working in a teaching and learning partnership with students, we need to think again about the traditional roles and identities of ‘teachers’ and ‘learners’. We also need to reflect on the changing nature of higher education, often instigated
by developments in digital technologies and demands from a technologically driven workplace – something we’ll look at in greater detail in Chapter 7. Life-long learning is now an idea that has very much become a reality as our graduates can expect to have portfolio careers rather than one job for life, with the associated demands of regular up-skilling or re-training. Part of this change is also the expectation that students will play a more active role in their learning journey through higher education. What might this look like? For some students, it may be engaging more proactively with their courses as class representatives or making the decision to sign up for a work placement or internship; that is, responding to the available opportunities. This kind of engagement can create mutually beneficial partnership working for everyone involved. In the following case study Bethan Wood and Sophie N. Brett (student) from the School of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Glasgow (Dumfries), discuss what they took away from an example of partnership working with an external organisation, whose views are also included.

Case study 4.1
LEVERAGING STUDENT CAPITAL
Bethan Wood and Sophie N. Brett, University of Glasgow (Dumfries)

Our campus is set in a rural location with access to the local living laboratory and within easy travelling distance of a number of environmental organisations. It is the ideal location for an environmental degree programme.

Bethan – My BSc programme includes an optional 60 credit placement course in the third year. This approach had worked well on an MSc programme I created and I was keen for the undergraduates to have the same opportunity – regardless of ability. Some of the local organisations already contributed to some of the courses through specialist talks, lectures, field visits and classes. It was therefore an easy step to raise the prospect of placements. As a result, about 80 per cent of students select a placement and locally 13 organisations have so far facilitated student placements, with some now offered on a yearly basis.

We have found that:

- Our students gain skills, and experience the reality of a work environment. This can lead to a lot of personal as well as professional learning which can mean that sometimes they find it is not the one for them.
They can link the University’s graduate attributes to their personal learning goals and can then articulate these skills on their CVs, enhancing their employability.

The employers frequently see the students as future employees. This has then led to further partnerships with the student: honours projects, part-time work, research, and higher degrees.

I have also benefited and learned new things from: specialist talks on courses, field classes, joint supervision of research students, and publishing papers together.

Sophie – Keen to ensure employability beyond undergraduate studies, choosing a credit-bearing work placement in collaboration with a local organisation over a taught course was a decision I easily made. Not only was it a great opportunity for me to gain experience of a `real-world‘ work place, it also facilitated networking with professionals in an area of interest – potentially for future career progression or study.

The accompanying assessments enhanced my experience by encouraging ‘real-world‘ thinking, rather than the traditional formats you would expect from a taught course.

Critically evaluating and reflecting on oneself and progress in relation to a real position with real consequences beyond the bubble of University, and being able to articulate this was a valuable experience I continue to benefit from.

Our campus is relatively small in a rural setting, and so having skills to build and maintain relationships outside academia are an important part of forging a career in the local area. While my journey brought me back to academia, the impact of my research relies on establishing and sustaining strong partnerships with local communities and organisations in rural areas. Thus, my work placement has proved invaluable to me.

Employers also valued the contribution the students make to their organisation.

The students were a real asset to the organisation and coped well with the demanding and varied workload – the willingness to ‘try anything they were asked to do’ was particularly appreciated.

The student could undertake the work/projects that we wanted to do, but which our own staff simply had not had the time to do.

Networking with the university/staff and the benefits of the experience meant that other departments within my organisation are now looking for placement students!
The three partners have benefited from this enhanced engagement. Placements could be included in any taught degree programme; whether as an option instead of a dissertation, or as an alternative to the equivalent credits in taught courses, and provide an authentic, practical and engaging route into multi-partnership working.

For other students, however, this kind of active learning can be more about creating new opportunities by assuming a direct involvement in the learning and teaching process through co-constructing that experience with their teachers. Viewing students as co-constructors of their own learning and teaching opportunities moves us away from the idea of students as simply passive consumers of educational didacticism. It brings to life the theory which extols active learning as the key to successful learning – but it may also be seen as taking it way beyond that idea and into a realm where students may know little about what they are trying to achieve, or can be argued as not ‘belonging’ to them. Some students will be drawn to this idea and others turned off by it. Some will be genuinely engaged by the process as a pedagogic device while others may take the view that it is ‘our job’, and not that of the students, to get involved in designing their learning experiences; parents or other funders may take a similar view. Positions on this topic will be adopted in relation to the individual’s conception of what university study ‘is’ – what it should look like, the roles that people should play within it, and what the outcomes should be. For those who associate ‘good teaching’ with increased contact hours, regardless of the role that the students take in this process, partnership working may not be an attractive option; nor may it make much sense to them. We are the teachers, who do the teaching, while the students are those who do the learning. Isn’t that the way it’s supposed to work?

From our perspective as teachers, however, to what extent can a partnership approach be seen as an extension of the student-centred model of teaching and learning? From a ‘sage on the stage’ didactic model to ‘guide on the side’ facilitation model; and now to ‘partner at the side’ co-construction model? For some of us, an initial reaction may be that students are not in a position to make these decisions in an informed
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and meaningful way. Bovill and Bulley (2011: 8) make a useful comment which addresses this concern:

in relation to other academic knowledge and skills we often support students to develop their capabilities, for example, with academic writing and presentation skills. Therefore, if a particular level of ASP [active student participation] in curriculum design is considered desirable and beneficial, equivalent support and guidance for students (and staff) may be necessary.

The idea of student co-construction of the curriculum as part of the overall learning process rather than an exceptional extra, contributing to the development of graduates’ attributes and value-added skills development within potentially every course of study, may suddenly make the idea appear much more attractive. It can also help to encourage an attitudinal shift – for both ourselves and our colleagues – in order to help create a new space for the development of working with our students in this way.

However, let’s not get ahead of ourselves but rather start with what we know and with which we are familiar. Is working with students, the same as partnership working? Is obtaining feedback from students just ‘good practice’, while acting on it reflects partnership working and the first steps towards working together on curriculum re-development? It may be that this is co-construction of the curriculum by the back door and that we may be engaged in a range of activities that do comprise partnership working without actually realising it. Good – and by ‘good’ we mean honest and thoughtful – student feedback has the potential to significantly enrich and enhance our practice. Learning from student feedback can help to develop your teaching in a number of ways including:

- leading you to a better understanding of how students learn;
- appreciating what works and what doesn’t in terms of your teaching practice;
- ‘road testing’ new teaching approaches;
- responding effectively to student concerns or anxieties;
- and validating your current approach to practice.

Students can also benefit from the shared learning experience that can be created by effectively designed feedback methods. In the following case study from the Arts Institute at Bournemouth, Val Fisher shares her experience of how feedback from students on her art and design course
illuminated the value-added learning that had developed from their studies, including student understanding of pedagogy.

**Case study 4.2**

**ADDING VALUE THROUGH STUDENT LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING**

Val Fisher, Arts Institute at Bournemouth

Lecturers are increasingly being faced with a dilemma. Where it was once possible to conduct small group sessions and create the ideal learning environment, increasing student numbers and larger groups now present challenges to those traditional models. Faced with one such large class, working in a practice-based art and design subject, I aimed to avoid the passive learning that can take place in lectures through the development of a ‘show and tell’ sketchbook of development work. However, the challenge was in recreating the learning dynamic of small group teaching, usually facilitated by a ‘flick-through’ of the sketchbook, in a lecture class of 40 students. I addressed this issue by photographing the pages to illustrate the development process and showed this as a PowerPoint presentation. Prior to this the students undertook a critique of my designs, and then, unaware of the context of my work, presented their analysis to the group. At the appropriate point in the lecture I talked them through the designs they had previously analysed. They were pleased to discover that their powers of analysis and deduction were astute, and I was pleased that their feedback indicated that my designs were successful. I did take away some ideas for improvements though.

The written feedback from students at the end of the lecture was very positive but also significant in that it worked on several levels. I was most interested by the comments about the session from the point of view of lesson planning and particularly the student understanding of pedagogy. The comments indicated that the students had evaluated the session not purely as a learning experience for themselves, but from a teaching and learning perspective — how to use visual aids, how to structure a two and a half hour session, how to vary the pace through the use of different methods, how to get the group to interact. They then went on to use what they had learned in the peer assisted learning scheme where third year students work with first years. It was a ‘red letter’ day for me, showing how verbal and written feedback were instrumental in informing student learning about their subject, my own
learning about my practice as a designer, my practice as a teacher, and student learning about teaching practice!

The driver here to create a new space for this kind of development was turning a potentially passive learning environment into one that facilitated student engagement and active learning. But the emergent learning that came out of this was the extent to which her students engaged not just with the activity itself but in how they adopted a meta-analytic approach to the whole experience, demonstrating a ‘student understanding of pedagogy’. How might this level of student engagement be harnessed in other ways?

In the following case study, Sue Beckingham explains how she approached her students in Business Information Systems and Technology at Sheffield Hallam University to look at co-construction of the curriculum. The opportunity to create a new space for development was provided in this case by social media. Three different stages of the partnership approach are discussed: co-creation of resources, ensuring the sustainability of the approach, and the value-added provided for the student experience.

**Case study 4.3**

**SMASH: SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC STUDIES AT HALLAM**

Sue Beckingham, Sheffield Hallam University

I became increasingly curious how social media, so easily accessible via a mobile phone, was being used to communicate and collaborate in the context of the student learning experience. Reflecting on my own use for informal learning and CPD, I wanted to know whether students also utilised social media beyond social interactions, and how this might be enhancing student engagement. There was only one way to find out and that was to ask my students.

I initially approached four students who’d attended the Social Media for Learning in Higher Education Conference at Sheffield Hallam University. Following the event I asked if they would like to form a special interest group to explore this topic further. This led to the creation of a student-led group named SMASH: Social Media for Academic Studies at Hallam. I adopted the role...
of mentor and we met fortnightly face-to-face and communicated online using social media.

Through our partnership, a framework was created which considers three strands of social media use for learning:

1. Learning Activities: supporting staff in identifying and using social media tools for communication and collaboration within and beyond the classroom.
2. Organising Learning: supporting students and staff to identify and use relevant social media tools to curate and organise information relating to learning.
3. Showcasing Learning: supporting students in preparing digital portfolios to openly share outcomes and projects to develop a professional online presence.

This approach was used to develop a collection of useful resources that would stimulate discussion around the use of social media; and these were shared with other tutors and students on our course. The result was that not only did we develop ways to enhance my teaching, so did my peers. Rich discussions transpired leading to new ideas that will be implemented across the course that students and staff value.

Initially I thought the project might fizzle out at the end of the academic year as one member graduated and two went on placement. However the remaining student was keen to take the project forward and reached out to her peers. Three new students joined the group, plus one of the students out on placement chose to continue to be involved remotely through social media. She will take up the lead in the new academic year and is already recruiting peers to join her.

From my perspective I will continue to explore student partnerships to enhance approaches in my own practice and hope to inspire others to do so too. I feel that the key aspects to the continued success of the SMASH project include:

- giving students ownership
- helping them develop confidence to put forward their perspectives
- ensuring that the students involved each recognise the skills they’re developing and how this valuable evidence can be added to their CVs
- celebrating their achievements using social media – this was valued immensely.

With thanks to the students involved in this student partnership to date: Sher Khan, Ola Mazur, Jess Paddon, Callum Rooney, Matty Trueman, Abby Wood and Corran Wood.
These two case studies identify different points on a spectrum of student partnership working through a co-construction approach. They have also highlighted two examples of what enabled it to happen: a drive to change the nature of the learning environment and the use of social media. Both of these drivers were highly relevant to both staff and students and allowed for positive engagement and follow-through. We will all have our own comfort level – staff, students and institutions – with the extent to which we might embrace or adopt such an approach. Bovill and Bulley (2011: 5) outline a ‘ladder of student participation in curriculum design’, which represents a continuum of levels of potential student participation.

**FIGURE 4.2** Ladder of student participation in curriculum design (Bovill and Bulley, 2011)
ranging from a tutor-controlled dictated curriculum with no student interaction through eight steps or stages, up to students being in control of decision-making and having substantial influence. In practical terms, Bovill and Bulley identify these steps as the lowest rung on the ladder beginning with students simply turning up for class, going all the way through to the topmost rung where students are developing their own learning outcomes and designing projects (2011: 7).

There are obviously several steps in between these two extremes and part of examining the idea of working with students in this way is to explore your levels of comfort with this process. Co-construction can be perceived by some to be a risky as well as an innovative undertaking. It raises a lot of questions for you, your students – and for your institution. It can also provide excellent opportunities for peer learning and support in addition to individual student learning, as we see in the following case study, which outlines the experiences of staff and students working together on the Student Active Engagement in Learning (SAEL) project at Royal Holloway, University of London. The case study was developed by Becky Thomas along with her students Anju Kirby and Billy Dyall, and provides an insight into the aims and outcomes of the project; the thoughts from all three on the experience from their individual perspectives; and additionally, as with Case study 4.3, an example of partnership working in the development of the case study itself.

Case study 4.4

STUDENT ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING – THE SAEL PROJECT

Becky Thomas, Anju Kirby and Billy Dyall, Royal Holloway, University of London

Higher education policy is continually emphasising the importance of students’ active engagement in their learning and the benefits that can be gained by students playing an active role in shaping this learning, so we approached this project with the view that our students would be active partners. Funding from the School of Biological Sciences allowed us to employ two students for four weeks, full time, on the SAEL project (Students Active Engagement in Learning). They were given the brief that we wanted to develop a series of stimulating and varied teaching materials to assist our students in their development. In response, the students created their own questionnaire, reviewed
the data and decided on two areas to target: students’ transition to university and employability, which resulted in the following project outputs.

- To support effective student transition, the students created a ‘survival pack’ sent out to students a month before they arrived at university.
- The survival pack contained videos and screencasts covering information about daily life and how to make the most of lectures and labs, creating an excellent introduction for new students.
- To support employability they created a further set of resources including a series of videos from our alumni talking about their career paths after graduation, helping students identify potential careers and providing tips on how to get there.

Billy – I jumped at the opportunity to take on an integral role within the department with student experience in mind. Using our own experience and that of my peers we have created a range of engaging resources which have successfully welcomed and supported new members of the student community.

Becky – From a staff perspective, the benefits of this project have been threefold: to the students on our programmes who benefit from the resources created, to the staff who get to work with dynamic students and to the students working on the project.

Anju – I have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the SAEL project. It has allowed me to have an active, creative role and feel involved within my department, whilst developing mixed-media resources for new students which I would have greatly appreciated when I joined the university.

Becky – Students are often consulted about their learning (e.g. course feedback forms), but it is much less common to see partnerships between staff and students where students are really brought to the heart of the teaching and learning process; they may not yet be ‘discipline or pedagogic experts’ but they have a much clearer knowledge of what it means to be a student in today’s higher education environment. Partnerships with students are a fantastic opportunity to work with individuals with a genuine understanding of the challenges faced by learners in higher education, and with support and guidance this can result in the creation of resources that are of real benefit.

This example of partnership working approached the idea of co-construction by framing it within a specific project. Adopting this method can provide a good testing ground for the concept in advance of potentially mainstreaming it within the broader curriculum. The focus of
the project was also on a topic that the individual students had experience of personally and was both relevant and meaningful to them. Providing this kind of hook into a model of co-construction is vital to a successful outcome. The level of student knowledge of the material also provided additional validity and authenticity to the co-construction approach.

Review point 4.1
IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Having now heard from several colleagues about how a model of co-construction has worked for them, reflect on these questions to help you think about how partnership working through co-construction might work in your practice.

- To what extent would this involve a culture change at your university?
- How receptive might your students be to the idea – or not?
- What vehicles currently exist that might help to mobilise these ideas?
- Can you create new vehicles?
- What are the potential barriers – or risks?
- What might be the benefits?
- How might working with students in this way help you to develop your teaching?
- And as a result, positively impact your students’ learning?

STUDENTS AS TEACHERS

Student partnerships in teaching and learning can extend beyond models of co-construction into the idea of students as teachers. We are already familiar with the idea of postgraduate students taking on teaching or demonstrating roles but identifying undergraduates with this role is much less common. So why would we want to do this?

- Teaching is one of the best ways of learning.
- It will support student engagement in active learning.
Students often learn best from one another, through peer learning. The act of teaching develops communication and presentation skills.

As we found earlier in this chapter when we looked at student feedback, we can often be working on the fringes of student partnership activity without actually realising or acknowledging it — or giving the students credit for it. Students will already be engaging in collaborative activities that support learning in a number of ways, such as:

- answering one another’s questions posted on discussion boards or social media platforms
- undertaking peer assessment
- providing feedback on peer presentations
- collaborative learning online
- leading debates, discussions or seminars
- structured activities, such as authoring Wikipedia pages or personal blogs related to their area of study.

Healey et al. (2014: 8) note that ‘[e]ngaging students as teachers and assessors in the learning process is a particularly effective form of partnership’ and we can see an example of this in action in our next case study. Neil Hudson tells us about the approach to champion students as teachers developed at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh.

**Case study 4.5**

**AND JUNO CAME TOO**

Neil Hudson, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh

At our university we have introduced a novel Undergraduate Certificate in Veterinary Medical Education. A key responsibility of veterinary professionals is the education of clients, colleagues and students undertaking placements. So, we wanted to formally recognise the important role that students play in the School’s teaching and learning processes and foster students as partners in education through the development of this Certificate. We surveyed students and future veterinary employers to see what they thought of such an idea. The
reaction was really positive and the comments helped us in the design of our programme. So, in 2014 we took the leap and started this optional programme which the clinical students can take in parallel to their main degree.

The programme is modular and students can enrol in their third year. There are core and elective components, incorporated into a reflective portfolio, with completion over the final three years of the veterinary degree. Our first cohort of 22 completed their Certificate in summer 2017 and we currently have a total of 120 enrolled with us. A small subset can take their training a step further under our staff mentorship by embarking on applying for Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA). Six students have achieved this to date, with several other applications underway. This is very exciting for us as our first successful AFHEA student was the first veterinary student in the UK to achieve this qualification.

One educational strand implemented in the Certificate is the opportunity for our veterinary students to become involved in outreach workshops and school visits to foster the link with young people aspiring to enter higher education. As an illustration of how this has grown, in the first year of running the programme, 26 of our students have been involved in a total of 10 outreach educational activities, with exposure to over 900 school pupils. The number of activities has increased and the reach is not just within Edinburgh and surrounds, but some of our students have done similar activities in their previous schools, including further afield in Scotland, England and even Hong Kong and Alaska!

The work with schools has really been embraced by our students and it has been great forging partnerships in this area. For me personally, this has been incredibly humbling and rewarding. Seeing our students in action with school pupils, inspiring them and reaching out with their developing skill set, has been fantastic. I have also learnt so much in terms of my own teaching, learning from my students and from the school teachers, for whom I have the highest admiration. It has broken down perceived barriers between staff and students and now we are very happy to share tips and learn from each other; the Certificate has really provided the backdrop to allow this. It has been a real two-way process and that is what partnerships are all about. Plus my dog, Juno, who accompanies us on many of these teaching activities, has really enjoyed herself, being the centre of attention as we teach pupils how to care for their pets.

Our students have also developed and been involved in activities as part of their Certificate that include helping fellow students with peer-assisted learning activities and charitable work such as tutoring refugees and helping homeless people with their pets. Through this programme our students have been fantastic ambassadors and inspirational role models. Truly, they are our partners in education.
Neil Hudson’s work in this area has created a distinctive space for development of a partnership working approach, to which his students have risen admirably. Their willingness to be stretched and challenged has seen them certify their learning as teachers and also take ownership of the idea, with increasing numbers engaging with the opportunity to take their learning a step further in becoming Associate Fellows of the HEA – accredited by Advance HE. In supporting his students to become teachers, Neil is also supporting them in developing their professionalism. Can you see similar opportunities within your context for your students?

**OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

What is it that you might be trying to achieve if you adopt a partnership working approach with your students? What benefits might there be for your students in terms of more meaningful, relevant and authentic learning; greater inclusivity; or greater understanding of how assessment supports learning? A partnership implies benefits to both sides so to what extent might working with students in this way help you to develop your teaching? Indeed, there is the possibility that:

student involvement in course design could lead to much more radical change in higher education: ending what is perceived by some to be the domination of curricula by Western, white and male thinking, and opening them up to be more representative of university communities that are increasingly diverse, and ever more internationalised.

(Havergal, 2015)

We saw from the case studies above that we need a reason or an opportunity – a driver – to implement this kind of approach and for it to work effectively. What might that look like in your practice? Do any of these statements resonate with you and might they provide that driver?

- My course is no longer ‘working’
- My students are not engaged
- I want to make my classroom environment more participatory
- There is funding available to develop a student-centred project
- The student voice needs to come through more clearly in my practice

(adapted from Bovill, 2014)
If you have an idea in mind, try using the planning approach outlined in Table 4.1 to scope the project and then to reflect on what the possible outcomes could be.

In this case study Richard Sober and Anne Llewellyn talk us through their development of a co-creation and authentic learning approach with their students on the Interior Architecture and Interior Design courses at Teesside University. Using the planning approach outlined above, they reflect on the opportunity to develop a partnership approach, the action taken, and the ways in which their students benefited from this approach.

**Case study 4.6**

**A PLANNED APPROACH**

Richard Sober and Anne Llewellyn, Teesside University

**What was the teaching opportunity?**

Part of the top floor of our University Library was designated as a postgraduate learning space and whilst the lower four floors had undergone major refurbishment, this floor remained unchanged since an earlier refit. The space consisted of a silent student area and a more social learning space. However, in practice both areas were treated as individual study rooms. The design students were asked to redesign it to more clearly represent the spatial definition from the perspective of being learners themselves, to increase social interaction and use of and engagement with the spaces. This presented an opportunity for collaborative working between our students and the University Library.
What did you do?

The students worked collaboratively in small practice teams to produce the designs for the postgraduate study rooms. This approach replicates industrial practice as well as developing team and leadership skills. The key tasks involved surveying the space, analysing user requirements, developing the brief from the client’s initial aims and requirements and ultimately producing design solutions.

What was involved?

The project was undertaken over a 12-week period and culminated in a presentation to the client in the form of a professional pitch rather than an academic presentation. Throughout the process the students were supported by design tutors and had access to advice from the Library team but were encouraged to lead their own projects and apply their own expertise and perspective of defining spaces for distinct learning types. Students received feedback on both their design and presentation skills.

How did this approach develop partnership working with your students?

This authentic practice and problem-based learning followed the principle of students as producers defined by Neary (2010) as ‘a fundamental principle of curriculum design whereby students learn primarily by engagement in real research projects, or projects which replicate the process of research in their discipline. Engagement is created through active collaboration amongst and between students and academics.’ This demonstrates the impact of this approach in terms of product, process and personal dimensions of knowledge gain and when examining the process it fulfils many of the latest aims for innovative and student centred pedagogy.

What did the students get out of it?

The benefits for the students involved were working on a real-life project with a real client and real users. This creative project connected teaching and research with students at the centre of the activity and the problem-based learning approach allowed students to apply critical thinking and analytical skills to a tangible disciplinary problem coupled with their research skills. Through the project, students developed both key discipline and more general employability skills such as team working, problem solving and professional presentation skills but with the added authenticity of applying their skills and knowledge to a real problem, the solution to which had a real chance of being taken forward.
What did you get out of it?

The student as producer approach links authentic learning with research informed teaching. This takes the lecturer and learner relationship much further towards facilitation and a module’s learning outcomes beyond being created simply for assessment purposes.

CONCLUSIONS

The case studies in this chapter have shown students: taking advantage of curriculum opportunities which allowed for the development of meaningful learning partnerships for everyone involved; adopting a more proactive lead in curriculum development with their teachers, benefiting themselves and their peers; and enhancing their professional skills through assuming roles as teachers themselves. In developing your teaching through partnership working with students, there are a number of aspects you need to think about.

■ What are the anticipated benefits or opportunities for all involved?
■ Why might your students choose to get involved? Are these benefits obvious?
■ How will the overall power balance in the relationship be managed? And who will do the managing?
■ What are the contingency plans if the relationship fails to work as anticipated? Would this simply be a lost opportunity or does a central aspect of your approach to learning and teaching hinge on the success of a partnership working approach?

Having a clear conception of what partnership working might look like in your context is an important starting point. This can vary in relation to discipline (Crawford, Horsley, Hagyard and Derricott, 2015: 15), experience in this area, and the ultimate objective and intended outcomes for the partnership. Keeping the HEA’s ‘values in partnership’ (ibid.: 2015: 17) in mind when you’re thinking about where to start may be a good place to begin.

Developing partnership working approaches with our students, either through co-construction of the curriculum or encouraging our students to take on more of a teaching role, will inspire some but terrify others. It might also invoke hostility and confusion, where colleagues feel
threatened by these developments. Yet, while there are undoubtedly challenges and potential risks associated with embracing this approach, we should not be closed off to considering how it might potentially enhance our teaching and ultimately our students’ learning. Indeed, if we are to continue to act as ‘gatekeepers to the curriculum’ (Bovill and Bulley, 2011: 8) what restrictions are we placing on the insights that might be gained from engaging in a partnership approach with our students?

REFERENCES


