Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: challenges and opportunities

Dr Catherine Bovill, Senior Lecturer
Academic Development Unit, Learning & Teaching Centre

Engaged Student Learning through Partnership
HEA Enhancement Event  25th March 2015
Overview

- Defining and mapping partnership
- Questioning our motivations
- Challenges to working in partnership
- Re-envisioning challenges as opportunities
- Practical strategies
- Moving forward
Defining partnership in L&T

“...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.”

(Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014)
Mapping partnership (broadly)

Student engagement

Co-creation

Active student participation

Partnership
Mapping partnership: a conceptual model

Healey, Flint & Harrington 2014 (HEA)
Mapping partnership: student roles

Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard & Moore-Cherry (forthcoming)
Mapping partnership: areas of engagement

Healey, Bovill & Jenkins (forthcoming)
Examples of partnership

- students co-creating the content of courses (Duah & Croft 2011; Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014)

- students co-evaluating a course (Bovill, Aitken, Hutchison, Morrison, Roseweir, Scott & Sotannnde 2010)

- students selecting text books (Mihans, Long & Felten 2008)

- students designing their own essay title (Kruschwitz in Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten. 2014)

- students choosing assessment methods and co-grading (O’Neill 2011; Deeley 2014)
Questioning our motivations

• Our motivations can influence our approach to partnership and the opportunities we create (Bovill 2013)

• “My course is broken and students are not engaged”

• Evidence of the benefits (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten, 2014)
  (1) increased engagement and motivation
  (2) increased metacognitive understanding of L&T and
  (3) enhanced learning and teaching practices

• A more democratic classroom

• The university is going through a structural change

• There is a small amount of funding available

• Marketised HE / democratic education
I found the experience of co-designing my geography course with my tutor and classmates exciting but the lecturers in history seem closed to the idea of partnership and I don’t know what to do because I’m finding the lectures dull...
Common challenges

- Resistance to students becoming partners
- Navigating university structures and norms
- Ensuring diverse perspectives are included

Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard and Moore-Cherry (forthcoming)
Challenges will vary depending on...

- Which students are involved
  *Retrospective, Current, Future* (Bovill 2014)
- Which staff are involved
- If not all students, who is chosen to be involved and how?
- Are staff and students rewarded for active student participation?
- Experience – pedagogical habits and familiarity
- Timing, opportunity and context
Challenges or opportunities?

- **Resistance to students becoming partners**
  - Effective communication, demonstrating SaP is worthwhile

- **Navigating university structures and norms**
  - Start small, new ways of thinking about large classes, building on existing structures and priorities

- **Ensuring diverse perspectives are included**
  - Intentionally choosing the unrepresented, including a range of skills, work with whole class
  - E.g. Hearing loss – deaf gain (Bauman & Murray, 2010)

  - Find pockets of good practice and build on them
  - Share examples and increase discussion

Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard & Moore-Cherry (forthcoming)
Practical strategies (1): Initiating partnerships

- start small
- be patient
- ensure participation is voluntary
- think carefully about which students to involve
- create shared aims
- cultivate support
- learn from mistakes

Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014
Practical strategies (2): sustaining and extending partnerships

- integrate partnerships into other work
- give/get credit for partnership work
- enhance diversity in partnerships
- CPD for staff and students involved
- value the process
- formally end partnerships when time

Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014
• Consider your **own attitude** to roles and power  
  – Language, behaviour
• Develop ways to **negotiate**  
  – Reifying student voice, discomfort, learn from mistakes
• **Be honest** about where power imbalance exists

Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014
Moving forward

• “Students, the university’s unspent resource” (Gärdebo & Wiggberg, 2012)
• Raising expectations (Bovill 2014)
• Overcoming pedagogical habits (Bovill 2014)
• Changing mindsets
• Maintaining criticality
References


