Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching
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Outcomes of partnership

Across examples of large- and small-scale partnerships, at different kinds of institutions from small liberal arts colleges to large research universities, and in different countries, we have found that outcomes of partnership were similar for faculty and for students, although the particulars might vary. We found that both faculty and students experience:

(1) engagement
   o Both faculty and students experience enhanced motivation and learning; and,
   o Both express a greater desire to invest time and energy, to work harder, to explore and learn.

(2) awareness
   o Both faculty and students develop greater metacognitive awareness;
   o Both come to see more clearly why they do what they do as teachers and learners and why what works does work or why what they are doing is not working as well as it could; and,
   o Both develop a stronger sense of identity as teachers and learners, which allows them to take greater risks and to grow

(3) enhancement
   o Finally, both faculty and students report improved practice;
   o Both talk about being better, most successful, more effective; and,
   o Both talk about having a better classroom experience

Advice for getting started with partnerships

Start small. This is both practical and prudent. The approach needs to be manageable in your particular context. There may be existing practices that could be adapted to include students as partners, such as involving students in collecting and discussing student feedback of courses and then collaboratively acting on the outcomes of this feedback.

Be careful about the language you use to describe your partnership. Your (and your students’) language can often unintentionally reveal assumptions about faculty retaining control over the learning and teaching process.

Think carefully about which students to involve in partnership. If not all students are to be invited into partnership, clear criteria will be needed for selecting students. Think carefully about the implications of choosing, and by implication not choosing, particular groups of students. One solution to this issue is to work in partnership with an entire cohort of students.

In the early stages of partnership it is crucial to create shared aims by ensuring that all involved recognize themselves and others as legitimate partners who bring valuable perspectives and expertise to the project.

Throughout the time spent in partnership, it is important to be patient. Things do not always go according to plan. Sometimes faculty and student expectations of partnership do not match and students and faculty may need to take more time to share expectations and jointly negotiate a plan.

Cultivate support for working in partnership with students. There are usually other colleagues on campus who are interested in, or are undertaking, partnership work. It can be valuable to meet with others to discuss the nature of partnerships and support others who might otherwise be working in isolation.

At all stages but particularly at the beginning, learning from mistakes is key to moving on to the next stage of partnership and adapting and enhancing how staff and students work in partnership with the potential for further learning from future partnerships.

Advice on sustaining and deepening partnerships

Where partnerships have been established, it is important to try to integrate partnerships into other work that is going on. This can really help with partnership sustainability if connections can be made between everyday activity and partnerships. Similarly, try to maximize any institutional opportunities for integrating partnerships into ongoing work.

To deepen existing partnerships, it is important to enhance diversity in partnerships. Ensuring that a diverse range of students and faculty engage in learning and teaching partnerships and are open to the richness of perspectives that arise from this diversity, can contribute to deepening partnerships and the learning and rewards that arise from partnerships.

In order to sustain student-faculty partnerships, it is important to value the process of partnership, and not just focus on what partnership can lead to in terms of outcomes. The processes of negotiating power, learning to work in partnership across traditionally hierarchical boundaries and sharing the co-construction of knowledge with others, can be transformative experiences for both students and faculty.

It is also important to plan to formally end partnerships, and to build this planned ending into the shared aims of the partnership. This acknowledges to everyone involved that the time and effort of partnership are not unending, which can make it easier for individuals to agree to participate in partnerships.

Key resources

Healey, Mick (2018). Students as Partners and Change Agents Bibliography, available for access on https://www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources

International Journal for Students as Partners, https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/ijsap