

Students as Partners: developing a culture of co-creation at the University of Adelaide

Dr Beth R. Loveys⁽¹⁾, Dr Hayley McGrice⁽²⁾, Associate Professor Catherine Snelling⁽³⁾
^{(1),(2)} Faculty of Science, ⁽³⁾ Faculty of Health & Medical Science, University of Adelaide

Abstract

Co-creation initiatives in higher education, where students authentically collaborate with teachers, have produced positive outcomes in a wide variety of contexts. At the University of Adelaide there is a growing number of successful co-creation projects initiated by staff at a grassroots level, whilst at the same time the institution is looking to create a formal Students as Partners framework. What has become clear is that a true partnership incorporates reciprocity and shared responsibility, not just teachers consulting with students and asking for their feedback.

Three co-creation case studies from the University of Adelaide are presented to demonstrate how these initiatives were designed, and describe the benefits for both students and staff. It is planned that these exemplars of the emerging co-creation initiatives at the university will encourage STARS audience discussion and stimulate the sharing of ideas to promote this concept in higher education.

Introduction

Students as partners, often termed co-creation, is becoming the focus of substantial research in higher education. Evidence has shown that effective student-teacher partnerships can address a wide number of contemporary issues encountered by universities (Curran, 2017; Bovill et al, 2016; Cook-Sather et al, 2014). Beyond the obvious benefit of enhanced student engagement, co-creation has positively contributed to student-staff relationships, graduate attributes and employability, course evaluation, assessment, curriculum design, as well as institutional recruitment and outreach programs. Moreover, successful implementation of co-creative partnerships has occurred across a wide range of disciplines. (Moore-Cherry et al, 2016; Fluckiger et al, 2010)

Mick Healey, the prolific educational researcher and co-creation champion, has developed a model that identifies the range of potential settings of student partnership. Figure 1 eloquently shows the scope and connectedness of how students and teachers can work together in a higher education context.

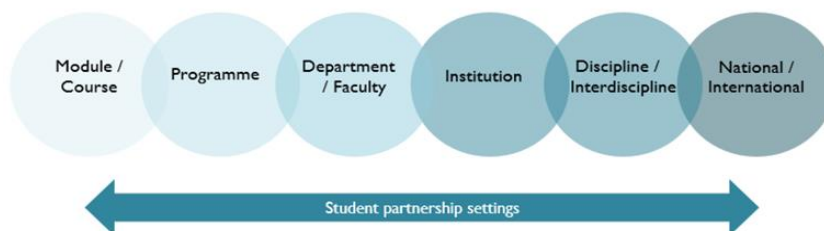


Figure 1 (Healey et al, 2014)

A model of active student engagement (figure 2) demonstrates levels of student participation in co-creation. Arguably, the lower rungs fail to incorporate a ‘students as partners’ approach. However, the model does provide opportunity for teachers to identify where they currently ‘stand’ on the ladder. It is commonplace for activities to be labelled as co-creation, when in actuality student feedback has simply been sought or incorporated, a situation that does not bare the hallmarks of a true student-teacher partnership.

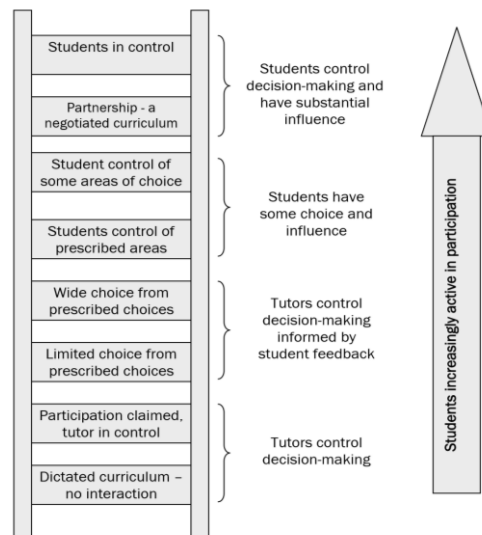


Figure 2 (Bovill & Bulley, 2011)

Students as Partners at the University of Adelaide

Student-teacher co-creation has been steadily gaining momentum at the University of Adelaide. In recent years, staff from diverse disciplines have implemented a variety of co-creative approaches to develop student-centred content. A number of students as partners initiatives demonstrate successful implementation at faculty, school and course level (Tooher et al, 2017). Driving these projects was a resolve to improve student engagement and curriculum quality using a previously underutilised resource - the student body. These co-creation activities were developed as a grassroots initiative, but based on sound evidence in educational research.

The University of Adelaide has responded at an institutional level in its “Strategy for Learning Teaching and Assessment 2016-18”, where it explicitly aims to “*identify and support students as co-creators and partners in learning, and in learning and teaching enhancement*” (<https://www.adelaide.edu.au/learning/slta/SLTAv2.pdf>) A Students as Partners Framework is currently being (co)-developed for implementation in 2018. It is clear that both “top-down” and “bottom-up” forces at the university have identified the benefits of co-creation as central to improving student engagement, education quality and learning outcomes.

Co-Creation Case Studies

Case Study One: students as course design partners
Inquiry-based learning is a feature of undergraduate curricula at the University of Adelaide. Thirty-two students and sixteen staff from the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences worked as partners to develop good practice principles for inquiry-based course design. In a two-hour co-creation ‘think tank’, groups (2:1 student: teacher) pooled their collective experience to identify what works (and what doesn’t) in this pedagogical approach. A major

challenge in planning this co-creation activity was to ensure students were equal contributors, not just ‘listened to’ or ‘surveyed’ for their opinions. However, the workshop exceeded expectations as the tangible student engagement was only matched by the palpable teacher engagement.

Benefits to Students	Benefits to Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Groups had more students than staff - less intimidating · Worked with staff from different course - facilitated more honest feedback · Certificate of participation for CV · Saw first-hand how staff are committed to enhancing their learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · More informal interaction with students · Worked with students from other courses - less threatened by feedback · Witnessed authentic student buy-in to course improvement · Received lots of good ideas to incorporate into their classes

Outcomes: the outcomes of this co-creation initiative contributed to the content of a staff development workshop: “Planning (more) engaging and effective inquiry-based learning in your courses”. The co-creators of this content were acknowledged as key developers of these best practice principles. Staff development workshop participants commented that knowing the best practice principles were co-designed in a ‘students as partners’ context, made them more authentic, with greater chance of being applied in their courses.

Case Study Two: student-designed assessment

Second and third year students and academic staff participated in a co-creation workshop focused on designing a specific assessment task in a new course, Plant Production and Global Climate Change, in a new program, the Bachelor of Applied Biology. Participants working in groups with a student: staff ratio of 4:1 were provided with broad learning outcomes to be achieved by the assessment task and were given complete freedom, but with strict time limits, to design an assessment task around these outcomes. The co-created assessment task emphasized both inquiry-based learning and mastery of key discipline specific research skills and methods. Using co-creation resulted in the production of unique student centred assessment tasks that successfully addressed the learning outcomes.

Benefits to Students	Benefits to Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Gain insight in role of learning outcomes · Working in a team of peers and teachers · Self-reflection with regard to learning style · Ownership over component of the course · Involvement in SaP at National level · Networking with students and staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Student-centred assessment · Greater student engagement · Increased efficiency in curriculum development · Improved relationships with student · Publications from students

Outcomes: key features of the co-created assessment task were: student choice of type of assessment (allowing students to perform to their strength); assessment broken into smaller manageable modules (allowing more regular feedback from the teacher). The co-created assessment was subsequently tested by the inaugural student cohort, who knew that the format had been devised by students and teachers working together. The co-creation continued with this first student cohort contributing to modifications made during the semester; enhancing the student-centredness of the assessment task whilst maintaining the constructive alignment of assessment with learning outcomes. This case study demonstrates that when students are given control of prescribed parts of the curriculum successful outcomes can be achieved.

Case Study Three: students as course design partners	
<p>A comprehensive review of inquiry-based learning in a first year class from Veterinary and Animal Science was planned and undertaken by a team of four undergraduate researchers from second and third year of the program. Project contribution from the supervising academic was limited to obtaining human ethics approval for a survey and focus group-based study and weekly mentor meetings. Otherwise, the student researchers led the planning and execution of the review. Surveys were distributed to the participants in face to face and online formats; focus group participants contributed their views using Google forms. The student researchers collated and analysed all survey data, prepared focus groups transcripts and formulated a comprehensive report of their findings that was submitted to the Faculty of Sciences.</p>	
Benefits to Students	Benefits to Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Autonomous research skills developed · Working in a research team · Survey and form design, data collation and report preparation · Statistical analysis skills · Conference presentations · Networking with students and staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Time - students acting autonomously · Greater access to participants · Quality data - honest responses from participants · Greater buy in from participants · Publications from students · Improved relationships with students
<p>Outcomes: as the project progressed, the student researchers transitioned from a context of ‘traditional’ academic instruction to a research partnership that culminated with the students in overall control. The student research partners were organised, professional and highly autonomous throughout the project, having the confidence to independently and successfully complete the review. 98 students responded to the survey, with 30 students taking part in the student led focus groups. Over 40% of students felt group-based discovery learning helped them to develop analytical and research skills and gave them a greater appreciation of group work. Socialisation with other students, developing experience with group environments and working under pressure were skills students also attributed to group-based discovery learning, valuable skills in for any first year cohort.</p>	

Discussion

The three case studies demonstrate how co-creation activities, in diverse contexts within the university and with varying degrees of student autonomy, have clear benefits for staff and students alike. Active collaboration between students and staff is central to all three case studies, despite the varied goals of each one. High student to staff ratios were a common feature, helping to empower students in a potentially intimidating situation. Furthermore, staff in every co-creation activity experienced improved relationships with students. Education researchers such as Wentzel (2009) have shown the relationship between students and teachers plays a central role in improving engagement and motivation. Consequently, this could be considered as a significant benefit derived from the notion of students as partners.

As an emerging initiative at the University of Adelaide the development of a students as partners culture will rely on a sustained grassroots adoption of co-creation. At the same time, the development of a formal Students as Partners Framework will encourage more widespread adoption of student-staff partnership activities. During the STARS conference workshop, feedback will be sought on the emerging initiative of co-creation at the University of Adelaide, whilst participants will be encouraged to implement co-creation at their institutions.

Questions/Issues for Audience Discussion

1. Based on Healey et al's (2014) model of student partnership settings, can you identify where co-creation is occurring in your own institution?
2. Do you think Bovill and Bulley's ladder should be re-designed? How? Why?
3. Based on the case studies provided, do you have an example of co-creation to share? Use the template provided to start designing your own co-creation activity

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