

April 2021

Navigating the Ethics of Partnership Relationships

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Context – my learning journey

- Background in Biomedical Sciences research and teaching
- Lecturer in Foundation learning
- First became involved with student staff partnerships in 2015
- Co-developed and supported the **Students as Co-Creators** programme until 2020
- Commitment to creating a culture of student partnership
- First curriculum design collaboration 2019-2020
- More student partnership at cohort/'whole-class' level in 2020-2021

What I hope to share with you

- Student partnership context for this talk
- What makes relationships the foundation of transformative partnerships
- Why we must engage with questions of ethics
- Examples of how we navigated and built relationships in a small group partnership and ‘whole-class’ partnership work

What does **student partnership** mean to me?

- Inspired by the NUS manifesto for student partnership and Cook-Sather et al (2014) definitions
- Inspired by the work of student and staff co-creators at Westminster
- An opportunity to re-imagine learning and teaching, and do things differently
- An opportunity to bring diverse views and students lived experiences into the classroom and learn from them
- An opportunity to better understand student needs

‘At its roots partnership is about investing students with the power to co-create, not just knowledge or learning, but the higher education institution itself...A corollary of a partnership approach is the genuine, meaningful dispersal of power.’
NUS (2015)

‘We define student-faculty partnership 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’

Cook-Sather, A, Bovill, C, and Felten, P (2014) Engaging students as partners in teaching & learning: A guide for faculty. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Why are **relationships** central to 'successful' or transformative partnerships?

- Doing things differently requires disrupting traditional student staff roles and power dynamics
- Understanding students needs and creating space for their contributions requires compassion and trust
- Partnership work can sometimes be challenging, risky, time consuming for both students and staff – affective relationships can help us navigate these
- But partnership work can also be 'fun'.



Why do we need to engage with questions of ethics?

- Duty of care – to engage with the priorities of our students
- For developing conditions where students can contribute their full selves
- For developing conditions where we listen and value those contributions
- To know how to navigate conflict and challenges, prevent harm
- To be mindful of the promises we make



Building relationships: Working in partnership with a **small group**

Foundation module – Critical Thinking for Academic and Professional development

4 student partners were invited to co-create the curriculum, including:

- Marking rubric
- Lecture and assessment topics
- Lecture and seminar activities

How the student partners describe their partnership with 3 words:

Chelsea Thompson – ‘family, collaboration and openness’

Sandro Porelo – ‘helpful, cooperative, relieving’

Mazarie Saeedi – ‘connecting, productive and collaborating’

Hassan Jagne – ‘fun, creative, brainstorming’

Building relationships: Working in partnership with a **small group**

What we did to disrupt power and build relationships:

- Studied the 'Westminster Co-Creators Principles' together
- Shared motivations of being involved and where these stem from
- Discussed our positions in the partnership – what we know and what we don't know
- Shared our goals for the project
- Shared our commitments and agreed on how we prefer to communicate –acknowledging the importance of flexibility
- Met in a different environment to the classroom
- Enacted changes as promptly as possible
- Dialogue about challenges
- Doing 'common' things together – e.g. eating

Building relationships to develop a **culture** of partnership in a large module online

Two large foundation modules with nearly 600 students

Lecture groups of ~100 and Seminar groups of ~25

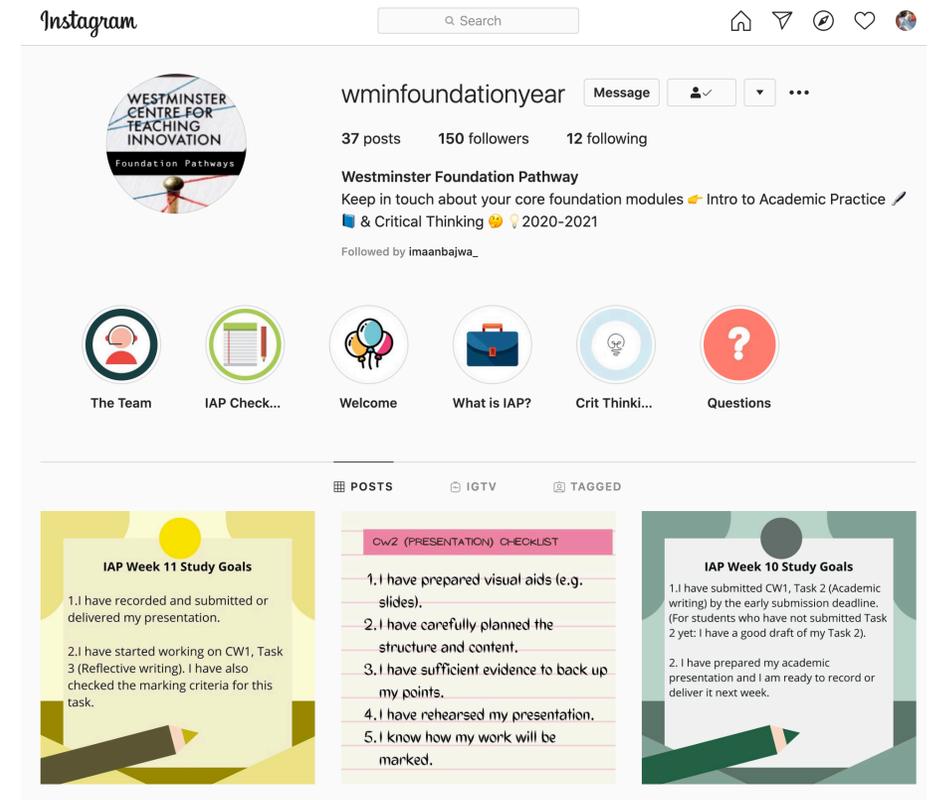
Experience of partnership work:

- More challenging to achieve a shift in relationships between students and staff
- Students shared that they felt '**cared for**' on this module
- Partnership learning experiences:
 - Co-creation of classroom values (first semester)
 - Democratic vote to assign lecture and assessment topics (second semester)
 - Adapted Problem Based Learning in seminars to be in partnership (second semester)

Building relationships to develop a **culture** of partnership in a large module online

What did we do to disrupt power and build relationships:

- 'Humanize' the digital learning experience
- Multiple channels of communication
- Ice-breakers to get to know the students and their learning experiences
- Listening to music together
- Creating time to chat about everyday life
- Drawing together
- Played online games together



Final reflections

- Partnership relationships that incorporate trust and compassion can enable transformative work for students and staff
- When creating these relationships, we need to wrestle with several question of ethics to allow our relationships to be meaningful and authentic
- There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach for navigating the ethics of partnership relationships and our approach may differ for each cohort, group size and other factors that affect how we learn
- It is also okay to start with partnership work, and let relationships develop and classroom dynamics shift in the process.

Thank you

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