

G9 Conwy 2 Thursday 6 December 9.00 -9.30

Staff-Student Partnership Initiatives to Promote Digital Technology Use in UK Higher Education: Their Emergence and Role in Defining Students as Partners (SaP) (0328)

Fiona Handley¹ *University of Brighton, United Kingdom*

This paper explores the historical development and emergent nature of initiatives which are based on partnerships between staff (e.g. lecturers, librarians, learning technologists) and students in digital technology projects in UK higher education. These initiatives form part of many institutions' approach to developing student and staff digital skills, by for example, giving training in particular learning software or devices, raising awareness of digital issues, or using technology to promote other initiatives. These fit within a broader international movement of students as partners schemes (SaP) often referred to as student ambassadors, change agents, or champions.

This research takes a social practice based view of SaP activities, scrutinising them as a set of emergent practices shaped by and generating discourses around, for example, student engagement and performance. It is situated in a growing body of research that reflects on the SaP and student engagement (e.g. Bovill 2017, Mercer-Mapton et al 2017, Matthews, 2017), and critical approaches to technology use in education (e.g. Gourlay and Oliver 2018), and particularly responds to calls for further research into understanding partnership working to avoid its appropriation by neo-liberalism (Matthews, Cook-Sather, Healey in press).

The roots of SaP are in students as researchers (Healey and Jenkins 2009), and students as producers initiatives (Neary and Winn 2009). The concept began to gain broader traction and a higher national profile through a series of national cross-agency initiatives such as Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) (Chatterton 2015) which highlighted the effectiveness of students as partners schemes within the participating institutions. Some of these agencies developed their own student partnership initiatives, for the example the Higher Education Academy (HEA nd, Healey, Flint, Harrington 2014), and the National Union of Students (the [Student Engagement Toolkit](#)). New organisations such as [RAISE](#) and [TSEP](#) were created, generating conferences and academic journals such as the *International Journal for Students as Partners* and *Student Engagement in Higher Education*, allowing the dissemination, often multiple times, of initiatives, and creating a focal point for SaP practitioners.

These changes have not taken place without scrutiny however. The increased institutional interest in SaP as part of the student engagement agenda can be understood as a mechanism for promoting a new staff/student relationship against the backdrop of the neo-liberalist reshaping of higher education (Macfarlane 2017, White 2018). Rather than seeing these initiatives as ways to increase students' sense of community and agency, this critiques position them as cynical attempts by institutions to divert student and staff attention away from the performance-based, consumer culture in higher education. SaP practitioners are now proactively addressing concerns through more thorough evaluation of projects (e.g. Matthews, Cook-Sather, Healey in press, Mercer-Mapton et al 2017), for example around 'tokenistic' approaches to partnership (Bovill and Bulley 2011).

Jisc, the national agency for supporting digital technology use in higher and further education, was one of the CLL partners that continued to develop its own students as partners initiative, which in line with Jisc's remit had a digital technology element. In 2014 it launched the Student Change Agent Network ([CAN](#)) to disseminate the results of their earlier CLL and digital literacies work more widely, and to support other institutions to implement partnerships in technology projects. Their financial and practical support for initiatives, and the dissemination of project findings, through a blog, a journal (*Journal of Educational Innovation Partnership and Change*), and a national CAN conference, helped underline a particular approach to development and dissemination which focussed on well-defined institutional initiatives, which, particularly at conferences, emphasised student participation. These initiatives are an increasingly important element in institutional approaches to digital skills development for staff and students, with a national survey finding that 30% of respondents had a scheme and a further 46% were considering developing one (UCISA 2015).

The paper presents some findings from a systematic review of students as partners in technology initiatives, examining how they were presented and disseminated outside their home institutions through conference abstracts, journal papers, blog posts and websites published between 2014-2017. The research aims to explore the relationships within the partnerships presented, understand the role of technology in shaping practices within the projects, and identify the role of these media in shaping SaP.

The review method uses predefined criteria to identify potential institutional case studies. These are currently being narrowed down to a final selection in collaboration with a colleague. It is envisaged that a total of circa 50 initiatives with circa 70 examples of dissemination will be identified. The analysis will focus on the characteristics of the partnerships as presented and performed through these media, through examining who the participants were (e.g. through job titles), the role of technology in the partnership, the aspects of the partnership working that were highlighted, and how these relate to the media in which they are presented. These are analysed using several frameworks which emphasise partnership working (Bovill and Bulley 2011, Fielding 2012, Healey et al 2014), and in comparison to the findings of a literature review based on journal publications (Mercer-Mapton et al 2017). The presentation will introduce some preliminary findings from this ongoing research project within the context of a discussion of the emergence of technology focussed projects within SaP, the influence of technology in shaping partnership, and how this relates to issues such as student performativity.

References cited

Bovill, C. (2017) "A framework to explore roles within student-staff partnerships in Higher Education: which students are partners, when, and in what ways?", *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 1 (1) pp. 1-5.

Bovill, C. and Bully, C. J. (2011) "A model of active student participation in curriculum design: exploring desirability and possibility" in Rust, C. (Ed.) *Improving Student Learning (ISL) 18: Global Theories and Local Practices: Institutional, Disciplinary and*

Cultural Variations. Series: Improving Student Learning (18). Oxford: Oxford Brookes University, 176-188.

Chatterton, P. (2014) *How do you change the learning landscape? Challenges in the strategic use of technology to support the student experience*, Bristol: Jisc

Fielding, M. (2012) "Beyond student voice: patterns of partnership and the demands of deep democracy", *Revista de Educación*, 359 September-December 2012 pp. 45-65.

Gourlay, L. and Oliver, M. (2018) *Student engagement in the digital university: sociomaterial assemblages*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Healey, M., Flint, A. and Harrington, K. (2014) *Engagement through partnership: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*, York: HEA.

Healey, M. and Jenkins, A. (2009) *Developing Students as Researchers*, York: HEA.

Macfarlane, B. and Tomlinson, M. (2017) "Critiques of student engagement.", *Higher Education Policy*, 30 (1) pp. 6-21.

Matthews, K. (2017) "Five propositions for genuine students as partners practice", *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 1 (2) pp. 1-9.

Matthews, K. E., Cook-Sather, A. and Healey, M. (in press) "Connecting learning, teaching, and research through student-staff partnerships: toward universities as egalitarian learning communities." in V. Tong, V., Standen, A. and Sotiriou, M. (Eds.), *Research equals Teaching: Inspiring research-based education through student-staff partnerships*, London: UCL Press.

Mercer-Mapston, L., Dvorakova, S. L., Matthews, K., Abbot, S., Cheng, B., Felten, P., Knorr, K., Marquis, E., Shammass, R. and Swaim, K. (2017) "A systematic literature review of students as partners in Higher Education", *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 1 (1) pp. 1-23.

Neary, M. and Winn, J. (2009) "*The student as producer: reinventing the student experience in higher education.*" in Bell, L., Stevenson, H. and Neary, M. (Eds.), *The future of higher education: policy, pedagogy and the student experience*, London: Continuum, 192-210.

UCISA (2015) *Digital Capabilities Report 2014*, Oxford: [online]. [Accessed

White, M. (2018) "Student partnership, trust and authority in universities", *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50 (2) pp. 163-173.