Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education

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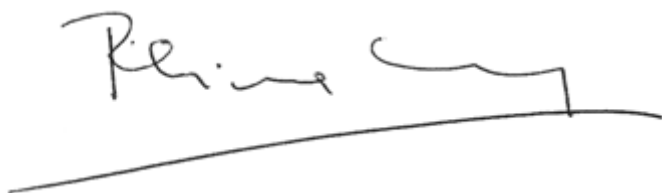
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Foreword by Philippa Levy

Over recent years, higher education policy initiatives across the UK have emphasised the importance of students' active engagement in their learning, and the benefits to be gained when students play an active role in shaping and enhancing their learning experiences. 'Student engagement' has become a core aim for the sector and, increasingly, is being linked to ideas about students' roles as partners in their higher education communities.

This report offers a distinctive contribution to current thinking and debate about students as partners in higher education in its focus on the pedagogical case for learning and working in partnership. It draws on extensive UK and international scholarship and research to propose a new conceptual model for exploring the different ways in which students can be partners in learning and teaching, including through active learning; subject-based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning; and, curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy. It also proposes ways in which the development of 'partnership learning communities' may help to guide and sustain practice. The authors acknowledge the diversity of learning partnerships and their potential for enhancing student and staff development both within and beyond the formal context of higher education. The report includes many examples to identify instances of sustainable practice in engaging students as partners in learning and teaching from a range of institutions and countries.

'Students as partners' principles and approaches are pertinent to many aspects of enhancement and innovation in curriculum and pedagogy. That is why this is a key area of work for us at the Higher Education Academy, building on the strong foundations of our work on student engagement throughout our ten year history. Over the years, we have commissioned influential research on the benefits and impact of engaged student learning, worked with institutions to develop and embed partnership through our change programmes, and produced resources and guidance for individual academics, students' unions and senior managers to promote effective student engagement in the classroom and in the development of the curriculum of higher education more broadly. We shall continue to develop this through our future enhancement workstreams on Curriculum Design, Innovative Pedagogies and Student Transitions. This will include collaborating with institutions to support their development of strategies to embed and sustain 'high impact' pedagogies for engaged student learning.

Student engagement correlates with positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. We sell students short if we treat learning and teaching as a one way transmission of knowledge and skills. The HEA's emphasis on engaged student learning through partnership is core to our vision for the future. We shall continue to collaborate with other sector agencies in this area – including National Union of Students, Quality Assurance Agency, The Student Engagement Partnership, Student Participation in Quality Scotland and Wales Initiative for Student Engagement – as well as commission research; host debate; support strategic change in institutions; create practical resources and assist in the sharing of good practice. As always, we welcome your feedback and look forward to working with you to improve the learning experiences and outcomes of students in UK higher education.

Professor Philippa Levy
Deputy Chief Executive
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June 2014.

The authors

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Abbi Flint has eleven years experience working in pedagogic research and educational development. Prior to joining the Higher Education Academy in September 2011, she was a Senior Lecturer in educational change in the Learning and Teaching Institute at Sheffield Hallam University, where she co-led the development of the institution's internal student engagement survey, led the institution's internal change academy and conducted qualitative research with staff and students. Abbi's role at the HEA concerns student engagement and partnership in their learning experiences, curriculum design and quality enhancement at the institutional and national level. She is an active qualitative researcher and has presented at numerous UK and international conferences and published research on a range of topics including: developing student engagement surveys, working with the NSS, student engagement in quality enhancement, running internal change academies, staff perceptions of plagiarism, and using peer-supported review in professional development for staff. She is also a Visiting Research Fellow in Student Engagement at Birmingham City University. As part of her current role she delivers consultancy in the UK and internationally, and works in partnerships with national sector bodies and networks.

Kathy Harrington is Academic Lead for Students as Partners at the Higher Education Academy and Senior Lecturer in Educational Development in the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at London Metropolitan University. She has over fifteen years experience working in learning, writing and educational development in higher education, with particular interests in the relationship between writing and thinking; partnership, risk and creativity; and the psycho-social dynamics of learning and teaching. Previously she was Director of the Write Now Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, a collaborative initiative between London Metropolitan, Liverpool Hope and Aston Universities, where together with colleagues she developed new programmes in peer mentoring and academic writing development for and with students and staff. She writes and publishes in the field, and has delivered a wide range of training programmes, workshops and conference presentations nationally and internationally.

Acknowledgements

Executive summary

Engaging students and staff effectively as partners in learning and teaching is arguably one of the most important issues facing higher education in the 21st century. Students as partners is a concept which interweaves through many other debates, including assessment and feedback, employability, flexible pedagogies, internationalisation, linking teaching and research, and retention and success. Interest in the idea has proliferated in policy and practice in the UK and internationally, particularly in the last few years. Wider economic factors and recent policy changes are influencing a contemporary environment in which students are often positioned as passive consumers of, rather than active participants in, their own higher education. It is timely to take stock and distil the current context, underlying principles and directions for future work on students as partners in learning and teaching.

The aims of this report are to:
- offer a pedagogical case for partnership in learning and teaching;
- propose a conceptual model for exploring the ways in which students act as partners in learning and teaching;
- outline how the development of partnership learning communities may guide and sustain practice;
- map the territory of strategic and sustainable practices of engaging students as partners in learning and teaching across diverse contexts;
- identify tensions and challenges inherent to partnership in learning and teaching, and offer suggestions to individuals and institutions for addressing them;
- identify priorities for further work.

This report concentrates on *students as partners* in *learning and teaching in higher education*, though we recognise that students may act as partners in many other important ways, including institutional governance, quality assurance activities, research strategies and policies, estates, community engagement, and other extra-curricular activities. Partnership in learning and teaching is one aspect of the larger picture of an institution-wide ethos and practice of partnership.

Pedagogical case for learning and working in partnership
Partnership is framed as a *process of student engagement*, understood as staff and students learning and working together to foster engaged student learning and engaging learning and teaching enhancement. In this sense partnership is a relationship in which all participants are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together. This approach recognises that engaged student learning is positively linked with learning gain and achievement, and argues that partnership represents a sophisticated and effective approach to student engagement because it offers the potential for a more authentic engagement with the nature of learning itself and the possibility for genuinely transformative learning experiences for all involved. Hence we speak of *engagement through partnership*.

Partnership as a process of engagement uniquely foregrounds qualities that put reciprocal learning at the heart of the relationship, such as trust, risk, inter-dependence and agency. In its difference to other, perhaps more traditional, forms of learning and working in the academy, partnership raises awareness of implicit assumptions, encourages critical reflection and opens up new ways of thinking, learning and working in contemporary higher education.

Partnership is essentially a process of engagement, not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself. All partnership is student engagement, but not all student engagement is partnership.

Conceptual model for partnership in learning and teaching
A new conceptual model (see Figure 2.3) distinguishes four broad areas in which students can act as partners in learning and teaching:
- learning, teaching and assessment;

- subject-based research and inquiry;
- scholarship of teaching and learning;
- curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy.

Visually the model is represented as four overlapping circles to emphasise that distinctions between the areas are blurred and inter-relationships are complex and diverse when put into practice. At the centre of the model is the notion of *partnership learning communities*, which draws attention to the *processes* by which partnership operates in the four different areas.

Partnership learning communities
Embedding sustainable partnership beyond discrete projects and initiatives requires that working and learning in partnership becomes part of the culture and ethos of an institution. Partnership is more likely to be sustained where there is a strong sense of community among staff and students. The key to achieving this is the development of *partnership learning communities*, and certain features are seen to encourage their development:
- working and learning arrangements that support partnership;
- shared values;
- attitudes and behaviours that each member of the community signs up to and embodies in practice.

Building partnership learning communities requires critical reflection on and consideration of key issues within specific contexts of practice:
- inclusivity and scale;
- power relationships;
- reward and recognition;
- transition and sustainability;
- identity.

Partnership learning communities invite critical reflection on existing relationships, identities, processes and structures, and can potentially lead to the transformation of learning experiences. Given that partnership is both a working and learning relationship, these new communities should acknowledge the dual role of staff and students as both scholars and colleagues engaged in a process of learning and inquiry.

Mapping the territory
Partnership in learning and teaching may take many forms, and increasingly students are engaged in areas in which traditionally they have been excluded, such as curriculum and assessment design. Case studies of initiatives from a range of institutions and countries, along with conceptual frameworks drawn from international scholarship in the field, are offered to illustrate the diversity of strategic and sustainable practices in the four areas we identify in our model.

- *Learning, teaching and assessment* – Engaging students in partnership means seeing students as active participants in their own learning, and although not all active learning involves partnership it does mean engaging students in forms of participation and helps prepare them for the roles they may play in full partnership. Engaging students as teachers and assessors in the learning process is a particularly effective form of partnership.

- *Subject-based research and inquiry* – Whether it involves selected students working with staff on research projects or all students on a course engaging in inquiry-based learning, there is much evidence of the effectiveness of this approach in stimulating deep and retained learning. As with active learning, not all ways of engaging students in research and inquiry involve partnership, but there are many examples where students have extensive autonomy and independence and negotiate as partners many of the details of the research and inquiry projects that they undertake.

- *Scholarship of teaching and learning* (SoTL) – Conducting projects in partnership with students has been suggested as one of the five principles of good practice in SoTL. There are an increasing number of effective initiatives of engaging students as change agents in institutions where they undertake research projects into the learning and teaching they experience with the intention of enhancing the quality of student learning.

- *Curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy* – Students are commonly engaged in course evaluations and in departmental staff-student committees, but it is rarer for institutions to go beyond the student voice and engage students as partners in designing the curriculum and giving pedagogic advice and consultancy. Yet where institutions have implemented such initiatives they have seen significant benefits for both students and staff.

Students as partners operate in many different settings – module/course, programme, department/faculty, institution, and nationally/internationally. Cutting across these settings is the additional dimension of the disciplinary or inter-disciplinary context.

Tensions, challenges and suggestions

Working and learning in partnership heightens an awareness of conflicting priorities and tensions between the different perspectives and motivations of those involved, and it raises challenges to existing assumptions and norms about higher education. Partnership also offers possibilities for thinking and acting differently, and for effecting a fundamental transformation of higher education.

Key tensions are identified, and suggestions for addressing them in different contexts are offered. The focus is not on prescribing specific practices or outcomes, but on helping to create conditions for enabling fruitful change through learning and working in partnership.

Students and staff

Students and staff will have different motivations for engaging in partnership, and the different positions occupied within organisational structures give rise to tensions around differentials in power, reward and recognition of participation, identity, and responsibility for partnership work. Working and learning in partnership is rarely automatic and can present significant challenges to existing ways of being, doing and thinking.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:
- co-develop partnership values with the people you want to partner with, and think about how behaviour and attitudes embody these values;
- consider the scale of your partnership initiative, and how to reduce barriers to participation, especially among marginalised or traditionally under-represented groups (e.g. part-time students, international students);
- be honest about when partnership is not appropriate or desirable;
- explore possibilities for joint professional development for staff and students;
- embed partnership approaches in postgraduate academic professional development courses for teachers;
- consider how partnership can be used to explore dimensions of professional practice outlined in the *UK Professional Standards Framework* (UKPSF).

Policy and pedagogy

There is potential for an inherent tension between partnership policy and partnership pedagogy in that policy is about determining the direction and shape of work in advance, whereas partnership pedagogy is about being (radically) open to and creating possibilities for discovering and learning something that cannot be known beforehand.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:
- remain aware of the tension while creating policy that values the flexibility and openness of partnership;
- consider how partnership is (or is not) described in institutional policies and strategies (e.g. learning and teaching strategies, student charters, partnership agreements, marketing materials);
- consider implementing staff and student engagement surveys to provide a more nuanced picture of the views, priorities and experiences of potential partners to inform local policy;
- use participatory and whole-system approaches to the development of strategy and policy in ways that seek to embody partnership in practice.

Cognitive dissonance
A partnership approach may be directly at odds with principles embodied in key drivers and mechanisms which have a strong influence on behaviour and attitudes among staff and students. In the UK, this includes the National Student Survey (NSS), Key Information Sets (KIS), institutional key performance indicators, and the Research Excellence Framework (REF). These place an emphasis on the importance of quantifiable information and the achievement of specific outcomes and impacts, whereas a partnership approach places value on a creative process that may result in unexpected outcomes.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:
- look for opportunities for employing partnership as a way of responding to other influential discourses;
- use the concept and practice of partnership to meet the requirements of the UK Quality Code, and in particular the seven indicators of sound practice in chapter B5 on student engagement;
- consider how reward and recognition for partnership may be developed – for staff and students.

Students' unions and institutions
Partnership in learning and teaching is part of a larger institutional picture and is supported by a coherent cross-institutional approach that is promoted and embodied through the relationship between a students' union and its institution. Traditionally students' unions have acted as an independent champion of students' interests, sometimes challenging institutional practice and policy. A partnership approach raises questions about how it is possible for students' unions to balance this politically orientated role while working in new ways with their institutions.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:
- institutions and students' unions should reflect on how their relationship provides (or does not) a context for local-level partnerships. Committing to partnership agreements, principles and manifestos is a way of indicating seriousness about partnership for the institution as a whole;
- consider how student and students' union-led activities may contribute to partnership in learning and teaching;
- develop a whole-institution approach to partnership, in active collaboration with professional services, educational and learning development, academic departments, students' unions and student societies, which extends beyond learning and teaching to encompass institutional governance and other aspects of staff and student experiences.

Fundamental purpose and structure of higher education
Current policy discourse around 'students as partners' and 'student engagement' can assume a consensus that higher education as a free public provision is no longer tenable, and thereby sidestep the wish and need for further debate among students and staff.

Suggestion for addressing this tension:
- explore how partnership (with an emphasis on the importance of re-distribution of power and openness to new ways of working and learning together), can provide a conceptual space in which to reflect on the nature and aims of higher education as well as effect change in practical ways.

The ideas presented in this publication can be considered in conjunction with the shorter, practically-focused companion HEA publication, *Framework for partnership in learning and teaching*.

Priorities for further work

Despite the innovative work in the field of student partnership in higher education in recent years, there remain substantial areas where further investigation would be desirable. Priorities for research and the development of practice in the sector are identified:

- developing understanding of disciplinary pedagogies of partnership;
- sharing and learning from experiences of when partnership does not work, and why;
- building a robust evidence base for the impact of partnership for students, staff, institutions and students' unions;
- investigating differences in experiences and perceptions of partnership among students and staff;
- developing an ethical framework for partnership in learning and teaching;
- building on the excellent work of and collaboration between various agencies (including in the UK National Union of Students, Quality Assurance Agency, The Student Engagement Partnership, Student Participation in Quality Scotland and Wales Initiative for Student Engagement and the Higher Education Academy) to support the sector to develop and embed partnership in practice and policy.

Concluding thoughts

A partnership approach might not be right for everyone, nor is it possible in every context. This report does not aim to be prescriptive, but to call for opening up to the possibilities and exploring the potential that partnership can offer. There is much to be gained by engaging with partnership in learning in teaching in higher education. The wider adoption of research findings on engagement through partnership can lead to significant improvements in student learning and success.

Most partnership work – across the spectrum of engaged learning and inquiry to quality enhancement and the scholarship of learning and teaching – still engages relatively few students. It is important for the future of higher education and the quality of students' learning to be critical about current ways of working and to strive to make partnership and its substantial benefits available to all.

1. The context and case for partnership

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. (NUS 2012, p. 8)

External policy drivers and the wider political context will inevitably shape how student engagement develops, but it should be possible to formulate a response that achieves an appropriate balance of pragmatism and authenticity. (Jarnecki and McVitty 2013, p. 4)

There is a subtle, but extremely important, difference between an institution that 'listens' to students and responds accordingly, and an institution that gives students the opportunity to explore areas that they believe to be significant, to recommend solutions and to bring about the required changes. The concept of 'listening to the student voice' – implicitly if not deliberately – supports the perspective of student as 'consumer', whereas 'students as change agents' explicitly supports a view of the student as 'active collaborator' and 'co-producer', with the potential for transformation. (Dunne in Foreword to Dunne and Zandstra 2011, p. 4)

One of the key reasons for developing a partnership approach is a belief that students should be active participants in the learning process, rather than passive recipients of knowledge; partnership is key to developing that participation. (WISE no date)

Introduction

Engaging students and staff effectively as partners in learning and teaching is arguably one of the most important issues facing higher education in the 21st century. Students as partners is a concept which interweaves through many other debates, including assessment and feedback, employability, flexible pedagogies, internationalisation, linking teaching and research, and retention and success. Interest in the idea has proliferated in policy and practice in the UK and internationally, particularly in the last few years, and it has been difficult to go to a higher education conference in the last two to three years where there has not been a discussion about engaging students in partnership.

It is timely to take stock and distil the current context, underlying principles and directions for the future of work on students as partners. The aims of this publication are: to identify the motivations and rationales for engaging in partnership in learning and teaching in higher education; propose a conceptual model for exploring the variety of understandings of students as partners in learning and teaching; outline how the development of partnership learning communities may guide and sustain practice in this area; identify examples of strategic and sustainable practices of engaging students as partners in learning and teaching; and identify tensions and challenges inherent to partnership in learning and teaching, and offer suggestions to individuals and institutions for addressing them.

In this publication, partnership is understood as fundamentally about a relationship in which all involved – students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students' unions, and so on – are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together. Partnership is essentially a process of engagement, not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself.

This publication concentrates on *students as partners* in *learning and teaching in higher education*, though we recognise that students may act as partners in many other important ways, including institutional governance, quality assurance activities, research strategies and policies, estates, community engagement, and other extra-curricular activities. Some of these may inter-relate with learning and teaching issues. For example, quality assurance procedures can lead to quality enhancement of learning and teaching, but these other areas of partnership work are not our main focus. Similarly, there are many examples in learning and teaching of staff partnering with other staff, and the principles we discuss ought to apply to these relationships too. But in the context of this publication these activities only become of interest where they also bring students into the relationship. Our attention is focused on the approaches and challenges of working in partnership with

students in learning and teaching. This includes activities where students and staff work and learn together, and where the partnership aspect is most pronounced through peer relationships among students themselves, such as peer assessment. In such peer-learning situations, students often have significant scope for negotiating the content and nature of the activity, and the students take on elements of the role of teachers or assessors of learning. As we will see, partnerships in learning and teaching may take many forms, and increasingly students are engaged in areas in which traditionally they have been excluded.

The prime audience for this publication is:
- teaching staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK and internationally with responsibilities for, or an interest in, student engagement and learning and teaching at the local level (faculty, department, course, and module);
- senior leaders in these institutions with responsibility for learning and teaching enhancement and the student experience.

It is also relevant to academic policy makers, academic developers and learning support staff, librarians and information specialists, learning technologists, sabbatical officers in students' unions, students in change agent roles and other students with an interest in learning and teaching enhancement.

This chapter explores the concept of partnerships in learning and teaching, draws on relevant aspects of the local and wider national and international context and offers a pedagogical case for working in partnership. Chapter two develops the conceptual model for partnership in learning and teaching, with a focus on four areas of partnership. Chapter three explores the processes for developing and sustaining partnership learning communities and some of the issues this way of thinking about partnership brings to the fore. Chapter four explores the four different areas of partnership in learning and teaching more deeply, with examples from practice in the UK and internationally. There is a deliberate focus on large-scale initiatives to show what it is possible to do when innovative vision and strategy come together, but sources for the many examples of what can be done at course and programme level and on a smaller scale within an institution are also highlighted. Many of the practices illustrate more than one way in which students are engaged in partnership. The final chapter discusses ways forward for the sector. Where possible, we draw on examples of published scholarship which have been undertaken in a spirit of co-inquiry and are co-authored between staff and students. Staff and student perspectives have also informed the development of the conceptual model presented and broader partnership framework.

Different readers may like to navigate the chapters in different ways, depending on their familiarity with the literature. However, we would recommend that, after completing this introductory chapter, all readers look at chapter two first as this outlines the conceptual model for engaging students as partners and provides a picture of the whole. After that, those relatively new to the topic may wish to start with chapter four, which maps out the territory and includes most of the case studies, before returning to chapter three. Others, perhaps more familiar with the range of partnership practices, may prefer to focus on chapter three, which discusses the nature of partnership itself and the issues involved in establishing partnership learning communities. Chapter five explores the implications, offers recommendations and identifies areas for further work in the development of partnership in learning and teaching for the higher education sector, and may be of particular interest to policy makers, researchers and those with institutional responsibility for student engagement and partnership initiatives.

Partnership in learning and teaching is a large and complex area, both conceptually and in practice. Within this publication, the aims are limited to summarising some of the debates around the topics covered, offering a conceptual model and underpinning values to help navigate the diversity of the field, and posing questions and challenges which it is hoped will prompt reflection and encourage the development of partnership in new and creative ways.

Engagement through partnership

Within the sector, various definitions of partnership between students and staff, and institutions and their students unions, exist. As with this publication, these definitions have been developed with a specific focus and area of work in mind, and reflect that purpose.

In the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) gives the following definition:

> In this Chapter, the terms 'partner' and 'partnership' are used in a broad sense to indicate joint working between students and staff. In this context partnership working is based on the values of: openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication between the partners. It is not based on the legal conception of equal responsibility and liability; rather partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, but different, perceptions and experiences. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to enhancements for all concerned. The terms reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff. (QAA 2013, p. 3)

The National Union of Student's (NUS) *Manifesto for partnership* explores the way partnership is understood in a slightly different way:

> 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 … Partnership means shared responsibility – for identifying the problem or opportunity for improvement, for devising a solution and – importantly – for co-delivery of that solution. (NUS 2012, p. 8)

Student Participation in Quality Scotland (Sparqs) define partnership, in the context of their guidance from developing partnership agreements, in the following way:

> Partnership implies an equal relationship between two or more bodies working together towards a common purpose, respecting the different skills, knowledge, experience and capability that each party brings to the table. Decisions are taken jointly between those organisations, and they co-operate to varying degrees in implementing the consequences of those decisions … it is an effective working relationship between an institution and its students, as individuals and through its collective representative body, working towards an educational institution of the highest quality possible. (Williamson 2013, p. 8)

Within this publication, partnership is seen as a process as opposed to an outcome of particular activities. Partnership within learning and teaching is understood as highly contextual and influenced by many factors, including the experiences and expertise of partners involved, the culture and history of the setting for partnership (e.g. the course, department, institution, students' union) and the wider social and political context of higher education. A prescriptive and tightly defined concept of partnership would be unlikely to accommodate the diversity of contexts for learning and teaching. However, boundaries are useful in framing and fostering debates. The conceptual model proposed in this document is underpinned by the following values, which have been drawn from scholarly literature and practice around partnership and student engagement:

- **authenticity** – all parties have a meaningful rationale for investing in partnership, and are honest about what they can contribute and the parameters of partnership;
- **inclusivity** – partnership embraces the different talents, perspectives and experiences that all parties bring, and there are no barriers (structural or cultural) that prevent potential partners getting involved;
- **reciprocity** – all parties have an interest in, and stand to benefit from, working and/or learning in partnership;

- **empowerment** – power is distributed appropriately and all parties are encouraged to constructively challenge ways of working and learning that may reinforce existing inequalities;
- **trust** – all parties take time to get to know each other, engage in open and honest dialogue and are confident they will be treated with respect and fairness;
- **challenge** – all parties are encouraged to constructively critique and challenge practices, structures and approaches that undermine partnership, and are enabled to take risks to develop new ways of working and learning;
- **community** – all parties feel a sense of belonging and are valued fully for the unique contribution they make;
- **responsibility** – all parties share collective responsibility for the aims of the partnership, and individual responsibility for the contribution they make. (HEA 2014)
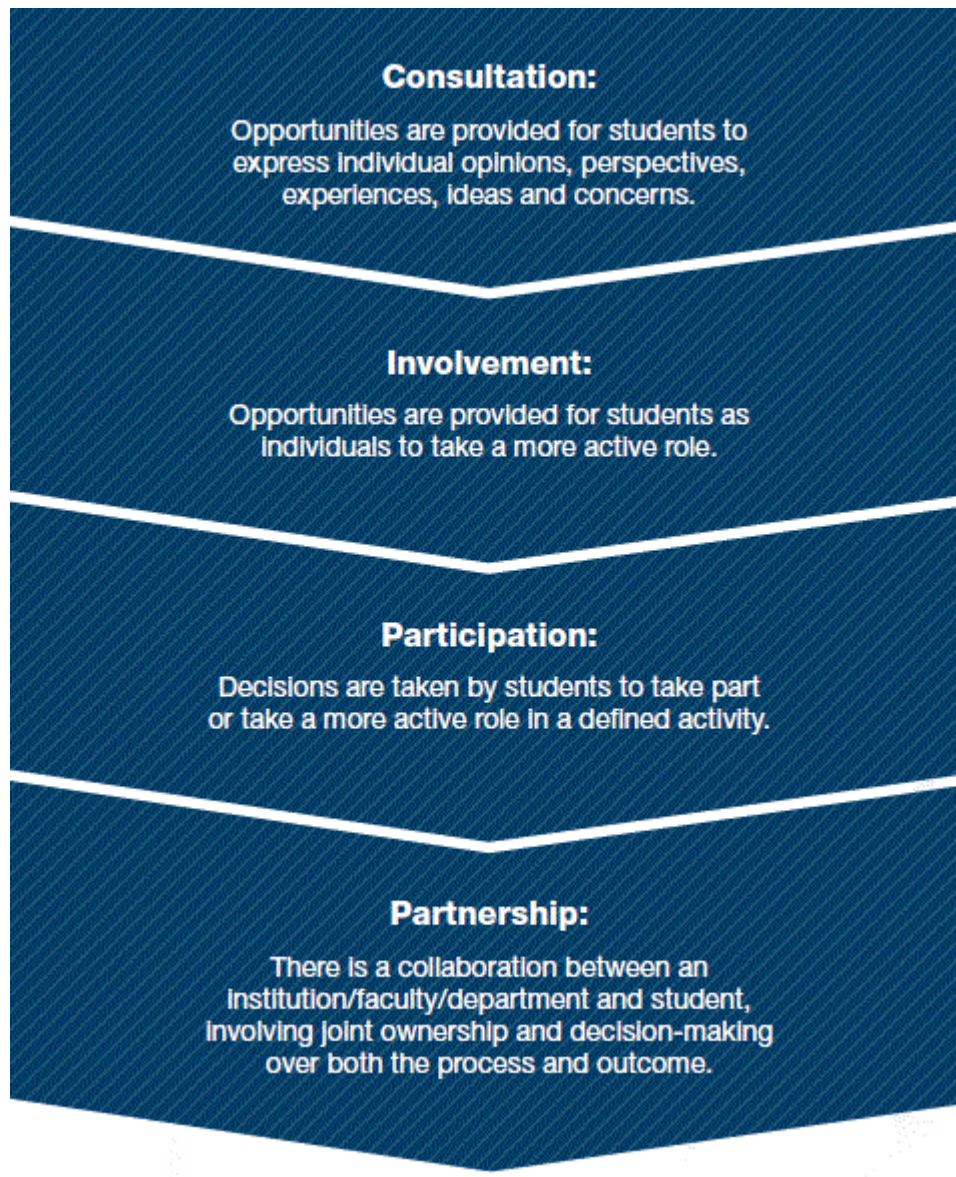
This understanding of partnership shares many aspects of the examples from the QAA, NUS and Sparqs given above, but also differs in a significant way. The focus of this publication is partnerships within learning and teaching in higher education and, as such, it focuses on *learning* in partnership as well as working in partnership. This requires attention to *learning relationships* as well as working relationships.

In exploring and unpicking the nature of partnership in learning and teaching when put into practice and policy, it is necessary to make the distinction between partnership and other student engagement processes. The field of student engagement – theory, practice and policy – is huge and varied, and it is beyond the scope of this publication to summarise broader debates on this topic. Alongside a significant history of peer-reviewed publications in academic journals, there are published syntheses of literature (e.g. Trowler 2010; Trowler and Trowler 2010); edited anthologies of case studies and articles (Nygaard *et al.* 2013; Bryson 2014; Dunne and Owen 2013a; Solomonides, Reid and Petocz 2012; Little 2011); and nationally commissioned studies and reports (van der Veldon *et al.* 2013; Little *et al.* 2009). As a concept, 'student engagement' is ambiguous and contested. Within learning and teaching it can be divided into two broad areas: (i) student engagement as the way in which students invest time and energy in their own learning, and (ii) the ways in which students are involved and empowered by institutions to shape their learning experiences. Kahu (2013) argues that problems in the definition of engagement stem partly from the conflation of the state of engagement, its antecedents, and its consequences. Within this publication, partnership is framed as a *process of student engagement* rather than an achieved state or consequence of engagement. As the NUS (2012, p. 8) state, "the sum total of student engagement activity at an institution does not equate to partnership; this is because partnership is an ethos rather than an activity." Partnership in learning and teaching is a way of staff and students learning and working together to foster engaged student learning and engaging learning and teaching enhancement. This way of working requires active engagement and responsibility of all involved, and in this sense partnership is distinguished by the importance placed on the distribution of power. As a concept and a practice, partnership works to counter a deficit model where staff take on the role of enablers of disempowered students, implicit in some forms of student engagement, aiming instead to acknowledge differentials of power while valuing individual contributions from students and staff in a shared process of reciprocal learning and working.

As terms such as 'student engagement' and 'students as partners' become enshrined in the discourse of higher education, there is a danger that terms can be used uncritically and interchangeably, without reflection on the different implications these have. For example, it is not uncommon to see work where students are consulted through surveys or focus groups described as a form of partnership. While it is of course possible to take a partnership approach to student voice within an institution and students' union, listening to students does not in and of itself constitute partnership. In this sense, all partnership is student engagement, but not all student engagement is partnership. While not proposing these concepts stand in a simple linear relationship to each other, ladders of participation and engagement can be useful in clarifying differences here. For example, the four-stage model of student engagement from the NUS/HEA student engagement toolkit (informed by May and Felsinger 2010) suggests consultation, involvement, participation and partnership are qualitatively different forms of student engagement (Fig. 1.1). Bovill and Bulley's (2011) ladder of participation makes similar distinctions within the curriculum design process (Fig. 4.6). Although the focus of this publication is engagement through partnership, this is not an implication that other forms and processes of student engagement are

somehow less valued or appropriate. Partnership as a process of student engagement is complementary to other forms of student engagement.

Figure 1.1: Four stages of student engagement (after HEA and NUS 2011)

Consultation:
Opportunities are provided for students to express individual opinions, perspectives, experiences, ideas and concerns.

Involvement:
Opportunities are provided for students as individuals to take a more active role.

Participation:
Decisions are taken by students to take part or take a more active role in a defined activity.

Partnership:
There is a collaboration between an institution/faculty/department and student, involving joint ownership and decision-making over both the process and outcome.

At this point it is important to acknowledge that while we are focusing on partnership in learning and teaching, we are also aware that this is one aspect of the larger picture of an institution-wide ethos of partnership. The partnership statement of the WISE Partnership for Higher Education in Wales articulates this position:

> Partnership is more meaningful if it … happens at the level of each individual student and staff member's experience. Typically, this takes its form in the learning and teaching process – at course or module level. Partnership, however, must also extend beyond learning and teaching into other activities of the university, for example, widening access, volunteering, community engagement, and employability. (WISE no date)

We see the work of students' unions as integral to the development of an embedded and sustainable culture of partnership that both complements and aligns with the perspectives offered in this publication. As Williamson (2013, p. 8) notes:

> [Partnership] goes far beyond the mere consultation, involvement, or representation of students in decision-making. Where partnership exists, students not only identify areas for enhancement, but they help to identify ways to carry out that enhancement, as well as helping to facilitate implementation where possible.

We argue that partnership represents a sophisticated and effective approach to student engagement for two connected reasons. First, it foregrounds qualities that put reciprocal learning at the heart of the relationship – such as trust, risk, difference, empowerment, inter-dependence and agency – allowing us to go beyond a consumerist relationship, and its critique, in meaningful and relevant ways. And second, partnership is different to other, more traditional relationships of power in higher education, which means that it is often experienced as an unfamiliar way of working, learning and thinking. Through this difference, partnership raises awareness of the implicit assumptions – about each other, and about the nature of learning and teaching – which would otherwise remain below the surface. In becoming more aware of one's assumptions and attitudes, and how they influence learning and teaching relationships, greater choice is afforded about how to act and relate to one another and the type of learning environments and spaces that are created. In sum, a partnership approach is valuable because it enables a more authentic engagement with the very nature of learning itself, understood as an experiential process of reflection and transformation, in relation to oneself and with others. Hence, we speak of *engagement through partnership*.

The context for partnership

Working within a context of rapid and complex change is now the norm for contemporary higher education. The factors influencing student and staff experiences of learning and teaching are multiple and layered, operating at both local and global levels, and encompassing personal, social, political and cultural dimensions. Organisational structures and systems; quality assurance and quality enhancement strategies and procedures; government policies and funding programmes; and a wide range of academic; and disciplinary and professional cultures and practices all contribute to the diversity of partnership opportunities and practices, for students, teachers and institutions, in today's higher education environment.

In the UK, recent policy initiatives and the wider economic climate are having a significant influence on the direction of change and the nature of students' individual experiences of learning in higher education. Key among these are the increase in student fees, from 2012, and a concomitant shift towards greater responsibility for the funding of higher education being placed with individual students and their families. The Key Information Set (KIS), also introduced in 2012, was established to inform student choice and create a degree of comparability in public information provision across UK higher education (HEFCE 2013b). Across the sector there is an increasing strain on available resources, linked to pressures in the wider economic environment and ongoing crisis. There is a renewed drive to enhance the quality of students' learning experiences, with a sharper emphasis on providing value for money education that fosters employability, enhances institutional accountability and transparency, and improves the quality of teaching. Some evidence suggests that the introduction of fees has intensified these pressures in England. Findings from the most recent Higher Education Policy Institute and Higher Education Academy (HEPI/HEA) *Student Academic Experience Survey* indicate only 41% of undergraduates in England, where fees are now typically £9,000, believe they are receiving good or very good value for money, compared with 70% of undergraduates at Scottish institutions, where typically there are no fees. Additionally, 33.1% of first and second year students in England believe their course represents very poor or poor value for money, which is an increase from 18.3% in 2012 before the increase in fees (Soilemetzidis *et al.* 2014).

As others have observed, recent policy developments and wider economic factors help to position the student as a passive consumer of, rather than an active participant in, their own education. In their study of 'Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education' – commissioned by the QAA – Kandiko and Mawer (2013) found that across year groups, institution type and subject of study, the dominant ideological framing of higher education among students was "a consumerist ethos" that emphasised "value-for-money". In their view this included high quality teaching from knowledgeable, passionate and well qualified staff, and guidance and access to experiences that will develop their employability and future job prospects (p. 5). Given the dominance of a

consumerist discourse, identifying oneself as a 'partner' in learning and teaching is not readily accepted by everyone, staff as well as students. Working in the contemporary environment presents hard challenges for individuals and institutions who take an interest in ensuring an engaged, relevant and meaningful educational experience for today's students. This challenging environment, however, can also be a helpful spur – and an opportunity – to step back and think about the nature of the complexity we are working in as well as the kind of higher education we value and want to create at a more fundamental level. Ramsden (2008, p. 16) argues that seeing education as something to be consumed goes against the very purpose of the academic enterprise of learning and inquiry:

> The vision of learner as passive consumer is inimical to a view of students as partners with their teachers in a search for understanding – one of the defining features of higher education from both academic and student perspectives, and powerfully embodied in academic culture since at least the time of Humboldt.

Rachel Wenstone (NUS 2012), then NUS Vice President for Higher Education, goes further:

> We have spent enough time condemning consumerism in education, and now we need to articulate the alternative. Student engagement is a great concept but it needs to be deployed to radical ends. Students as partners is not just a nice-to-have, I believe it has the potential to help bring about social and educational transformation, as long as we know what we are trying to do and we maintain a critical attitude about the ways the concept is adopted and used. We say we want to celebrate and share best practice; that can no longer mean that which simply works well. Our practice needs to be underpinned by our values. An activity really should make the reality of education closer to our vision before we single it out as 'best practice'.

Although practice lags behind values in many areas, the prime importance of students actively engaging as partners in shaping the nature and quality of their learning experiences is recognised both at the level of government policy and among national professional bodies invested in improving students' experiences of higher education. For example, in the UK the government published a white paper in 2011 entitled *Students at the heart of the system* (BIS 2011). The same year, the Scottish Government (2011) published *Putting learners at the centre,* and two years later the Welsh Government's (2013) *Policy statement on higher education* stated that:

> Partnership is about more than just listening to the student voice and enabling students to have input in decisions that affect them. True partnership relies upon an environment where the priorities, content and direction of the learning experience are all set by students and staff in partnership (Welsh Government, p. 21).

In 2012, the National Union of Students (NUS) published *A manifesto for partnership* (NUS 2012), and in the same year the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published a new chapter of the *Quality Code,* on Student Engagement, referring to the importance of a 'partnership' among students and staff in ensuring all students have equal opportunities to participate in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experiences. In 2013 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) established The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) among different sector bodies, including the QAA and the HEA, and hosted by the NUS "to help students and their associated representative bodies become partners in the student experience". They go on to say that this means "giving students an active role in the development, management and governance of their institution, its academic programmes and their own learning experience" (HEFCE 2013).

While acknowledging the real gaps that exist between policies that advocate a partnership approach and the practices that instantiate these values, there are, nevertheless, indications that a large number of students already perceive themselves to be engaged in partnership, and that more would like to be involved. In the student experience survey 2012 – involving over 5,000 students – approximately half of the students said that they were involved, or somewhat involved, in helping shape the content, curriculum or design of their course,

compared to three-quarters who would like to be (NUS and QAA 2012). This is encouraging, especially given the popular discourse and perception of students as consumers outlined above. However, it is still fair to say that much of higher education remains structured around more traditional roles and hierarchical relationships between students and staff, and that moving towards a greater degree of learning and working in partnership with one another is neither comfortable nor desired by all, both staff and students. Change and complexity may now be a familiar feature of the contemporary landscape of higher education. But that does not mean it is impossible to make the most of the opportunities this challenging environment presents for finding "an appropriate balance of pragmatism and authenticity" (Jarnecki and McVitty 2013, p.4) and for discovering genuinely new and transformative ways of learning and working together that meet the diverse educational and professional needs of contemporary students and staff.

The case for partnership
There are multiple drivers for partnership, and it perhaps is not necessary for all parties to share the same motivations in order for this way of working and learning to be effective and worthwhile. Some of the motivations identified at the HEA's *Students as Partners Summit,* in September 2013, included:
- to design and deliver engaging student learning experiences;
- to make higher education more accessible and inclusive;
- to align with personal beliefs and values about learning and teaching;
- to develop a sense of community and belonging;
- to develop student and staff knowledge and capabilities;
- to address some of the challenges currently facing higher education;
- to offer a constructive alternative to consumerist models of higher education;
- to align with national policy imperatives which place engagement and partnership as key to quality enhancement;
- as an ethical responsibility to students and staff;
- as a response to the current multi-faceted challenges facing HE.

The HEA's particular focus is on the *pedagogic* rationales for working and learning partnership: how partnership can lead to increased student engagement with and success in their learning, as well as enabling academic and professional services staff to design and support engaged student learning. This recognises that engaged student learning is key to learning gain and achievement, and that *engagement through partnership* represents a sophisticated and effective approach.

The benefits of partnership in learning and teaching
Developing engaged student learning through partnership in learning and teaching leads to evidenced benefits for both staff and students. Jarvis, Dickerson and Stockwell (2014, p. 220) conclude from their evaluation of six project groups – each composed of staff and undergraduate students engaged in mini-projects designed to research an aspect of learning and teaching, plus a larger coaching group – that:

> [Staff-student] partnership in learning and teaching has a significant impact on learning and teaching development and enhancement, learning to learn, raising the profile of research into learning and teaching, and employability skills and attributes.

Barnes *et al.* (2010) also identify gains for students who engaged in national projects at two universities in terms of the development not only of knowledge, skills and values, but also increased agency in shaping their learning and changes in the power relationships between them and staff. Within quality enhancement, there is evidence that empowering students through partnership not only leads to enthusiasm for learning, but also increased passion and enthusiasm for enhancement activities (SooHoo 1993). Partnership can engage and empower traditionally marginalised students and lead to sharing authority and responsibility with staff in the development of culturally sustainable pedagogy (Cook-Sather and Agu 2013). Interestingly, Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten (2014, p.100) note that: "Research suggests that partnerships tend to produce similar outcomes for both students and faculty". They go on to identify three clusters of outcomes:

- engagement – enhancing motivation and learning;
- awareness – developing meta-cognitive awareness and a stronger sense of identity;
- enhancement – improving teaching and the classroom experience.

For example, they analyse *engagement outcomes for students* in terms of:
- enhanced confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm;
- enhanced engagement in the process not just the outcomes of learning;
- enhanced responsibility for, and ownership of, their own learning;
- deepened understanding of, and contributions to, the academic community.

And *engagement outcomes for staff (faculty)* included:
- transformed thinking about and practice of teaching;
- changed understandings of learning and teaching through experiencing different viewpoints;
- reconceptualization of learning and teaching as collaborative processes.

A further benefit is the development of a sense of community between students, and among students and staff. At Birmingham City University, examples of Student Academic Partners work (Vaughan and Williams 2013; Gough, Morris and Hession 2013) have blurred the boundaries between staff and student identities and roles. This has led to transformational learning for staff and students and challenged the constraints of traditional hierarchical relationships. At the core of this Student Academic Partners work is a sense of a shared learning community:

> Much of that which the various student engagement initiatives at the university are trying to achieve is the building of a strong learning community where students, alumni and staff all feel valued for that which they can offer to the University and proud to be part of the University. (Chambers and Nagle 2013, p. 64)

Evidence from the '*What works?*' programme indicates that developing this kind of community and sense of belonging is key to student success and retention (Thomas 2012).

Conclusion
The research suggests that where partnerships are focused on educationally meaningful activities, the benefits are multiple for all parties. Nevertheless, many remain to be convinced. Some question whether students have the expertise, knowledge and experience to be fully engaged in partnership in learning and teaching. However, as Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten (2014, p. 15) express it:

> … students are neither disciplinary nor pedagogical experts. Rather, their experience and expertise typically is in being a student – something that many faculty have not been for many years. They understand where they and their peers are coming from and, often, where they think they are going.

Alongside the experience of being a student, each person entering higher education brings a whole host of other and prior experiences, perceptions and thoughts which can be seen as resources for any new learning experience that strives to meet the other with openness, respect and curiosity. A partnership approach values the unique identities each partner brings to the experience of learning and working together (NUS 2012), using the encounter with one another as a starting point for discovering together new ways of understanding, acting and being. In this sense, and broadening the focus to include the wider context of complexity and change of which contemporary higher education is a part, partnership can perhaps most helpfully be understood as an ethos or a frame of mind where difference and complexity are seen as resources for creativity and transformation. Partnership is fundamentally a way of relating to the other and to oneself which is both deeply challenging and enables challenge, is both risky and enables taking risks. Working and learning in partnership then becomes a way of being and doing that is responsive to, and enables, thoughtful engagement with the

contemporary landscape of higher education, where students and staff can collaborate as individually valued and invested members of a shared learning and academic community.

As we will see in the chapters that follow, there are numerous examples of this kind of innovative and inspiring partnership work happening in a wide variety of settings and institutional and disciplinary contexts. Nevertheless, partnership is not easily or straightforwardly achieved and sustained. Developing a co-learning, co-inquiring, co-developing, co-designing and co-creating approach challenges traditional power relationships and involves a cultural change in how much of higher education is organised. Building genuinely inclusive student and staff academic communities of practice is challenging – that is, both difficult and destabilising, effortful and provocative. Change can be experienced as deeply threatening to one's personal and professional identities, and the degree of resistance that can be mobilised to prevent having to learn new ways of learning and working should not be underestimated for all parties. However, it is also true that where resistance is most pronounced, the potential for powerful and transformative learning and change is greatest. Support, sensitively and thoughtfully offered, is needed to build the capacity of both students and staff to work together effectively in partnership (Williamson 2013).

2. Building a conceptual model for partnership in learning and teaching

Students as 'co-producers', not as 'consumers' … are viewed as essential partners in the production of the knowledge and skills that form the intended learning outcomes of their programmes. They are therefore given responsibility for some of the work involved, and are not passive recipients of a service.
(Streeting and Wise 2009, p. 2)

The concept of 'partnership' has gained significant currency.
(Little 2013)

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, Bovill and Felten 2014, pp. 6–7).

Students at Western Washington University (2013) are partners in institutional initiatives for enhancing learning. They work alongside faculty (academic staff), administrators, and staff from across the University, as well as several alumni and community members in the Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA). Each year the TLA participants talk together in fortnightly dialogue groups to develop a 'big' question on teaching and learning to study for the year. Students participate in the TLA in a number of different ways. Most students enrol in one of several courses and participate in the TLA as part of their coursework. Additionally, many students participate on a volunteer basis.

This example illustrates how students as partners may involve several different activities. In this case all the students are engaged in teaching and learning projects engaging in what is commonly called the "scholarship of teaching and learning" (Boyer 1990). Most do this for credit; a few do it as a voluntary activity. The projects are chosen to enhance the quality of learning at the University. Students gain research and inquiry skills as well as group work skills and in particular learn to work in partnership through dialogue (Werder *et al.* 2010). As Werder and Skogsberg (2013, p. 139) note: "We enter into dialogue with one another because we trust in what we can know together through mutual engagement."

A wide variety of terms have been used to describe the process of engaging students as partners. Some emphasise partnership in research and inquiry and use terms such as "students as researchers and inquirers" (Healey and Jenkins 2009; Levy 2011), "student as producer" (Neary 2012), "student as collaborator and producer" (Taylor and Wilding 2009), "student as co-producer" (McCulloch 2009), and students as co-authors (Healey, Marquis and Vajoczki 2013a). Others emphasise how students may be engaged as "learners and teachers" (Cook-Sather 2011) or as "co-creators" in the learning experience (Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felten 2011; Bovill 2013). Further terms used in the literature include: "students as consultants" (Cook-Sather 2009; Crawford 2012), "students as change agents" (Dunne and Zandstra 2011; Healey 2014), "students as change entrepreneurs" (Ryan *et al.* 2013) and "student engagement in educational development and quality enhancement" (Gibbs 2013). The HEA has adopted the term "students as partners" (HEA 2013; Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten 2014). Though these, and other terms, overlap, they have been developed for different purposes and with different underlying conceptualisations by different authors and it is timely to attempt to clarify the field.

Students as partners is a messy and complex area. In this chapter we seek to develop a conceptual model for students as partners in learning and teaching. In the next chapter we explore the nature of partnership learning communities and the issues faced in developing them, while in the chapter four we consider in more detail the four areas of partnership in our conceptual model.

Towards a model for students as partners
A simple distinction may be made between a focus of students as partners on:

a)   student engagement in learning, teaching and research;

b)   student engagement in the quality enhancement of learning and teaching practice and policy.

Although there is common ground, these two strands are distinct areas, each with its own strategic implications, scholarly underpinning and different impact on the student learning experience. Each area also has, to an extent, distinct communities of actors, practitioners and researchers (Fig. 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Simple model of students as partners
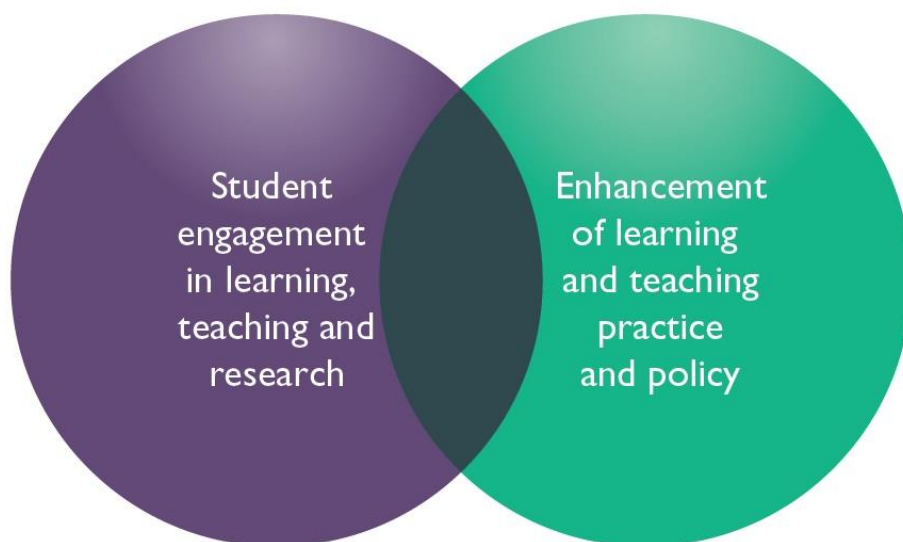
These two areas of potential partnership are not poles of a continuum and they reinforce each other. Hence they are shown as two overlapping circles. This point is also made by Dunne and Owen (2013b, p. 616):

> As with student engagement, partnership is multi-faceted and has a number of different meanings and purposes dependent on context. Although the two main areas discussed here are partners in learning, and partners in development and change, even these are not always simple to separate.

Furthermore, one instance of working in partnership may align with both of these areas simultaneously, depending on the roles and perspectives of those involved. For example, a peer assisted learning programme may engage students actively with their own learning and with one another (left hand side of Fig. 2.1), and at the same time through the partnership between students and staff to develop and implement the programme may lead to an enhancement of learning and teaching practice within a subject area or department (right side of Fig. 2.1).

An important distinction between the two areas, as currently developed, is that whereas most students in a programme may be engaged in learning and research, it is very rare that most students in a programme are engaged as partners in the enhancement of learning and teaching practice and policy, beyond giving their opinions or evaluations. The important issue, however, is that there is equality of opportunity for students to be engaged in appropriate partnerships and that there is a move over time to increase the number of students so engaged and their depth of engagement.

This simple model may be developed by recognising that each of the two ways of engaging students as partners may, in turn, be divided in two:

•   student engagement in learning, teaching and research through –

- o learning, teaching and assessment;
- o subject-based research and inquiry;
- • enhancement of learning and teaching practice and policy through –
  - o scholarship of teaching and learning;
  - o curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy.

These are expressed in figure 2.2 as four overlapping circles to emphasise how the distinctions are blurred, and the inter-relationships between the different aspects are complex and diverse when put into practice. It is more about recognising where the balance of emphasis lies than trying to assign activities to specific categories. The horizontal spectrum from learning, teaching and research to quality enhancement of learning and teaching has been retained from figure 2.1, and a vertical spectrum from co-learning, co-designing and co-developing, to co-researching and co-inquiring has been added. This leaves a tendency to engage students as partners in learning, teaching and assessment *or* in curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy, in the top half of the diagram; and a tendency to engage them as partners in subject-based (including discipline-based and inter-disciplinary studies) research and inquiry *or* in the scholarship of teaching and learning in the bottom half. The scholarship of teaching and learning is taken here to include both researching and inquiring into teaching and learning in courses, and more broadly, institutional research relating to learning and teaching. Over time we are seeing increased overlap between these activities so, for example, students are not only engaged in learning, teaching and research, but are beginning to negotiate the form that these engagements take, and some may be involved as co-designers of the activities and co-evaluators of the experiences.

Figure 2.2: Ways of engaging students as partners in higher education
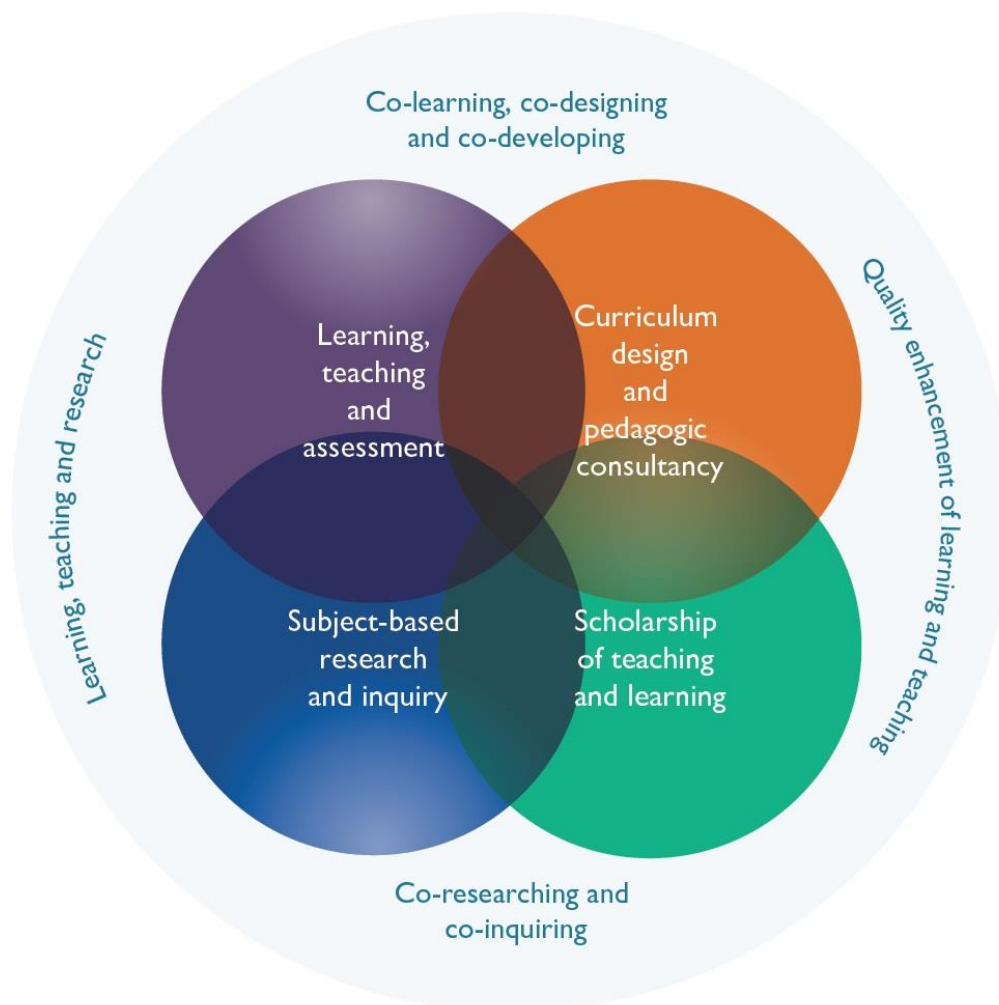
The model, as so far constructed, focuses on four interrelated ways of engaging students in partnership. In chapter four, each of these four activity areas is discussed in turn, conceptual frameworks which have been developed for each area are identified, and case studies of initiatives which have applied the ideas are presented. To this must be added at the centre of the model the partnership learning communities, which emphasises the *processes* by which the four different kinds of partnership operate. These are discussed in detail in the following chapter. Our model of students as partners is contained within a larger circle representing the wider topic of student engagement to emphasise the point made earlier that engagement through partnership is a form of student engagement, but not all forms of student engagement are forms of partnership (Fig. 2.3).

A complementary model has been developed independently by Bovill *et al.* (forthcoming) which focuses on the roles students may play in what they call the "co-creation of teaching and learning". They concentrate on three roles – co-researcher, consultant, and pedagogical co-designer. Another tripartite distinction for students as partners in learning is made by Healey, Bovill and Jenkins (forthcoming) between their roles as teachers, scholars and change agents.

Figure 2.3: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education – an overview model
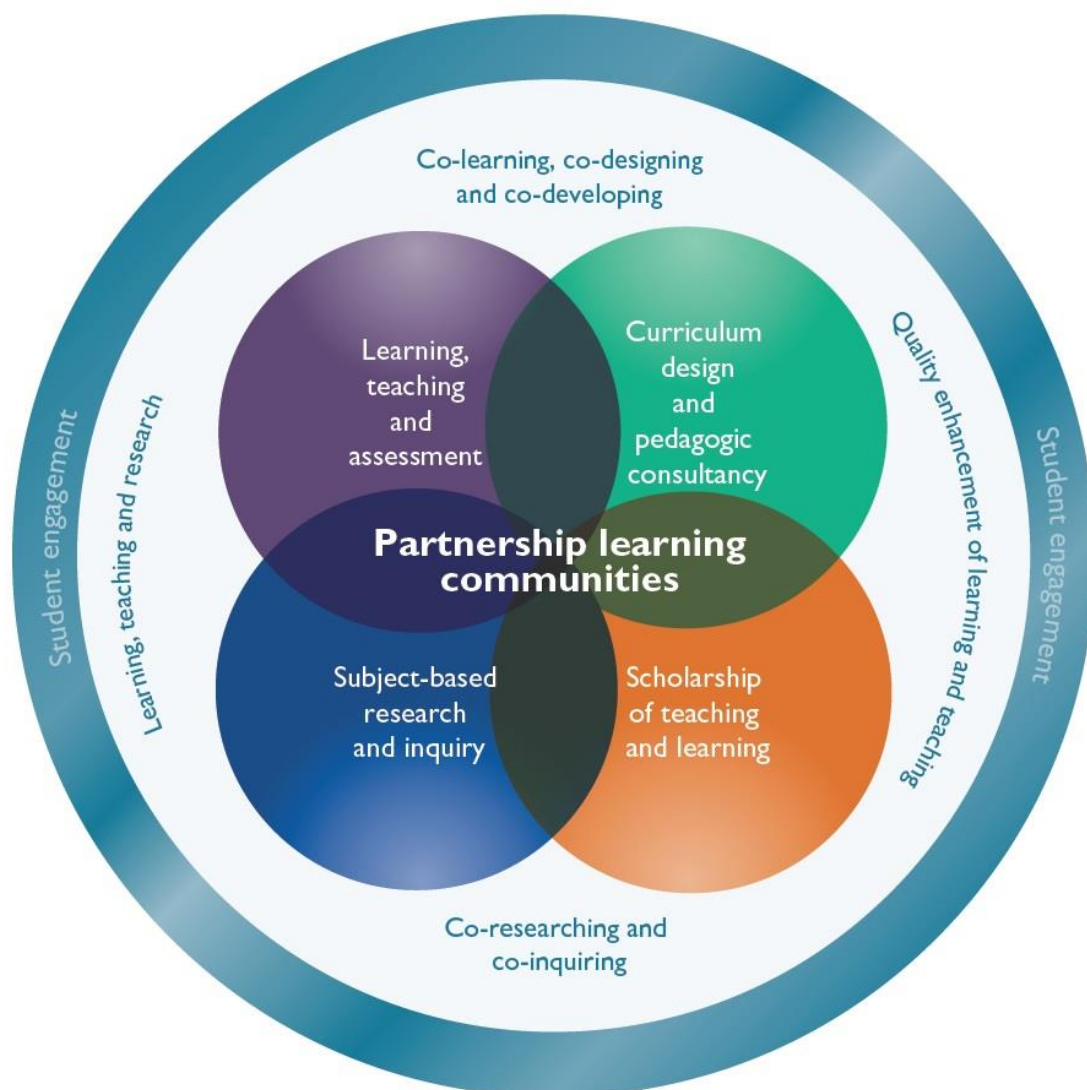
3. Developing partnership learning communities

Learning and participation cannot be separated: they are irremediably bound up with one another.
(Roth and Lee 2006, p. 34)

Learning communities are the pedagogical embodiment of this belief: Teaching and learning involve co-creating knowledge through relationships among students, between students and teachers, and through the environment in which these relationships operate.
(Price 2005, p. 6)

For all parties to have made explicit the terms of the partnership will be one of the most important aspects of collaboration.
(Little et al. 2011, p. 218)

There is abundant evidence that the most effective higher education environments are ones in which students are diligently involved as part of a community of learners. As part of this engagement, they work together with academics to enhance teaching, assure quality and maintain standards. In these contexts, they understand themselves as active partners with academic staff in a process of continual improvement of the learning experience.
(Ramsden 2008, p. 16)

Chapter one dealt with the context for *Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching* and the motivations for different groups to engage in partnership; chapter two then introduced a conceptual model for exploring the nature of the different areas of partnership. This chapter examines how partnership may be put into practice through the development of *partnership learning communities*. Partnership learning communities are at the centre of our model, unifying the four areas of partnership activity, and providing a focus for developing partnerships in practice.

The broader literature on partnership identifies a number of critical factors for successful partnerships (Wildridge *et al.* 2004; Hudson and Hardy 2002). Some of these can be built into institutional structures and processes and documented in formal partnership agreements between, for example, institutions and their students' unions (Williamson 2013). This may involve, developing a shared vision and values; sharing knowledge; regular communication between partners; and joint decision-making and accountability. Others, however, are more difficult to structure as they relate to personal relationships and individual attributes and behaviours. For example, developing trust; mutual respect; listening to one-another; and personal commitment and investment. If partnership is to be embedded beyond documents, and discrete projects and initiatives, it needs to become part of the culture and ethos of the institution. The key to this is *community*. Partnership is more likely to be sustained where there is a strong sense of community among staff and students.

Learning communities and communities of practice
The dominant models of community discussed and applied within learning and teaching in higher education are *learning communities* and *communities of practice*, both of which share a focus on social learning. The most commonly described *learning communities*, particularly from the US, are those which focus solely on students. The theoretical and philosophical foundations of learning communities are attributed to the work of Dewey and Meiklejohn around the Experimental College in Wisconsin in the 1920s, and informed by the dialogic model of educational practice advocated by Paulo Freire in the 1970s (Price 2005). These involve a consistent group or cohort of students who take multiple classes together and meet regularly, either as part of module design or in separate sessions, to discuss and make connections across these classes. They may be structured around a common theme, and can span multiple subjects or disciplines. For example, in Seattle Central Community College, there is a co-ordinated studies programme which makes links between courses in Biology, Sociology and Psychology around the theme of *Body and Mind* (Tinto 2003). As well as making connections

across subject knowledge, these communities may focus on professional learning and practice; for example, within medical and health related subjects there are a variety of inter-professional learning modules, assessments and mentoring practices (Barr and Low 2013).

Learning communities often emphasise the "integration of ideas across disciplines and restructuring the curriculum across courses and semesters" (Love 2012, p. 9), aiming to help students develop a sense of coherence and community which transcends the compartmentalised nature of modular study. They are often focused on first year students, as part of integration into university life. For example, the *Common Time* programme at Griffith University (Australia) involves students, academic and student support staff in structured activities to support academic and intellectual development and informal opportunities to socialise with staff and other students (Fowler and Zimitat 2008). The benefits of being part of learning communities often relate to retention, academic success, engagement and investment in learning within and outside of class, 'educational citizenship', and the growth of high-level academic skills (Tinto 2003; Price 2005). There is also some evidence that the benefits may be even greater for traditionally underserved students; for example, commuter students (Love 2012). Beachboard, Beachboard and Adkinson (2011) argue that the primary benefit of student learning communities is in the development of belonging and relatedness, which in turn leads to enhanced motivation and academic benefits. Participation in learning communities may also lead to enhanced higher-order learning outcomes, such as critical thinking, complex problem solving and communication, which may be related to the tasks communities undertake and lead to greater student employability (Montesinos, Cassidy and Millard 2013). Using analysis of large-scale data from the *National Survey of Student Engagement* in the US, Zhao and Kuh (2004, p. 124) suggest that:

> Participating in learning communities is uniformly and positively linked with student academic performance, engagement in educationally fruitful activities (such as academic integration, active and collaborative learning, and interaction with faculty members), gains associated with college attendance, and overall satisfaction with the college experience.

When learning communities are embedded in course design they may involve tutors from different modules re-structuring the curriculum together, to facilitate connections between modules and embed collaborative learning activities into contact time. In these learning communities staff often take a traditional role, as the developers of content and pedagogy of the linked modules and programmes (Tinto 2003).

Communities of practice are rooted in a constructivist perspective and see learning as participation in "a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Wenger 2001, p. 45). Learning in these communities takes place through experience (meaning), doing (practice), belonging (community) and becoming (identity). This concept has been applied to fostering the scholarship of learning and teaching, professional development for teaching staff, and to explore teacher identity (Cox 2004; Viskovic 2006). The benefits of this model are that staff are more likely to appreciate multi-disciplinary practices and different approaches to learning and teaching, and accommodate diversity within their teaching. Furthermore, staff engagement in these communities is also linked to improved student learning on the courses these staff teach, and an openness to curriculum development and renewal (Cox 2004). Communities of practice have also been used as a lens to explore staff and student relationships; in academic research and inquiry communities within the disciplines (Brew 2003) and in relation to student voice and representation (Flint and O'Hara 2013). More broadly, Streeting and Wise (2009) have called for the relationship between students and their institution to be reframed using the model of communities of practice.

While both these forms of structured communities have many strengths and common aims to facilitate social learning, they can also be potentially divisive, creating barriers between staff and students. For example, research suggests that learning communities which focus solely on relationships among students, or tight control of learning communities by staff, can lead to negative consequences with students uniting in opposition to the tutor or programme; or, staff control detracting from students' social adjustment to university (Beachboard, Beachboard and Adkinson 2011). Similarly, Lea (2005, p. 194) has questioned whether attempts

to bring students into academic communities of practice have placed "emphasis on the student as novice being acculturated into the established academic community."
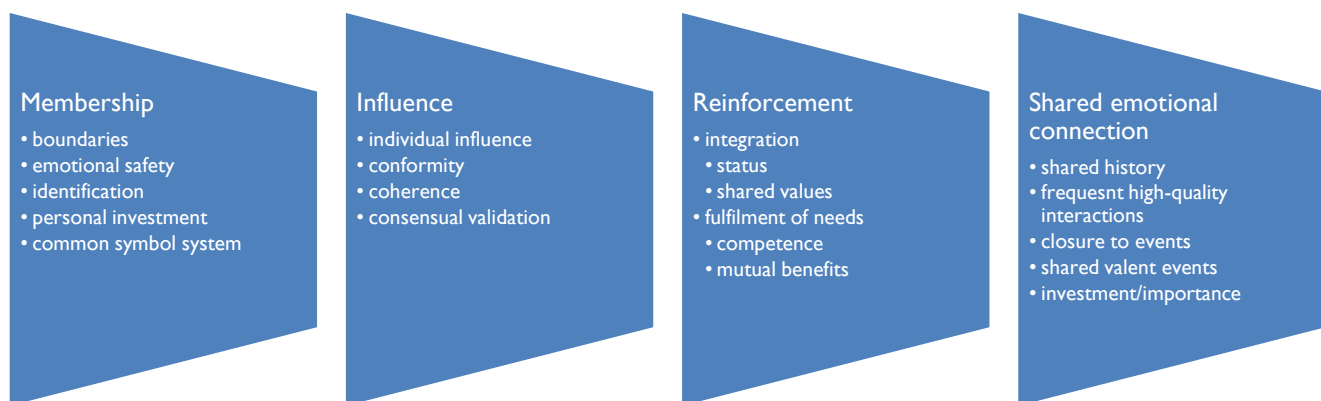
Drawing on the scholarship and practice of learning communities, and communities of practice, and with a focus on partnership, there is potential for a new kind of community to emerge. Partnership places students and staff in different roles and challenges the traditional hierarchical structure of learning and working relationships. As such, it may not be enough to simply extend invitations for new partners to become part of existing communities. In these new communities all parties actively participate in the development and direction of partnership learning and working and are fully valued for the contributions they make. To distinguish these from the learning communities and communities of practice described above we are terming these *partnership learning communities*.

Features of partnership learning communities

Partnership learning communities should facilitate deep connections between staff and students and lead to enhanced learning and motivation for all community members. Many of the examples given in chapter four involve the development of this type of community among staff and students, although to different extents. Communities cannot be created easily; instead they emerge over time through people engaging in shared endeavour (Wenger 2001). From a psychological perspective, the critical dimension of community is a sense of belonging. A four-element definition of this was proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 4, and summarised in Fig. 3.1).

> The first element is membership. **Membership** is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is **influence**, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is **reinforcement**: integration and fulfilment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last element is **shared emotional connection**, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together and similar experiences [emphasis ours].

Figure 3.1: Four-element model of sense of community (Informed by McMillan and Chavis 1986)

Membership
• boundaries
• emotional safety
• identification
• personal investment
• common symbol system

Influence
• individual influence
• conformity
• coherence
• consensual validation

Reinforcement
• integration
  • status
  • shared values
• fulfilment of needs
  • competence
  • mutual benefits

Shared emotional connection
• shared history
• frequesnt high-quality interactions
• closure to events
• shared valent events
• investment/importance

While it may not be possible to force the creation of community, or indeed the sense of community referred to in the model above, the rich literature around partnership and communities of learning and practice in higher education suggests there may be common features that foster their development. By using these features to reflect on and explore practice, it may be possible to identify where to focus efforts to support the emergence of partnership learning communities. Taken together, these features indicate that a partnership learning community is encouraged by structures and working/learning arrangements that support partnership, shared values, and attitudes and behaviours that each member of the community signs up to and embodies in practice.

Structures and working/learning arrangements

Most definitions of partnership focus on working arrangements. At the core of this definition is having a shared goal or aim (QAA 2012; Williamson 2013; Wenger 2001) and working and/or learning collaboratively through shared practices to achieve these aims (Wenger 2001; Tinto 2003). Tinto (2003) elaborates on this to include shared knowledge and shared knowing (through social learning). Partners are accountable to one another and share the responsibility for achieving community aims, which often involves a dispersal of power (Little *et al.* 2011; NUS 2012) and joint decision-making processes (Williamson 2013). Roth and Lee (2006) stress individual choice over which practices members participate in (self-determination and control), flexibility in the way members contribute, and a division of labour among community members. Cox (2004) adds that the activities undertaken should be relevant and include opportunities to socialise and enjoy one another's company

Shared values

Many definitions of partnership refer to specific values that partners agree to embody in practice. For example, the University of Leeds states that through the partnership between staff and students the university will "be responsible, accessible and respectful" (University of Leeds [n.d.]). The most common values cited in the literature include trust, respect, reciprocity, responsibility and openness (Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten 2014; QAA 2012; Bovill 2013b).

Attitudes and behaviours

The attitudes and behaviours of partners referred to in the literature are mainly focused on interpersonal relationships; for example, listening to one another (Werder and Skogsberg 2013, Powers 2012); recognition of the different contribution partners make (Williamson 2013); a willingness to meet others "where they are" (Powers 2012); communicating openly and honestly (Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten 2014; QAA 2012); and, sharing a commitment to continued learning and celebrating and being proud of successes (Powers 2012; Cox 2004).

Attempting to align these commonly cited features of partnership from the higher education literature with McMillan and Chavis's (1986) four-element model suggests that there may be elements of community that are made more explicit than others. For instance, the structures and working/learning arrangements align well with the influence element, but the level of influence or power each community member has is rarely made explicit. Similarly, many of the attitudes and behaviours of partners described above can be seen as fostering a shared emotional connection. However, the frequency and quality of interactions are not made clear, neither is the notion of investment in the shared history of the community. These and other issues are discussed in the next section.

The nature and context of the partnership may also influence the level of importance placed on specific structures and working/learning arrangements, values, attitudes and behaviours. For example, Dunne and Owen (2013b, p. 624) state that from their perspective "It is the quality of the relationships that matters more than the equality of the partnership". Some of the partnership activities related to the quality enhancement area of figure 2.1 may require closer attention paid to working arrangements, structures and processes as they are principally around working in partnership. Those embedded within learning, teaching and research, on the other hand, may require a closer focus on attitudes and inter-personal factors of learning relationships. While the balance of these may change in practice, they are a useful starting point for developing partnerships.

Taking the values underpinning partnership set out in chapter one as a starting point, a useful first step is for partners to collaboratively explore and agree on shared values. These can then be used to explore how working arrangements (including structures and processes) enable these values and what attitudes and behaviours embody these in practice. It is worth highlighting that it is very hard to 'see' partnership as a process when it is committed to paper. It is essentially experiential. Therefore, it is also useful to reflect on partnership through experience. A question asked by Dr Cathy Bovill, of participating teams in the HEA's (2014-15) *students as partners in the curriculum change programme,* was "what does partnership look like?" If an observer walked into a classroom, practice learning setting or meeting room what would they see which would show students (and staff) engaging through partnership?

Putting partnership into practice

In this section we identify a number of issues that deserve consideration when putting the partnerships into practice, and building partnership learning communities. Through careful and critical reflection on these issues within your own context, be that at the initiative, module, programme, faculty or institutional level (Fig 4.7), it is more likely that successful and sustained partnerships may be developed.

Issues of inclusivity and scale

Within the student engagement literature, inclusivity is a key issue. Some pedagogic approaches to partnership operate on an "elite" or "boutique" (Kuh 2007) model and only directly involve a small group of students. This creates challenges for developing partnership learning communities, as membership is restricted. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) ask whether in such "elite" models it may be only those "best served" by the current system that put themselves forward (i.e. those already engaged and succeeding), or those who have the "cultural capital" and are articulate enough to contribute in expected ways (Taylor and Robinson 2009). Furthermore, staff may play a role in "selecting" certain students whose voice and perspective is permitted to inform partnership (Bovill *et al.* under review). The adoption of these approaches could unwittingly increase inequality among students. Hence it is useful to reflect on who is and is not involved in current partnership work (staff and students) and whether there are structural or cultural barriers to certain groups of people engaging (Felten *et al.* 2013) as well as the ethical implications of differential participation. Where there is a selection process, the criteria used should be transparent and open (Bovill *et al.* under review).

The NUS (2012) and Sparqs (Williamson 2013) both highlight the importance of collective partnerships, between students' unions and their institutions, to embed partnerships strategically within structures and processes and hence the ethos of the institution. At the same time, people often experience partnership as an individual relationship and it is there that they feel emotionally invested and empowered. There may also be a tension between the collective objectives of partnership and the focus on individual achievement within higher education (Roth and Lee 2006). McMillan and Chavis (1986) point out that community can be seen as the link between the individual and the collective, with a dual focus on meeting individual needs through membership of the community, and the tendency for communities to promote a level of conformity. It is worth exploring how the aims and values of collective partnerships can be realised through partnership learning communities to accommodate individual partnership relationships. Partnership agreements between students' unions and institutions may be one way for to provide a collective context for local and individual partnerships (Case study 3.1).

Nevertheless, specific partnership practices have their own challenges with regard to scale. For example, when appointing students as course design consultants there may be a limited number of roles available. Where pedagogic approaches to partnership are embedded within the curriculum – for example, through inquiry based learning – there are fewer restrictions on membership, and all staff and students involved may engage. With reference to children's participation in their education, Hart (1992) has suggested that every student should have the opportunity to participate at the highest level of her/his ability. This principle of "equality of opportunity" is useful to bear in mind for HE partnership learning communities, especially when balancing issues of inclusivity and scale.

Case study 3.1: Partnership agreements in the Scottish HE sector

In 2003 the Scottish HE sector established Students Participation in Quality Scotland (Sparqs), to support student engagement with quality arrangements. In 2012 Sparqs published the *Student Engagement Framework for Scotland,* through which it aimed to provide clarity to inform discussion and practice around student engagement. One of the key features identified in this framework as supporting effective student engagement is seeing students as partners. Building on the success of their student engagement work, Sparqs developed guidance for institutions to develop and use student partnership agreements (SPAs). This reflected the Scottish Government's call for partnership agreements in their view of post-16 education – *Putting Learners at the Centre* – as a way of maintaining and supporting effective relationships between institutions and student bodies.

The development of SPAs is seen as a negotiation and collaboration between institutions and their students' union/guild/association (as the collective voice of students).

In their model, SPAs should adhere to four key principles:
- be firstly a tool for quality enhancement, reflecting the shift from quality assurance to enhancement in quality arrangements in Scotland;
- promote opportunities for students to engage in quality processes;
- offer an alternative to consumer rights documents or memorandum of understanding between institutions and their students;
- be a tool to frame discussions around the way staff and students interact.

As well as forming a working group (comprising staff and student body members), Sparqs advise incorporating the process of developing SPAs in the normal systems, processes and work-cycles of the institution. For example, making good use of course representative training and staff-student liaison meetings. SPAs are developed in consultation with staff and students, informed by evidence and signed off by institutional and student body leaders. It is intended to be a single collective agreement for all staff and students, therefore needs to reflect obligations around equality and diversity legislation and should be accessible in both language and format.

It is important to note that SPAs are seen as dynamic documents. Therefore, it is advised that they are monitored, reviewed and updated regularly to reflect the relationship between students and their institution as it develops.

As of 2014, eight universities and three colleges in Scotland were using or developing SPAs.

Further information: Williamson (2013), Sparqs (2012), The Scottish Government (2011) and www.sparqs.ac.uk

Issues of power relationships
The distribution of power and responsibility is seen as one of the fundamental features of partnership, and a way in which it may be distinguished from other forms of student engagement – partnership requires empowerment and accountability. Paraphrasing Hart (1992), participation is the process of sharing decisions which effect one's experience and the experience of the community in which one studies. Without this, student voice and involvement activities can be experienced as disempowering. Taken simplistically, partnership could be taken to mean equal power. However, very few relationships are truly equal and the distribution of power is likely to be fluid and vary over the course of a partnership relationship. It is important to reflect on power relationships, and whether existing structures and processes reify existing inequalities that present barriers to partnership working and learning. These can be simple – for example, "who makes decisions on the direction of partnership working initiatives?", "who has access to resources, systems and spaces?" – or, more

subtle – "how do power relationships between students and the tutor assessing their work affect partnership within the curriculum?" Traditional hierarchical models of power dominate learning and teaching within higher education and, while pockets of partnership working may offer alternatives, students will also negotiate "parallel universes" within their learning experiences where more traditional academic–student relationships exist (Hutchings, Bartholomew and Reilly 2013).

The co-creation process, which underpins learner empowerment and is central to the concept of students as partners, has recently been recognised in an HEA publication as one of six new pedagogical ideas, which concern the relationship between flexibility and pedagogy. It is an important arena for critical questions about the core purposes of learning and teaching in higher education. As Ryan and Tilbury (2013, p. 5), the authors of the report, state, learner empowerment is about:

> … actively involving students in learning development and processes of 'co-creation' that challenge learning relationships and the power frames that underpin them, as part of the revitalisation of the academic project itself.

In many cases this may involve staff relinquishing a level of control, for example, over pedagogic planning and curriculum content, which may cause discomfort (Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felten 2011) as it may lead to re-evaluating positions and beliefs around roles and identities within learning and teaching relationships. It may be prudent to anticipate potential resistance to partnership by providing space for colleagues to explore and reflect on this. It may also be useful to reflect on the situated nature of power. For example, a sabbatical officer from a students' union may sit on more high-level university committees than a senior lecturer, and have access to different forms of influence.

Within the discourse around student engagement and partnership there is an implicit notion that the aim should always be the highest level of participation and engagement. It is important to be honest and realistic about when partnership work is and is not possible, and to consider what is possible in different contexts (Bovill and Bulley 2011). Within a partnership learning community it may be that different areas of work are more heavily led and controlled by different partners at different points in time. For example, when engaging students as partners in curriculum design, there may be areas of the curriculum for which there are professional body requirements that present challenges to partnership working and may require "small steps" to start with (Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felten 2011) and the recognition of and respect for the specific expertise that each party brings as professional, academic and student.

Writing specifically about student voice, Taylor and Robinson (2009) argue that the power dimensions of student engagement have received little theorisation. They highlight that notions of empowerment and emancipation are core to the roots of student voice in radical pedagogy. Inherent in this is the assumption that power resides with one party, and it is within their gift to empower others, but this may not be nuanced enough to accommodate the situated realities of power relations in practice. Even the term 'students as partners' implies a certain power dynamic: that staff have the balance of power and are in a position to invite students to become partners. Furthermore, discourses like empowerment often frame students as homogenous, with little attention to the interaction between power and dimensions such as inclusivity (for example considering empowerment in relation to gender, race, class, etc.). Taking a post-modernist perspective, Taylor and Robinson (2009) encourage the deconstruction of the assumptions and practices of current student voice activity, and a shift away from binary conceptions of power – thinking about 'power with' rather than 'power over'. Similarly, by reflecting on the assumptions inherent in tacit models of partnership, and the way in which language and practices reflect these relationships, it becomes possible to begin to challenge some of these ingrained power dynamics and develop new ways of working and learning together.

Issues of reward and recognition
Within a partnership learning community partners may be engaged on different terms. When working in partnership in learning and teaching, staff act in their role as paid employees of the institution, while for students the situation can be very different. This is a particular challenge when students work in partnership

with staff outside of their core learning experiences; for example, in extra-curricular research projects, or quality enhancement work. In these situations it is important to reflect on how student contributions to partnership are recognised and rewarded. This may be through payment – for example, Birmingham City University pays its Student Academic Partners, and The University of Sheffield pays its Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching. In other cases, the skills that students develop through the partnership are recognised and formally documented so they can be used as evidence in applications for work and further study (for example, through the Higher Education Achievement Report www.hear.ac.uk). Different approaches to rewarding and recognising student contribution may affect other issues like inclusivity and have ethical implications. For example, are students who need to support themselves through part-time work able to make the most of voluntary partnership opportunities? Much attention has been paid to incentivising student engagement in partnerships, but it is also useful to reflect on how staff engagement with students is valued by the institution; for example, through formal awards, the appraisal process and so on. Embedding the recognition and reward of staff and students engaging in partnerships, is one way in which institutions and students' unions can embody an ethos and culture of partnership in practice.

Issues of transition and sustainability
A further difference between student and staff terms of engagement is around length of membership within partnership learning communities and what that means for continuity of membership; largely due to the time-bound nature of students' relationship with their institution. Using terminology from Lave and Wenger (2007) this means that most of the 'old timers' within the community will be staff and they will hold much of the participative memory of the community. It takes time for 'new-comers' to move from being peripheral to full members of the community, and if these new-comers are predominantly students it creates challenges to partnership and how student perspectives may contribute to the development and direction of the community. It is useful to reflect on how continuity can be supported, and how access to the shared memory of the community is made available to new-comers. For example, "who provides training and support for incoming student partners?" and "who documents and holds records of the work of the partnership?" Peer support and continuity may be "designed in" through building relationships between outgoing and incoming student partners (Summers *et al.* 2013; and Case study 3.2).

Sustainability and transition issues may also be linked to the nature of the partnership taking place. Where partnership is embedded in the curriculum; for example, through pedagogies of partnership and research and inquiry-based learning (the left hand side of Fig. 2.3), all students are involved and, subject to course development, are likely to be sustained. Many of the partnership activities on the right hand side of figure 2.3 tend to be discrete initiatives, often one-off examples dependent on special funding and individual staff enthusiasm. The challenge is how to sustain and mainstream these initiatives, for example, through building them into the curriculum. Most of the examples used in this publication are deliberately those that have the potential to be scaled-up and sustained to engage more students (and staff).

Case study 3.2: Course design consultancy at Sheffield Hallam University
Since 2013 students have been recruited to be Course Enhancement Officers (CEOs) (formerly known as Course Design Consultants) at Sheffield Hallam University through an initiative that aims to go beyond student voice, giving students a role as active agents 'early on' in the course approval process. Course leaders and teams who are interested in working with CEOs meet with potential CEO partners at the start of the (re)approval process, where both parties negotiate what the consultancy will involve. CEOs do not usually support course leaders/team for subjects they are studying. Typically, CEOs will conduct a 'solutions-based' workshop with students on the course, then prepare a report on the findings for course leaders/teams, which may also be used as evidence in the (re)approval submission documents.

Sustainability is designed into the initiative in a number of ways. Firstly, a repository of knowledge was created so that participants could learn from previous student reflections, case studies, and feedback from staff involved. Secondly, support for student CEOs was embedded in existing structures through governance, line management and training. The initiative was linked to the implementation of the institution's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Academic Quality Framework, and reported to a Student Voice Committee (co-chaired by the institution and students' union). The initiative team also collaborated with the Venture Matrix™: an institutional scheme that works across academic departments and provides opportunities for students to develop employability and enterprise skills through accredited real-life work related projects. The Venture Matrix™ helped to recruit CEOs, and provided weekly line management (from a student placement project officer).

Further information: Sheffield Hallam University (2013)

Issues of identity
Staff and students are members of multiple communities within and outside the university, and different aspects of their identity dominate at different times and in different contexts. Cook-Sather (forthcoming) highlights the need for dialogue across differences in identity, not to focus on reaching consensus, but to acknowledge, respect and begin to understand others' perspectives and experiences; to engage with difference. Not all students are 18-year olds straight from school and not all staff are full-time academics who have only worked in higher education. In addition to the diversity of prior life and other learning experiences each of us brings to higher education, many students and staff have experience of working as professionals in different fields for many years. In many situations it may therefore be more appropriate to talk about *professional* learning partnerships.

> Engaging students as partners is so complex because it requires attending to the intersectionalities within student identities (McLeod 2011). A particular student, for example, might not only be deaf but also female and from a minority religious community. In different contexts, different aspects of that student's identity will be more or less salient. (Felten and Bauman 2013, p. 375)

Partnership may be a rich ground for exploring these intersectionalities. For example, reflecting on her experiences of an auto-ethnographic approach to co-research as part of her undergraduate studies, Baker (2014) describes this as a legitimate space to connect the personal and the academic, to connect the knowledge and theory of the discipline to her personal experience. Within the wider discourse of higher education, students are described as consumers, producers, co-creators, employees and so on. McMillan and Chavis (1986) argue that identity changes through membership of communities, and many examples of partnership support this. For example Borsos *et al.* (2014) discuss how participation in an internationalisation research project helped them not only gain appreciation of others identities and perspectives, but a greater level of reflection and awareness of the role their own identity plays in their learning and teaching experiences. Partnership may also blur the boundaries between traditional roles. When staff engage in partnership with students in co-inquiry, both become learners. When students engage as pedagogic consultants, or as teachers

and assessors of their peers, the boundaries between staff and students are less clear (Jensen and Bennett forthcoming). This can be a challenging experience for staff, if this requires them to let go of part of their existing identity, or challenges their perceptions of what a teacher/lecturer is. Student partners, with a foot in both camps, may "bridge the gap between staff and students" (Summers *et al.* 2013, p. 51) and thus influence the dynamic of wider relationships. When combined with students' emerging professional identities within their field of study, there is a "blended professionalism" where identity is drawn from academic, employment, and professional environments (Gough, Morris and Hession 2013).

This prompts reflection on the usefulness of current labels like 'staff' or 'students' and the importance of not making assumptions based on perceived 'status'. There may be times in the learning and teaching relationship where staff and students usefully play these traditional roles, but partnership opens up opportunities for all to be scholars, researchers, learners, teachers, leaders and so on. This is reminiscent of Fielding's (2001) notion of radical collegiality between staff and school students having potential to transform education. Some partnership initiatives refer to staff and students as "academic communities of practice" (Brew 2003, p. 12) or simply members of the university community (University of Leeds, [n.d.]), and perhaps terms such as these, relating to a community of scholars, are more suitable to reflect the fluidity of identity. Designing in time for partners to get to know one another, and to challenge and unpick assumptions about identity and role, is important for successful partnerships.

Woven through the issues highlighted above, there are complex ethical dimensions of engagement through partnership that are rarely discussed. These may stem from the form of partnership (particularly in relation to power relationships between parties (e.g. the level of management of the process by the staff member), the terms of engagement (for example ethical issues around reward and recognition for partnership), inclusivity (in terms of who is engaged, how decisions are made around participation and why), and differential commitments to partnership learning and working (ethical issues of responsibility and accountability). Where students are engaged as co-researchers, work may go through the formal ethics committees of institutions – but there is a difference between these formal ethical procedures and how ethics are 'lived out' in individual relationships between students and between students and staff (Taylor and Robinson 2014). Taylor and Robinson (2014, p. 175) argue for a holistic, bricolage approach to the ethics of engagement, stating:

> We hope we have clearly made the point that ethics is never about 'one size fits all'. It is about using our practical wisdom – what Aristotle calls *Phronesis* – to act as wisely and as well as we can as embodied, unique individuals within the particular, social encounters we have, while acknowledging that some tensions may remain and some issues cannot easily be resolved.

Conclusion

The notion of staff and students being part of a community or group committed to learning and knowledge building is implicit in many policy aims to place students, and student engagement, at the heart of learning in higher education. This importance is reflected in the use of measures which aim to capture the level of perceived community. For example, see the additional question bank (B. 11) in the *National Student Survey* that refers to learning communities (Ipsos Mori [n.d.]). There is evidence that seems to support the notion that encouraging a sense of community and belonging increases student retention and success (Thomas 2012). However, more clarity is needed on the kind of communities that are being promoted.

Taking a partnership approach to community implies that all staff and students are valued members of that community. This is not simply about inviting students to be partial or temporary members of established staff communities, but creating opportunities for the co-creation of new communities where both staff and students can contribute to the development and sustaining of those communities. Given that partnership in the conceptual model, presented in chapter two, is both a working and learning relationship, these new communities should acknowledge the dual role of staff and students as both scholars and colleagues engaged in a process of learning and inquiry. Partnership learning communities invite critical reflection on existing relationships, identities, processes and structures, and can potentially lead to the transformation of learning experiences.

4. The four areas of partnership: mapping the territory

There is abundant evidence that the most effective higher education environments are ones in which students are diligently involved as part of a community of learners. As part of this engagement, they work together with academics to enhance teaching, assure quality and maintain standards. In these contexts, they understand themselves as active partners with academic staff in a process of continual improvement of the learning experience. (Ramsden 2008, p. 16)

When students and academics co-design curricula, benefits include deeper student engagement in learning, increased staff enthusiasm for teaching, and curricula that meet students' needs. (Bell *et al.* 2013, p. 499)

In our conceptual model (Fig. 2.3) we identify four areas of partnership:
- learning, teaching and assessment;
- subject-based research and inquiry;
- scholarship of teaching and learning;
- curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy.

In this chapter we explore in greater depth the nature of these four areas. As previously stated, these are all forms of student engagement, but not all forms of student engagement involve students in partnership. A key characteristic of partnership is that all involved stand to gain. It is in attending to the issues of power, inclusivity/scale, working/learning arrangements, shared values and responsibility, and so on discussed in the last chapter, which brings the concept of partnership alive. Many of these ideas were developed by colleagues working on the quality enhancement side of our model, and applying them to the learning, teaching and research side of the model is equally important. Thus active learning and research and inquiry-based learning associated with involving students in learning, teaching and research are excellent ways to engage students. But only where students are given a significant amount of autonomy and independence, and where students are involved in negotiating and choosing the form of the activities, do the experiences align with our conception of students as partners. The terms co-learning, co-researching and co-inquiring in our model become critical here.

However, it is far from easy to identify the extent to which partnership occurs in many of the practices described in the literature and on websites, because the focus is usually on the activities in which students are engaged rather than the nature of the processes and decision-making involved. We have also identified that there are qualitatively different forms of participation involved (Ch. 1). We value the forms that engage students actively, even though they may not involve full partnership, and it may not be appropriate that they should. Hence, in this chapter, we outline some of the conceptual frameworks and examples of strategic practices which have been developed in these four areas, while recognising that there is also variability in the ways and extent to which the work described represents the idea of partnership in practice. Nevertheless, we think that these conceptual frameworks make significant contributions to the theory and understanding of partnership, and the attempts to apply them provide valuable lessons for developing students as partners' initiatives.

Learning, teaching and assessment

Engaging students in partnership means seeing students as active participants in their own learning and is the most common way that students act as partners. Active learning is the key to meaningful student learning (Chickering and Gamson 1987; Gibbs 1998; Graham *et al.* 2007).

The key idea behind active learning and student engagement is reflecting on the experience of learning by doing (Healey, Solem and Pawson 2010). According to Kolb (1984, p. 38) "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." Kolb's theory presents a way of structuring and sequencing the curriculum at module and programme levels so that students, taking account of their diverse set of learning styles and needs, go through a range of activities which reflect the *cyclical* nature of

learning (Fielding 1994; Healey and Jenkins 2000). This involves four stages which, paraphrasing Kolb, may be referred to as experiencing, reflecting, generalising and testing (Cowan 1998).

The Centre for Active Learning at the University of Gloucestershire extended Kolb's approach to include the 'teaching for understanding' perspective because it requires attendance to the *kinds* of experience we design for our students (Fig. 4.1). The strength of the 'teaching for understanding movement' (Blythe and Associates 1998; Perkins 1999) in the US is in its emphasis on crafting thought-demanding experiences for student learning. Its proponents insist that simply 'having' knowledge is insufficient because learners need to go through 'performances of understanding' to comprehend their subject fully. Performances of understanding involving partnership are likely to be particularly effective in developing student learning.

Figure 4.1: The Centre for Active Learning approach to active learning (source: Healey, Solem and Pawson 2010, p. 3)
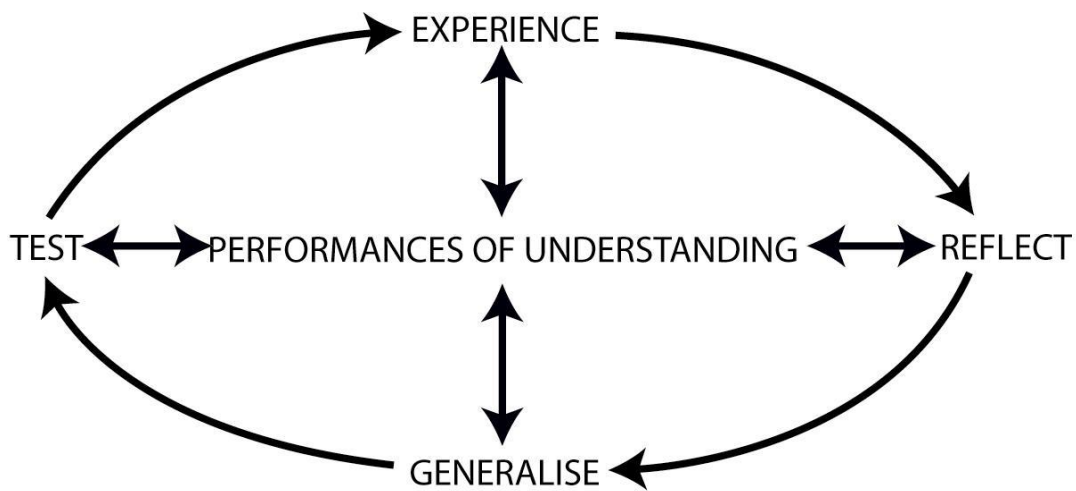
There is evidence that students appreciate active learning. In the *Student experience research 2012*, the most frequent response to the question "What, if anything, would improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience at your university?" – given by 50.2% of the 4,440 who responded – was "more interactive group teaching sessions/tutorials". This compared with 26.1% who answered "more lectures" (NUS and QAA 2012).

The importance of active learning came out in Trowler's (2010) international review of research into student engagement. She found that engagement in student learning is enhanced by:
- student active participation in their learning (both in-class and out-of-class);
- collaborative activity (e.g. peer-to-peer learning, peer review, assessment);
- student involvement in the design, delivery and assessment of their learning.

Not all active learning, of course, involves partnership, but it does mean engaging students in forms of participation and helps prepare them for the roles they may play in full partnership.

Baxter Magolda (2007) has suggested that when active learning is incorporated into a carefully designed curriculum it can speed up the journey of students through the stages of intellectual development towards what she calls the 'self-authorship' stage of learning partnership. Kuh (2009, p. 21), moreover, using data from the US *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE), identifies ten 'high impact' activities which when done well, "appear to engage participants at levels that elevates their performances across multiple engagement and desired outcome measures such as persistence and other dimensions of student success such as university grades" (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: High impact learning activities (source: Kuh 2009, p. 21)	
1.	First-year seminars and experiences
2.	Common intellectual experiences
3.	Learning communities
4.	Writing-intensive courses
5.	Collaborative assignments and projects
6.	'Science as science is done' – undergraduate research
7.	Diversity/global learning
8.	Service learning, community-based learning
9.	Internships
10.	Capstone courses and projects

One of the high impact activities is internships. Where students have a placement as part of their course a three-fold partnership between students, staff and employers or professional organisations is critical for its success (Matthews, Healey and Jones1995). Another high impact activity is engaging students in community-based projects and relates to Boyer's (2006) scholarship of engagement. Sometimes, of course, students may be placed in partnership with a community organisation (Harris, Jones and Coutts 2010). For example, at Macquarie University in Australia, Participation and Community Engagement (PACE) is the third pillar of the undergraduate curriculum. PACE units foster professional and community engagement by enabling students in almost every undergraduate programme to work with partner organisations in a range of workplace activities as part of their degree (Macquarie University [n.d.]). Service learning is particularly common in the US. Portland State University is unusual in requiring all final year undergraduates take a *compulsory* community-based learning capstone project, which provides senior students with the opportunity to synthesise and apply their knowledge and experience from their programme (Case study 4.1). There is evidence that where students have engaged in service learning, including cases where staff have facilitated partnerships between students and community organisations, the experience is potentially conducive to students' transformation (Deeley 2010).

Case study 4.1: Compulsory community-based learning capstone project at Portland State University, US

During the final year each undergraduate student is required to participate in a 'senior capstone', the culmination of the University Studies programme. The senior capstone project is a community-based learning experience that:

    a) provides an opportunity for students to apply the expertise they have learned in their major to real issues and problems in the community;

    b) enhances students' ability to work in a team context necessitating collaboration with persons from different fields of specialisation.

Each student works with a team of students and faculty. Each senior capstone must result in some form of summation, closing project, or final product that puts closure to the students' experience. For example, in a course on Asset Mapping and GIS, students work in partnership with a community organization in need of community-based research.

Further information: capstone.unst.pdx.edu/; University of Gloucestershire (no date); Kerrigan and Carpenter (2013)

A further way in which active learning is becoming embedded in courses is through the development of inverse or flipped classrooms (Lage, Platt and Treglia 2000; Gerstein 2012), in which students obtain the material traditionally covered in lectures prior to, as well as following, the class. This is through, for example, readings, videos and sometimes open educational resources, such as MOOCs. Time in class is then spent in discussion, problem solving and on other experiential activities. The key to the flipped classroom experience is the linkage between the out-of-class and in-class activities. Gerstein (2012) adapts Kolb's experiential learning model to provide an experiential flipped-class model in which "the video lectures, screencasts, and vodcasts fall within a larger framework of learning activities" (Fig. 4.2). The cycle often begins with an experiential exercise, before exploring the concepts touched upon in the experiential engagement using a variety of media. Learners then reflect on what they have learnt during the previous phases using a range of meaning making activities, including tests. In the final phase the "learners get to demonstrate what they learned and apply the material in a way that makes sense to them" through creating personalized projects and presentations. A number of institutions are currently developing flipped classroom strategic initiatives, including the Universities of Bath and British Columbia (University of Bath 2013; McCabe 2013a). Again, a flipped classroom does not necessarily mean partnership is occurring, but as students are given greater independence, and are involved in negotiating the nature of the activities in which they are engaged, it increases the probability of students engaging in partnership activities.

Figure 4.2: The experiential flipped classroom model (source: Gerstein 2012)
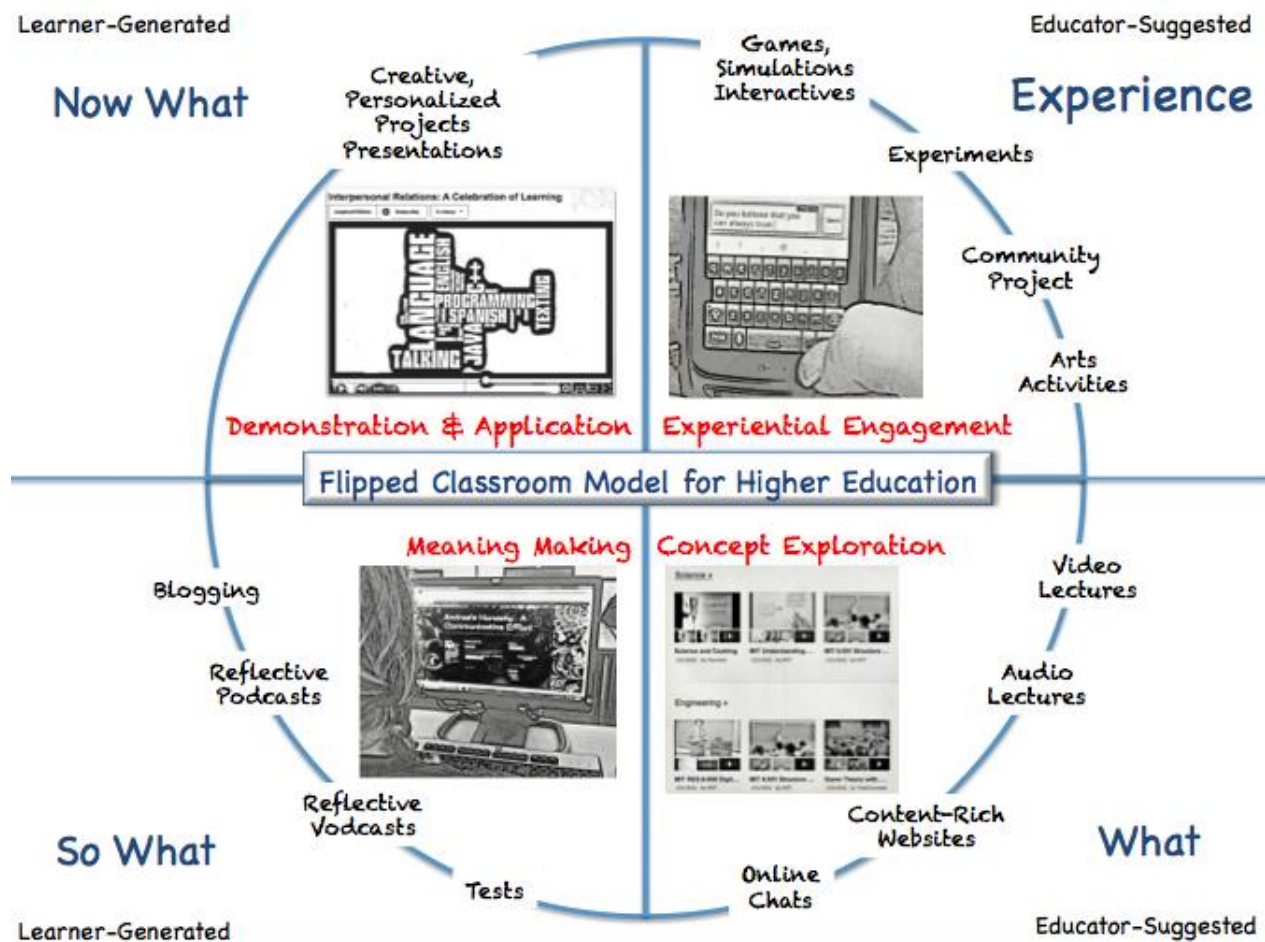
Students are not only learners, they may also act as teachers on the principle that, as Frank Oppenheimer noted, "the best way to learn is to teach" (Paull 2013). Gärdebo and Wiggberg (2012, p. 8) use the term "active student participation" to describe students taking an active role in other students' learning. One example of this is through various peer-learning schemes which foster cross-year support between students usually on the same course. These approaches derive from the model of supplemental instruction, developed originally in 1973 at the University of Missouri, Kansas City (Arendale 2002). Most peer-learning schemes are

voluntary and extra-curricular, whereas other forms of peer, collaborative or co-operative learning take place between students on the same course and may be formally integrated into the curriculum (Boud, Cohen and Sampson. 1999; Jacques and Salmon 2007). A common feature of all the schemes is that the students step outside their usual identity and become teachers, and hence, act as partners in supporting other students in their learning. For example, the University of the West of England's (2014) peer assisted learning (PAL) scheme is designed for second year students to support first year students at Bachelor and Masters levels. Over 100 modules are currently supported and the programme has been widened to include PAL leaders in services such as library and careers, based on generic study and employability skills, and global PAL where the focus is more pastoral. A more radical example comes from the Centre for Sustainable Development (CEMUS) at Uppsala University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Science where students have designed and commissioned courses which are taught, mostly in the evenings, with an inter-disciplinary team of lecturers. This initiative, which began in 1998, provides a creative forum for undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers and teachers to work in partnership (Matilda 2011; Stoddard et al. 2013).

A key way to bring learning and teaching together through engaging students as partners is through the assessment process. However, the power relations in assessment partnerships may be significantly different than those in active learning or peer-learning partnerships. As Bevitt (2012, p. 4) notes:

> Evidence suggests that assessment and feedback processes used with students have a significant impact on "what, how and how much students study" (Gibbs and Simpson 2004, p. 3) and is therefore an essential element in the learning and teaching process.

Involving students as partners in assessment is beginning to be advocated widely (HEA 2012b). One of the first institutions to develop an institutional strategy based on assessment was Alverno College in Milwaukee. In 1973 they began a new curriculum based on eight abilities integrated within the content of the disciplines (Mentowski and Associates 2000). 'Student assessment-as-learning' is Alverno's term for a process that involves individual student demonstration of those abilities as requirements for graduation. Self-assessment is a key element of this process.

Engaging students in the process of assessment is an essential part of balanced assessment. Indeed, in Australia, students and teachers becoming responsible partners in learning and assessment was one of seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education (Boud and Associates 2010). Some practical ways of doing this are outlined by Fluckiger et al. (2010), who describe three formative feedback activities that illustrate how students can be involved as partners in the assessment process. The ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), based in the Business School at Oxford Brookes University, has developed a series of resources which staff and students can use in partnership to engage students in the development of assessment criteria and formulation of feedback (www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/resources/index.html) (see also Price, O'Donovan and Rust 2007).
e-Assessment may also be used to increase student choice and self-regulated learning (Ellis and Folley 2011).

Giving students a choice of assessments has become a common way for making reasonable adjustments for disabled students, but it has yet to become common for all students despite Healey's (2003) forecast that the disability legislation would act as a Trojan horse and demand would grow rapidly for such adjustments being available for all students. The increase in autonomy gained by students who are able to negotiate their assessments provides a good example of student engagement through partnership. There is a growing literature referring to the experience of giving students a choice of assessments (O'Neill 2012; Waterfield and West 2006).

Developing students as partners in assessment is part of the recognition of the importance of 'assessment *for* learning' (McDowell, Sambell and Davison 2009; Sambell, McDowell and Montgomery 2012). Feedback on formative assessment is at the core of the assessment for learning (Nicol 2010; Orsmond et al. 2013). As Sambell (2013, p. 384) notes:

The notion of feedback is expanded to include not only the 'normal' tutor feedback on student work but also tutor–student dialogic feedback, which is part of interactive teaching and learning and peer feedback from a range of formal and informal collaborative learning activities. This interaction enables students to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own work, rather than simply expecting tutors to perform that role for them.

Engaging students as partners in self-assessment and peer-assessment are key to this process and these methods are often used to redistribute group work marks between team members (Healey and Addis 2004). Sambell (2014) observes that:

> Some of the dominant exponents of learning-oriented approaches to assessment, where the value of involving students in the assessment process is highly prized, are tending to shift the emphasis away from the earlier prominence of peer assessment where students use grades (which students often resist and dislike) towards the 'learning element' (Liu and Carless 2006) embodied in peer review.

Sambell and Graham (2010) give a fascinating case study of their experience of developing and running a module on 'assessment for learning' for students on a non-vocational joint honours course; usually such modules are restricted to courses for teachers.

A further high impact learning activity identified by Kuh (2009) above is writing-intensive courses. While such courses do not feature in UK higher education in the same way they do in the US, attention to writing as an integral part of active subject-based learning is gaining ground (Clughen and Hardy 2012; Deane and O'Neill 2011). In the UK, Academic Literacies is a theoretically informed approach to pedagogy which actively challenges prevailing notions of student writers as deficient, offering instead a framework in which students and teachers work and learn together to question and challenge ways in which power, identity and knowledge are inscribed in dominant literacy practices (Lillis *et al.* forthcoming).

Subject-based research and inquiry

Engaging students in research and inquiry into their discipline, subject or professional area is a particular and distinct way in which students are partners in their learning, though in some forms it is more akin to students acting as research assistants. "Undergraduate research is the pedagogy for the 21st century" (Council on Undergraduate Research and National Conference on Undergraduate Research 2005). Hodge *et al.* (2008) suggest that the time has come to move on from the paradigm shift from teaching to learning, advocated by Barr and Tagg (1995), to one based on discovery and inquiry. Hence subject-based research and inquiry is shown as a separate circle in figure 2.3. When appropriately designed it is recognised as an effective way to develop linkages between research and teaching and to enhance student learning (Healey 2005; Jenkins, Healey and Zetter 2007). Half of the high impact activities identified by Kuh (2009) (Table 4.1) involve students in undertaking some form of research and inquiry, which also shows that engaging students in these activities is not restricted to final year projects and dissertations (Healey *et al.* 2013; Levy and Petrulis 2012).

There are two main models for engaging students in partnership in this way (Healey and Jenkins 2009). First, there is the *elite* model, which aims to give selected students an authentic research experience. This may be outside the curriculum, for example, students who are given a bursary to work for six weeks in the summer vacation in a laboratory or with a member of academic staff, and is closely related to training students to become researchers (Laursen *et al.* 2010). Second, there is the *mainstreaming* model in which, as Healey and Jenkins (2009, p. 3) argue: "*All* undergraduate students in *all* higher education institutions should experience learning through, and about, research and inquiry." For this to be possible it can only occur if the experiences are integrated into the curriculum (Jenkins and Healey 2012). As with active learning, not all ways of engaging students in research and inquiry involve partnership, but there are many examples where students have extensive autonomy and independence and negotiate as partners many of the details of the research and inquiry projects that they undertake.

Several frameworks have been developed to shed light on the different ways in which students may be engaged in research and inquiry. Perhaps the one which has been most widely applied is that developed by Healey (2005), drawing on the work of Griffiths (2004), to help individual staff, course teams and whole institutions analyse their curricula and consider ways of strengthening students' understanding of and through research (Fig. 4.3).

In this model curricula can be:

> **Research-led**: *Learning about current research in the discipline*. Here the curriculum focus is to ensure that *what* students learn clearly reflects current and ongoing research in their discipline. This may include research done by staff teaching them.
> **Research-oriented**: *Developing research skills and techniques*. Here the focus is on developing students' knowledge of and ability to carry out the research methodologies and methods appropriate to their discipline(s) or profession.
> **Research-based**: *Undertaking research and inquiry*. Here the curriculum focus is on ensuring that as much as possible the student learns in research and or inquiry mode (i.e. the students become producers of knowledge not just consumers). The strongest curricular form of this is in those special undergraduate programmes for selected students, but such research and inquiry may also be mainstreamed for all or many students.
> **Research-tutored**: *Engaging in research discussions*. Here the focus is on students and staff critically discussing research in the discipline as, for example, in many seminar-based courses.

Figure 4.3: The nature of undergraduate research and inquiry (source: Healey and Jenkins 2009, p. 7)
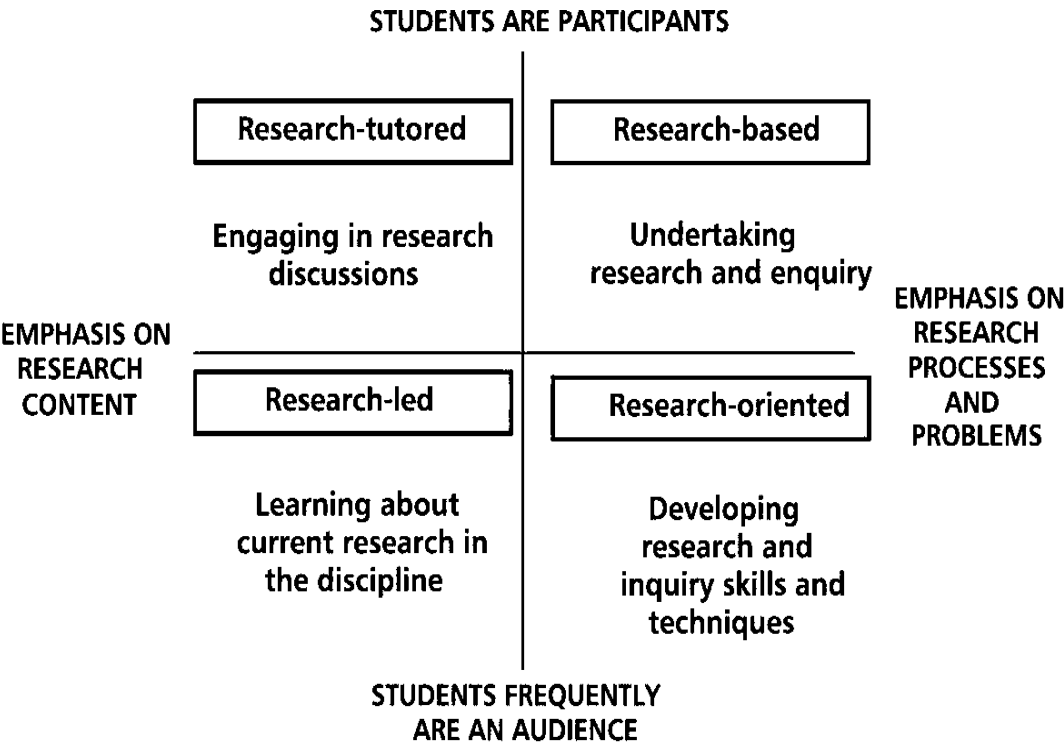
The model has been used in the context of college-based higher education as well as in universities (Healey, Jenkins and Lee 2014; Jenkins, Healey and Zetter 2007). All four ways of engaging students with subject-based research and inquiry are valid and valuable, and curricula can and should contain elements of them all. However, students are most clearly engaged as partners in the top half of the diagram. Most attention has focused on the research-based quadrant, as there is much evidence of the effectiveness of students learning by doing to produce their own knowledge in terms of depth on learning and retention of learning (Healey and Jenkins 2009; Lee 2012).

Much research-based practice and policy sees undergraduate research as students producing 'original' knowledge, in some cases suitable for publication in external refereed journals. Others, however, define or conceive undergraduate research as students learning through courses which are designed to be as close as possible to the research processes in their discipline. In these cases, what is produced and learned may not be new knowledge *per se*; but it is new to the student and, perhaps more significantly, transforms their understanding of knowledge and research. This distinction is central to Levy's model of inquiry-based learning (Levy 2011) (Fig. 4.4). A further key element of the model is the variation in the *degree of autonomy* students have in defining the research topic and questions, the methods adopted to address them, and the way of disseminating the findings. The more autonomy the students have the more they are engaged as partners. The degree of student independence is also central to several other undergraduate research frameworks (Beckham and Hensel 2008; Brew 2013; Willison and O'Reagan 2006).

Figure 4.4: Modes of inquiry-based learning (source: Levy 2011, p. 38)
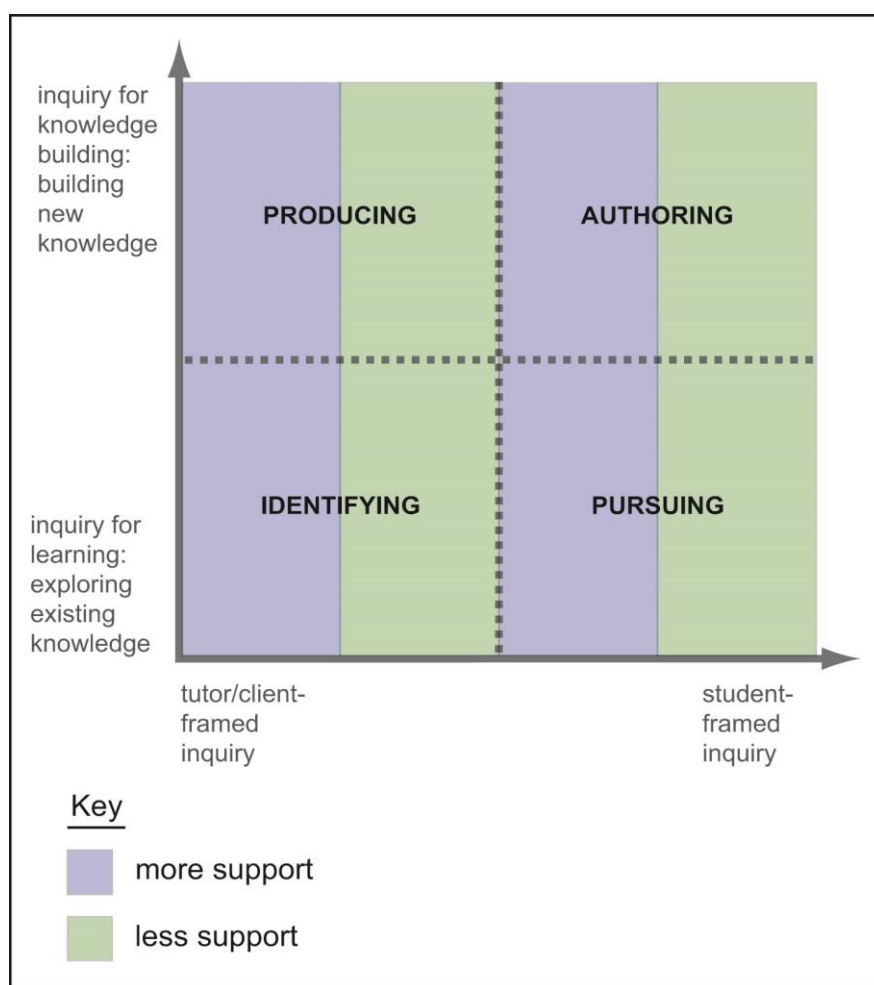
There are many published examples of students as partners in research and inquiry at course and programme levels (Jenkins, Healey and Zetter 2007; Healey and Jenkins 2009; 2013). However, very few institutions have developed and implemented policies to mainstream student research and inquiry across the institution. Two examples of attempts to implement large-scale curricular change in this area are the 'student as producer' initiative at the University of Lincoln, UK (Case study 4.2) and the 'students as scholars' programme at Miami University, US (Case study 4.3). The latter discusses an initiative to embed inquiry-based learning at first year level and students appear to be at lower levels of participation (Fig 1.1).

There is also a growing interest in students going public with the outcomes of their research and inquiry through conferences, websites and undergraduate research journals (Spronken-Smith *et al.* 2013). For example, there are national annual undergraduate research conferences regularly held in Australia, Netherlands and the

UK, as well as in the US. Such experiences provide students with significant opportunities to demonstrate their position as partners in the development of knowledge within their field or discipline.

Case study 4.2: Curricula are organised around the concept of student as producer at the University at Lincoln, UK

'Student as producer' is the organising principle for the learning landscapes at the University of Lincoln. In this approach the emphasis is on students producing knowledge in partnership, rather than just consuming it. The focus of student as producer is the undergraduate student, working in collaboration with other students and academics in real research projects, or projects which replicate the process of research in their discipline. Undergraduate students work alongside staff in the design and delivery of their teaching and learning programmes, and in the production of work of academic content and value. Staff and students can apply for development funds to the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Scheme (UROS) and the Fund for Educational Development (FED). Student as producer is making research-engaged teaching an institutional priority. As courses come up for validation staff and students are asked to consider student as producer in terms of the following key features:

- discovery – student as producer;
- technology in teaching – digital scholarship;
- space and spatiality – learning landscapes in higher education;
- assessment – active learners in communities of practice;
- research and evaluation – scholarship of teaching and learning;
- student voice – diversity, difference and dissensus;
- support for research based learning through expert engagement with information resources;
- creating the future – employability, enterprise, postgraduate, beyond employability.

The Student Engagement Strategy at Lincoln requires that students should play an active part in quality enhancement by working together with staff, recognising that students are experts in their student experience.

Further information: studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk/; researchengaged.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/; Neary with Winn (2009); Neary (2010; 2011; 2014); Ryan and Tilbury (2013, p. 17)

Case study 4.3: Mainstreaming undergraduate research and inquiry in largest recruiting courses at Miami University, Ohio, US

Miami University is moving from a 'teaching and learning paradigm' to a 'discovery paradigm' supporting the development of students as scholars. The 'Top 25' project, begun in 2007, has introduced innovative approaches that move learning away from "too much time telling students what we think they need to know, and not enough time using their curiosity to drive their learning" (Hodge 2006, p. 3). Over a four-year period the Top 25 project involved the largest recruiting courses being rewritten as inquiry-based courses. By the end 29 courses were involved. Each course was allocated $35,000 to fund curriculum revision. Learning technologists and educationalists supported the teams of faculty involved. Together the courses account for almost a quarter of total credit hours.

"Different courses have adopted different redesign strategies. For example, the Theatre Department refocused their traditional Theatre Appreciation class to center on the creation of theatre. Other classes, e.g., Marketing, used an 'inverted' or 'flipped' classroom model. In Communication and Calculus classes, the teams created a menu of inquiry exercises from which individual faculty can select. The Psychology team, similar to the Theatre team, refocused their course from the 'what' of the discipline to the 'how'; they also introduced discussion sections led by trained undergraduate leaders" (Shore and Obade 2013, p. 4). Some of the physical spaces are being redesigned to provide flexible furniture to encourage discussion.

"Responses to survey questions show that the Top 25 courses are promoting active, engaged learning. Compared to students in the traditional sections, students in the redesigned sections report:
* more frequently discussing ideas from class with others outside of the classroom;
* spending much more time working with other students on projects during class time;
* spending less time memorizing facts and ideas;
* spending more hours on their course work and working harder than they thought they would to meet faculty expectations.

Top 25 courses also have more emphasis on higher-level thinking skills. Compared to students in the traditional sections, students in the redesigned sections report more frequently:
* supporting their ideas and beliefs with data or evidence;
* making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods by examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions;
* synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships;
* working on a project or paper that requires integrating ideas from various sources" (Hodge *et al.* 2011, p. 32).

Many faculty not involved in the Top 25 project are also adopting similar changes. "Because the redesigned courses are creating new expectations among students they are now arriving in class expecting to be challenged and ready to take more responsibility for their own learning" (Hodge *et al.* 2011, p. 33). The challenges in maintaining this 'project' include reduced financial support because of problems in the national and thus institutional economy, in maintaining the momentum. "The visibility of the Top 25 project and its support at the highest levels of the university have encouraged the development and expansion of programs that support student engagement. For example, the First Year Research Experience (FYRE) program has been established to offer incoming students an opportunity to engage in research and to establish early contact with a faculty mentor" (Hodge *et al.* 2011, p. 33).

Further information: Hodge (2006); Hodge *et al.* (2007; 2008; 2011); Taylor *et al.* (2012); Shore and Obade (2013); www.units.miamioh.edu/celt/engaged_learning/top25/; www.units.muohio.edu/oars/undergrad_research/first_year_research_experience/fyre_info.php

Scholarship of teaching and learning

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) involves researching and theorising how students learn within a discipline and communicating and disseminating the findings (Hutchings and Schulman 1999; Healey 2000). Most SoTL projects are undertaken by staff. Engaging students in undertaking SoTL projects still occurs relatively infrequently; students are usually seen as the subject of research undertaken by staff. Yet Felten (2013) has recently suggested that one of the five principles of good practice in SoTL is that the projects are conducted in partnership with students. The idea is not new, however, and many of the early initiatives of engaging students as researchers took place in schools (Fielding 2001) as did many of the early initiatives focused on engaging students as partners in learning and teaching (Bovill 2013a).

Two ground-breaking edited collections which focus on students as partners in SoTL were published in 2010 and 2011 in the US and UK respectively (Werder and Otis 2010; Little 2011). Where students are SoTL co-inquirers they tend to be involved in investigating the teaching and learning that they and other students on their courses receive. By going beyond the student voice, students move from commenting on the teaching they experience and engaging in decision-making processes to becoming evidence-based change agents. Dunne and Zandstra's model illustrates this shift in focus, although its concentration on students as change agents goes beyond engaging students in SoTL to also engaging them in curriculum design and pedagogic advice and consultancy (Fig. 4.5) (see also the quote from them at beginning of Ch. 1). As yet, there are relatively few studies which have examined the experience of students working with staff on SoTL projects. One exception is the study by Allin (2014).

Figure 4.5: A model for students as change agents (source: Dunne and Zandstra 2011, p. 17)

EMPHASIS ON THE STUDENT VOICE

STUDENTS AS EVALUATORS OF THEIR HE EXPERIENCE (THE STUDENT VOICE)

Students offer feedback, views and opinions and are listened to on an institutional basis, in order to build an evidence-base as a basis for enhancement and change. Decisions for action tend to be taken at subject and/or institutional level.

STUDENTS AS PARTICIPANTS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Students engage in institutional decision-making, in order to influence enhancement and change. Decisions for action tend to be taken collaboratively with staff and students.

EMPHASIS ON THE UNIVERSTY AS DRIVER

Integrating students into educational change

EMPHASIS ON THE STUDENT AS DRIVER

STUDENTS AS PARTNERS, CO-CREATORS AND EXPERTS

Students are collaborative partners in curriculum provision and professional development, in order to enhance staff and student learning. Decisions for action tend to be taken at subject and/or institutional level.

STUDENTS AS AGENTS FOR CHANGE

Students are collaborative partners in pedagogic knowledge acquisition and professional development, with the purpose of bringing about change. Decisions for action tend to be promoted by students and engaged with at subject and/or institutional level.

EMPHASIS ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

46

Most examples of students undertaking SoTL are one-off projects. Examples of these, and those covered in the next section on curriculum development and pedagogic consultancy, are provided by Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten (2014), Healey (2014) and on the HEA students as partners' webpages (www.heacademy.ac.uk/students-as-partners), but some institutions are developing SoTL in collaboration with students more strategically. For example, the Undergraduate Learning and Teaching Internship Scheme (ULTRIS) has been running at the University of Western Australia since 2008. In this scheme 10-15 students are paid a stipend ($AUS 3,000) as research interns to investigate a teaching and learning issue prioritised by the University, for example, the first year experience (Sandover *et al.* 2012a). The students are provided with a well-supported and scaffolded programme, including training in research methods, and are able to make significant contributions to the understanding of the problem and provide insights to inform future changes in policy and practice. The Matariki Undergraduate Research Network (MURN) has extended this model internationally and connects undergraduate researchers investigating teaching and learning topics in four universities in four countries: University of Western Australia; University of Otago, NZ; Durham University, UK; and Queens University, Canada (Sandover *et al.* 2012b). Another example of global collaboration is provided by the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 'international collaborative pedagogic writing' workshops which first took place in Hamilton, Canada in 2012 and are due to be run again in 2015 in Melbourne, Australia. Each of the writing groups contains at least one student member, and hence students act as co-authors (Healey, Marquis and Vajoczki 2013; Matthews and Healey 2014).

Case study 4.4: Students are engaged as partners in shaping and leading their own educational experiences through the 'students as change agents' initiative at the University of Exeter, UK

The key concept is that students themselves take responsibility for bringing about change, based on their own research on aspects of learning and teaching. The approach enables students to be actively engaged with the processes of change, often taking on a leadership role. They are engaged deeply with the institution and their subject areas, and the focus and direction is, to a greater extent, decided by students. A small amount of funding was originally available from the University's learning and teaching budget to support this initiative, but it is now embedded and funded within Colleges. There are no payments directly to students. The most important aspect is the focus on research, and building change on evidence-based foundations. Students from across the university have contributed to this initiative, carrying out a series of research projects on their learning and teaching environment, selecting concerns raised through student-staff liaison committees, and providing recommendations and solutions to improve their experience. Students work as apprentice researchers; their research methods include focus groups, informal interviews and questionnaire surveys. Outcomes are presented at an annual student-staff conference, which results in institutional engagement with key research findings. Well over 100 projects have been undertaken since 2008 though, overall, thousands of students have been involved. Student research has driven organisational change, contributed to student engagement in shifts of policy and practice within the University, and supported students' graduate skills in the areas of research, project management and presentation of outcomes, leadership and understanding organisational development. For example, student projects in the Business School on the benefits students have gained from implementation of technologies in the classroom have contributed significantly to streamed video being now far more widespread, and 7000 voting handsets being distributed to undergraduate and Masters students.

Further information: Kay *et al.* (2010); Dunne and Zandstra (2011); Sandover *et al.* (2012a); Kay *et al.* (2012); Dunne and Owen (2013a)

Case study 4.5: Students undertake educational development projects as academic partners with staff at Birmingham City University, UK

Launched in 2009, this partnership between Birmingham City University and Birmingham City Students' Union aims to integrate students into the teaching and pedagogic research communities of the University to enhance the learning experience. Staff and students are invited to propose educational development projects in which students can work in an academic employment setting in a paid post at the University, on a more equal footing with their staff partner. Students negotiate their own roles with staff and are paid for up to 100 hours of work. Each project is designed to develop a specific aspect of learning and teaching practice. Typically, these may result in new learning resources, developments in curriculum design or the evaluation of innovations and changes that have already been made. It is key to the scheme that students are employed as partners not assistants, co-creators not passive recipients of the learning experience. Some projects are initiated and led by students. The Students as Academic Partners (SAP) scheme is part of a wider University initiative to create a greater sense of learning community at the University in which students and staff view it as the norm, not the exception, that they are engaged in academic discussion about the nature of their courses and the way they are taught. In the first year, 23 projects involving 35 students were funded across the University in all subject areas; this increased to 47 projects and 120 students the following year; and over 200 students engaged in 65 projects in 2012.

Further information: Birmingham City Students' Union (2010); Brand *et al.* (2013); Nygaard *et al.* (2013); www2.bcu.ac.uk/celt/forming-learning-partnerships/sap

National initiatives to engage students in SoTL are even rarer than institutional strategic initiatives. An exception is the '3M National Student Fellowships' in Canada (Case study 4.6).

Case study 4.6: 3M National Student Fellowships, Canada

For many years, 3M Canada has funded scholarships and awards for undergraduates in universities and college across Canada and in 2011, 3M added a student fellowship using the long-standing 3M National Teaching Fellowship for university professors as a model. The 3M National Student Fellowship honours up to ten students who have demonstrated outstanding leadership in their lives and at their college or university. These students embrace a vision of quality education that enhances their academic experience and beyond. Each cohort member:

- receives an award of $5,000 to be spent at their discretion;
- joins the others at the June STLHE conference where they will also participate in a 3M National Student Fellowship retreat;
- receives a contribution toward the cost of conference travel and accommodations;
- develops a cross-Canadian collaborative project to enhance teaching and learning at the post-secondary level.

Further information: www.stlhe.ca/awards/3m-national-student-fellowship/

Curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy

Students are commonly engaged in course evaluations and in departmental staff–student committees, but it is rarer for institutions to go beyond the student voice and engage students as partners in designing the curriculum and giving pedagogic advice and consultancy. These ways of engaging students as partners complement those discussed in the last section in which students undertake SoTL projects and the student representative systems which are well developed in many institutions of higher education. They represent the higher levels of engagement in Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation (see the ladder adapted to student participation in curriculum design Fig. 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Ladder of student participation in curriculum design (source: Bovill and Bulley 2011; adapted from Arnstein 1969)

Ladder rungs (top to bottom):

- Students in control
- Partnership - a negotiated curriculum
  → Students control decision-making and have substantial influence

- Student control of some areas of choice
- Students control of prescribed areas
  → Students have some choice and influence

- Wide choice from prescribed choices
- Limited choice from prescribed choices
  → Tutors control decision-making informed by student feedback

- Participation claimed, tutor in control
- Dictated curriculum – no interaction
  → Tutors control decision-making

Students increasingly active in participation

Bovill (2013b) clarifies that when it comes to staff–student partnerships they are complex and contextual and usually high up on Arnstein's ladder of participation (Fig. 4.6).

> Students and academic staff have different expertise to bring to the process, and there will be times when staff may appropriately have more voice, and other times when students may appropriately have more voice. Co-creation is not about giving students complete control, nor is it about staff maintaining complete control over curriculum design decisions. The relative levels of control over decision making and appropriate levels of partnership are likely to depend upon the context, the level of study, the relative experience levels of the students and the staff, the attitudes of students and staff, what is being discussed, and the level of influence of professional bodies over the curriculum (Bovill 2013b, p. 464).

It is important to see the ladder as a useful tool for exploring practice, not a measure of the quality of engagement. There are many factors that affect the ability to offer greater participation and the ability of staff and students to engage, and students do not always have to be engaged at the top rung of the ladder. In partnership, control and ownership of the curriculum is shared, with different partners taking the lead as appropriate. Therefore, models of complete tutor or student control may not align with partnership. However, the form of participation needs to be fit for purpose, and honesty is required about what level is being offered to students and why.

As noted in previous sections in this chapter, there are many examples of one-off and small-scale initiatives in engaging students as partners. For example, at McMaster University they have developed an Applied Curriculum Design credit course for third and fourth year students from across the Faculty of Science. Not only do students learn about curriculum and course design, but they also propose and develop a series of learning modules that then become part of the first year science course (Goff 2014). Strategic large-scale initiatives of students acting as pedagogic advisers and consultants are rarer, though there are a few notable exceptions. For example, at Oxford Brookes University, staff and students work as partners for digital literacy development through the *Institutional Student ePioneer Partnerships* scheme (Oxford Brookes University 2013); while at the University of Sheffield the *Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching (SALT)* scheme engages students in projects which improve and develop how students learn and how they are taught at the department, faculty and university levels (University of Sheffield 2013). The Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development (CEMUS), where students have been designing courses for over 15 years, was mentioned earlier. At Bryn Mawr College, in the US, students act as pedagogical consultants to academic staff in their *Students as Learners and Teachers* scheme (Case study 4.7). The impact of such partnerships can be powerful. For example, Cook-Sather (2013, p. 556) describes the knock-on effect of engaging students as consultants:

> After experiencing the kind of engagement that can come through partnering with a student consultant to explore teaching and learning within a particular course, many academic staff apply this transformed notion of engagement to other collaborative ventures with students: gathering feedback on and planning courses, interacting with students more as partners in that planning.

Case study 4.7: Students act as pedagogical consultants at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, US

Most models of professional development assume that faculty learning is the purview of faculty colleagues or teaching and learning centre staff. A programme, called Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT), at Bryn Mawr College challenges that assumption by inviting undergraduate students to serve as pedagogical consultants to faculty members. Between 2006 and 2014, 175 faculty participants and 105 student consultants have participated in 250 partnerships. Feedback from participants suggests that this approach affords faculty and students an unusual opportunity to co-construct a more informed model of faculty development, deepens the learning experiences of both faculty and students, and recasts the responsibility for those learning experiences as one that is shared by faculty and students. Students are not enrolled in the courses for which they serve as consultants. Each student consultant has the following responsibilities: meet with the faculty member to establish why each is involved and what hopes both have for the collaboration, and to plan the semester's focus and meetings; visit one class session each week; take detailed observation notes on the pedagogical challenge(s) the faculty member has identified; survey or interview students in the class (if the faculty member wishes), either for mid-course feedback or at another point in the semester; meet weekly with the faculty member to discuss observation notes and other feedback and implications; participate in weekly meetings with one another and with the coordinator of SaLT; and visit one or more faculty seminars five times over the course of the semester. For full-semester partnerships, student consultants work approximately five hours per week and receive a stipend of $500.

Further information: Cook-Sather (2011; 2013); Cook-Sather *et al.* (2014); www.brynmawr.edu/tli/

Examples of large-scale programmes in which students are co-designers of the curriculum are also as yet rare, though it is beginning to be embedded in practice at the University of Lincoln through their Student as Producer programme (Case study 4.2). Most examples are related to particular courses or programmes (Cook-Sather 2014; Healey 2014; Potter 2012). Many of these involve students in developing open educational resources for other students to use (e.g. Williams *et al.* 2011). At the University of British Columbia, students are involved in the co-creation of teaching resources as part of an institutional flexible learning initiative

(McCabe, 2013b), while at Elon University in the US, they have been exploring several different ways of engaging students as co-creators of the curriculum (Case study 4.8).

Case study 4.8: Students act as co-creators of course design at Elon University, North Carolina, US
Since 2005, faculty, students, and academic development staff at Elon University have experimented with a variety of approaches to partnering in 'course design teams' (CDT) that co-create, or re-create, a course syllabus. Each team's process varies, but typically a CDT includes one or two faculty, between two and six undergraduate students, and one academic developer. Faculty members initiate the redesign process, inviting the students and developer to co-construct a team. Students usually apply to participate in a CDT, motivated by a desire to contribute to a course they have taken or that is important to the curriculum in their disciplinary home. Once the CDT is assembled, the CDT uses a 'backward design' approach, first developing course goals and then building pedagogical strategies and learning assessments on the foundation of those goals. Time is the most important element in the success of a CDT. Successful teams usually meet weekly for two or three months, providing ample opportunities to both accomplish the CDT's practical purpose of redesigning the course and, perhaps more importantly, to develop a true partnership that welcomes student voices. Students often doubt that they will be taken seriously in the process, and they also need time to develop the language and the confidence to express pedagogical ideas clearly. Many CDTs experience a liminal moment when everyone present recognizes that a fundamental boundary has been crossed, either by a faculty member ceding significant authority for the course design or by students claiming power in the process.

Further information: Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felten (2011); Delpish *et al.* (2010); Mihans, Long and Felten (2008)

Some curriculum development initiatives go across institutions. An example of an initiative to test out curriculum development using Change Academy processes (HEA 2012) was piloted nationally within the geography, earth and environmental science disciplines. Teams, including at least one student member, from four departments were supported in a year-long process (Case study 4.9). Change Academy processes have also been used within institutions to support learning and teaching enhancement initiatives including student members (Flint and Oxley 2009), and the HEA is running a 'students as partners in the curriculum' change programme nationally, which requires students to partner staff on teams (www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/change/SAP_in_curriculum_13_14/SAP_in_curriculum_info).

In 2009 the Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) Subject Centre piloted a year-long initiative to support four GEES departments plan changes to their curricula. All but one team had one or two student members. The main feature was a 48-hour retreat where teams were supported by discipline-based experts in educational development. Roughly half the time was spent working on their own projects, while the other half was spent working with other teams and in plenary activities encouraging divergent and creative thinking and prioritizing of ideas. Teams that comprise a 'diagonal slice' across departments, with academic staff, at different levels of seniority and functions, and students, can be very effective in breaking down status and level differences that can impede change. Students are key, providing creativity and new perspectives, and are less bound by departmental contexts. The groups were full of praise for the important contribution students made to team thinking:

"It was essential to our thinking. Having the students with us has been immensely helpful, and frankly they have played as full a part as any other team member and have been just amazing."

The approach was based on the 'change academies' which have been run for several years by the HE Academy and Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and support institutional teams developing teaching and learning initiatives. Some institutions have run internal academies where departmental teams work on related topics.

Further information: Healey *et al.* (2010; 2013)

One approach which relates student partnership in curriculum development to student learning is that of *rhizomatic learning*. In this approach rhizomes are used as a metaphor for a way of looking at pedagogic and curriculum design which places students clearly as partners in both the design and direction of their learning, as well as the creation of knowledge. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), learning and the creation of knowledge are compared to roots of rhizomatic plants which have no distinct centre, grow in any direction from any starting point, spread via experimentation, and adapt to their environment (Cormier 2012).

> In the rhizomatic view, knowledge can only be negotiated, and the contextual, collaborative learning experience shared by constructivist and connectivist pedagogies is a social as well as a personal knowledge-creation process with multiple goals and constantly negotiated premises (Cormier 2008).

Cormier (2012) suggests that this approach to learning, where the "community is the curriculum", promotes peer support, learner responsibility, highlights the importance of complex networks and helps to prepare students for working with uncertainty and complexity in the future. It also can be a transformative learning experience, through enabling learners and educators to see beyond dominant paradigms and discourses (Le Grange 2011).

At the University of Regina in Canada, a post-graduate course in educational technology involves students in creating and mapping their own curriculum through combining their own blogs with knowledge sign-posted by tutors and engaging in discussions with professionals within the tutors' networks. In this way, the tutors enable an entry point into a professional learning community. The students' emerging knowledge not only influences the development of the curriculum, but also the development of the learning community and knowledge within the field (Cormier 2008).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex territory of students as partners by outlining some of the theory and practice behind four main ways in which students may be engaged in partnership: learning, teaching and assessment; subject-based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning; and curriculum design and

pedagogic advice and consultancy. The four ways are closely inter-related, which is why we have depicted them as four overlapping circles in figure 2.3.

The wider adoption of research findings on students as partners can lead to significant improvement in student learning. Kuh (2009, p. 31), in particular, argues in a US context that:

> Most institutions can increase student engagement and success by more consistently using what the research shows are promising policies and effective educational activities and practices. Almost every college or university offers some form of every high impact practice described here. But at too many institutions, only small numbers of students are involved. The time has come for colleges and universities to make participating in high impact activities a reality for every student.

Several of the partnership activities discussed in this chapter go beyond the list of high impact activities identified by Kuh (Table 4.1), particularly those on the right-hand side of our model (Fig. 2.3) associated with SoTL and curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy. This probably reflects the fact that fewer students are engaged in these activities than are engaged with those on the left-hand side of the framework, associated with active learning and subject-based research and inquiry, and consequently were not picked up in the NSSE. However, it is not unreasonable to expect that engagement in them may have similar high impacts.

It is also important to recognise the different levels at which student partnerships may operate. Healey, O'Connor and Broadfoot (2010, p. 22) proposed a three-level framework:
- Micro – engagement with their own learning and that of other students;
- Meso – engagement in quality assurance and enhancement processes;
- Macro – engagement in strategy development.

Brand *et al.* (2013, pp. 477–8) also identify three levels of partnership work that they have implemented at Birmingham City University:
- project work as a vehicle for partnership between individual or small groups of students with academic staff;
- student engagement in curriculum design through a process of programme team redefinition;
- institutional arrangements to underpin partnership between staff and students.

Figure 4.7: Student partnership settings

National / international

Institution

Department / faculty

Programme
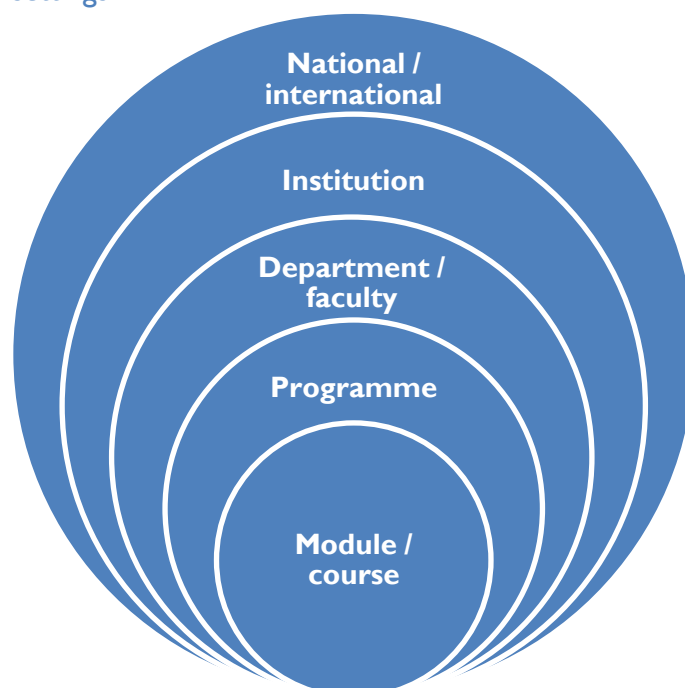
Module / course

A further way of distinguishing the settings within which students as partners operate is to differentiate between whether it occurs within a module/course, programme, department/faculty, institution, or nationally/internationally (Fig. 4.7). Cutting across these settings is the additional dimension of the disciplinary or inter-disciplinary context.

The next chapter explores the implications of the arguments and analysis presented in this publication for development of partnership in learning and teaching in higher education.

5. Conclusions and ways forward

Sometimes we may be more held back by our own imaginations or assumptions than by any other constraints.
(Breen and Littlejohn 2000, p. 282)

If there is to be a single important structural change during the coming decades, it is the changing role of students who are given more room in defining and contributing to higher education.
(Gärdebo and Wiggberg 2012, p. 9)

If you are not already engaged in student-faculty partnerships, you might consider joining us in efforts to work with students and to promote critical conversations about partnership. The future shape of higher education depends on it. (Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten 2014, p. 203)

In the preceding chapters, we have sought to provide an overview of the diversity of partnership in learning and teaching in higher education, as well as to offer a conceptual model and set of partnership values to aid clarification of the field and guide further development of practice. We have identified four overlapping areas of partnership activity (Fig. 2.3) – to embrace learning, teaching and assessment; subject-based research and inquiry; the scholarship of learning and teaching; and curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy – and have illustrated each area with examples of practice from the UK and internationally. We have also explored how the development of partnership learning communities may guide and sustain practice, and have suggested that critical engagement with the important issues which this approach to partnership brings to the fore – such as inclusivity, power relationships, and staff and student identities – has the potential to lead to transformative learning. In this final chapter, we review our central argument, outline the key tensions and challenges raised by a partnership approach to learning and teaching, reflect on implications for practice and policy and offer suggestions for future work in the field.

In this publication, partnership is framed as a *process of student engagement*, rather than an achieved state or consequence of engagement. Our central thesis is that partnership in learning and teaching represents a sophisticated and effective approach to student engagement because it offers the potential for a more authentic engagement with the nature of learning itself and the possibility for genuinely transformative learning experiences for all involved. We argue that partnership uniquely foregrounds qualities that put reciprocal learning at the heart of the relationship, such as trust, risk, inter-dependence and agency; and in its difference to other, perhaps more traditional, forms of learning and working in the academy, partnership raises awareness of implicit assumptions, encourages critical reflection and opens up new and as yet unthought-of or unrealised ways of thinking, learning and working in contemporary higher education.

Although we have offered many examples of partnership in practice, to both model and inspire further work, partnership is essentially about a process of working and learning, and an ethos that fosters this process, rather than a specific outcome. This understanding is shared with the WISE Partnership for Higher Education in Wales, for whom "partnership is an ethos, not an activity", and who caution that "we must be clear that a collection of activities with students does not necessarily signify an arrival at partnership" and further that "we should take care to avoid applying the language or idea of partnership to new or existing processes" (WISE no date). The unique value of a partnership approach lies less in the emulation of existing work than in the possibilities it creates for discovering learning and teaching practices, and institutional structures and working arrangements, that have not yet been experienced or even imagined. Partnership between students and staff (and between student peers) involves questioning and sometimes letting go of existing and familiar ways of working and learning, and requires instead trust in a shared process that is inherently unpredictable in its outcomes.

Partnership is not just about a will to change existing practices and structures, important as this is. It is also about a change in mind-set and attitude to the nature of learning itself, understood as an experiential process of reflection and transformation in relation to oneself and with others. It is about cultural change in the

academy, and about embracing the often-disorientating complexity of the contemporary world while maintaining the curiosity, and indeed the courage, to find out what is not already and cannot be known in advance. In this, there is a fundamentally radical potential inherent in a partnership approach. Rachel Wenstone (NUS 2012) sees students as partners as a way of deploying student engagement to "radical ends", arguing that it is "not just a nice-to-have" but "has the potential to help bring about social and educational transformation, as long as…we maintain a critical attitude about the ways the concept is adopted and used" (p. 1). Having a "critical attitude" is central to our notion of partnership, which means that it is also not always an easy or comfortable concept, or process, to put into practice.

Tensions and challenges

Working with a partnership approach heightens an awareness of conflicting priorities and tensions between the different perspectives and motivations of those involved, at individual and institutional levels. It raises challenges to existing assumptions and norms about working and learning in higher education, and offers possibilities for thinking and acting differently by embracing the challenges as problems to grapple with and learn from. Taylor and Robinson (2009) discuss this challenge in the context of student voice as a tension between the normative ideal of student engagement and the realities of practice (i.e. the constraints and limitations of the current context). With a partnership approach, it is in the tensions raised, and in being prepared to acknowledge, confront and work with them in new ways, where the potential for new learning, and the 'social and educational transformation' of higher education, resides. The high degree of change and complexity that is now a familiar feature of the contemporary environment of higher education means that continuing as before – in the classroom and in institutional structures – is not a viable option. There is evidence that this view is shared by some students, such as those from countries across the globe who have formed the International Student Initiative for Pluralist Economics (ISIPE) and who argue that the way economics is currently taught impairs an ability to confront urgent 21st-century challenges, such as financial (in)stability and climate change, calling instead for the teaching of more radical and inter-disciplinary versions of their subject (Inman 2014). Although there is a desire for this kind of fundamental change in higher education, among students and staff, engaging with the real and complex processes of change is neither easy nor straightforward. However, the cost of not engaging with the challenges of partnership is potentially very high, both for individuals and the future of higher education. The risk is that in failing to engage, students and staff will be severely short-changed with respect to the kind and scope of learning that is possible, and higher education itself may cease to be an arena where meaningful, creative and relevant engagement with the modern world is possible.

Below we draw attention to some of the specific tensions and troublesome questions a partnership approach in learning and teaching raises – based on the scholarly review and analysis offered throughout this publication – and we offer suggestions to foster possibilities for putting partnership values into practice in different contexts and at individual, institutional and cross-sector levels. These often prompt questions rather than offer answers, and we hope the areas addressed will continue to be lived and grappled with in diverse and creative ways through on-going dialogue and practice in local, institutional and cross-sector spaces and contexts. The focus is not on prescribing specific practices or outcomes, but on helping to create conditions for enabling fruitful change through learning and working in partnership.

Readers may find it helpful to reflect on the ideas presented in this publication in conjunction with the shorter, practically-focused companion publication, *Framework for partnership in learning and teaching* (HEA 2014), which has been designed to support institutions and their students' unions, associations/guilds, staff and students to inspire and enhance practice and policy relating to partnerships in learning and teaching. This shorter document includes the conceptual model and partnership values presented here, along with a series of explorative questions to provide a starting point for strategic conversations about partnership in different contexts.

As indicated in chapter one, the prime audience for this publication is academic teaching staff with responsibility for, or an interest in, student engagement and learning and teaching at the local level (faculty, department, course, and module), as well as senior leaders with responsibility for learning and teaching enhancement and the student experience at institutional and national levels. We hope it is also relevant to academic policy makers, academic developers and learning support staff, librarians and information specialists,

learning technologists, sabbatical officers in students' unions, students in change agent roles and other students with an interest in learning and teaching enhancement. Sometimes these different roles will have more of an individual, localised focus, and sometimes more of an institutional one, or indeed a cross-sector focus, depending on the context and the specific motivations and rationales for working in partnership. For example, an academic developer may be working with students in the development of a module for teaching staff and also in the creation of learning and teaching strategy for the institution as a whole. Similarly, a student may be working with staff both in the capacity of a course representative and as a member of a research team investigating an aspect of disciplinary learning and teaching practice. The suggestions below focus primarily on a UK audience, but as they have been informed by the wealth of international scholarship and practice referred to in this publication, we hope they may also be relevant to colleagues working with similar tensions and challenges in other national contexts.

Students and staff
Students and staff will have different motivations and rationales for engaging in partnership and different experiences of navigating institutional structures, practices and norms (Bovill *et al.* under review). These often lead to differing perceptions of one another's roles and tasks in the process of partnership. The different positions students and staff occupy within organisational structures give rise to tensions around differentials in power, reward and recognition of participation, (professional) identity, and responsibility and accountability for partnership work. The desire for change will also vary among individuals, and resistance to change can be accentuated when differences between partners are experienced as a source of conflict rather than a meeting point and the beginning of a learning process.

Even when there is the will to do so, working and learning in partnership is rarely automatic: it presents significant challenges to existing ways of being, doing and thinking, and requires confronting assumptions about ourselves and others and – ultimately – a change in mind-set and one's sense of self. Understanding it like this, partnership can be thought of as a 'threshold concept' (Meyer and Land 2003), in that adopting it is 'troublesome' (Perkins 1999) and leads to irreversible conceptual transformation, among teachers and academic developers as well as students (King and Felten 2012; Cook-Sather 2013). For example, King and Felten (2012) report an example of faculty working as co-learners in a community setting who found it difficult to return to their former need for a sense of authority in the classroom and who experienced new understandings of the purpose of higher education. Successful partnership requires sensitivity to the tensions that can provoked through the experience of encountering difference between individuals and by the degree and depth of conceptual change that is needed.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:
- consider how to take a partnership approach in your own learning and teaching and/or professional practice, referring to the examples in chapter four for ideas and insights. Many of the pedagogic approaches that foster partnership are well documented through scholarship and supportive guidance (e.g. HEA 2012b; Barnett 2014; Pegg *et al.* 2012);
- think about how you can develop a partnership learning community in your area of work or study, referring to chapter three for a discussion of the values and key issues this involves;
- initiate a discussion about partnership values with the people you want to partner with, or co-develop your own, and think about how your behaviour, attitudes and approaches to learning and work embody these values;
- consider the scale of your partnership initiative, the extent to which it operates on a 'boutique' model or is more broadly inclusive, and how to reduce barriers to participation, especially among marginalised or traditionally under-represented groups (e.g. part-time students, international students);
- be honest about when partnership is not appropriate or desirable, taking into account both student and staff perspectives;
- explore possibilities for joint professional development for staff and students. Training and building capacity for partnership needs to be done in a way that does not 'manage' student partners. It is important to ask questions about who is involved in designing and delivering training, and indeed what constitutes 'training' itself;

- embed partnership approaches in postgraduate academic professional development courses for teachers (e.g. HEA-accredited certificate/diploma/masters programmes and CPD offerings);
- consider how the partnership ideas explored in this document can be used to explore dimensions of professional practice outlined in the *UK Professional Standards Framework* (UKPSF) (www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf).

Policy and pedagogy

There is potential for an inherent tension between partnership policy and partnership pedagogy in that policy is about determining the shape and direction in advance, whereas partnership pedagogy is about being (radically) open to and creating possibilities for discovering and learning something that cannot be known in advance. Stevenson, Burke and Whelan (2014) also note that there is often a dissonance between the language and aims of 'teacher excellence' at the institutional level and how pedagogy is practiced locally, and recommend a deeper and more meaningful engagement with issues of pedagogy in institutional documentation.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:
- remain aware of the tension while creating policy that values the flexibility and openness of partnership;
- think about how partnership is (or is not) described in institutional policies and strategies (especially learning and teaching strategies, student charters, partnership agreements and marketing materials) and what the language used says about relationships between students and staff, on campus and online; also consider changes that would enable a more accessible and inclusive approach for all partners; consider implementing staff engagement surveys to complement student engagement data (HEA no date) to provide a more nuanced picture of the views, priorities and experiences of potential partners as a basis for developing meaningful local policy;
- develop participatory and whole-system approaches to the development of strategy and policy in ways that seek to embody partnership in practice.

Cognitive dissonance

A partnership approach may be directly at odds with principles embodied in key drivers and mechanisms which have a strong influence on behaviour and attitudes among staff and students. In the UK, such drivers include the National Student Survey (NSS), Key Information Sets (KIS), institutional key performance indicators, and indeed the Research Excellence Framework (REF), all of which to greater or lesser degree place an emphasis on the importance of collecting and disseminating quantifiable information and the achievement of specific outcomes and impacts, whereas a partnership approach places value on a creative process that results in unexpected outcomes.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:
- look for opportunities for employing partnership as a way of responding to other influential discourses;
- use the concept and practice of partnership to meet the requirements of the UK Quality Code – and in particular the seven indicators of sound practice in chapter B5 on student engagement – which include the need to have informed conversations and to value the student contribution (QAA 2012).
- consider how reward and recognition for partnership may be developed – for staff and students.

Students' unions and institutions

Partnership between the two bodies works best when there is an agreement on the philosophy and ethos of partnership and engagement for an institution. Partnership in learning and teaching is part of this larger institutional picture and is supported by a coherent cross-institutional approach that is promoted and embodied through the relationship between a students' union and its institution. Drawing on findings from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and HEFCE funded '*What Works?*' programme, Thomas (2012) suggests three overlapping spheres of the institution in which students engage: academic; social and professional service. Partnerships between students' unions and their institutions may be particularly powerful in exploring the interconnections between the academic and social sphere. However, tensions between the two bodies exist,

primarily around issues of autonomy and representation of the students' voice, and with 'partnership' gaining greater currency, this relationship is receiving renewed attention.

In the UK, as Chapman, Blatchford and Hughes (2013) outline, students' unions have acted as the "sole representative body of the student experience to their parent institution", and have "sought to protect and champion student interests, challenge policy and practice and hold universities to account, sometimes employing the tactics of student demonstrations, protests and campaigns" (p. 272, citing Grattan and Meakin 2012). A partnership approach, which requires a model of working and learning together based on (at least partly) different principles, raises questions about the extent to which and how it is possible for students' unions to balance this politically orientated, critical role while working in new ways with their institutions. Creating an ethos of partnership that permeates the whole culture of an institution requires confronting the significant tensions raised and entering into a re-negotiation of the relationship and underpinning values between a students' union and its institution.

Suggestions for addressing this tension:

- institutions and students' unions should reflect on how their relationship provides (or does not) a context for local-level partnerships. Committing to partnership agreements, principles and manifestos is a way of indicating seriousness about partnership for the institution as a whole. Together, an institution and its students' union have greater and deeper reach and can achieve more than the sum of both acting individually;
- consider how student-led and students' union-led activities may contribute to partnership in learning and teaching; for example, the impact on student learning of student academic and professional societies;
- develop a whole-institution approach to partnership, in active collaboration with student services, educational and learning development, library services, students' unions and student societies, which encompasses but extends beyond learning and teaching to institutional governance and other aspects of staff and student experiences within and beyond the curriculum. An embedded and living ethos of partnership across an institution both supports and is supported by the development of partnership approaches in learning and teaching.

Fundamental purpose and structure of higher education

Current policy discourse around 'students as partners' and 'student engagement' can assume a consensus – or present the illusion of such – that higher education as free public provision is no longer tenable, and thereby sidestep the wish and need for further debate, among students and staff. There is evidence such a consensus is not shared by all; for example, an alternative notion of higher education based on democratic, non-hierarchical principles is being developed co-operatively by students and staff at The Social Science Centre, Lincoln, UK, a not-for-profit initiative operating outside the formal university sector (socialsciencecentre.org.uk/).

Suggestion for addressing this tension:

- explore how partnership as conceptualised in this publication (with an emphasis on the importance of re-distribution of power and being open to discovering new ways of working and learning together), can align with these alternative views and provide a conceptual space in which to ask such fundamental questions about the nature and aims of higher education as well as assist with effecting changes in practical ways.

Further work and ways forward

Although there has been a burgeoning of innovative work in the field of student partnership in higher education in recent years – as has been illustrated throughout this publication – there are also substantial areas that remain underexplored and where further investigation would be desirable. Here we identify some of these areas as priorities for research and the development of practice in the sector.

Pedagogies of partnership

Although partnership has been described foremost as process, rather than a product or specific outcome, we still know relatively little about the 'how' of learning partnerships in practice, and particularly with respect to disciplinary approaches to partnership. There is a need for work that develops understandings of partnership in connection with scholarship, practice, signature pedagogies and the epistemology of different disciplines and professional spheres.

When partnership does not work, and why

The examples in this publication have highlighted successful partnership in practice, largely because this is the work that is published and disseminated. However, we can often learn most from mistakes or dead ends or not achieving what was initially hoped. It is important that investigations of the 'how' of partnership include descriptions and understandings of when partnership did not happen, and why, rather than seeing such examples as 'failures' to be hidden from view. It is valuable to share all experiences of partnership, even if they are uncomfortable or seeming to fail, and in fact it is worth considering how we define 'failure' in this context. For example, a colleague or student who actively complains about not seeing the point of partnership is already engaging in some way, even if negatively, and this can be the starting point for an important, if difficult, conversation about learning and teaching. Documenting these processes is an essential part of understanding the 'how' of partnership in practice.

Impact of partnership

Beyond case studies and anecdotal reports that 'students like it', understandings of the impact of partnership work – for students, staff, institutions, society more broadly – remain relatively poor and there is a need for a greater evidence base around the benefits of partnership, particularly in under-explored areas such as curriculum design. Making better use of existing data, such as qualitative research and feedback from surveys, would be beneficial, as would a systematic review of current evidence as a basis for further research.

Differences in experiences of partnership

Investigation of differences and overlaps between students and staff in ways of perceiving and articulating partnership and engagement would help provide baseline understandings of how this work is experienced and conceptualised by different participants.

Ethical implications

Relatively little work has been done to explore and tease out the complexity of ethical issues raised by partnerships between staff and students, as well as among students. It may be possible to explore how values or principles of partnership can be developed into an ethical framework for partnership in practice.

Cross-sector collaboration

There is greater scope to build on previous strengths, initiatives and research undertaken by various sector agencies, including the NUS, QAA, TSEP, Sparqs, WISE and the HEA, to work collaboratively to develop an overarching ethos of partnership for the sector and to assist in embedding partnership in practice in the diverse local contexts of higher education.

Concluding thoughts

We acknowledge that a partnership approach might not be right for everyone, nor is it possible in every context. Our aim in this publication is not to be prescriptive, but to call for opening up to the possibilities and exploring the potential that partnership can offer. We suggest there is much to be gained by engaging with partnership in learning in teaching in higher education, not least through wrestling with the substantial challenges this way of working and learning presents. As Breen and Littlejohn (2000) suggest, sometimes the greatest constraint to moving in a new direction comes from the limits of "our own imaginations or assumptions." Recognising this, however, means the process of moving beyond them has already started, and the journey towards discovering new ways of learning, working and being together in higher education is already underway.

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Appendix 1: Some useful websites and resources

Websites

The following links are primarily to websites of UK-based organisations interested in students as partners, with a few additional examples of other national and international organisations. Examples of key institutional students as partner websites are given in the main text.

British Conference on Undergraduate Research – founded in 2010 to promote undergraduate research in all disciplines www.bcur.org

Change Agent Network – a JISC funded network supporting educational innovation, partnership and change www.hei-flyers.org/wordpress/

Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) – US-based organisation supporting engagement of students and faculty in undergraduate research www.cur.org./

HEA Students as Partners www.heacademy.ac.uk/students-as-partners

International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Students as Co-Inquirers Special Interest Group www.issotl.com

JISC – curriculum design and delivery programmes in engaging students as partners in the designing and delivering curriculum change jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/31087422/Students as Change Agents

JISC – guide to students as change agents within technology enhanced learning www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/students-as-agents-of-change

NUS Connect – student engagement covers the different elements of NUS' work on student engagement www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/

QAA – student engagement and student partners www.qaa.ac.uk/Partners/students/student-engagement-QAA/Pages/default.aspx; www.qaa.ac.uk/Partners/students/Pages/default.aspx

Partnership Awards The HEA recognise and celebrate successful partnerships between students and staff, and institutions and students' unions, through two partnership awards. One of which is jointly awarded with the NUS www.heacademy.ac.uk/partnership-awards

Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) – a network of academics, practitioners, advisors and student representatives drawn from the higher education sector who are working and/or interested in researching and promoting student engagement raise-network.ning.com/

Sparqs – the website of Student Participation in Quality Scotland www.sparqs.ac.uk

The Student Engagement Partnership – the partnership supports and influence both local and national student engagement activity in the UK tsep.org.uk/

Student Learning and Teaching Network – the SLTN promotes active student engagement in learning and teaching communities studentlandtnetwork.ning.com/

Student Led Teaching Awards Run by the NUS and the HEA www.studentledteachingawards.org.uk

Wales initiative for student engagement (WISE) www.nus.org.uk/en/nus-wales/campaigns/wise/

Journals

Student Engagement and Experience Journal – an online peer-reviewed journal published by Sheffield Hallam University research.shu.ac.uk/SEEJ/index.php/seej/

The Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change – an online peer-reviewed journal published by the Change Agents Network journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/studentchangeagents/index

Perspectives on Undergraduate Research and Mentoring (PURM) – a multi-disciplinary journal addressing the processes of undergraduate research blogs.elon.edu/purm/

Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education – peer-reviewed, inter-disciplinary journal that serves as a forum for the reflective work of college faculty and students working together to explore and enact effective classroom practice. Published by Bryn Mawr College, US. teachingandlearningtogether.blogs.brynmawr.edu/

Bibliographies and case studies

The following **bibliographies** compiled by Mick Healey are regularly updated. They are available on his website at: www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources

1 Active learning and learning styles: a selected bibliography
2 Discipline based approaches to supporting learning and teaching: a selected bibliography
3 Linking research and teaching: a selected bibliography
4 Pedagogic research and development: a selected bibliography
5 The scholarship of teaching and learning: a selected bibliography
6 The scholarship of engagement: a selected bibliography
7 Dissertations and capstone projects: a selected bibliography
8 Students as change agents: a selected bibliography
9 Research-based curricula in college-based higher education: a selected bibliography

The site also contains the following sets of **case studies** which are regularly updated:

- case studies of research-based curricula in college-based HE;
- final year projects and dissertations handout;
- linking research and teaching through engaging students in research and inquiry handout;
- students as change agents handout;
- approaches to curriculum design.

Where to find out more

HEA webpages: www.heacademy.ac.uk/students-as-partners
Twitter: @HEA SaP
E-mail: StudentsasPartners@heacademy.ac.uk
Sign up to the Students as Partners mailing list: my.heacademy.ac.uk/

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