

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

## How did you come to engage in students-as-partners work?

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The language of students as partners was cemented into higher education practice and scholarship ten years ago. While it had been circulating in higher education policy, practices, and publications before that, two key 2014 publications on engaging students as partners or SaP inspired a myriad of practices and publications brought together by the relational, values-based ethos of partnership (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). A seductively simple idea—that students can collaborate with staff as partners on matters of teaching and learning—landed at the right time. The higher education sector was increasingly fixated on student involvement and engagement, particularly how university changes students (Klemenčič, 2024). SaP offered a related but direction-shifting proposition: what if students could shape higher education?

This proposition is rooted in practical orientations to student engagement (Healey & Healey, 2019), critical, relational pedagogies (Bovill, 2020), and theorisations of student voice (Cook-Sather, 2018). At its core, SaP counts students as knowledge-holders and knowers who *should* participate in formulating, analysing, investigating, and discussing

curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and student life activities with members of faculty/staff or academics (terms that vary by country and context) in higher education.

This iteration of *Voices from the Field* is time bound. It enables collective reflection on what has inspired many of us to respond to the call for learner-teacher partnership in higher education. It is community generated, connected to the *Students as Partners Network* annual *Students as Partners Roundtable* event, which also started 10 years ago in Australia (Matthews, 2020). The 2024 SaP Roundtable theme—*Inspiration, Action, and Aspiration*—focused attention on the next ten years after acknowledging those people and practices that have inspired and connected us as a scholarly community. The key goals of the annual SaP Roundtable are to share practices, ideas, and experiences; discover new ways of thinking; engage in and reflect on practices; network with a diversity of practitioners and scholars; and harness the creativity of staff and students to advance teaching and learning (University of Queensland, n.d.).

The unique approach of *Voices from the Field* provided an ideal forum to capture the motivations that brought people to engage in SaP at their institutions. Their inspirations. The question prompted students and staff to reflect on what got them involved in SaP—linked to the first theme of the SaP Roundtable online session, Inspiration, held in September 2024. We, three students and two staff members editing this piece, embraced this opportunity to share sources of motivation and inspiration from personal narratives, reflections, and insights from 50 contributors from 33 universities in Australia, England, Scotland, South Africa, Portugal, Canada, Pakistan, and the United States. We identified four key themes amongst the contributions and invite you to consider their overlap and synergies. The themes are as follows:

- 1. Improving the student experience.** Students know what it is to be a student. Involving students in co-design and co-creation with staff enhances the student experience. Additionally, this theme shows the breadth and positive effects of fostering stronger relationships between students and academics. The motivations shared in this theme tended to relate to the practical orientation of engaging students and staff in partnership.
- 2. Challenging the status quo.** Calling into question the taken-for-granted assumptions, cultures, and norms of higher education learner-teacher interactions enables more collaborative relationships that grow student agency and ownership of their learning. Through critical pedagogies, submissions in this theme tended to encompass contributions that focus on dismantling traditional classroom hierarchies to reshape power dynamics (either implicitly or explicitly). In many cases, these shared a commitment to the next theme.
- 3. Creating a more equitable society.** Higher education learning and teaching have been designed and enacted with a particular idea of a student in mind. Engaging in

partnership with historically unconsidered, underserved, and marginalised students and staff creates a process and movement toward a more just and inclusive higher education.

- 4. Growing personal and collective skill development.** SaP develops skills and capabilities, for instance, collaboration, communication, resilience, creativity, and event management, of benefit to students and staff, and that enriches the higher education community more widely. A practical orientation that links to improving the student experience, yet is distinctive.

The XX submissions are organised by theme, yet all offer unique insights that reflect country, culture, and position of contributors in their institution. Most submissions were authored by one person, with XX authors identifying as academic staff/faculty, XX as professional staff, and XX as students. Along with their submissions, academic staff/faculty and professional staff tended to refer to their previous and/or current roles, such as senior lecturer, associate professor, publishing and curation manager, research associate, and academic student success advisor. Students tended to note identities and experiences influencing their motivations to participate in SaP, including those who identify as: queer student, Asian-American sophomore coming from a STEM focused background, international occupational therapy student, female student in Pakistan, and graduate students wanting to develop employability skills.

#### IMPROVING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

I engage in 'student as partners' initiatives due to my interest in the first-year experience and student engagement. I have taught first year students for over 30 years and been actively involved in orientation and transition processes. Implementing a student mentor system for all first years in my school enables me to work with students to facilitate positive peer relationships within our cohorts. This initiative has eased the transition of commencing students, built mentoring skills of existing students, and enabled connections between staff and students. More recently, working with student leaders and the student association to facilitate student engagement activities has been challenging but is slowly enabling a sense of belonging to evolve. This initiative is particularly important as our school embarks on a move to a new campus later this year which will rely on strong 'student as partners' collaborations to ensure a positive student and staff transition.

–Tracy Douglas, academic staff/faculty, University of Tasmania, Australia

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Although not initially familiar with the term "Students as Partners", I realized that I'd been taking this approach for some time in my role as an academic in UKHE - by introducing a Student-Staff Forum to obtain student insights and feedback; by appointing 3 Student

Ambassadors to work with me on a curriculum project in 2013 to ensure I was informed by their perspective, and to enable them to develop initiatives and provide feedback. I fully embraced SaP when I co-developed a Teaching Enhancement Project “Co-discovery – a student and staff collaborative evaluation” (2016) and this introduced me to the literature, in particular Bovill and Bulley’s (2011) ladder of student participation. This inspired me to invite my students to co-design the syllabus each semester. I also discovered the RAISE community and this reminded me of the importance of adopting SaP in all aspects of my work.

–Caroline Campbell, academic staff/faculty, University of Leeds, United Kingdom  
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While in the role of Discipline Head of Education in Chemical Engineering at The University of Manchester, UK, a need arose to modernize the delivery methods for all Chemical Engineering programmes. This meant a comprehensive review of the assessment distribution (exams vs courseworks) as well the balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning and teaching activities. I felt it was imperative to include student opinion into these developments. Collaborating with students as partners facilitated their active participation with the teaching changes and allowed students to also have more ownership of the teaching design. This partnership provided numerous advantages, including gaining insights into the learning preferences of students, understanding their utilization of asynchronous materials, and identifying the coursework formats that best promoted engagement in applying and evaluating their knowledge.

–Thomas Rodgers, academic staff/faculty, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom  
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Our motivation to work with SaP, as a group of academics from five departments (education, engineering, humanities, law and mathematics), is ultimately to enhance the student experience. Collectively we believe in the collaborative nature of these partnerships, and the removal of traditional hierarchies. With varying experience of working with SaP an aspect that we are all invested in is identifying the barriers to participation in working with SaP and importantly thinking how these can be addressed. What has enabled us to feel safe expressing vulnerabilities as we collaborated to share goals was the fact that we are all novices in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Being able to share our knowledge and lack of knowledge in a supportive, truly collaborative group provided a safe environment for honesty and vulnerabilities to be supported. This, coupled with our range of disciplinary backgrounds allowed us to progress and develop our ideas in a genuinely collaborative way.

–Suzanne Faulkner and Elizabeth Dombi, academic staff/faculty, Lynne Jones, professional staff, and Lauren McMichan and Gillian Melville, academic staff/faculty, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom

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My own experience of being a first-generation student, struggling with transitioning into university life, and not having the agency or support to seek help, in my first year at university motivated me to work in partnership with students. Much of my involvement with students was also evidence-based. Data was collected on understanding first-year students' university expectations and actual experiences. The gap analysis showed that most students felt comfortable seeking support from peers rather than staff. This initiated a partnership that at the beginning was fragile, the power dynamics between a student and staff created some challenges that needed to be addressed. I had to be intentional and ensure I was more relatable to students. Using the pedagogy of real talk allowed me to connect with the students, this engagement built trust and a sense of belonging and connectedness as we worked in partnership to design a transition program: by students for students. My passion for seeing students succeed and my belief in the transformative power of student-staff partnership inspired me to continue to work closely with students to ensure that our students succeed academically and personally.

–Subethra Pather, professional staff, University of Western Cape, South Africa  
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As a Professor at the University of the Algarve (Portugal) for over 30 years, I have taught various subjects, most recently focusing on Biochemistry for Health students. Lately, teaching has become a challenge due to students' increasing struggles at various levels. Despite having explored different teaching and assessment methodologies within the framework of "Pedagogical Innovation", success has been difficult. My interest in the students as partners approach was sparked by a LinkedIn reference to the *International Journal for Students as Partners*. I'm looking forward to learning more, testing out strategies to engage students and improve their knowledge acquisition and skills development for the job market that awaits them. We are in a period of significant change, particularly with the rise of Artificial Intelligence. As teachers, our adjustment is crucial to prepare students for these challenges. In this context, I believe that engaging students in the teaching-learning process will make it possible to establish teaching and assessment strategies that are more attractive to students and therefore better able to allow teachers and students to achieve their goals.

–M. Dulce Estêvão, academic staff/faculty, University of Algarve, Portugal  
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Mentored undergraduate research can significantly boost the online educational experience. From our classroom observations and discussions with students and educators, it's clear that support systems are crucial to tackling the isolation often felt in digital

learning spaces. That's why we started the Research Scholars program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University-Worldwide to strengthen faculty-student bonds online. This program goes beyond matching interests and improving grades—it enriches students' learning experiences. Treating students as partners in research is key, fostering ownership and engagement. Students dive into faculty-led research, mentor less experienced peers, and share their findings publicly, solidifying their identity as research scholars. Despite challenges like research barriers, securing buy-in, financial sustainability, and adapting to technological advances, we've found that mentoring, workshops, internal funding, and individual recognition make a big difference. These elements create a lively and supportive learning environment, empowering students and fostering a culture of innovation and growth.

–Brent Terwilliger, Emily Faulconer, Robert Deters, and Darryl Chamberlain, academic staff/faculty, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, United States  
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As a teaching-focused academic in a UK Law School, my initial experience of working in partnership with students came about when I wanted to create a new module. It seemed like a good idea to bring students on board to help; they ended up designing module assessments. At the time, I was blissfully unaware of the pedagogic scholarship in this area. I set up a student-staff partnership because it seemed like the right thing to do to work with students when developing something new for them. It was only later when I started to read about Bovill and Bulley's (2011) work that I realised that I had accidentally stumbled upon a fascinating area of pedagogic research, which dovetailed with the work I was doing on the ground. Partnership working has been fundamental to my approach to teaching ever since and is firmly embedded in the culture of our Law School.

–Amanda Millmore, academic staff/faculty, University of Reading, United Kingdom  
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We are a student-faculty team (two pharmacy students and two faculty members) from the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of British Columbia. Faculty members first recognized a need for student perspective in redesigning curriculum. Students were then invited to join the project as partners, and an informal meet-and-greet was utilized in lieu of an interview process, moving away from a traditional hiring model. During this meeting, there was a genuine desire to collaborate and gain new perspectives in teaching and learning. As students, this pedagogical approach created a collaborative environment, providing psychological safety to experiment with our ideas. This affirms the idea that students have expertise to support teaching and learning. As faculty members, it was an opportunity to practice reflexivity and (un)learn ways of co-constructing curriculum.

Together, the work that we created is greater than the sum of our individual efforts—a synergistic result of student-as-partners work.

-Alex Tang and Gabriella Wong, academic faculty, and Meg Wang and Sara Hamidi, students,  
University of British Columbia, Canada

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## CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

The National Student Survey (NSS) has always played a role in UK university league tables but the importance of NSS scores have amplified with the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Low NSS scores, means lower TEF awards and this has reputational consequences for institutions. So universities have had little choice but to embrace the TEF and strengthen their metrics to stay ahead of their competitors. It is this market-led metrification of higher education that led me into student partnership work. My role as an Educational Developer has been to support course teams with NSS enhancement. But rather than put colleagues at the mercy of their metrics, I have instead nurtured student/staff partnerships within disciplines to work together to develop collective understanding and action aimed at enhancing learning and teaching. The work is contextualised, meaningful and participatory. Far from the metrics that inspired it!

–Karen Arm, academic staff/faculty, Solent University, United Kingdom

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My journey into student partnership work began while reflecting on my research at the Master's level where I investigated the phenomenon of Quality Assurance, namely accreditation. I acknowledged that “Future studies could attempt to replicate this investigation using students as participants in order to gain additional knowledge from student feedback on pedagogical skills of lecturers, accessibility to teaching and learning resources, and verifications of claims made during accreditation exercises” (Ladipo, 2017). Also, having worked in the HE sector in Nigeria for over a decade and volunteered as a teacher at the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, I have locally contextual evidence that student partnership is not working effectively. Based on the above, it became important for me to investigate students’ lived experiences as ‘other voices’ in HE at the PhD level with the hope that it will challenge us to examine our assumptions as well as aims, intentions, and processes.

–Kike Ladipo, PhD Researcher, University of Leicester, United Kingdom

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The QAA (Scotland) Enhancement Themes are a rolling programme of development activities selected by the Scottish HE sector. Central to the Themes are student-staff



partnerships on teaching enhancement projects. This culture of collaboration also permeates other teaching development activities, and led to our partnership in which undergraduate students, educational developers, and academics collectively conducted programmatic level reviews with Schools to enhance assessment and feedback practices. Our student-staff partnership proved invaluable when working towards enhancing the student experience. Not only were diverse perspectives beneficial when identifying areas of potential enhancement, but working collaboratively prevented a top-down enforcement of student passivity. Working together, we learned from each other, and more effectively and efficiently supported our partner schools. As an unexpected outcome, the student partners reflected that their confidence and sense of institutional belonging and mattering had vastly increased as a direct result of our work shaping the student assessment experience together.

–Joanna Wilson-Scott, academic/professional staff, Mary Pryor, academic/professional staff, Mailie Besson, graduate, Samu Turi, graduate, University of Aberdeen, and Joy Perkins, academic staff, Heriot-Watt University, United Kingdom  
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I worked closely with a professor of mine in 2022, where I engaged in his philosophy that students and faculty should function in partnership. Later on, with the Teaching Commons at York University, I was prompted to embark on Students-as-Partners work to expand my passion to work towards a normalized collaboration between students and faculty. Hearing student voices improves the quality of education because it motivates and inspires both the students and faculty involved, making learning and teaching more impactful. My work with Students-as-Partners is empowering, as it centers around campus-wide research and one-on-one faculty consultations where I can share my student perspective. Students-as-Partners inspires me to broaden the movement of transforming learning from top-down to student-centred. As a student, student consultant, and a future educator, Students-as-Partners work creates a space where I can bring student voices forward, and one day be a teacher who is a vessel that centres all student voices.

–Alexis Skopelitis, student, York University, Canada  
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The wealth of work and guidance published by Alison Cook-Sather and others inspired me to embark on students-as-partners work, but my institutional context—the University of North Carolina, Pembroke, North Carolina's historically American Indian university—made it urgent. With a student body that's one of the US Southeast's most racially diverse, our students' raced and classed experiences are very different from our faculty's. To inspire and nurture culturally-responsive and affirming pedagogy, then, I need to bring students into the work of faculty development, foregrounding their educational experiences and aspirations. At the same time, I need to cultivate the capacity of faculty to step out of hierarchies and open



themselves and their pedagogies to meaningful change. Given the challenges of being a “center of 1,” I’m limited to doing a sort of “students-as-partners lite” – but it’s bringing new energy and revealing new horizons in every relationship we create.

–Scott Hicks, academic staff/faculty, University of North Carolina, Pembroke, United States

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Enrolment in this partnership was based on complete chance. The partnership struck a chord of amusement and I wanted to inquire about its result hence I took the course. How could this system work in Pakistan where culture ingrains this concept of respect for elders to the extent where you cannot question your instructors. I was paired with an instructor I had known for the last two years and since I knew their core values before as a student, understanding them as a student partner was easier. Both partners had the goal to enhance learning and teaching, we had weekly meetings where I would sequentially organize areas of focus and then there would be discussion to further enhance the environment in our class. For me and my instructor, we faced difficulty in communication in the first week so we laid down some ground rules such as honesty, providing suggestions backed with literature, evidence and creating a space where we could co-create.

–Zoha Aftab, student, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan

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My mother and grandmother were both activists in the women’s peace movement and their influence led me to develop strong values based on justice, equity and cultural diversity. I started my working life in health promotion, community development, and international development, where I discovered the literature, theory, and practices of participatory approaches. When I became an academic developer 20 years ago, it was clear to me that we should be working in partnership with students, but back then no one was talking about ‘students as partners’ (SaP); indeed my colleagues were sceptical of my partnership approach to teaching, research, and writing. It has been exciting to witness the expansion of interest and diversity of practices in SaP, and to see students’ voices and actions changing universities and changing all of us involved in SaP. Every day I learn more and strive to embody partnership in all my work.

–Catherine Bovill, academic staff/faculty, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

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As head of psychology, I worked closely with student course representatives. In addition to formal university processes, I established an open door policy and ‘drop in’ times for student reps. These informal processes helped to establish relationships based on mutual trust and principles of psychological safety: feeling included; safety to learn (on both sides); safety to contribute; and safety to challenge. This enabled me to address student issues/concerns more quickly than through formal channels; offer students an opportunity

to partner with me in my leadership role – e.g., co-presenting a keynote speech at an equality, diversity and inclusion conference; and develop a reverse mentoring project with minoritized students mentoring senior university leaders. Key reflections are that students-as-partners must be treated as genuinely ‘equal thinking partners’, and components of Nancy Kline’s ‘Thinking Environment’ coaching approach have much to offer.

–Kathryn Waddington, academic staff/faculty, University of Westminster, United Kingdom  
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As a professor, I coordinate all undergraduate community engaged learning (CEL) in my faculty. This form of hands-on pedagogy sees students working collaboratively with a local non-profit or community-based organization. CEL is a unique form of experiential learning that is expressly geared towards the public good and is underpinned by in-depth reflection and a commitment to reciprocity. To ensure that students work on issues and with organizations of interest to them, they are partners throughout the entire process. From the outset, we talk through what they want to experience and accomplish during a placement. Together, we develop a CEL undertaking that aims to foster their personal agency and provide them with opportunities to hone skill sets that will advance the life they wish to lead both during their program of study and after they graduate.

–Sandra Smeltzer, academic staff/faculty, Western University, Canada  
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My journey into students-as-partners work was sparked during my time as a student pursuing an MPhil in Education. As a student, I participated in a learning cycle course on policy analysis with a faculty member. There, we were engaged as learners which resulted in a collaborative partnership, leading us to co-teach a course on policy studies following my graduation. Together, we produced a knowledge report from the learning cycle, which we presented at an international conference and further disseminated through blogs and panel discussions. Our partnership also resulted in published works showcasing students’ policy analysis and insights into the scholarship of teaching and learning. Believing in student empowerment, I saw firsthand how students’ voices became valued contributors to education. This ongoing partnership enriches my experiences. Currently, we are involved in three major projects, including a systematic review and two large-scale research endeavours, highlighting the power of students-as-partners initiatives.

–Aisha Naz Ansari, Research Associate, Aga Khan University, Pakistan  
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## CREATING A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY

As a female student in Pakistan, I've encountered distinct experiences across government and private universities. Before I became a student partner, I felt relegated to a passive role, perceiving a tangible power distance and communication gap between students and faculty.

My student identity and background, coupled with these experiences, initially casted a shadow over my academic journey. When I embraced the role of a student partner with a faculty member who championed my capacity to co-create, it was nothing less than a revelation. She encouraged initiative, sought feedback, and affirmed my contributions, embodying the essence of a true partnership. Despite cultural norms preventing me from addressing her by her first name, our relationship transcended traditional hierarchies. I was no longer seen as naive/inexperienced but as a valued collaborator. I like to call this my "academic healing". It not only rectified my previous disenchantments but also ingrained in me the profound significance of partnership values. As a result, I've become an advocate, carrying forward the message of collaboration and mutual respect in the academic sphere.

–Fatima Iftikhar, professional staff, Lahore University, Pakistan

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I came to be interested in students-as-partners work through the effort to challenge and eradicate awarding gaps in Higher Education (in the UK, 'awarding gaps' refers to the variation in grades between two student groups, e.g. first-generation and non-first generation students) . Working in Higher Education, it is clear to me that universities can serve as centers of profound social change. However, the outcomes of a university education can also reflect the social and political contexts within which that education is based - something that I am especially interested in as a political scientist. National- and institutional-level data can often give us some insight into what awarding gaps exist in Higher Education, but it can take more localized (i.e., subject-level) responses to challenge those gaps. Therefore, I came to engage with students-as-partners work as a framework through which to understand how students understand awarding gaps and what we can do together to best shape our teaching and learning environments to make awarding gaps a thing of the past.

–Jeremy F. G. Moulton, academic staff/faculty, University of York, United Kingdom

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Being a queer student at The University of Queensland, there were instances in which I felt I was under-represented, and marginalised perspectives were sometimes vacant from courses I undertook. This had an impact not only on my confidence as a researcher/writer, but also affected my day-to-day campus life. When I saw a student-as-partner position being offered that was looking directly at collecting data from LGBTQIA+ students to enhance their experience, I immediately applied. The student/staff partnership project was also being coordinated by LGBTQIA+ staff members I was familiar with, which provided a sense of safety and community. What was most inspiring to see, was the project plan that sought to fuse queer student and staff voices to create change within our own institution. This led me to apply and join the partnership project as it gave me the chance to make connections with LGBTQIA+ staff members in my field and enhance the student experience for future queer students.

–Jordan Ross, student, The University of Queensland, Australia

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I came to this work after taking a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) class in my doctoral program for Educational Leadership. While taking this SoTL class, I wrote several papers about the feasibility of including veteran students in an SaP project. I couldn't have imagined that three years later, I'd actually be using this framework in my dissertation study to explore how SaP contributes to veteran student success. As a military veteran, I felt compelled to investigate if this intentional partnership could make a difference in the lives of our veterans. Now, as I work through my findings, I have witnessed firsthand the connection students have with faculty, and how they are at the forefront of helping us transform our campus. The veteran collaborators who participated in my dissertation are likely to publish the shared document we co-created. Wow! SaP has truly changed how I approach my work with undergraduate students.

–Alecia Matthews, student, University of North Carolina Wilmington, United States

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The Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) initiative undertakes research, implementation and advocacy activity on open textbooks as a means to address challenges related to cost, access and representation in South African higher education. The initiative is focused on the concept of 'parity of participation' in textbook creation as a means to surface student voice, create more inclusive teaching and learning materials, and address social (in)justice in the classroom. Engaging with students as partners has provided a means for the team to better understand and more accurately describe the insights of students collaborating in open textbook production as well the experiences of the students making use of open textbooks, particularly as relates to their sense of agency, belonging and power dynamics. The DOT4D research process has evolved through these partnerships to include students not only as research participants but also as co-authors in bringing student perspective into peer-reviewed articles for publication.

–Michelle Willmers, professional staff, University of Cape Town, South Africa

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Our initial aim was to diversify the narrative within STEM curricula, so students in our diverse cohort would be more likely to see themselves represented and hence feel a greater sense of belonging within their programmes of study and also within STEM itself. We employed student partners to co-create 'Hidden History' seminars, based upon the contribution of undercelebrated scholars, in order to support the development of their transferable and employability skills. However, it has now become clear to us that an additional benefit of empowering student partners to bring about change in the curriculum is that this agency in itself increases their sense of belonging. There was also a notable

positive reaction from the receiving cohort when Hidden History activities were led in sessions by the student partners, highlighting to us the power of peer ‘real models’ in the drive for inclusivity and challenge of the status quo.

–Ellie Davison and Thomas Hobson, academic staff/faculty, University of Lincoln,  
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My engagement in SaP is deeply inspired by the liberatory pedagogies of bell hooks and Paulo Freire. My approach centres on creating an environment where every student, regardless of their background, feels they truly belong, and where their voices not only matter but are pivotal in shaping the learning journey. In steering Deakin's Equity-First SaP programs, my focus has been on dismantling the traditional hierarchies that often hinder the realization of truly inclusive and equitable learning environments. Our programs are crafted to foreground the diverse experiences and identities of our students, enabling them to take an active role in their education. This journey into SaP work reflects my belief in the transformative power of education as a practice of freedom—a space where dialogue, mutual respect, and co-creation of knowledge are the foundations upon which we build a more just and inclusive academic community.

–Cassandra Iannucci, academic staff/faculty, Deakin University, Australia  
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## PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE GROWTH AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

I was inspired to embark on students-as-partners projects (including the publication of a book last year, a presentation at a conference next month and another book later this year) because of the context where I work: a specialist French hotel school (Ecole de Savignac) which offers two programmes of study and two qualifications: a Bachelor and an MBA in Hospitality Management (so approximately 300 undergraduates and 100 postgraduates). In a hotel, all staff collaborate (‘front office’ staff such as receptionist and concierge, ‘back office’ staff such as marketing, finance and senior management) – they are all colleagues, which is my model to collaborate with my students, thinking of “students-as-colleagues”. Just as the kitchen staff, the porters, the housekeeping employees and all the department managers, up to the general manager of the hotel, join forces with the same aim – with my students, we are part of the same educational venture, we share the same values (such as excellence in service, benevolence, altruism and leadership), we are a large team, we are together... which just logically led me to create projects involving my students as partners/colleagues.

–Loykie Lomine, academic staff/faculty, Ecole de Savignac, France  
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Law is a subject that draws people in because they want to change the world. I embarked on

over 25 years of students-as-partners work because of a growing realization that students have as much to contribute as I do: and sometimes more. In Universities, you constantly engage with the next generation: their experiences, perspectives, hopes, and ambitions. Young people are endlessly optimistic, and their joy for life and belief in a better future is infectious. One of the first students-as-partners projects I did was to fill a gap in my own knowledge and, from there, to provide learning materials to everyone in my discipline. I realized that law students were relatively ill-equipped to communicate about their research methodologies, even though they were doing great research. We ran two collaborative workshops, developed educational materials, and wrote a little book (Cryer et al, 2011), which is still used today.

–Tamara Hervey, academic staff/faculty, City, University of London, United Kingdom  
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We came to work in the students-as-partners space serendipitously. In search of a community with a focus on engaging in reflective practices and supporting the development skills for post-graduate career paths, we began working together. Early on in our work as graduate students together, we recognized the value of sharing our experiences in an environment that was welcoming and fostered a sense of belonging. As Rachael has transitioned from graduate student to professional staff and Asia continues her trajectory in graduate studies while teaching, we continue to collaborate. This has led to a mentorship that has worked both ways, where feedback is offered and we both continue to learn and grow with one another. We have expanded our community of practice to include other graduate students, as we feel it is essential to pass along what we have learned – our challenges, successes, and everything in between.

–Rachael A. Lewitzky, professional staff, University of Guelph, and Asia Majeed, student,  
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A catalyst experience for embarking on student-as-partners work was around sixteen years ago when I was an early-career Academic Skills Tutor. It was agreed that two psychology students would work alongside me in our academic skills team throughout their placement year. Both wanted to pursue careers related to coaching, so providing relevant experience was a focus for their placement. Accordingly, both were supported to provide peer-support to students related to academic skills development. The opportunity to observe and be observed by the placement students in terms of delivering 1:1 support was invaluable in terms of providing opportunities to critically reflect on my own practices. In retrospect, this reverse mentoring experience (although not framed as such at the time) has fundamentally shaped my subsequent work as a Learning Development Practitioner.

–Steve Briggs, professional staff, University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom  
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My perspective is of an Asian-American woman studying to pursue a career as a trauma medicine physician. I come from an incredibly STEM-focused background where many classes are famed to be rooted in tradition. “Weed-out-classes” are a norm in which students are expected to pass through the gauntlet while simultaneously competing with their peers as if their education is a contest. After working in the local emergency department as a part of the trauma response team, I learned that there are many skills utilized in the field, like collaboration and communication, that are vastly overlooked in our curricular training. My experiences in school and the field inspired me to work with STEM pre-professional faculty to promote the development of those crucial skills through groupwork, self-determination theory principles, and equity-mindedness as a Student Pedagogy Advocate and consultant for the Purdue University STEM Equity Learning Community.

–Hurshal Pol, student, Purdue University, United States  
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Embarking on university partnership activities opened my eyes to the true meaning of belonging. As a female ethnic minority, I initially felt adrift in the university landscape as I entered higher education as a blank canvas, re-learning the ability to fit in and establishing my identity all over again. However, I was determined to carve out my identity in this new educational chapter. Through staff-student activities, I discovered a profound sense of belonging that anchored me in academia to understand who I was and am. Now, as an Early Career Academic, these principles remain at the core of my journey. Partnership collaborations have strengthened my sense of self and nurtured invaluable relationships in my career. To my younger self and others starting new career chapters, embrace the exploration of your identity. Staff-student partnerships offer transformative growth opportunities, fostering resilience and a deeper sense of belonging in academia's ever-evolving landscape.

–Kiu Sum, academic staff/faculty, Solent University, United Kingdom  
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As an academic advisor at a historically disadvantaged institution in Cape Town South Africa, I participate in peer-led programs, collaborating with tutors, mentors, and first-year students. Through these engagements, I've witnessed firsthand the influence of adopting a "students as partners" approach within our university. These programs serve as a beacon, illuminating the transformative potential inherent in empowering students to take an active role in their education. They are not merely recipients of knowledge but essential contributors, challenging conventional learning methodologies. Technological platforms such as social networking sites provide students with a space for co-creation. Technological advancements in learning and teaching serve as catalysts, further enhancing this collaborative dynamic and facilitating innovative approaches. Through my experiences, I have come to appreciate the profound impact that occurs when students are recognised not



merely as recipients of knowledge but as active agents in shaping their educational journey, empowered by the integration of technology.

–Chante Johannes, professional staff, University of Western Cape, South Africa  
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I was born and raised in Hong Kong, but am currently in Brisbane studying occupational therapy (OT) at UQ. Hoping to bring the perspective from my experience as an international student, I participated in two Student-Staff Partnership programmes, with one focussing on improving student experience in standardised patient interviews and the other focussing on developing the UQ international OT student community. In both projects, I love how perspectives and experiences of various individuals come and work together to create. I also appreciate being valued as a team member, which inspires me to contribute to the team more willingly. Furthermore, the projects brought me opportunities I have never imagined. Who could have imagined that I could film and edit a teaching resource, or be in charge of organising a social event? These valuable experiences no doubt made me understand more about my skill levels, and I certainly will continue to further develop these skills moving on.

–Tiffany Yeung, student, The University of Queensland, Australia  
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Working in partnership with learners helped me to meet their needs and interests. I became a Senior Lecturer Practitioner in Education teaching a primary (elementary) education degree programme. Working in partnership with young learners underpinned much of my previous teaching experience and I felt that if co-creating learning supported children's learning it would also assist adults to learn as well.

–John Parkin, professional staff, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom  
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## CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, students-as-partners practices and research have grown in scale and scope, leading to the initiation of this journal and the annual SaP Roundtable. This edition of *Voices from the Field* pays attention to *the why*—why students and staff from different institutions, contexts, cultures, and countries got involved in SaP. Working in partnership, the student and staff co-editors identified four themes as we read and discussed the contributions, namely improving the student experience, challenging the status quo, creating a more equitable society, and personal and collective growth and skill development.

Motivation can be a force within us or from our environment. It refers to movement (causing movement or a moving cause from the Latin *motivus*). Partnership is about movement that happens when people come together intending to bring the values of respect, mutuality, and reciprocity to life in the direction of development, growth,

enhancement, connection, or understanding that could not happen alone or individually. Regardless of the theme selected by us, the co-editors, the collective contributions of all co-authors make clear the inspiration that motivates pedagogically-oriented partnership work in higher education is the connection and collaboration of learning together.

That inspiration—doing it together as partners—will carry us in the next decade. We, the SaP scholarly community, can collectively draw on our shared inspirations to craft and mould our aspirations as SaP practices and research continue to expand and evolve on local and global scales over the next decade.

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