Staff-student partnership: Inclusive/exclusive pedagogical practices

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This workshop focused on student-staff partnership working in a mass education system. Specifically we explored whether in a mass education system we can, and should, engage in partnership working that goes beyond just selected staff and students to become mainstream pedagogical practice. It began with a short overview of a conceptual model of inclusive partnership developed by Moore-Cherry et al., 2015. This model highlighted the potential benefits to the whole learning community of expanding partnership working beyond a few selected students (whether chosen by staff or self-selected) to all staff and students. Given the reported positive impacts and benefits of partnership working, the discussion began with how we might maximize opportunities and potentially mainstream this approach to staff-student collaboration? A cautionary note was struck by one participant who commented that particular students may not want to engage in partnership working and that this should not be read as student disengagement. More inclusive partnership was thus defined within the workshop as *mainstreaming the opportunity to engage in partnership working*, recognizing that it is a choice and just one tool through which to enhance student engagement. A consensus emerged that partnership working should be a goal of institutions, staff and students, and then discussion moved to thinking about how we can mainstream it.

There was significant caution around the potential for mainstreaming with most participants agreeing that it was a good idea but questioning whether it is realistic in the context of growing student numbers. The example of Birmingham City University was used to suggest that one way of mainstreaming partnership within resource constraints is to conceptualise it as a continuum from very high-level curriculum design type collaboration through to more light-touch activity, such as student jobs on campus programmes.

The group broke into smaller discussion teams to address three key questions:
1. What kinds of principles do we need to underpin the mainstreaming of partnership working?
2. What are the key supports that already exist or are needed to mainstream partnership working?
3. What are the key barriers to mainstreaming partnership working in our institutions?

Each team had the opportunity to contribute their responses on each question. The top or most important response to each question was then identified collectively. Table 1 summarises the main points that emerged from each question with the most critical issue highlighted in red.

Table 1: Principles, supports and barriers underpinning the mainstreaming of staff-student partnership working in higher education

Key principles	Supports	Barriers
An 'enabling' institution valuing all (staff as well as students)	Resources (money, champions, success stories)	Perceptions of staff and students
Time / space	*Trust (amongst stakeholders, freedom for failure)*	Cost to university and to student
Reward / recognition	Long-view – sustained wins	No incentives for staff (e.g. promotion criteria etc)
Leadership (why? What's in it for me?)	Commitment (institutional and local)	Lack of skills / experience of staff
Culture of expectation (students and staff alike)	Evidence of impact (metrics – NSS/degree classifications); qualitative comments; longer-term alumni	Is it an institutional driver?
Accessible for all	External drivers e.g. government push for inclusive practice	*Lack of time 'to be brave'*
Flexible admin	Start development for culture change (personal/professional development)	Apathy / indifference
Meaningful participation	Student body – make sure we understand it	Time / space
Negotiation, shared understanding	Schemes/structures to enable engagement	Obvious opportunities
Communication		Self-interest
Rebalance power relationships (student-student; staff-student; leadership-staff-student)		Conventional roles – stuck in the status quo
		Opportunity costs - resistance

Source: Workshop participants

Reference:
Moore-Cherry, N., Healey, R. L., Andrews, W., & Nicholson, D. T. (2016). Inclusive partnership: Enhancing student engagement in geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education.* 40(1), pp 84-103