

Reflecting back to move forward ... Student as Producer in practice in Social Sciences

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Introduction

This notice presents a discussion of the application of Student as Producer in practice over the last decade, seeking to define and capture the impact of Student as Producer as a research and teaching model for the future. By considering the legacy of Student as Producer, the arguments to revitalise its role as a progressive model in future teaching and learning development are considered. Core values and principles embedded in Student as Producer asserts its potential to positively impact upon teaching and learning, curriculum design and innovative approaches to engaging students alongside academics. Definitional complexities are evaluated in the notice to frame the underlying principles of Student as Producer, with further consideration of alternatives, yet often seen as parallel teaching and learning model, Student as Partners (Healey et al. 2014). Circumventing the development of these teaching models is the embedding of student engagement, shown as a broader concept and practice that acts as a driver for the practice and pedagogical application of Student as Producer and Student as Partners.

Setting the scene ... response to the increased marketisation of Higher Education

Policy context for practice discussed here is located from 2010 to the present due to the significant transitions occurring in Higher Education during this period. According to Molesworth et al. (2009), Holmwood (2011, 2014) and Tomlinson (2008), and for the last 10 years, the focus of reform has been on core trends of increasing marketisation and the financial context of Higher Education. Central to these reforms, was also an emphasis on the role and place of students in Higher Education, alongside assessments of standards and teaching quality, with a spotlight on employability and the role of student choice and expectations as core values.

In 2009, the Browne Review '*Independent review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance*' (BIS 2010) instigated financial reforms of Higher Education. These built upon those proposed by *The Higher Education Act* (2004) to cap tuition fees at £3,000 and remove the upfront cost imposed by *The Dearing Report* 1997, by proposing a new system of loans and the removal of the cap on funding. Transformative reforms, continued to be shown under the previous Coalition Government in 2010, with the introduction of £9,000 fees for full-time students. All of these policy drivers moved Higher Education policy towards greater marketisation, building and further developing the 'customer concept' with students seen as

consumers (Hillman 2016; Holmwood 2014). The continued commodification of Higher Education, with its focus on increased marketisation has shifted role of students as core to developments, shown with increasing competitiveness between institutions and the sector providing greater public choice.

It is within this context, post-Browne, that responses in my practice have built around relationships and partnerships with students. My practice in Social Sciences, specifically in the discipline of Criminology, has engaged students in curriculum reform and strengthened the role of student voice in programme and module design. By focusing upon transforming the relationship between teaching and research, students and academics, opportunities facilitated in my work have enabled students to be active learners rather than consumers (see Jameson et al. 2012, Jameson et al. 2012a and Strudwick 2017).

Key elements of the Student as Producer and Student as Partners models focus upon providing student choice, collaboration, active participation and engagement with employability. The models seek to build and develop these relationships between students and academics in a reciprocal manner, to bring together teaching and research and facilitate student engagement opportunities in and outside of the curriculum. My work as a facilitator (since 2009 in the School of Social and Political Sciences) has been an enabler to empower students to be more than passive recipients in their learning, but to be active in the process. This engagement has involved students as co-authors and/or co-presenters of conference papers and co-authors on peer reviewed published papers (see Picksley et al. 2012, Strudwick, et al. 2017, Strudwick 2017, Strudwick et al. 2017 and Strudwick 2019).

The links made between these models in my practice, form the lens through which the shifting role of students was addressed, with models providing choice, collaboration, active participation and facilitating opportunities for student engagement. It is under this background that Student as Producer and Student as Partners models set the foundations for my practice.

Model characteristics

The values of the models, particularly important to framing my work, have been student choice, collaboration, active participation and engagement with employability. To contextualise further some discussion of the models in their original form is presented.

Student as Producer is a teaching and learning strategy developed by Professor Mike Neary at the University of Lincoln. This strategy initially evolved from work developed at Warwick University and Oxford Brookes University in 2004, under The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research and Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). In 2010, '*Student as producer: research-engaged teaching, an institutional strategy*' (2010 to 2013), was funded by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) with Neary institutionally embedding Student as Producer as a teaching and learning model. This model was multi-disciplinary in nature and redressed the

'*imbalance between teaching and research*' (Neary and Winn 2009:193). The model was based upon eight key principles (Discovery, Technology in Teaching, Space and Spatiality, Assessment, Research and Evaluation, Student Voice, Support for research-based teaching through expert engagement with information resources and creating the future) and established an institutional framework for curriculum development, through research engaged teaching.

Healy et al. (2014) developed Students as Partners '*Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in Higher Education*' with HEA funding. As a conceptual model that engages students and academics in collaborative practice, students are seen as active participants, in partnership with academics. The model has four main areas, presented as Venn diagram, showing the relationship between learning, teaching and assessment; subject-based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning and curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy, with the *students as partners* model all being framed within a wider circle of student engagement.

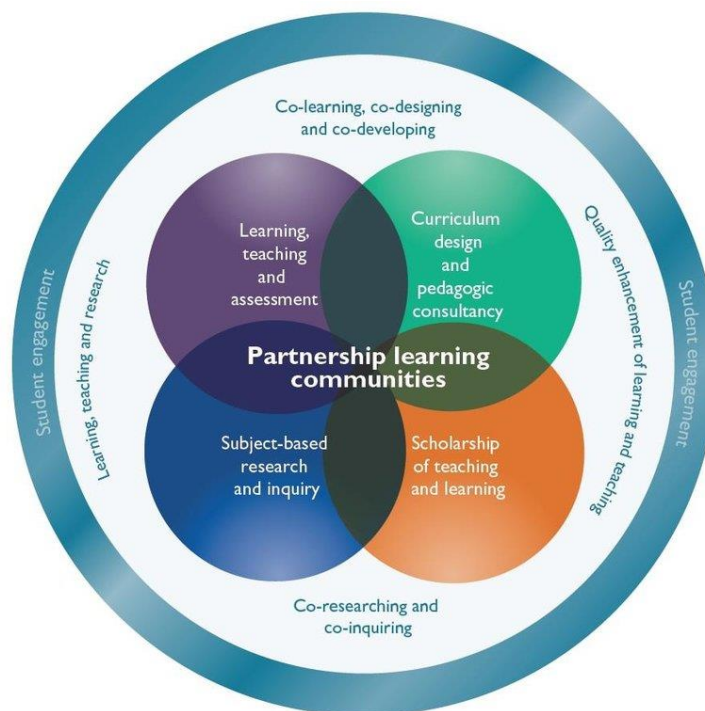


Figure 1: Students as Partners model (Healy et al. 2014: 25).

Connections between the models have been shown in my practice, with student engagement opportunities adopting elements from student as producer and students as partners. Work conducted identifies the connections all highlighting elements of co-

creating, co-producing, co-learning, co-designing, co-developing and co-researching (Healey et al. 2014: 21).

Student engagement is a term outlining the different forms of collaboration between students and academics, whereby academics facilitate and provide opportunities for student involvement in an independent way. Student Engagement was central to my practice as a broader concept, but it has clear definitional ambiguity which is further complicated by multiple layers (see Baron and Corbin 2012, Gourlay 2015, Kahu 2013; 2013a, Trowler and Trowler 2010, Trowler 2013 and Zepke 2015). In essence, student engagement is about student involvement in a proactive way. Core values are represented in the HEA Framework for Student Engagement through Partnership (2015) Authenticity, Honesty, Inclusivity, Reciprocity, Empowerment, Trust, Courage, Plurality and Responsibility, all of which are present in my practice and have developed student engagement with research, where students are “...*an integral part of the academic project of their institutions*” (Neary and Saunders 2016: 2). In sum, Student as Producer, Student as Partners and Student Engagement have equivocal themes as shown in the literature on student engagement, with a focus upon sharing, collective responsibility and contributions through partnerships and collaboration (see Dunne and Zandstra 2011, Kahu 2013 and Trowler 2013).

Despite these commonalities there are also differences between these models. Healey et al. (2014: 7) identify that the students as partners model is all about partnership and “...*all partnership is student engagement, but not all student engagement is partnership*”. The students as partners model, with its key element of autonomy has been influential, whilst not explicitly being implemented to change curriculum institutionally in the University of Lincoln, as student as producer has.

Practice and application in Social Sciences

My practice has sought to re-connect teaching and research, through developing active engagement and collaborative relationships between students and academics. By responding practically to challenge this disconnect, opportunities were developed for teaching and research to be united, both inside and outside of the curriculum. This work has embraced the categorisation of scholarship, discovery, integration, application and engagement and teaching (Neary and Winn 2009: 128) and reflected upon student expectations and student engagement.

Being centred on key principles, the student as producer model has empowered and influenced my practice in collaborative projects. By developing opportunities through partnerships, my work has enabled students to shape their learning in an engaging and participatory way. These opportunities have embraced some elements of the model, such as:

- The form of *Discovery*, (shown with approaches to employability);
- Utilising *Assessment*, (demonstrated with research engaged teaching);

- *Applying Research and Evaluations within* research engaged teaching (shown in student employability projects);
- Promoting *Student Voice with learning and providing support for research-based teaching through engagement and creating for the future*, illustrated in my work embracing employability (Neary et al. 2014).

My work has embraced and led on the teaching of employability, noting the ‘rhetoric’ of choice in policy, whilst continuing to provide initiatives to increase student voice. By involving students in creating a community of practice at the University of Lincoln, between students and academics, students are able to construct their own knowledge being framed within these core principles. Hence, students are not seen in an instrumentalist way as a consumer, but as co-partners in the learning process.

Reflecting back to move forward....

Student as producer, as an institutional research–engaged teaching model, has visibly impacted upon teaching and learning practice at the University of Lincoln. By utilising key principles, projects have been developed in and outside of the curriculum, “...whereby student learn primarily by engagement in real research projects...Engagement is created through active collaboration amongst and between students and academics” Neary et al. (2014: 9). The valued role of students has been integral with Student as Producer and Students as Partners values playing a core role in developing student engagement with research, where students are “...an integral part of the academic project of their institutions” (Neary and Saunders 2016: 2).

Student as producer is more than a vehicle, it has the ability, to develop student engagement beyond the conventional form of student engagement, but where the institutional principles of teaching and learning are progressive in their own way and continue to be. By taking elements from models encompassing student engagement, my practice has shown the convergence between the models with principles, notably partnership, collaboration and active participation. My practice has been influenced with principles from Healey et al.’s work (2014:7), which sees the flexibility in the process of engagement, which is “*not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself*” (Healey et al. 2014: 12).

The legacy of Student as Producer has embedded teaching and learning principles at the University of Lincoln, which embody partnership, trust and responsibility (see Picksley et al. 2012 and Strudwick et al. 2017 with examples of co-producing conference presentations and students’ role as co researchers on projects). Alongside these principles are core pedagogic values, focusing upon participation and engagement for all involved, embracing Student as Producer partners or active beneficiaries in their learning experiences.

The University of Lincoln has its legacy with Student as Producer and will continue to be progressive. The current Strategic Plan (2016-2021) commits to “*trial and adapt new approaches to teaching*” (2016: 2) which “*will grow and enhance the wider student*

experience" (ibid). In 2020, 'One Community' developed an institutional environment based on equality, diversity and inclusion for all which has further developed foundations, supporting student as producer, student voice and student engagement.

Conclusion

The integral values to Student as Producer continue in practice at the University of Lincoln and my manifesto aims to progress the model for the future. My role as Dean of LALT has championed these plans, developing of Student as Author in Higher Education, with an Undergraduate Journal. Further plans seek to extend routes for student representation and facilitation in and outside of the curriculum, to be embedded institutionally.

In essence, the future for Higher Education requires student engagement to advance beyond Student as Producer or student voice, but for the processes to be the norm and be part of the new strategic level of planning, design and innovations in teaching and learning. This rationale has framed my manifesto as Dean of LALT, whilst also supporting the foundations we currently have, as shown in our legacy of Student as Producer. Such reflective considerations also embrace different ways of working collaboratively with students. It is proposed that in these initiatives there can be a development of narratives, where students can work with academics to be part of the process of innovative teaching and learning.

Given the challenges facing Higher Education, it is timely to think creatively about how student engagement looks like for the future, where it fits with the next teaching strategy and how this might be framed around research teaching models which reflect the common principles among the models to create continued collaborative engagement between students and academics. The future application and redevelopment of Student as Producer can feasibly add to 'Lincoln effect' and continue to provide exemplars of sustained good practice in teaching and learning.

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