



# Learning from collaborative ‘conversations’ on the *Students as Producer* Pedagogic model: students’ views

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## Abstract

This paper explores and reflects on the outcomes of the application of two different pedagogic models at two Higher Education institutions in the UK, University Centre at Blackburn College and the University of Lincoln. Through a set of collaborative ‘conversations’ the experiences of the pedagogic practices – from a sample of participating students – within and across the two institutions are contextualised in relation to the following projects: the *Community Challenge* project, developed and implemented at University Centre Blackburn College; and, the *Student as Producer* initiative developed and implemented at the University of Lincoln. The reflections and narratives that emerged from the collaborative conversations are grouped (and explored) via four key themes: student engagement, research skills, employability, and curriculum design; a number of similarities and differences are also highlighted in relation to the two projects. These variations support the point made by Bovill (2015: np) that ‘[i]f we constantly question ourselves and each other about partnerships, we are more likely to gain greater understanding to enhance future partnerships’. Beyond this, the paper addresses wider literature in relation to the *Students as Partners* (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014), and *Students as Change agents* as pedagogic approaches (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011). Finally, the paper considers whether a common pedagogic ethos can be identified.

**Keywords:** Student as Producer, Students as Partners, Collaboration, Student engagement, Skills

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## 1. Lincoln: Student as Producer

In 2010-13 the University of Lincoln (UoL) commenced the ‘*Student as Producer: research-engaged teaching, an institutional strategy*’ project funded by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), which

was developed by Mike Neary as an institutional Teaching and Learning strategy. The pedagogic model developed – and used – as part of this project helped reassess the ‘imbalance between teaching and research’ (Neary & Winn, 2009, p.193), in a radical manner. As a multi-disciplinary and research engaged

teaching approach, *Students as Producers* sought to transform Higher Education teaching and learning into a more co-operative student experience. As a model, it emphasised the importance of establishing and developing partnerships and collaborations between academics and students. In the ever-changing Higher Education environment, the *Students as Producers* approach (*SaPr*), promoted – and continues to promote – the value of student agency in identifying and pursuing meaningful participations with academics; furthermore it served, and continues to serve, as a critique of market-based consumerism now endemic throughout English Higher Education. Subsequently, Neary & Saunders (2016) identify the model ‘as a critical response to attempts by national governments to create and consolidate a consumerist culture and impose high levels of debt among undergraduate students’ (2016, p.2). As a pedagogic challenge to market-based standardised *product choice* of Higher Education, the *SaPr* approach looks to reposition the role of the student, from one of passive consumer, to a more dynamic position as active collaborator. Through involved participation and engagement *SaPr* students are afforded direct and influential input in to the broadening of ‘their learning experiences through opportunities to be participants in research activity as well as teaching and learning projects.’ (Strudwick, 2017, p.75).

Practically, institutional support for *SaPr* at the University of Lincoln (*UoL*), facilitated resourced opportunities for participation in partnership projects (UROS),<sup>1</sup> alongside other forms of student engagement partnerships, involving curriculum design and extra curricula practices. Furthermore the value of student voice (a key facet of *SaPr*) was to become enshrined across all disciplines, with students increasingly being identified as co-producers of knowledge, as opposed to simply consuming pre-packaged canons of knowledge.

*SaPr*, using Mathiesen’s model as an organising framework, sought to provide an ‘alternative radical form of Higher Education’ (Neary & Saunders 2016,

p.14) against the trends of neo liberalised forms of Higher Education. By critiquing the contradictions evident within increased HE marketisation, with students ‘being at the heart’ (BIS 2011), Neary & Winn (2017, p. 2) argue *SaPr* is not just an innovative approach but ‘principally a pedagogical project that aims to reconstitute Higher Education’; as Neary (2015) suggests, *SaPr* should be seen as ‘the heart-beat of the system [in] the production of knowledge and meaning’ (2015, no page). Looking to the future, alongside the growing recognition of *SaPr* as a ‘model of good practice’ (Neary 2016, p. 90) we have also seen the development of a co-operative university, an ‘autonomous critical pedagogical project,’ in Lincoln but outside of the University, the Social Science Centre (SSC) (Neary & Saunders, 2016, p. 3).

## 2. UCBC: Community Challenge

University Centre Blackburn College (*UCBC*) is a provider of Higher Education with one of the largest cohorts of students in the ‘HE in FE’ part of the sector, known more recently as College Based Higher Education (*CBHE*). The *CBHE* position has been criticised for failing to provide “real Higher Education” and characterised by the equally pejorative term “HE lite” (Leahy, 2012; Creasy, 2013). However, set against such concerns are recent claims for *UCBCs* place as an institution for embracing, ‘not only new but maverick and innovative academic practices along with a willingness to nurture developments which manifest the potential for wider application’ (Hammond, 2017, p.5). This has included its distinct Higher Education building, which for almost twenty-five years, has provided courses to students living and working in the local area as reflected in the *CBHE* general characteristics (ETF, 2016). It has also included several HEA workshops and seminars plus other forms of dissemination, such as book chapters (Daley, Orr and Petrie, 2017) and the inception and initial development of the peer reviewed teaching and learning journal, *PRISM*.

<sup>1</sup> Undergraduate Research Opportunities Scheme (UROS) supports undergraduate students through bursaries for research conducted between staff and students at the

University of Lincoln. See: <https://lalt.lincoln.ac.uk/aboutlalt/undergraduate-opportunities-research-scheme/>

Several years before the *Community Challenge* and collaborative conversations project, *SaPr* had already influenced pedagogy at *UCBC*, leading to a public exhibition and subsequent research, from photographs of 'hidden' crime as taken by its undergraduate criminology students (Johnson, 2011). This form of teaching was part of a wider agenda for the Criminology department to enhance learners' experiences and embrace the diverse forms of responses to learning at undergraduate level. Its position as a successful curriculum area was protected by its relatively high student numbers and this facilitated the department's interest in providing teaching and learning that challenged the hegemony of traditional hierarchies in 'the university' by developing more organic forms of knowledge production.

This early inception of pedagogic experimentation was followed by the award of a Teaching Development Grant from the HEA in 2012 which resulted in the *Community Challenge (CC)* project being introduced involving a handful of curriculum areas in the school of Social Sciences (Healey, Jenkins and Lea, 2013, p.24). The full title of the HEA funded project was *Enhancing Employability via Community Challenge*; as part of the context of employability, it introduced an enhanced form of independent learning by way of a student-led project. The creation of small interdisciplinary teams of tutors and students working collaboratively, produced outputs to benefit their local communities. Students' were required to identify their own 'community challenge' and apply learning to their respective areas of interest. Influences from *SaPr* allowed the application of a critical pedagogic approach to teaching, predicated on 'encouraging students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation' (Giroux, 2018, p.31).

Open Educational Resources (*OERs*) and Open Educational Practices (*OEPs*) supported the work and encouraged engagement with opportunities from the growing open education movement. This included the DiY form of HE known colloquially as 'edupunk' which according to one of the original theorists behind the connectivist approach to learning had, 'totally caught

wind, spreading through the blogosphere like wildfire' (Downes, 2008, np). Despite such support, the approach was soon criticised for lacking clarity and for being too closely aligned to the model of punk purportedly conveyed by the 'Sex Pistols' in the 1970s. It stimulated much interest making appearances in books and numerous blogs, extolling equally its death and growing popularity (Kamenetz, 2010 and 2011; Cain, 2008; Churchill, 2011). As such, the project and subsequent pedagogic iterations required participants' reflections on sources such as 'Going to Harvard from your own bedroom' (BBC News, 21 March 2011); 'Is it possible for everybody to be an autodidact, now that knowledge is so accessible online?' (Wall Street Journal, 4 December 2010); and, 'Outsider art: what students can learn from self-taught artists' (Guardian, 8 March 2018).

### 3. Common themes & ethos of Student as Producer/CC to other models

Both pedagogic initiatives placed students at the centre of their learning journey, and emphasised the values and benefits of partnerships, collaboration and engagement. The positioning of students as active partners as part of the projects also played a role in influencing their wider experiences of Higher Education, as the different pedagogic models enabled them to reconsider the relationships between student/lecturer, research and teaching. Although, Neary (2016, p.90) notes that the recuperations of *SaPr* in different forms of student engagement have 'denied the subversive intent out of which it originated' (Neary & Saunders, 2016), there are clear similarities among the common themes and aims of the different models. Healey, Flint and Harrington (2016), through their work on *Students as Partners (SaPa)*, praise the benefits of such initiatives, stating that, 'our vision for the future is that it should be the norm, not the exception, that students are engaged as partners in learning that co-creating, co-designing, co-researching and co-learning should be common practice between student and staff across higher education' (p.162).

There are similarities between the *SaPr* and *CC* models of student engagement, and along with

*Students as Change agents* (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011) and *SaPa* (Healey et al, 2014), can be seen as a multifaceted 'heart of current initiatives ... across the sector' (Healey, Bovill and Jenkins, 2015, 169). They share common threads characterised by student and staff 'partnership teams' (Matthews et al, 2018; Matthews, Dwyer, Hine, and Turner 2019), as collaborators (Mercer- Mapstone et al, 2017, Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten, 2011) and as reciprocal co-creators of knowledge with direct student engagement (Ahmad, VanMaaren, Barrington, Merritt, & Ansillo 2017, Curran, 2017; Zepke, 2019, Zepke & Leach, 2010, Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felton, Millard, & Moore-Cherry, 2015). By focusing on providing a challenge in the form of a 'counter-narrative' (Matthews 2016), the ethos of these collective models and approaches are 'instrumental in enhancing student engagement activities' (Curran & Millard 2016, p. 68). *SaPa*, as with *SaPr* and *CC*, have ultimately been developed to 'enhance the students' learning experience' (Coombe, Huang, Sheppard, & Khosravi, 2018, p. 86). However, we would argue that the ethos of *SaPr*, offers a particularly radical agenda for culture change, by aiming to inspire and generate alternative forms of co-created curriculum development, and related critical initiatives, which harbour the potential to reinvigorate 'the university beyond the logic of market economics' (Strudwick, 2017, p.175).

#### 4. Methodological approaches to generating 'conversations' and narratives

The rationale for generating shared dialogue between staff and students at both institutions in relation to the two projects was likened to 'open-to-learning conversations' (Robinson, 2014); the idea was to be both collaborative and critical by encouraging people to speak freely, whilst interacting with other participants. The desire for meaningful dialogue with current and former students was also influenced by the

'conversational' learning feature which underpins a new undergraduate textbook for criminology (Case, Johnson, Manlow, Smith & Williams, 2017).

The target sample for the collaborative conversations consisted of students and alumnus that had participated in the *Student as Producer* or *CC* initiatives; as a result we opted for a self-selecting sample method.<sup>2</sup> This resulted in the recruitment of a sample of four students. The participants were then sent a stimulus to read in advance of the conversations. The stimulus – or conversation prompt – at *UCBC*, was the HEA's Teaching Development Grant report for *Community Challenge*; at *UoL* it was a recent publication on the *Student as Producer* model (Strudwick, 2017). These conversational prompts were sent one week in advance of the pre-arranged interviews, along with a request for the participants to consider their own experiences and learning journeys.

Two in-depth unstructured interviews or 'conversations' were implemented in the same way at both institutions; these comprised an academic member of staff, a current student and an alumnus.<sup>3</sup> Following the Socratic method, the interviews were implemented in two stages: initially, dialogue took place between members of staff and current students (we termed this 'the inner circle'); and then, between members of staff and the alumni (we termed this 'the outer circle'). Through our circular learning conversations approach, inspired by Paulo Freire and Myles Horton's *We Make the Road by Walking* by (1990), meaningful dialogue was explored and obtained in a cumulative way.

The conversations lasted thirty-two minutes at *UCBC* and thirty-five minutes at *UoL*; the transcripts were dominated by the voices of the student participants at both institutions. This meant that the role and influence of the staff member was limited to inquiring about what the students had done whilst studying and engaging in

<sup>2</sup> The respective studies were approved by the Ethics Boards at both *UCBC* and *UoL* and every member of the circular learning conversations gave their consent to the reproduction of their data as part of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> The discourses of 6 participants are not presented as being a substantial sample in the paper, but as one potential

means, when framed within other relevant literature, to further understand core themes within student experiences of research engaged teaching models.

activities as part of these pedagogical models; the benefits they felt they had acquired, and any difficulties they had faced. This conversational structure gave both current students and alumni an equal chance to speak; usefully, this resulted in detailed and personal evidence beyond the reach of more formal measures such as module evaluations and the NSS

Through the flexibility of the conversational prompts and the liberated dialogue of the participants, thematic analysis of the content of the conversations was conducted. Inspired by the work of Braun & Clarke, (2006), we generated initial codes from within the data of the conversations. Coding points of interest resulted in the recording of 42 separate concepts overall.

The authors then sought connectedness from across the discursive framework of participant responses, to identify dominant themes; this allowed themes such as self-confidence and self-awareness to emerge.<sup>4</sup> Additional themes focused upon student engagement and research, employability, and the curriculum. The subsequent analyses and comparisons of these core themes, resulted in differences and similarities between *SaPr* / *CC* approaches being identified.

### 5. Student narratives of Student as Producer and Community Challenge

Commonalities across the narratives from both institutions also highlighted 'student identity' as a key area, whether it be as 'producer', 'researcher' or 'partner'. Crawford, Horsley, Hagyard and Derricott (2015, p.14), note the similarities between the principles of *SaPr*, student engagement and partnerships, acknowledge the role towards peers in student groups and committees, and the potential impact they can have in developing the formal curriculum. Nonetheless, the extent of the impact is complex, an issue raised by Winstone & Parker (n.d.) who highlight the varied role that students can take in research with academics, one evolving from, 'where the students shifted from merely being participants to

being partners in the analysis, and, furthermore, consultants in crystallising our understanding'.

The involvement of students in teaching and learning, as evidenced in the narratives from both of our institutions, demonstrate the breadth of practices adopted. The *SaPr* pedagogic models served to re-frame the students' role through partnerships and collaborative relationships with academics, and re-assessing the relationship between research and teaching.

The narratives from *UoL* evidence the attractions of having *SaPr* as institutionally integral to their teaching and learning. Student engagement was recorded far beyond the customary student voice / NSS type of measures, with the impact on student experiences highlighting the positives of building relationships between academics and students, '*I definitely feel it helped for building relationships with the lecturers and tutors. It's just meant I feel that much more comfortable asking for help*' (UOL- Student-1).

Narrative acknowledgments also identified the broader purpose of engaging:

*'You have to engage yourself in it, I don't think it is something that develops naturally and is there for the taking, you have got to actually put yourself in that, get this out of this and go to the tutors; that builds rapport, and it snowballs from there ... if you do that you will reap the rewards, but you need to push yourself a little bit. You can do uni a lot of different ways, you can skim by not going to a lecture or talk to tutors, or you can get really involved and that will show itself in your own work as well as how you are treated in the community and how it feels to you'* (UOL Student-1).

Such views expounded the potential benefits of students having roles as 'producers' (Neary, Saunders, Hagyard and Derricott, 2014); as 'partners' (Healey et al, 2014) and 'consultants' (Winstone & Parker, n.d.). All identify the importance of partnerships between students and academics as being fundamental in

<sup>4</sup> Such themes from a critical pedagogy perspective, include emancipation and the creation of "critical social agents" (Giroux, 2018, p.29).

developing a community of learning. Some initiatives, adopted at other institutions, have followed the framework outlined by Healey et al., (2014) as part of the *SaPa* approach, while others have continued to apply and develop *the SaPr* framework to enhance student engagement in a wider sense while developing the role of students as ‘researchers’. Walkington (2015) discusses engaging students as researchers, ‘to break the long standing disconnect between teaching and research and providing career pathways, reward and recognition for those who support ‘students as researchers’ (p.29).

Despite the differences in the interpretation of conceptual models and the forms they may take, Healey et al., (2016) acknowledge some of the known and common benefits, suggesting that ‘[e]ngaging students as partners is a powerful idea, the implementation of which has the potential to transform HE’ (2016, p.1). Narratives from the conversations address the values placed by students’ on enhancing the collective identity or community of partnerships. The value of student engagement opportunities and participation, developed under *SaPr*, has the potential to form strong alliances, to enhance greater collaboration with academic tutors and encompass themes of equality and partnership. Such positives were observed:

*‘I think it really positively impacts you in terms of community feel, you do feel more kind of on a level with other students and academics and it feels like you can go and raise questions and say what about if this ... It does help make you feel part of the school and it raises your kind of confidence levels of what you are capable of doing ... the collaborative approach makes you feel more valued as a member of the community and that then leads you to feel more confident in getting involved. It is a snowball thing, one you get involved it is easier to get involved more’ (UOL-Alumnus-1).*

Such recognition of enhanced student engagement was further identified by students at *UCBC*, referring to a similar sense of achievement:

*‘It helped me find different strengths. I’m older so technology was never my thing, but I love the fact that I now have a video on YouTube ... never in my wildest*

*dreams did I think I’d ever do something like that’.* (UCBC-Student-1)

The narratives show how pedagogic models of empowerment can build confidence and a sense of self-worth. The benefits of engaging students through collaborations with academics, has been discussed through many different formats or models. For instance, Healey et al., (2016) model on *SaPa* establishes student engagement under four main aspects: learning, teaching and assessment; subject based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning; and, curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy (2016, p. 4). Importantly, for the line of argument presented this paper, such conceptual models tend not to present themselves as a ‘schedule’ or ‘formula’ but more as a framework of flexible principles to engage students. The *SaPr* approach, and associated pedagogic models often embrace common core values, as identified by Healey, et al., (2016) who argue that dialogue needs to: ‘recognise that there are qualitatively different forms of student engagement and not all involve partnership; our focus is on when institutions go beyond listening to the student voice and engage students as co-learners, co-researchers, co-inquirers, co-developers, and co-designers’ (2016, p. 2).

Acknowledging the differences between alternative approaches is an issue which is important to this paper. As authors, we would argue, there are indeed similarities in some of the core values shown in alternative approaches, such as partnerships, shared values, identities and collaboration; but the differences are also important to recognise, especially considering there is no single process or model but a variety of potential opportunities.

Engaging students, whether as ‘Partners’, ‘Producers’, ‘Co-designers’ and ‘active learners’ (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Neary & Hagyard, 2010; Healey, et al, 2014; Neary, et al. 2014, Healey et al, 2015, p. 141) has been seen as ‘a hot issue in Higher Education’ and continues to gain ‘significant momentum’ (Mercer-Mapstone et al, 2017, p.3). The model of *Students as Change agents* encapsulates the breadth of student-staff partnerships and meets some of the core aspects of the *SaPr* approach. Healey, et al., (2015, p.155) see

this approach as representing a shift within teaching and learning, where students are not seen as 'passive recipients of teaching' but more transformatively as 'active contributors and collaborators within the learning process'. This view is similar to Neary's definition of *SaPr* being 'created through active collaboration amongst and between students and academics' (Neary, et al, 2014, p.9); and *Students as Change agents* explicitly supports a view of the student as 'active collaborator and co-producer' (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011, p.4).

The themes identified within our narratives, include students identifying their role as active researchers, through opportunities presented in student engagement and employability, all of which complement the sub-themes of models discussed by Healey et al., (2014) and (2016). Conversations importantly recognise the fluctuation within power relations among students and academics, with levels of confidence, assurances of worth, creativity, and a sense of belonging, with students becoming the producers of knowledge. Greater empowerment for students was fostered in student engagement, with insights being valued alongside the potential to reposition voices and positively shift power dynamics.

Mercer-Mapstone et al., (2017, p.14), identify similar themes in their writings on *SaPa*, referencing the reciprocity of partnership and the dialogue between students and academics in their collaborative relationships. This mirrors a number of examples emergent from within our own narratives, including co-authorship and a shared responsibility on projects, all of which can be conceptualised under the 'ethic of reciprocity' lens adopted from Cook-Sather & Felten's work (2017). Students at *UoL* participated in small scale projects, leading to shared responsibility for the dissemination of research outcomes. This enabled them to identify themselves as being on an 'equal footing', by participating in conference presentations and becoming co-authors on a journal article publication. In this sense, the relationships between students and academics has been transformed by partnerships and shared learning responsibilities. The students at *UCBC*

engaged in equivalent work by using technology in new ways and for different audiences.

Students participated in many different forms of activities, some within student engagement projects with others relating to extra curricula placements. Such contributions match the theme of 'partnerships in practices' cited by Mercer-Mapstone et al (2017, p.16). As authors we agree with Bovill (2017, p.1) about differential levels within initiatives, with adaptation being shown at different stages. There is no 'one' set way to engage students in partnerships, it is an evolving and fluid development; as noted by Bovill, *SaPr* 'can involve work with individuals, small groups of student or whole cohorts of students, and in situations where a subset of students are invited to become partners' (p.1).

Different student and academic partnership initiatives can be understood under broader 'umbrella' descriptions, with Matthews (2016, p. 2), arguing that student engagement has become a blanket term in Higher Education. Kahu (2013, p. 758) further notes the complexity and multi-faceted nature of student engagement stating that, 'While all agree it is important, there is debate over the exact nature of the construct; a key problem is a lack of distinction between the state of engagement, its antecedents and its consequences'. Kandiko & Buckley (2016, p.3) identify the combined use of the term 'student engagement' with reference to 'student voice' and Zepke & Leach's (2010) conceptual organiser, enables some commonalities and shared values of what is seen as 'positive' or 'best practice' within student engagement. In accordance with the work of Curran (2017), themes embody personal development and the enhancement of the learning climate.

Such variation across the models, both within the curriculum and across extra-curricular activities, were *recognised* and emphasised as part of our emergent participant narratives. Active partnerships had a positive impact on creating and embedding a culture of community for learners on an institutional basis, one that appreciates the value of the student voice and the pedagogic potential for students to be partners, producer and agents for change. However, challenges

were also expressed throughout our narratives; some highlighted the need for more guidance and collaboration whilst working as partners / producers; although the lecturers' workloads was seen as a barrier for this. The importance of time was also raised at both *UoL* and *UCBC*; with general agreement on the view that 'you have a lot on all of the time'. The financial cost to students was also discussed but moreso at *UCBC* where the lack of a system like UROS was found to be a potential problem:

*'Sometimes it's cost me money to do these things. Although there was a bit of funding available it certainly didn't cover everything, that got me frustrated if I went to do it and there was nothing for me to do ... but I still wouldn't have it any other way. I've loved it.'* (*UCBC-Student-1*).

The pervasive effects of the 'Lincoln formula' were acknowledged enabling far in excess of a 'one-off' student experience:

*'You get a standard package and then you can choose to upgrade it if you want. Some attitudes with some students who see it as well why I am doing a presentation or my own research when I'm paying this amount to be taught. They want to sit with the lecturer telling them what to do, so to make that benefit if I am going to use it anyway I may as well relish it and enjoy every bit of it'* (*UOL- Student-1*).

All narratives contained references to the enhanced knowledge and understanding of the research process that emerged from involvement with *SaPr/CC*. In *UoL*, references were made to varied opportunities for student participation in initiatives and the different forms in which such opportunities emerged:

*'The first few things I thought of were, the student engagement research where there was an advert on blackboard to be involved as the student in creating and designing and taking part in research through the university with lecturers; the modules in the first and second years where you are given the choice for applying research to do a critical analysis of an article or*

*to go out and conduct your own interview and practice through that way'* (*UOL-Student-1*).

Student research opportunities at *UoL* have been provided by the UROS Scheme, an initiative similar to research bursary arrangements at other institutions such as Imperial College and the University of Warwick.<sup>5</sup> Bursaries can be given to projects that are part of a larger programme or for one-off small-scale projects, on the condition that they are undertaken by an undergraduate student working under the supervision of a member of academic staff. Research by Hagyard & Watling (2012) recognised the significant impact from UROS, not only in developing students' research skills but also for increased understanding of their disciplines. Students further recognised UROS as a core element of Student as Producer:

*'I took part in UROS, a student as producer led approach, where it's your idea and you get the opportunity to run with it - you have a lecturer who is educated in that field, to lead you and make sure you are doing the right thing.'* (*UOL-Student-1*)

Conversations highlighted the potential nuances within the two institutions and the greater opportunities made available to *UoL* students as a result of well-established institutional support. Such prospects were not routinely available at *UCBC* although the Teaching Development Grant from the HEA provided some progress.

Students at *UoL* presented noticeable differences in their narratives, compared with those through *CC* at *UCBC*. The wider range of opportunities meant the research process was more practised, with students acknowledging their increased confidence from these experiences. There was more familiarity with specific parts of the research process, such as creating interview schedules, conducting interviews and completing ethics forms. The opportunities at *UoL* meant students felt more equipped to apply their skills:

*'We are prepared by doing the research, and having a go ourselves, to understand how other lecturers' /*

<sup>5</sup> This institutional support offers bursaries of up to £1000 to support collaborative work between Lincoln students and staff on different research projects (Lincoln Academy of

Learning and Teaching, 2018: <https://lalt.lincoln.ac.uk/aboutlalt/undergraduate-opportunities-research-scheme/>)

researchers / tutors do it and get to the conclusions they do' (UOL-Student-1).

At UCBC, the students' conversations revealed a conscious approach to their research and a need to identify tangible outputs; such as acquiring extra contacts and additional dissemination of outputs: *'For me it's giving me something to show somebody. Instead of a paper dissertation, some of my research is going to be something you can see ... it's going to be slightly different'* (UCBC-Student-1).

The impact of SaPr on curriculum development at UoL was expressed several times: *'giving ideas on where things could be changed in the curriculum or kind of overseeing proposed new modules or changes to modules and giving the students view on that'* (UOL-Alumnus-1). Examples demonstrated the students' appreciation of their views being recognised and actioned, such as when commenting on modules with distinct assessment burdens. Such experiences support the ethos for SaPr to be embedded across UoL in all its strategies, including curriculum design and practices that involve students in the delivery of its courses (Neary, et al, 2014).

The conversations at UCBC referred to a student mentoring scheme where volunteers play an effective part in the general management of a course. This system takes place in the summer months where volunteers are placed in support groups of two or three students on a lower level, to help them proceed with the course. The scheme has found some success in stimulating a sense of community within these groups:

*'I also did student mentoring and I absolutely love this role. It was mainly about giving reassurance to folk over faced with the amount of work they had to do... It was great seeing peoples' confidence grow as once they'd achieved one a goal they'd feel better about others'* (UCBC-Student-1).

This is not the proactive curriculum design as evidenced at UoL, but there was collaborative development of the curriculum at UCBC, tending to occur through bureaucratic processes for (re)validations and periodic reviews rather than a central principle in its teaching and learning strategies.

Softer skills associated with SaPr / CC were referred to in the narratives, with the influence within the classroom being expressed at both institutions. With reference to the positive effects on the learning process, perceptions of improved confidence were found within four main themes of this study. The emphasis in SaPr / CC for actively developing the undergraduate role was valued, with participants expressing views such as 'being a better learner', one that learns 'from doing new things'. Such beliefs were sustained by having confidence in their abilities for learning through reflective practice, underpinned the development of this assurance.

Narratives addressing employability from the UCBC participants illustrated the primacy of work-based learning in CC. Students had initially worked for a support organisation for Victims of Domestic Abuse and for a Youth Offending Team and both conversations referred to options 'snowballing' with subsequent work following other activities. When questioned on the initial driver behind this progress, the support from institutions was apparent:

*'There was a volunteer fair and I met many different voluntary organisations that were very approachable they'd say 'just come and see us for a day and see how you feel'. This meant there was no pressure and no-body was wasting too much time, the benefits can be amazing'* (UCBC-Student-1).

All participants believed their skillsets had developed as a result of holding focus groups, making professional presentations and report writing. However, this acquisition of benefits was accompanied with some perceptions of risks:

*'It can take a bit of getting used to, takes time but I think at times it is scary because you are putting yourself out there doing new things... it means you are pushing yourself out of your comfort zone ... Looking back now as something that is working, its good it helps in that once you get into work you are presented with new things, I need you to do this, not would you like to try this'* (UOL-Alumnus-1).

## 6. Conclusion

The discourses in this paper present a narrative of students' views of student engagement, research skills, employability and curriculum design within research engaged teaching models. The students' perceptions of where they place themselves within these models are presented in the dialogue highlighting core values. To summarise, the core themes identified in the collaborative conversations all recognised the importance of partnerships and shared relationships between academic and students. The value of student voice was focal, with participation in student engagement opportunities positively impacting upon the confidence of students. Greater empowerment for students was also illustrated through such participation, with students seeing themselves as partners, and in some cases producers of knowledge (particularly through co-producing/presenting roles). Key values within the models, *SaPr*, *CC*, and *SaPa* all recognise collaboration as central, shown in the conversations with students identifying as being active participants.

The conversations highlight student engagement as a key part of practice, often representing *SaPa* rather than *SaPr* in reality. The application of the projects and their associated pedagogic models across *UCBC* and *UoL* importantly embrace similar principles in their examples of good practice. Looking to the future, it is with the acknowledgment of such core principles that the breadth offered by such models is clear. By adapting core values of collaboration, active participation and partnerships between academics and students opportunities can be facilitated in varied forms, adapted to different institutions.

The study concludes that the role for both Higher Education and CBHE institutions in facilitating such experiences is vital to investing in students as partners / producers, with both providing demonstrable benefits for both student and academics. The student narratives have illustrated how institutions can benefit from such investment when it comes to curriculum design and employability - two fundamental responsibilities of all contemporary Higher Education providers.

This project would not have been possible without the work and enthusiasm from the participants at *UoL* and *UCBC*. They have shown how conversations can provide greater understanding, with their experiences demonstrating how simply 'talking' results in voices that should be listened to for continuing pedagogical development.

## 7. Disclosure statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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