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PLAYING WITH PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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*Ko koe ki tena, ko ahau ki tenei kiwai o te kete
You at that and I at this handle of the basket*

Introduction

Partnership encapsulates the idea of each holding a handle of the basket (kete), both bringing knowledge and experience, and where the diverse needs of students are actively included. The increased diversity of student cohorts brings new ways to conceptualise partnership and to create knowledge. Therefore, when learning becomes fully immersed with teaching, the concept of *ako*, a Māori term that encapsulates both learning and teaching, comes alive. This means new ways of conceptualizing learning, having long shifted away from a transmission model of teaching and an acquisition approach to learning, to new ways of understanding learning through “intent participation” (Rogoff, 2012). We see learning communities who share responsibilities for learning and create new ways of knowing.

Working with students, employing a partnership model underpinned by principles of “respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility” (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014) foregrounds the importance of playing with ideas *with* students in order to maximize learning and teaching. Given that there is no template or ‘one way’ to work alongside and with students, or even how to conceptualize ‘partnership,’ each cohort of students brings new and exciting possibilities for their, and their teachers’, learning.

This collection of essays has come from a range of staff and students who have played around with partnership ideas at Massey University, Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa, in New Zealand. Massey University has approximately 30,883 students, where students can participate in courses internally (17,658 internal students) or through distance learning (13,796 studying at a distance). This includes about 5,000 international students, and over half the students are over 25 years old (54%) (Massey University Annual report, 2017). The university has three campuses (Auckland, Palmerston North, and Wellington) and a diverse teaching and student community, including non-traditional learners in higher education (e.g. first in family, mature students, second or third career qualifications), and a distinct bicultural and multicultural commitment.

This collection of essays includes those written together by teachers and students, distance and face-to-face, in both generic degree and applied professional programmes, and across discipline areas and faculties.

Background

The collection arose from a visit by Professor Alison Cook-Sather to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018, where she created an environment for colleagues within the university to play with partnership ideas and approaches in higher education. Colleagues and students across the university were invited to participate in seminars, workshops, and discussions at two of the campuses, to learn about partnership initiatives, and to share their experiences of partnership approaches. As identified in this collection, not all innovative ideas are possible, as university

policy and practices can create unintended obstacles to the enactment of partnership. All the essays integrate ideas around assessment, pedagogy, and the importance of teacher-student relationships and wellbeing.

The contexts for these essays are diverse and include undergraduate and postgraduate experiences, distance and face-to-face teaching, and programmes that are professional, or vocational in addition to individual courses. These include:

- Master of Environmental Management
- Agriculture – Farm Business Management
- Teaching Spanish as a language in an online environment
- Adult education
- Postgraduate specialist teaching programme
- Educational Psychology training programme
- New Zealand Defence Force
- Horticulture and Landscaping
- Critical Thinking course
- History
- Engineering and science

In [“ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING TOGETHER IN HIGHER EDUCATION.”](#) Roseanna Bourke, Claire Rainier, and Veerle de Vries (2018) explore assessment and learning together, as teacher and students. In an attempt to steer postgraduate students away from an eye on the grade and the marking criteria in assignments, this essay brings together the ideas of ways to encourage greater autonomy for the learner, while still maintaining the accountability mechanism required in universities. This paper uses three simple examples—(i) developing quality criteria; (ii) self-assessment; and (iii) ePortfolios—to show how these can be mechanisms to enable students to ‘access’ their learning, rather than focusing on being able to simply ‘assess’ their learning. Claire, one of the students at the time, noted: “I didn’t want to do the wrong thing. Then I realised there was no wrong, it was what I wanted to do,” and Veerle said, “I found it inspirational to see the other ones [self-assessments]. ...They are different and get you thinking in a different way.”

Within a Master of Environmental Management programme at Massey University, Karen Hytten, Eva Schröer-Merker, Sofia Denfeld, Lovisha Dhoomun, and Sylvia Villacis Lozada (2018) introduce a series of workshops for students to overcome some of the challenges associated with postgraduate study. In [“PROMOTING STUDENT PARTNERSHIP IN A POSTGRADUATE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME THROUGH THESIS RESEARCH AND WRITING WORKSHOPS.”](#) they describe how their partnership work commences with the ‘students’ voices,’ identified as often being overlooked in designing teaching approaches (Bovill et al., 2011). Hytten et al. explain how they can create the “opportunity to initiate and promote multiple multilateral relationships between students, their peers, and other academic and support staff, to complement the student-supervisor relationship.” Therefore, the results they found with the first approach to their initiative, was that both academic and wellbeing aspects for the students were inter-related and addressed. Partnership for students for them was not solely at an ‘academic’ level but personal as well.

Agriculture is another context explored in this collection. In [“STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO TEACH FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT IN NEW ZEALAND, OR: ‘CAN FINANCIALS BE SEXY?’”](#) Eva Schröer-Merker and Karen Hytten

(2018) wanted to engage students more intentionally and set out to make their financials curriculum *sexy*. Eva Schröder-Merker's students who were enrolled in a compulsory course that focussed on farm business management including financial tools, made it clear they found the material dry. They tended to do the basic minimum and with limited engagement. However, "changing content was not an option," so Eva decided to "get information on how my teaching practice could be enhanced. Thus, I turned to former students for feedback, and consulted with them about their learning." One of the first realizations was that although teachers focus on their own course content and requirements, students need to prioritize multiple demands across courses, and have multiple university, social, community, and sports-related demands. As a result of student consultation, Eva changed assessment approaches, and found "the new structure and processes around assignments seemed to work well for current students; overall assignment marks increased compared to last year."

In "[TEACHER-STUDENT PARTNERSHIPS IN A STUDY OF SPECIALIST TEACHERS' FULFILLMENT](#)," Holley-Boen (2018) explores her work with fourteen students who were practicing teachers and enrolled in a postgraduate specialist teaching programme. She worked with these teachers over two-years and explored their integration of life, teaching, and study. Holley-Boen was interested in "the ways teachers make sense of the concepts of professional identity, wellbeing, and authentic practice" and employed a collaborative and participatory approach to work in partnerships with these teachers gaining specialist teaching qualifications (i.e. her students). Her model of analysis included four key aspects: (i) Engage, (ii) Empower, (iii) Experience, and (iv) Enact (Duncan-Andrade, 2008). Through this lens, Holley-Boen explores 'stamina' for both her students and herself, where she identifies that partnership in practice takes considerable *intentional* effort and is transformative.

Elida Drenzo and Hayley Dustin (2018) write in "[LEARNING ONLINE: A SAFE AND ENGAGING PLACE](#)" about teaching Spanish as another language and one where the teaching and learning interactions with students are predominantly online. As a teacher (Drenzo) and student (Dustin) partnership, the essential issue of students experiencing positive emotional involvement is explored. For Drenzo, the essential aspect of her teaching is to address students' "attitude, motivation, and integration," and for Dustin as a student, her experience of participation in the class as "engaging, non-threatening, and encouraging" is a critical ingredient in being a student. This comes with an intentional focus on reducing student anxiety in order for teaching to be enhanced.

In the adult education context Linda Rowan and Warren Granger (2018) use "[PAYING IT FORWARD: PARTNERSHIP WITH STUDENTS IN ASSESSMENT](#)" to explore assessment choices within courses to recognise both diverse teaching contexts and students' autonomy and opportunity for empowerment. Both Rowan and Granger have intentionally played around with assessment and concluded that learners who learn to negotiate assessment come to see learning in different ways. As Granger, in his role as student, noted: "Whenever I was given the opportunity to try something out I used it, not to just pass the degree." For Rowan as a teacher, this provides an example of how teachers can support learners within their institutional context, and "pay the knowledge and experience gained forward."

When reading Eva Heinrich's (2018) essay, "[STUDENT AND STAFF AS PARTNERS IN LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT CONVERSATIONS](#)," the reader may feel they have wandered into an Alice in Wonderland world. At the risk of giving too much away, Heinrich comes up with a vision, her answer to student-staff partnership where students create personal learning plans, where conversations with students around course material is the norm, and where

students have schedules that meet their own needs, not the norm. Through her teaching within the school of engineering and advanced technology, she has vast and successful experience in conventional traditional approaches, but has realised a new vision and has the ideas to share. To her dismay, such imaginings are beyond a university budget, and her personal dissatisfaction with the financial, rather than student, hurdles will no doubt resonate with readers across the globe.

In **[“RECONCEPTUALISING HISTORY TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT TO MEET STUDENT EXPECTATION,”](#)** John Griffiths explores the reconceptualization of history teaching in a university context and the changing assessment tasks to meet student needs. As he notes: “I found myself reviewing my teaching in both an individual and collective context; circumstances that proved in the event to be quite fortuitous.” In the context of reforms of the programme he teaches in, Griffiths explores the role of partnership and raises a number of questions around the use of online technologies that teachers employ, but students engage with ‘when required.’ Aware of greater diversity in teaching, Griffiths identifies ‘power’ at play in teaching, and in his new course on *The Swinging Sixties* proposes exploring the involvement of students in course design. Through exploring other practices in the UK and beyond, Griffiths opens up the door of possibilities and plays with ideas that will bring in fresh partnership approaches in his teaching.

Students within a PGCert Tertiary Teaching and Learning course, write about partnership experiences within their own contexts: as a learning designer in the NZ Defence Force (Franklin, 2018) and a lecturer in horticulture and landscaping (Padfield, 2018). As a lecturer within a vocational course, Paul Padfield writes in **[“A REFLECTION OF STUDENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP IN A VOCATIONAL SETTING”](#)** about his exploration of student-teacher partnership for learning, and sees teaching as relational. In his role as a teacher, he explains his move away from a didactic approach towards a partnership approach to teaching, resulting in students gaining a greater sense of ownership for their learning *and* a closer collaboration with industry. As Padfield notes, this approach “enriched my own experience of teaching.” Franklin explores student-staff partnership within a New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) context; one that creates a complex and unique context requiring him to play with ideas that challenge the ‘expert model’ to empower the learner.

In his essay, **[“UNDERSTANDING PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE COLLEGE \(NZDC\),”](#)** Franklin explores the literature on partnership in order to understand possible ways to incorporate partnership approaches in the NZDF. As a learning designer he courageously challenged some established thinking in the area, and he personally found that students were more open to talk face-to-face (kanohi ki te kanohi) and have an open discussion than they were online. As with Padfield, albeit in a different context, Franklin argues that keeping close to industry and collaborating with them is an essential part of the partnership process. In this wider systems’ level focus, Franklin explains that “the collaboration we have with instructing staff and other Defence professionals” are important for the courses to reflect authentic workplace practices.

Jim Henman, Simon Herbert and Rebecca James discuss how they engage with students in a course, Tū Arohae: Critical Thinking in **[“DEVELOPING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AS A STEPPING-STONE TO PARTNERSHIP: TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CRITICAL THINKING.”](#)** Although identifying some barriers they face (a compulsory course and largely distance learning), they explain how the course challenges students from the start by not being a traditional model of a ‘banking system of education.’ In their essay, the course approach is

explained and the rationale for decisions is given. Throughout, Henman, Herbert, and James strive for flexibility in their teaching approach and have the student interests foregrounded. They believe this partnership approach with a large cohort of students is both an important imperative as well as achievable. Their playfulness with the material, approach, and engaging with students come through in their narration of their experience.

In this collection, we are presenting a range of ideas, assessment practices, and approaches—pedagogical approaches through student-staff partnerships that we are playing with—in attempts to create new possibilities to ensure our students enjoy learning as a creative endeavour, and in doing so, we are transformed as teachers and educators.

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