**SaP o’clock: Student-educator experiences with the Students-as-Partners (SaP) metaphor in Australian Business Schools**

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**Abstract**

In recent years, the academic discourse related to Higher Education has become more and more oriented towards the co-creation of teaching and learning experiences with students. As a result, the catchy metaphor ‘students-as-partners’ (SaP) is rapidly gaining more influence on teaching practice in Australian universities, earning its place in discussions, teaching philosophies and institutional strategies. SaP has worked well for some, but it should not be applied blindly, and it should be considered carefully in each context. During this session, educators will showcase different applications of SaP, and explore whether and when SaP is beneficial to the different stakeholders and contexts. Students will present their perspective on how SaP influenced their attitudes, learning outcomes and graduate qualities. Finally, the round table session will draw upon the discussion to outline tips and advice on how to successfully implement SaP.

Metaphors are a powerful way to support the practice of theorising, intervention in decision-making, and individuals’ sensemaking (Cornelissen et al., 2008). In this session, we will debate the influence of the ‘students-as-partners’ (SaP) metaphor that is rapidly becoming a catch-all phrase in academic discourse (Godbold et al., 2022) and has had a significant influence on our teaching practice in Australian universities. We will also discuss how SaP can be compared/contrasted to other common metaphors for teaching and learning relationships between students and educators, such as ‘students-as-customers’, ‘students-as-clients’ and ‘students-as-employees’. This session will bring together academics and students as co-presenters to contribute to the understanding of the SaP approach, its ups, downs and limitations, when and if it should be used and what is instrumental to its success.

According to Cook-Sather and colleagues (2014), the SaP metaphor highlights ‘a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis’ (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6–7). Cook-Sather and Matthews (2021) highlighted three ways in which educators can engage students as partners: to co-create the curriculum, to influence assessment approaches, and to co-create knowledge through research. Though this is useful, there are tensions between theorising and practicing the SaP approach (Freeman, 2016, Gravett et al., 2020; Matthews et al., 2018; White 2018).

In this session, we will discuss examples of teaching practices from two Australian Universities that showcase the SaP metaphor: the University of Sydney Business School and Swinburne University of Technology. It is an interactive session, as we would like to invite the attendees to also share their examples and reflect on how we can better develop SaP teaching and learning practices. The examples we plan to discuss will vary from a radical flipped classroom design that engaged students as partners in the co-creation of curriculum (Ishkova et al., 2021), to the co-development of assessment approaches, which are all aimed at inspiring deep learning via the co-creation of knowledge. In particular, we will discuss content co-creation and peer feedback, which are outlined below.

**Content co-creation**

This vision of SaP emerged to sustain student engagement during online delivery and target spaced and paced learning patterns to improve long-term memory retention. To inform digital strategy, pre-class surveys indicated that 83% of the first-year students were aged 24 years or under, 89% were multi-modal and visual learners, and 93.5% indicated that gamification quizzes and challenges interested them. Thus, the peer leadership strategy focused on piloting a mobile learning platform Quitch (2022) designed to improve student retention and boost performance through game-based techniques for content co-creation. Through the Quitch Educator Portal, students co-created questions and resources which could be easily reviewed by academic staff for quality assurance before being published, ensuring content accuracy. Access to the Educator Portal also allowed for tracking student engagement and assessing participation and performance (accuracy) in real time. It also allowed for sharing multi-modal peer-created resources from modern media sites such as TikTok and YouTube. These resources accompanied the weekly content and assisted with student understanding of that content. Student feedback was collected during live sessions and polls within MS Teams and actively implemented to adapt exam revision content, such as review materials and quizzes, to address student knowledge gaps.

Academically, students who opted to use the app received an average final grade of 23% higher than those who did not download the app. In conclusion, the students reported that this experience provided a student-partnership exemplar at a time when coming together was more important than ever through the COVID-19 remote learning period. The group created an intentional experience that flourished in part because their subject convenor had the curiosity, willingness and generosity of spirit to try something different. Beyond the academic benefits, the students enrolled in the unit reported a sense of ownership and ability to improve communication skills and content creation while fostering a sense of community to help stay connected. They reported that they have learned that meaningful connections can be achieved in a virtual world and that the new gamified technologies such as Quitch introduce an exciting and effective means for positive learning behaviours and accordingly improve academic performance (Wust et al., 2021)

**Peer-to-peer feedback**

Most educators would relate to the challenges of students complaining about free riders, poor communication and conflict in group assignments. As a result, students become dissatisfied or have a negative experience of teamwork, especially when it comes to the free rider and social loafing effects. Researchers and educators recognise that one of the ways to remediate free riding challenges is to use peer feedback (Ohland et al., 2012) as a tool to allow educators to gain insights into the contributions of each member and thus fairly assign grades according to the students’ contributions (Chen & Lou, 2004; Fellenz, 2006). However, the use of peer feedback as a decision tool in determining students’ grades has been criticised because such an approach discourages students from providing an honest assessment and feedback as their ratings would influence their final grade (Sridharan et al., 2018). More importantly, this approach limits students from learning how to engage with feedback and provide objective evaluative judgment (Boud et al., 2018).

The work by Ibarra-Sáiz, Rodríguez-Gómez and Boud (2020) concludes that involving students as partners in co-designing assessments, in this case, in the delivery of peer feedback and ratings, will help to enhance students’ self-regulated learning and their ability to engage with feedback. The peer feedback is designed to focus on eliciting students to craft constructive feedback for their peers on how they can better enhance their team contribution and teamwork skills. Instead of using the peer feedback to determine students’ marks, marks are awarded based on the quality feedback that they provide to their peers. Students were tasked with the responsibility to help their peers understand the strengths and limitations of their teamwork behaviours. Hence, this increases the responsibilities and autonomy of each team member to help their peers develop and improve their teamwork skills and experience. This also increases students’ autonomy and freedom to determine the focus of how they would like to improve their teamwork skills and experience. This means that each student assesses and decides how they would like each team member to demonstrate good teamwork skills, suggesting specific ways that each member can improve aspects of less favourable teamwork behaviours. In addition, a double-loop learning design (Argyris, 2002) is used to allow students the opportunity to engage with peer-feedback in the first loop to improve their teamwork skills and experience for their peers in the second loop when working on their team assignment.

Overall, this double-loop pedagogical design and a student-centred approach of involving UG and PG students (between 60 to 160 students) in crafting constructive feedback to improve teamworking skills not only creates unique and customised feedback that empowers the team to improve their teamworking experience but also reduces the workload of the coordinator or tutor.

Another exemplar of our SaP feedback practice is the pandemic-inspired gamification of peer feedback “Feedback hugs” in UG and PG courses (up to 160 students each), which received the Student Relationship Engagement System (SRES) “Relationship rich education” inaugural award (SRES, 2021). Students receive access to the photo-enhanced online class lists where they are incentivised by a small portion of participation mark (0.5 points out of 10 possible) to anonymously provide weekly appreciative feedback to peers who influenced their learning. The educator monitors the system and also provides behavioural feedback to students where possible, aiming to a) transform the ‘Listen to me!’ behaviour of extrinsically motivated students and those students who cannot tolerate silence and tend to fill every pause with their voice into them saying ‘[Name], you made a good point during our small group discussion, would you like to share it with the class?’ and b) cheer up shy contributors. When individualistic high achievers realise that a High Distinction for participation in this class requires helping others succeed, they are willing to go above and beyond to engage their peers. It creates a support network and builds psychological safety in classes, develops a higher degree of self-efficacy for everyone involved (Bandura, 1977), and gently evolves students’ employability skills. It also makes classes engaging, insightful and inclusive, allowing students to form long-lasting connections and friendships even when studying remotely. Additionally, tasking students to reflect on the feedback (or lack thereof), the educator perpetuates a semester-long action learning cycle that helps students develop a lifelong learner mindset (Yeganeh & Kolb, 2012). Evidence from students’ exit interviews showed that this behaviour change extends beyond the current classroom into the rest of their university teamwork and workplace communication. According to students’ testimonials during international educational events 0.5 to1.5 years after the semester, peer feedback became an insightful reality check as it allowed them to see if their contribution had an impact on others (Ishkova, 2022).

In considering the advantages a SaP approach offers, optimising its adoption across faculty is paramount. But how do we pragmatically lead the adoption of this innovation across our academic cohort? There will always be academics with a variety of motivations and creative innovations but SaP may not be for everyone. In addition, adoption of innovations can take time to upskill. Hence, this can be seen by some as another ‘fad’ that is ‘taking time away from my research’. To conclude this session, we will explore the ‘osmotic’ approaches to the adoption of new innovations, that can be more attractive to reticent faculty members, such as Communities of Practice, Co-teaching and team teaching.

**Agenda:**

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| **What is happening** | **Who is involved** | **How long** |
| SaP Academic Discourse | First author | 5 min |
| SaP Successes and Challenges | Facilitation session to showcase some examples from co-authors and invited students-partners | 20 min |
| Community of Practice: Ideas from the Attendees | Interactive session with small group discussions. Each group can decide what they would like to discuss. Example topics include what it means to partner with our students, challenges in the changing model, sharing experiences of SaP, or how they might revise their own classes to try a SaP experiment, the potential of SaP in counteracting academic dishonesty and the disruption ChatGPT brings to traditional assessments in 2023. | 20 min |
| Debrief and Knowledge Sharing | Facilitators and attendees – one person per group shares the highlights of their group’s discussion. | 20 min |
| Q&A and Concluding remarks | Facilitators and attendees | 10 min |

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