

The Power of Partnership: A Book Review

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Healey *et al.* (2014) argue that partnership in learning and teaching intertwines across multiple scholarly topics enabling active participation in quality enhancement and can be understood as both a personal and contextual experience. Thus, the opportunity to consider how pedagogy changes in higher education (HE) can help develop partnership communities and meet learners' growing expectations in developing their skills with the available and highly competitive opportunities, despite the constant challenges and barriers across the sector. Edited by Lucy Mercer-Mapstone (University of Sydney) and Sophia Abbot (Elon University), *The Power of Partnership* is a much-needed book uncovering the multiple interpretations of what partnership means.

In contrast to other works where keywords such as 'partnership, learning and teaching, pedagogical, development' are used repeatedly in various combinations, this book's title emphasises the importance of the power dynamic between staff and students in reforming the HE system. It offers a clear yet vigorous interpretation of partnership through three themes: introducing the power and politics of partnerships (Section 1); the intersectionalities of understanding the spaces in which staff and student partnerships occur (Section 2); and broadening the context to better situate the growth of staff-student partnerships across the HE sector (Section 3).

According to the authors, this book aims to be "*a deliberate act of disruption*" (p. 8), focusing on several multifaceted areas within academia. Nevertheless, this book offers a clear definition of 'partnership' from the first page. Therefore, the editors' introductory dialogue, '(re)envision' what partnership means, reflecting individuals' vulnerability and expressing how 'power' emerged as the core theme in the HE space. Hence, power is a substantial aspect contributing to the "*radical transformation through these connections across differences*" (p. 9). Thus, reflecting on personal awareness and transformation through the lens of co-authorship allows both staff and students to examine traditional power structures within HE.

The fifteen well-conceptualised chapters emphasise that partnership is a political process, which can counterbalance the challenges of maintaining collaborative and equitable relationships in a pedagogical setting. It provides an informative yet thought-provoking experience for the reader, especially for students like me, whose skills and experiences have developed from partnership opportunities. Described as 'working against the grain', partnership experiences provoke particular challenges for pedagogical scholarship and questioning the meaning underlying those relationships means giving weight to each voice (p. 15). Breadth is achieved through the multi-national perspective, honouring 51 authors' voices from 21 institutions and six countries. For authenticity, terminologies and spellings were kept using the authors' perspective.

The depth covered is just as striking. The authors' iterative reflections on their partnership experiences provide different lenses of representation for positive change, framing new and existing values, and how students can embed themselves within the organisation, rather than being a 'wedding crasher' (p. 76). Therefore, the students' values and experiences engender a feeling of responsibility and enable them to "*pivot in and out of the role as the*

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"expert" (p. 230). Transforming the HE sector through traditional and radical partnerships also leads to personal growth (Chapters 13 and 14). Thus, demonstrating that power and identity are at the heart of the pedagogical partnership story. Though this story could be 'messy', this nevertheless enables creative spaces from different disciplines and experiences to come together for further conversations. (Chapter 7).

This book provides a platform to increase accessibility for staff and students and helps create a space for different meaningful conversations, uncovering students' voices and their emotional and vulnerability experiences, rather than just publishing for 'academic rigour'. Therefore, it would appeal to people across the HE sector as it unpacks the complexity, challenges, and emotional aspects of partnership roles. The authors shared how this book pushes the "boundaries of traditional academic formats," and strives to remove the "bumps, the curves, the perfect imperfections," (p. 3), by celebrating partnership experiences and embracing imperfections. Furthermore, the student voice can challenge the traditional power dynamics within institutions. The authors encourage readers to address questions such as: "can students truly be equal when issues of power, privilege, status as staff or students in understanding those relationships and activities?" (Chapter 1); "do we understand the value of partnerships?" (Chapter 13); or "do partnerships need to be successful to be transformative?" (Chapter 14), which are fundamental to any comprehensive understanding of institutional engagement.

This book employs techniques outside of traditional academic publications – for example, by sharing the realities of partnership work through poetry, including conversational dialogues between authors, and skipping the text-only approach altogether by providing illustrations of partnership experiences, in place. Yet, however intuitive and provocative this book may be, it appears to lack a firm understanding of how outcomes are achieved through valued partnerships. Nevertheless, the questions posed at the end of each chapter are useful in encouraging us to reflect on what partnership means.

The Power of Partnership aims to bend or break traditional academic moulds." (p. 11) The partnership field is constantly evolving, and we need to understand it from the perspective of those who have participated in partnerships themselves. Through the tensions, challenges, and emotions of partnerships, there is a sense of urgency to address the fundamental power imbalance. However, developing a language to speak about and convey the meaning of partnership is a significant part of the HE revolution. As Mercer-Mapstone and Abbot ask, "so what new opening do you now see in your life for partnership?" (p. 239).

This book successfully brings together existing literature on HE partnerships, identifies key problems, and shares the realities of partnership work whilst including the deep values of the community and providing a space for students to voice their experiences. Ultimately, the authors call for future partnerships to embrace 'imperfections' and build upon the wealth of existing projects. Mercer-Mapstone and Abbot's *The Power of Partnership* will undoubtedly be a powerful source for partnership research.

References:

Healey, M; Abbi, F; Harrington, K. (2014). *Engagement through Partnership: Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*. York, UK: Higher Education Academy. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher> (Accessed 10 May 2022).

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