Co-creation of the curriculum: challenging the status quo to embed partnership

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Introduction

The idea of students co-creating the higher education curriculum has become popular because it is student-centred and promotes more active engagement by both students and staff in the learning and teaching experience. Over the past thirty years, the concepts of student-centred learning (Cevero and Wilson, 2001; Entwistle, 1992), self-directed and autonomous learning (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991), and student involvement and engagement (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2010; Kuh *et al*, 2005) have risen in prominence within the higher education and adult learning sectors since they help contribute to student success. Each of these pedagogies can improve students' development of self-authorship and create the conditions for transformational learning experiences (Barnett and Coate, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Johansson and Felten, 2014). 'Co-creation of the curriculum', a new term that has arisen in the last decade, draws on and extends these pedagogies to develop students' and staff members' shared ownership, responsibility and power over learning and teaching processes.

The curriculum is rarely defined in the higher education context and, even when it is, there are many different interpretations (Crosling, Thomas, and Heagney, 2008; Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006; Lattuca and Stark, 2009). Drawing on the work of Lattuca and Stark (2009), Barnett and Coate (2004), and Crosling *et al* (2008), I take a broad view of the higher education curriculum and conceptualise it as teaching and learning plans that can include both course-level and programme-level content, structure, delivery, assessment and learning outcomes that will be achieved through interaction and collaboration between students and teachers. Furthermore, as in the work of Dewey (1998) and Kuh (2010), the curriculum must be responsive, dynamic and adapted to each cohort of students, so that it is engaging and relevant to their needs. However, this does not usually happen in a profound way in traditional forms of learning and teaching in higher education, especially within the context of the massification of higher education (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991).

In my research, I examine how co-creation of the curriculum is changing the nature of student-teacher relationships by embedding partnership practices and challenging the status quo of traditional power dynamics in the Scottish higher education sector. I define co-creation of the curriculum as a process of student engagement that encourages students and staff members to become partners, each with a voice and a stake in curriculum development. There have been numerous small-scale, grassroots efforts of staff members to implement co-creation into the curriculum in the US, Scotland, England, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand (Bovill, 2014; Bovill, Morss and Bulley, 2009; Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten, 2014; Croft, 2013). The topic of co-creation of the curriculum is currently still emerging because it tends to occur in pockets of innovation in the higher education sector, but there has been growing interest in the concept during the last few years in particular (Cook-Sather *et al*, 2014; HEA, 2015). My research explores with staff and student participants what challenges they overcome and benefits they discover as they participate in co-creation of the curriculum and embed partnership in higher education.

Methodology

In my research, I provide both an explanatory account of co-creation of the curriculum and an interpretivist account of how participants challenge the status quo and work towards embedding partnership in the Scottish higher education sector. To learn about the nuanced nature of students' and staff members' conceptions of these complex topics, I employed qualitative research methods. I identified individual staff members at Scottish universities (through their publications, conference presentations or by word of mouth) who facilitate opportunities for co-creation of the curriculum with their students. These individuals identified through criterion sampling included ten staff members from four Scottish universities with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews. Snowball sampling was also employed, with these staff members' identifying ten students who were interviewed subsequently.

The identified instances of co-creation of the curriculum within the Scottish higher education sector include three broad categories. In the first category, experienced students (who have studied a subject area) work with staff members to design and/or deliver components of a course curriculum for future or less experienced students. Examples include experienced students working with staff to develop educational resources, plan a new introductory course or conduct peer teaching embedded into the curriculum (and into the assessment for the experienced students). In the second category of examples, current students on the course work with staff to co-create the curriculum as the course takes place, including co-created content, pedagogy, assessment and/or grading criteria. In the third category, students not on the course act as consultants who aid staff in curriculum enhancement activities. Their role is similar to that of a course representative or a student reviewer in that these student consultants give staff feedback on how to improve the curriculum, including how classes are taught, the virtual learning environment and opportunities for student engagement.

The staff participants in this research had a wide range of experience with co-creation of the curriculum, having facilitated co-creation with their students for between one and twenty years of their career. They came from diverse subject areas including: education, psychology, politics, service learning, geosciences, environmental biology, medicine and veterinary medicine. The majority of staff were mid-career or late-career educational professionals. Like the staff, the student demographic came from diverse subject areas in the social sciences, sciences, and medical sciences. Whilst all student interviewees had participated in co-creation of the curriculum activities as undergraduate students, when they were interviewed, two were third-years, five were fourth-years, two were taught Masters students and one was an alumna. The majority of student participants were of a traditional student age, but two were mature students, with a rate of participation in co-creation of the curriculum that appears to be significantly higher than that of mature students participating in Scottish higher education in general.

The interviews with staff lasted between forty-five and 157 minutes, whereas the interviews with students lasted between thirty-five and seventy-five minutes. It was apparent from the staff response rate and the average interview length that they were proud to share their innovative work to co-create the curriculum with students. The student participants were all happy to have had the opportunity to co-create the curriculum with staff and many saw participating in an interview as a way of giving back to their teacher whilst also advancing academic knowledge in this area. The student participants tended to be highly-engaged,

self-motivated students who valued opportunities for personal and professional development.

During the semi-structured interviews with co-creation of the curriculum practitioners and their students, I explored with participants their experiences of working in partnership and their beliefs concerning the purposes of higher education. The interviews focused on their perceptions of effective teaching and student engagement, how they conceptualise co-creation of the curriculum, why they engage in it and what purposes of higher education they believe it will achieve. With permission from each participant, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcripts of the extensive qualitative data were then produced and analysed using elements of a grounded theory approach to identify themes emerging from the data.

Challenges in co-creation of the curriculum

In interviews, both student and staff participants reflected on various challenges they have encountered whilst engaging in co-creation of the curriculum. Some participants highlighted these challenges at length, with the aim of being transparent and helping colleagues (who might consider trying this form of teaching) have a better understanding of the structural and ideological challenges before engaging in it. Three key challenges were identified as themes emerging from the data: 1) responsibility of academic staff and students; 2) bureaucracy, time, and effort; and 3) resistance as they try to challenge the status quo within higher education. These themes are interrelated, and each will each be discussed below.

1.Responsibility of academic staff and students

Each co-creation of the curriculum project is different, tailored to the needs and strengths of the staff and students who are participating and their academic context. Some staff and students have tried to strive for equality in sharing power democratically whilst co-creating the curriculum. However, both staff and students recognised that academic staff normally need to take the lead on these projects. For instance, Staff Participant 3 stated:

> *"There is still always a natural leader in a project, and here it would always be led by staff… I don't think that we can ever fully share power with students. I designed this project so I would always have more power in it in the sense that I was creating its direction…"*

Resulting from university-level and national quality assurance standards, course proposal and approval processes often take place far ahead of courses running. These processes will lead to staff designing initial course curricula plans. Even if they try to leave as much room as possible for working in partnership with students to co-create elements of the course, staff need to lead on the curriculum development and ultimately have greater responsibility even if they aim for co-creation processes to be democratic.

Furthermore, some participants emphasised the need for staff to manage the co-creation activity. Even though co-creating the curriculum can be a more collaborative form of curriculum development, Staff Participant 8 suggested:

> *"…I think it does require someone in the end, who makes the decisions, and that is what we found with this course. With the learning contract we eventually had to put a thing in which said 'if we can't reach a decision, the course organiser will decide'*

because we were getting to the point where we were too democratic and we were sitting around and saying 'well whatever everybody thinks'… I think there still has to be a kind of line manager in these kind of partnerships. That is what we had to grapple with. It is a lot of cooks, or herding cats as someone in the school teaching committee described it. Not quite, but yes."

This participant recognises the time-consuming process of establishing collaborative work (which will be explored more in the next section) and suggests implementing a learning contract to clarify to all participants the relationship and ultimate decision-maker. Similarly, students acknowledge that staff need to take the lead in course organisation and management. For example, Student Participant 9 said:

"In terms of co-creation, I think of course the staff need to lead it because it is their job, they are paid for it, they know how to do it, but I think there is definitely an element for students to come in."

Both students and staff participants have shared power in curriculum decision-making, but they have acknowledged the leadership role that staff take on when organising a course, as well as their subject expertise and quality assurance responsibilities.

It is important that staff who participate in co-creation of the curriculum do so whilst fully embracing the principles of partnership: respect, reciprocity and shared responsibility (Cook-Sather *et al*, 2014). Therefore, students and staff who work in true partnership will take time to develop trust and shared dialogue about learning and teaching aims, so that staff are not being (or appearing to be) lazy or shirking responsibilities. For example, Staff Participant 9 shares frustrations:

"I got quite cross at what I thought was a bit lazy [co-creation], as if anything goes: 'Hey, students will suddenly just do this'. They may do things that are superficially interesting but don't provide the building blocks for a deeper understanding of the discipline…"

Whilst co-creation of the curriculum has become a popular term and a way to promote student engagement, students will recognise if staff promote this engagement in a superficial way, such as if staff are trying to 'share' with students their workload in course management, assessment and/or feedback. Staff leading co-creation projects need to frame their work carefully so as not to be perceived as shirking these responsibilities, as Staff Participant 1 describes:

"A lot of it just goes back to making sure that we don't look like we are just being really lazy, 'there you go, create your own curriculum'… We do need to throw stuff back [to students] and help people understand that it's good for them to lead the engagement part as well."

Although, in practice, staff participating in co-creation do share responsibility for the course and learning outcomes with students who take on increased responsibilities in these scenarios, it is important for student understanding, engagement and satisfaction that staff and students build trust in their relationship. Therefore, staff should adequately explain how co-creation of the curriculum is different from other curricula and why they are choosing to do things differently.

Staff and students participating in co-creation of the curriculum projects have recognised how, by the nature of this partnership work, students take on increased responsibility and ownership over their own learning and that of their peers. Staff Participant 6 shows how this can be a challenge:

> "I do think they find it difficult at first because it is more democratic and it's them taking responsibility."

When students are more actively involved in democratic decision-making affecting the learning and teaching experience for themselves and their peers, students need to adjust to this. For example, Student Participant 7 stated:

> "I also learned a bit more about responsibility. I think having that close interaction, that close engagement with professors, you're held accountable for more. …I think there was less room for me to casually do it or just pass by, which in other classes that's easier to do if there's less accountability and trust that's made, that bond."

Whilst comparing more passive learning in lecture-based classes to her experience in co-creating the curriculum with staff, this student emphasised how she developed shared ownership over the course by working in a learning environment characterised by trust and respect. Although this could be challenging at first, many students found this experience to be extremely rewarding (as will be further explored in the section below on benefits of co-creation of the curriculum).

2. Bureaucracy, time and effort

Almost all staff and student participants recognised the increased time and effort they devoted to co-creation of the curriculum compared with what they might have contributed to more traditional courses and some staff also highlighted having to overcome bureaucratic obstacles. Staff Participant 5 shared some of these challenges:

> "…we've come up against similar issues with silly things, I say 'just silly things like timetabling' but they are real issues of timetabling so that people from different schools can come, and people doing things differently in different schools, and there's no way for people who want to swap teaching hours… [because] there are no mechanisms to transfer hours from one school to the other. There are bureaucratic things like I think a lot of co-created courses should by their nature be interdisciplinary, but then you come up against things like 'which school is going to host the exam board?' …[T]hese are really big things that can sink it."

This staff member reflects on how traditional university structures and processes have made difficult the process of engaging in co-creation of the curriculum to allow for deeper learning and engagement in interdisciplinary work. His use of the phrase 'silly things' highlights his frustration with these challenges, which he feels should be simple to overcome, although they pose real threats to the success of his initiatives.

Overcoming these structural and procedural challenges as well as planning for and engaging in the co-creation projects themselves is time-consuming for participants. For instance, staff participants mentioned set-up costs to plan for every contingency and different ways the course could evolve based on collective decisions made with students during the course. Furthermore, to overcome the challenges of different student responsibilities, they described the time involved to explain both the rationale behind co-creation of the curriculum and staff and student responsibilities which were different from those in more traditional courses. For instance, Student Participant 2 explained:

> *"There's definitely much more time that went into it, so obviously the meetings took time to decide what we were going to do before we did it."*

Through the collaborative nature of co-created courses, participants take more time to discuss their plans and to implement them, whilst also giving formative feedback to each other as their work evolves. Furthermore, Staff Participant 8 elaborated:

> *"For me it has been so time intensive, and I didn't think it would be because we don't meet every week… [A] lot of it has been informal formative feedback, rather than formal feedback… I have had individual consultations with each of them. It is so time intensive. It is really time intensive… I think that I hadn't anticipated that. I actually thought it would be less time, because they would be doing more independent work."*

The repetition in this statement certainly reinforces the participant's surprise at the time-consuming nature of co-creation of the curriculum!

Although it was clear from both staff and student participants that co-creation of the curriculum involves more time than traditional courses, they nevertheless felt that the time and effort required were more rewarding and that they were intrinsically motivated. For example, Student Participant 10 reflected:

> *"I guess it was more work so in that respect I had to dedicate more time to it. But it felt like less energy was taken up doing it because it was more enjoyable."*

Similarly, Staff Participant 7 said:

> *"I suppose the negative side is, because I find it rewarding and fun, I do tend to put probably too much into it and care about it too much... students have told me that they appreciate the sheer amount of individual time that I give."*

Thus, though one challenge of co-creation of the curriculum is that it can take more time and effort, many participants do find it extremely rewarding, which often leads them to spend even more time working in partnership together.

3. Challenging the status quo within higher education

Some staff participants who co-create the curriculum with their students take on risk and challenge the status quo by being more progressive in their approach to learning and teaching. Many participants highlighted how the UK's Research Excellence Framework had placed an emphasis on staff members' research and publication rate. Staff Participant 5 stated:

> *"For lecturers, they don't really have the time and space to be developing a lot around their courses and they're usually recycling the same lectures every year because that's all they've got time to do. They're so pushed in terms of the research and other things like admin that they haven't really got a lot of space to be thinking outside the box and doing other things. …I do think it is quite a conservative environment and that's something we need to change a bit. …I think with this university we're struggling a bit with our identity: we've always been really good at research now we're trying to improve teaching. It's one thing saying something [about co-creation] but it's another thing doing it and doing it properly which is the hard part."*

This participant highlights the importance of research in his university, and how any focus on teaching – and especially co-creation of the curriculum – challenges the conservative view that a world-class university will be strong in both research and teaching. Staff members tend to be recognised for the time and effort they put into their research, which was previously prioritised. Although this participant's university is now trying to excel in both research and teaching and the rhetoric about teaching is changing to value student/staff partnerships, he points out that it is not an easy task to change an institution's identity and implement co-creation of the curriculum.

Some staff members are indifferent to co-creation of the curriculum, some may be interested although they don't have the time to dedicate to it and others actively oppose the idea. For instance, Student Participant 9 shared:

> *"…there has been some resistance [from staff] and some quite open patronising behaviours… Definitely one of the things that really bugs me is the fact that sometimes there is this prejudice about students that 'no, they are not going to work in partnership, it is not going to work because students don't want it'. You don't know what they want!"*

This student shares her frustrations about staff members who make assumptions about what their students think, disrespectfully believing that they are not able to work in partnership to co-create the curriculum. Initiatives promoting the 'student voice', including student representation and co-creation projects, have empowered her to speak out about these staff members' prejudices and identify their fear of partnership work. Similarly, Staff Participant 3 stated:

> *"Some [colleagues] were cynical and they asked why they should be made vulnerable to student opinion. But students' genuine opinions are underrated… [so] our project was running against the norm. Many staff still want to think that they are the 'true' expert, and some thought the project was wishy-washy."*

Several participants also stated that their colleagues felt that co-creation of the curriculum might make them feel vulnerable because they worried it would mean giving up their status as an academic subject expert or sharing decision-making power in the classroom with students. However, participants in co-creation of the curriculum may well view their students' abilities differently, overcoming the challenge by fully respecting and valuing students' contributions in order to improve the learning and teaching experience.

Many participants discussed the fact that it will take time for Scottish universities to change before they incorporate co-creation of the curriculum on a larger scale across Scotland. One element of this is buy-in. For instance, Staff Participant 2 reflected on the challenges of developing trust and carving out time to facilitate more complex large-course and programme-level co-creation of the curriculum:

> *"I think it would be lovely to do this in a much more profound way across the University but it's a real struggle, partly because of institutional inertia…"*

Furthermore, Staff Participant 7 said:

> *"I'd say it's definitely something worthwhile but we've got a very long way to go before we convince people to buy into it… I think that the PGCert is going to be a great help and it's going to teach the new lecturers, and then the old ones can just retire and be got rid of; universities will change."*

This participant notes the changing nature of the Scottish higher education sector as it promotes student engagement in its learning and teaching practices. She has hope that she will succeed in convincing her colleagues of the benefits of co-creation of the curriculum (which we shall explore in the next section). She sees staff professional development programmes such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice as one way forward and waiting for some of the most resistant staff to retire as another.

Many participants suggested that co-creation of the curriculum is extremely valuable as one part of the degree programme, but that it is not only difficult but also inappropriate to implement it in all courses. For instance, Staff Participant 9 stated:

> *"I would see it as part of a portfolio, part of what you would do but not the whole part and not a part that you can just whip out… I do think we've got to be really careful about managing student expectations, about providing a quality experience, and about being able to scale things up."*

This participant recognises the importance of managing students' expectations and communicating why they will experience different forms of teaching and assessment across their programme of study to receive a holistic, high-quality experience. Therefore, staff and students who do overcome challenges of working in partnership to co-create the curriculum tend to incorporate it as one part of the degree programme in honours years as a 'capstone' experience.

Benefits of embedding co-creation of the curriculum

All students and staff participating in co-creation of the curriculum highlighted many benefits of their partnership work. Whilst they were self-selecting in their willingness to participate in co-creation of the curriculum and, moreover, to choose to participate in this research and share their experiences, they were transparent about the challenges they had overcome and the profound benefits they experienced whilst participating in this innovative form of learning and teaching. Three key benefits will be explored below: 1) shared ownership and engagement in the learning community, 2) student satisfaction and development and 3) staff satisfaction and development.

1. Shared ownership and engagement in the learning community

Many participants highlighted that participating in co-creation of the curriculum makes the relationship between students and staff more 'meaningful' and 'authentic' for participants as they learn from each other and could see tangible benefits within a safe learning community. For instance, Staff Participant 4 said:

> *"There is a fantastic synergy and collaboration with the students who are doing the writing [for new educational materials], and that's very rewarding for staff – striking up some really intimate academic relationships."*

Participating in co-creation of the curriculum can be an intense experience of working in partnership and challenging each other in a respectful manner to advance the academic pursuits of the collaboration. This can be a very different learning and teaching experience that students and staff are not used to. Staff Participant 8 highlighted many of these new experiences:

> *"…for me it was quite helpful to hear from them what they thought was a good classroom, versus what I might have thought was a good classroom. …They were telling me things like they had never done this kind of group work… [and] some of them had never engaged one-on-one with a lecturer in this way and that, for me, was quite eye opening. …I think it took a certain amount of trust on both of our parts, and the trust has paid off. …I think they have felt they are part of a community and a friendship and a task, which has been quite good. …I think also it is much more rewarding. I would much rather do this kind of teaching where we are all engaged."*

This individual highlights how participating in co-creation of the curriculum was a new experience for students to work *with* staff, and it was new for her to develop such a learning community where students and staff participated in conversations about how to implement effective learning and teaching. These conversations were based on trust that facilitated engagement and shared ownership of the task at hand within their learning community.

Many participants also emphasised how they facilitated this safe environment, based on trust and respect, for co-creation to take place. Staff Participant 9 reflected:

> *"I think a learning environment that we create is usually respectful… It's about providing support and an enabling environment but also a challenging one because actually we're about taking your views and then looking at them around in 360°, imagining different perspectives. I would say that that's one part of the environment, and allowing people to say silly things without feeling that they have to crawl away."*

The majority of staff and student participants felt that they had a shared responsibility for student engagement, in that staff needed to create an environment based on trust and respect which would invite students' active participation and engagement. Many participants made the point that the traditional learning and teaching environment has promoted the idea of the staff member as the expert and that often in these circumstances students can be intimidated to ask what they are afraid are silly questions; conversely, many participants pointed out that this is not the case in effective co-creation projects. Student Participant 10 said, *"You're more comfortable and feel safer"* in this type of learning community. Furthermore, Student Participant 4 felt that:

> *"…everyone was in the same boat. Even though they were the specialists in this area it was nice to know there wasn't an 'us and them' divide."*

In these ways, a strong benefit of co-creation of the curriculum is that it creates shared ownership between students and staff and it brings them together within a respectful learning community where there are no judgements made about perceived silly questions.

Additionally, many participants noted that co-creating the curriculum promoted a dialogue about effective teaching and bridged the gap between students and staff. Participants spoke of the power of allowing students to see into what Student Participant 4 called the *"black box of teaching"*. For example, Staff Participant 10 stated,

> *"…the more you engage students in activities like this, the more they empathise with the role that academics play. That comes back to my thing about bridging the gap between staff and students, bringing the communities closer together."*

Similarly, Student Participant 3 said, *"It allows the students to understand the human side of academic staff"*. This, in and of itself, is powerful, but also leads to many additional benefits. Staff Participant 9 reflected:

> *"…the thing that had never occurred to me before, which maybe shows how daft I am, was that showing your workings to students makes a huge difference. I probably had taught a little bit about learning styles before, but never that much, and it had never occurred to me to talk to students about basic pedagogic principles. …Actually those couple of weeks on pedagogy had a transformational effect on students: it really made them incredibly active and reflexive. I just thought, 'I've been missing a trick for a couple of decades on that!"*

Few teachers appear to involve students in pedagogic discussions about effective learning and teaching practices since those decisions are usually left solely to academic staff members. However, this interviewee shows the powerful benefits of having these conversations during co-creation of the curriculum to allow students to empathise with staff, reflect on effective pedagogy and engage in both teaching and learning practices.

2. Student satisfaction and development

Many interviewees highlighted how students become much more engaged in the learning experience when they share ownership of the learning and teaching experience. Like Staff Participant 9 above, other interviewees cited the transformational potential of co-creation for students who are gaining new experiences and applying their knowledge and skills in new contexts. For example, Staff Participant 2 stated that, in co-created courses:

> *"…students have a chance to fail, and fail kind of creatively. That is an element of co-creation because I guess students have a lot of freedom to design their own projects and to go away, collect data, and discover that it doesn't work but then to go back and learn from that."*

By challenging traditional rhetoric in universities that failing is a negative experience, this participant shows the powerful benefits of learning from failure or struggle within the context of a reflective, safe learning community. Similarly, other participants suggested that students

learn much more from the active experience of thinking on their feet whilst trying the new, challenging experience of co-creation that can be outside their comfort zone at first.

The student participants referred to similar benefits of satisfaction with the co-creation experience and the opportunity for both personal and professional development. Student Participant 10 stated:

> *"We knew that they were going to use that [our work] to create a really great course. …You feel like what you're learning is really relevant to your life rather than just something you can put in your short-term memory and forget about once the exam is over or an essay is over… I know that people will be benefiting from it in years to come, so I guess you feel more important."*

This student feels that co-creating the curriculum is beneficial and has helped her develop transferable skills that are relevant outside the university context; also, that the experience has been the more meaningful and authentic because her contributions will benefit other students. This helps her feel valued and 'more important' since her views are being respected by staff and she has power in shared decision-making processes. Similarly, Student Participant 2 said:

> *"I think it's being treated with respect in that way really gives students a kind of satisfaction from the course and know that their views are actually being listened to because they're being treated like adults. I think there's a sense of empowerment from it so you really leave feeling that you can make a difference."*

This participant also felt more valued and respected by staff when participating in co-creation of the curriculum than she did under traditional teaching conditions. Like the other student participant, she feels empowered to make a difference as an active citizen within the university and beyond in the wider community.

3. Staff satisfaction and development

It is not only students who find it rewarding to participate in co-creation of the curriculum initiatives; many staff members also reported how they enjoyed this experience and developed from it. Staff Participant 4 felt that, *"It's a lot of fun to be involved with, and it's quite rewarding".* Similarly, Staff Participant 5 felt that it was a positive experience since *"[t]he students are giving something back to the community, and the community is getting something out of it"*. Like the student above, she also feels that co-creation has the potential to affect and improve the wider community. It can be rewarding for staff to see students' contributions and achievements in this way.

Furthermore, many staff members spoke about how engaging in co-creation of the curriculum helps them to contribute to educational research and enhances their professional development. Staff Participant 10 said:

> *"I think it is learning something and gaining something that you couldn't have gained without their insight... We have also had them presenting their work at conferences and things like that."*

Participants like this staff member have presented their work alongside their student co-creators to contribute to educational research and they also felt that students bring new perspectives to the partnership. In addition, Staff Participant 6 stated:

> *"It's made me more interested and excited about teaching I think, being able to do this and to improve and develop my teaching."*

Similarly, Staff Participant 2 reflected that co-creation of the curriculum helped him to achieve:

> *"[M]y own goals in terms of trying to do what I can with my students to really engage them with the subject and enthuse them with the subject, but also in terms of improving my practice as a teacher. For example, getting better assessments…"*

This staff member had been wary of going ahead with his students' idea to make the assessment harder than previous assessments and he had been worried that they would struggle. However, taking on the students' ideas helped them to work collaboratively to create better assessments that were more meaningful and rewarding for them, whilst also improving student engagement with the subject and contributing to this staff member's professional development.

Conclusion

This qualitative research has analysed students' and staff members' perspectives of engaging in rare instances of co-creation of the curriculum in the Scottish higher education sector. It has highlighted the challenges for students and staff when shifting the balance of power and responsibility to give students more ownership and it has also explored the bureaucratic challenges and time-intensive nature of co-creation of the curriculum projects. It has shown how both students and staff have challenged the status quo of traditional methods of teaching to engage in these innovative projects despite 'institutional inertia' and the resistance of some colleagues. However, this paper has also shown how both student and staff participants have enjoyed engaging in co-creation of the curriculum because it is a creative, stimulating and fun process of collaboration which has helped to advance the professional development of both student and staff participants. They have shared ownership of the curriculum within their learning communities, which themselves have helped all members to feel that their contributions are respected and valued.

The Scottish higher education sector enjoys strong quality assurance and enhancement processes (QAA, 2012) that facilitate the recognition and sharing of best practices in learning and teaching. Although universities within the Scottish sector are each unique and the participants in this small-scale, qualitative research project offered perspectives that were individual, the thematic trends that have emerged from the data can be found in other settings in the UK and beyond. For instance, Cook-Sather *et al* (2014) have illustrated other examples of co-creation of the curriculum in England, Ireland, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

In many cases, it is individual academic members of staff who have initiated and implemented co-creation of the curriculum in different ways with various aspects of the curriculum. Whilst a large-scale, quantitative study of the impact of co-creation on students' and staff members' learning and teaching experiences would be helpful, current cases are

not easily comparable in a quantitative study. Future areas of research could use quantitative measures to explore further the impact of co-creation of the curriculum and more generalisable challenges and benefits of these partnerships. However, it is heartening to see how participants in this study have challenged the status quo to implement their successful projects; these students and staff perceive that co-creation of the curriculum has had a positive impact on them as individuals and on their communities.

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