Creating Strong Student Partnerships

Challenge: Facilitating student engagement through partnerships
How do you facilitate student engagement through partnerships?

Guiding Questions

How do we ensure student engagement is more than a buzzword?

How do we meaningfully engage students in partnership?

Levels of Engagement

Students as Carrying out tasks
- Students carry out project tasks. Project goals, activities and deliverables are pre-determined, and students don't have the chance to impact the design, content or structure of the program.

Students as Consultants/Collaborators
- Students are invited to take part. They can share and discuss ideas, but are mostly limited to commenting on already developed strategies and plans.

Students as ChangeMakers
- Students are recognized as the experts. They take the lead, and have actual authority and responsibility, as well as opportunities to develop the skills needed to make good decisions.

Task

1. Discuss the pros and cons of each level of engagement

2. Provide an example of each from your experience

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Challenge: Managing expectations in partnerships
How do you manage expectations of a partnership?

From a staff perspective

To enable the students to take control and be empowered in the projects, we gave them a very open brief. We wanted them to identify areas to investigate that are important to students. However, this posed a problem because we also wanted them to work on something that we thought would enhance the initiatives and the two did not always co-incide. We also wanted them to contribute something that a staff member could not, so were disappointed with offers of evaluations.

The student interns did not always understand how we worked and had expectations of us that we could not always meet. For example, expecting a turn-around time of a couple of hours, or a meeting the next day was not realistic in a world where our diaries are often full for days or even weeks.

The interns have reported back that the openness of the brief was disorientating at first and that they did not have the time available to research the initiative, formulate a good research question, investigate it and pilot a change to enhance the initiative. The expectation that they would do all of that was unrealistic. As they wanted to show impact there was a temptation for them to undertake a lot of work at a superficial level (e.g. run 4 focus groups with superficial analysis) rather than investigate something in depth.

The interns also questioned the commitment that all members of the department had to their work. Some members of staff seemed to think that it was the role of others to work with the interns. Clearer expectations of the commitment required from everyone and the benefits that would be seen by all would have been beneficial.

Task

1. Consider how you can set realistic expectations that empower students and create actionable results which cannot be done as well by staff.

2. How do you get commitment from all staff?

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Challenge: Creating belonging within partnerships
How do you create a sense of integrated belonging?

From a student perspective

Students' expectations about a partnership opportunity, such as an internship, goes beyond the accomplishment of a task because they also seek the sense of belonging of a project and a team. These factors are important for attributing meaning to the work developed by students. The sense of belonging has shown itself to be a factor that affects the students' motivation and determines the space of exchange. This results in the impoverishment of the experience itself and of the final work, which may lack the benefit of collaborative dialogue. Consequently, this leads the student to form a superficial understanding of the work developed in the department.

The superficial understanding of the work context directly affects the quality of student contribution, leading to frustration not only for the student but for the other side of the partnership that does not have their expectations achieved.

The sense of belonging might be affected by the organizational culture of the workspace. To facilitate a fruitful partnership, it is important to emphasize that ideally, the work team should be prepared to receive the students and at the same time assign a value to their participation. For example, if staff see the partnership as an extra work activity, this undermines the spaces of exchange and collective construction.

"The culture of the workspace trickles down to shape the culture of the partnership."

Task

3. Discuss how to shape a culture of partnership that embrace the important of the sense of belonging.

4. For instance, how can a set of activities and thoughtful planning help to create a sense of belonging?

Creating Strong Student Partnerships

Challenge: Relating to your partners and your work
How do you relate to your partners and your work?

Guiding Questions

How can conscious feedback promote a better partnership and work experience?

How do the constraints of work reflect on the quality of the partnership?

Relating to Your Partners

When we offer feedback to our partners, it should be offered in an open space of constructive dialogue with the intention to benefit their performance moving forward. When feedback is given in a close space, "destructive dialogue", it may appear as tarnishing judgement that harms the working relationship and fails to initiate change.

"The Who": Identity-based Feedback
- "You are/n't…"
- Holds perceptions of "this is who I am" and connotations of permanence.
- Empowering when used positively; rapport-breaking when used negatively.

"The How": Capability-based Feedback
- "You can/'t…"
- Holds perceptions of "this is what I can do" and connotations of ability to improve.
- Supportive when used positively; rapport-building when used constructively.

Positive feedback should be offered in identity statements
Constructive criticism should be offered in capability statements

Relating to Your Work

How we attribute results impacts how we connect with our partnership and our partners. In the face of less-than-desired results, we may short-change ourselves or others by being unable to distinguish personal potential from the performance output. Understanding where to draw the line creates a space to celebrate success and reflect on limitations, rather than make judgements about the work or our partners.

Performance = potential – interference
   Partnership Results = Partners' capability – constraints of work

Task

1. Discuss your relationship with feedback. Where is it good, where can it improve?

2. How do you evaluate your work? Where have constraints not been fully considered, what affect might this have moving forward?