Transforming patterns through the scholarship of teaching and learning

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ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the theme of transforming patterns of learning and behavior, focusing specifically on potential shifts of identity and culture when students and staff form partnerships, particularly in a SoTL context. Student-staff partnerships in higher education (HE) can re-frame the ways that students and staff work together as active collaborators in teaching and learning (Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014; Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014). Such a radical re-visioning of the relationships between students, staff, and the institutions within which they function is both potentially transformational and a significant challenge, given the deeply entrenched identities, traditions, recurrent practices and routines found within institutions and for individuals (Bovill et al., 2016; Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015).

Using a collaborative-autoethnographic approach, we have been exploring the nexus of identity formation and navigation within the partnership context (Mercer-Mapstone, Marquis, & McConnell, under review). We examine our own partnership experiences, drawing on structured reflective narratives, through a social identity lens to explore how identity influences, and is also transformed by, student-staff partnership. Our findings highlight the need to move away from the polarization of 'staff' and 'student' labels, to a more nuanced conception that embraces the multiplicity of identity and diverse dimensions of role and meaning. We will emphasise the power of those normative conceptions that we attach to our different identities, particularly where dissonance arises should those norms conflict. We will discuss how this dissonance is particularly salient for us as we cross the partnership threshold and that the ethos underlying our new partnership identities contradicts the traditional hierarchical structure of the institutions within which we work.

Finally, we will highlight the implications of our ongoing research for those engaging in student-staff partnerships in HE and in SoTL, and raise the potential for reflective partnership practices which can support identity navigation and transformation. We hope that those attending this session will walk away with questions that incite them to probe their own experiences, a greater sense of the importance of being a reflective SoTL practitioner, and a deeper more nuanced conception of the integral part that identity can play in HE research and practice.

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