

Uncovering building blocks towards a collaborative culture through staff-student partnership

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Sub-theme: *Student-staff partnership; Collaboration and culture building*

Overview:

Following the ethos of student-staff partnership, this poster reflects on two projects that engaged students (co-authors Clarrie and Arslan) as partners in projects, first in transforming a student-staff liaison committee (SSLC) into an engaging and collaborative platform that led to enhanced pedagogic practice among staff and second in organizing a student-led department wide student conference. Partnership is an ongoing process working together with students, and almost every process is different depending on the individual and roles. When working with students, I'd like to remind myself of values such as being authentic in my communication, inclusive of all individuals and their capabilities, through trusting them to make decisions empowering them to manage challenges. And through this repeated process, it helps build a sense of community among staff and students. Although time constraints and heavy workload are barriers to this initiative, working with students offers new perspectives to learning (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Through reflections on our projects and contextual nuances, we identified several interconnected building blocks that lay a good foundation for a good partnership.

Building blocks:

Partnership as practice. Providing active space for students to experiment and exercise decision-making through their roles (e.g., co-leading, organising and chairing events) with supervision.

Flattening the hierarchy builds student confidence. Malaysian or Asian students generally stay silent out of respect for their teachings (Le, 2024). Flattening the hierarchy helps break the ice and creates approachable and safe environment to encourage students to engage with staff. Adapting Bowlby's attachment theory (1988), as staff we can create a secure base by providing prompt response, providing care and reassurance helps students to be brave to experiment on their own.

Using communication as a relational infrastructure. Strengthen existing communication structure through frequent weekly updates and informal chats with Student Leaders such as School Officers and Class Representatives who act as bridges between staff and students. Using this communication with intention to reduce uncertainty and anxiety among students helps signal care and build trust, consequently, increase engagement and reciprocity. Students who experienced care and felt understood would give back to the partnership (Mori, 2022) and are open to growth and change.

Impact:

Students explicitly recognised the developmental value of these partnerships. They built soft skills such as leadership, management, they adapt under pressure and handle uncertainties with confidence. This led to their personal growth, and they felt learning is more practical and can be applied, driving them to take ownership of their roles and are eager to do a good job.