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- Students active in disaster resilience
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Why does Connect exist?
 Connect has been published bimonthly since 1979!

It aims to:
• document student participation approaches and initiatives;
• support reflective practices;
• develop and share resources.

Connect:
ABN: 98 174 663 341
Connect is edited and published by: Roger Holdsworth
12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070 Victoria Australia
Phone: (03) 9489 9052; Web: www.asprinworld.com/connect
Contact e-mail: r.holdsworth@unimelb.edu.au

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Roger Holdsworth
Student Voice or Students as Partners?

The language of ‘student voice’ has been around for sometime and scholars have written quite a bit about ‘student voice’ with a deeper history in the school sector compared to higher education. The language of ‘students as partners’ is more recent, particularly in higher education. What is ‘student voice’? How does it relate to ‘students as partners’? Why does it matter?

In 2012 Michael Fielding gave a talk: Student Voice: patterns of partnership and the demands of deep democracy. (This is available at: http://ow.ly/LwGx30bLqc8 as well as in Connect 197: October 2012.) He outlined the development of the range of student voice work in many countries across the world since the 1990s. While he has written eloquently about ‘student voice’ in many papers, this talk is a easy introduction to ‘student voice’ with an important historical context.

The value for me is how his work challenges the use of the term ‘student voice’ as I often hear it being tossed about in higher education in contrast to ‘students as partners’: in competition with ‘partnership’ – which is better than ‘student voice’. In this talk, Fielding relates voice and partnership by outlining six patterns of partnership:

1. **Students as data source**: in which staff utilise information about student progress and well-being
2. **Students as active respondents**: in which staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning / professional decisions
3. **Students as co-enquirers**: in which staff take a lead role with high-profile, active student support
4. **Students as knowledge creators**: in which students take lead roles with active staff support
5. **Students as joint authors**: in which students and staff decide on a joint course of action together
6. **Intergenerational learning as lived democracy**: in which there is a shared commitment to/ responsibility for the common good

He is talking about work conducted in schools. As we delve more into students as partners in higher education, it is seems relevant and sensible (scholarly) to expand from the work of student voice and partnership in schools while acknowledging the obvious differences between the two educational contexts. Fielding outlines many concerns many of us have been discussing recently (eg equity; appropriation for management agendas; power dynamics). He grounds the talk in democratic principles, explicitly linking the practices of voice and partnership to a theoretical place.

As practitioners, many of us want better learning relationships with our students and we see students as partners as a process to achieve that goal. For students, partnership offers an opportunity for empowerment, genuine engagement, and ownership of learning in an environment that typically makes little space for most students to engage with academics or staff to shape higher education. Even if we don’t make the link, the democratic values and principles that Fielding discusses underpin our partnership practices.

In 2006, Alison Cook-Sather published a powerful paper titled Sound, Presence, and Power: “Student Voice” in Educational Research and Reform. (This is available at: http://ow.ly/SHLq30blqV7 but it may be paywalled.) Like Fielding, this paper is in the context of the school sector regarding ‘student voice’ but has clear lessons for engaging ‘students as partners’ in higher education. She concluded in 2006:

> Currently, many people are using the term “student voice” to assert that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling, that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults, and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education.

In 2017, this sounds a lot like how we are talking about ‘students as partners’ in higher education, which is about going beyond a culture of staff ‘asking & listening’ toward ‘students having an active, engaged voice in shaping their learning experiences’ in collaboration with staff.

There have been many brilliant opportunities in my National Fellowship on students as partners. Learning more about the historical context of partnership has been one of them and collaborating with scholars like Alison Cook-Sather (who was in Australia in 2016 thanks to the Fellowship and UQ’s Visiting Scholars Scheme). We are currently collaborating with a group of students and staff on a manuscripts that explore the ‘language of students as partners’ and ‘theoretical views on students as partners’. Such work matters because making these scholarly links, that underpin our practices, explicit will only sustain our collective efforts to reposition students in higher education in the name of ‘students as partners’ - a movement that has emerged from the ‘student voice’ movement.

**Kelly Matthews**

Australian Students as Partners Network
k.matthews1@uq.edu.au

This reflection from Kelly is reprinted (with permission) from the latest Australian Students as Partners Network update, which also features:

- **Resources for Practice**: New case studies, advice for getting started, 4 ‘how-to’ guides
- **Research from Practice**: Australian Stories of Partnership special issue published + Issue 1 of International Journal for Students as Partners available
- **Events**: 2017 National Roundtable Date announced (see page 36 of this Connect) + many more events
- **Featured Work**: Spotlight on selected research, case studies, & blog posts
- **Reflections**: Linking ‘student voice’ & ‘students as partners’; student reflections on partnership

The Update can be found at:
http://ow.ly/ULIU30bLruO