

Are we really working with students?

Working with students as partners to explore and enhance feedback practices with undergraduate students, a freestanding narrative review.

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Abstract

Undergraduate students are generally dissatisfied with current feedback practices. Feedback is a crucial element of the learning process, leading to calls for increased attention on the development of the feedback literacies of students and staff. While there is growing literature base with regards to working with students as partners, the focus of this appears to be on learning and teaching, with a lack of specific focus on feedback. An under-researched area in the field of Students as partners (SaP) is the development of learning-oriented feedback practice and feedback literacy.

This narrative literature review was undertaken to establish the current landscape of working with undergraduate students as partners, with a specific focus on learning-oriented feedback.

Following an initial wide reaching literature search, we decided to focus the review on publications with a specific focus on working with students as partners. Grey literature was also considered. Our evaluation of the included literature was informed by Tracy's eight 'big tent' criteria for excellent qualitative research.

Power dynamics were an issue with students being perceived differently by peers and staff by colleagues. Other barriers included existing institutional structures (staff) and equity of opportunity (students). Conversely, important reported benefits for student and staff partners include feelings of shared ownership and shared understandings regarding aim and purpose. Successful SaP projects resulted in the development of courses that better met the needs of students, enhanced student engagement with feedback and improved student wellbeing. The extent to which educators in HE *are* really working *with* students as partners on this process is unclear.

Our findings strongly suggest that undergraduate students and staff at the University of Strathclyde (and beyond) would benefit from embracing a SaP approach to developing feedback literacy in all courses. The findings of this review will inform the development of an interactive digital toolkit to facilitate this process.

Introduction

Working with Students as Partners (SaP) is a growing practice of learning and education that is gaining traction with teachers and students in higher education (HE). At its heart, students are not merely passive consumers to whom it is the teacher's job to impart knowledge, but rather agents of their own learning (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014). Studies have shown that students, when working as partners with educators, can co-create ideas and knowledge that can be applied not only to enhance their own education, but to improve current teaching/learning methods overall (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Curran, 2017; Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014 cited in Snelling et al., 2019). These benefits include positive impacts on student engagement, increased motivation for learning by students and staff, and enhanced inclusiveness in teaching practices (Healey et al, 2014). Given the potential benefits it seems timely to investigate the extent to which we really are working *with* students as partners.

In the 2023 National Student Survey, only 72% respondents indicated that feedback helped them to improve their work. Additionally, only 61% said it was clear that feedback they as students gave, was acted upon (Office for Students, 2023).

At the University of Strathclyde, it is recognised that students and staff are “not particularly satisfied with feedback and broader assessment regimes within HE. Where feedback is concerned, students may need support to recognise the value of feedback and understand their active role in its processes.” (Morrissey, 2023, no page). It is also recognised that ‘developing students’ feedback literacy involves a conscious, ongoing approach on the part of educators’ and that ‘feedback literacies’ should be ‘baked in’ to the design of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback activities, and not considered as discrete activity or something that is done once and for all time” (Morrissey 2023, no page).

This article aims to identify and summarise the extent, nature and range of literature in relation to working with SaP that has a specific focus on feedback. Primarily, we seek to understand

what has been done *in practice* using SaP models to address feedback literacy, and what recommendations have arisen out of these practices. By engaging with the issue of SaP in learning-oriented feedback in undergraduate contexts we hope, in the long term, to provide guidance for Strathclyde teaching staff and students. We aim to provide insights to all those working with SaP at a departmental and institutional level, including undergraduate students, staff who teach undergraduate students, academic developers, and those with an interest in enhancing feedback practice generally.

Methodology

This literature review has been undertaken by five academics from different departments (engineering, education, law, mathematics, and humanities). This brings different disciplinary perspectives to the topic. Following an initial wide-reaching literature search (conducted in the following databases: SCOPUS/ Web of Science/ ERIC and Google scholar), using the search terms in Table 1, we decided to focus the review on the following journals with a specific focus on SaP; *International Journal for Students as Partners*, *Journal of Student Engagement in Higher Education*, grey literature from key sources such as Advance HE (UK), QAA, Institutional publications of the University of Strathclyde and the resource page of Healy HE Consultants.

Table 1: Examples of search terms included

| |
|---|
| <p>'Student-staff partnerships'/ 'co-teaching'/ 'students as partners'/ 'student voice in learning'</p> <p>'Higher Education'/ 'Further Education'/ College/ University</p> <p>Feedback/ Feedforward/ 'dialogic feedback'/ 'mutual feedback'.</p> |
|---|

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Our literature search focussed on literature specifically relating to UG students working as SaP in relation to feedback. We developed the inclusion/exclusion criteria (see Table 2 below) in an iterative process, often updating and revisiting it during our search (Healey & Healey 2023). Literature before 2016 was excluded. Our rationale for this was that a systematic review had been published in 2017 by Mercer-Mapstone et al, which already focused on SaP in HE/feedback and assessment.

Our review reveals that SaP in developing learning-oriented practice *and* feedback literacy is an under-researched field. Conceptual and empirical literature concerning SaP has, however, been published in dedicated journals such as the *International Journal for Students as Partners*, *Journal of Student Engagement in Higher Education*. Furthermore, HE feedback practices are reported in sector specific journals e.g. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. However, we found comparatively little research explicitly concerned with both. Following an

iterative process in which our search strategy was refined, and inclusion/exclusion criteria strictly applied, our final literature review encompassed 13 papers including grey literature.

We attribute the relative dearth of literature to two main factors. Firstly, feedback is subsumed in the term 'assessment and feedback', with the focus often being on assessment, which is more measurable in terms of grades and qualifications. Secondly, planning feedback opportunities in the context of SaP may be part of course design. We suggest that feedback may therefore be being addressed as part of course co-creation but is not reported explicitly in the literature. Further investigation is required to clarify our underlying assumption, based as it is on an absence. Empirical research that explicitly identifies the different elements of courses that are co-created with SaP would enhance our understanding of the extent to which co-design of feedback activities is undertaken as part of course co-creation. It should also be noted that SaP in learning-oriented feedback may be happening in practice more than is currently evident in the research.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria applied to literature

| Inclusion | Exclusion |
|--|--|
| Undergraduate Students | Non-Undergraduate Students |
| ≥2016 | < 2016 |
| English Language | Non-English Language |
| Feedback on student learning with students as partners | Literature where working with students as partners was not evident |
| Level of student partnership identified from literature | No evidence of any of the four types of partnership |
| Includes student engagement with feedback | Feedback related to module/course/programme evaluation. |
| Includes student reflection on feedback | Student reflection on feedback not included |
| Literature that includes a definition of feedback literacy | Does not include a definition of feedback literacy |
| Full-Text Articles | Systematic reviews and conference Proceedings |

Definitions

Strathclyde's Assessment and Feedback Policy defines feedback as "information provided to students on the quality of their performance in relation to assessment criteria, which forms the

basis of improved student learning". However, we acknowledge that this definition does not adequately reflect the variety of rich feedback practices currently undertaken at the University of Strathclyde.

Capturing a complete definition of feedback is complex and the language used can provide valuable insight into the expected roles of staff and students in the feedback process. For example, Minnoni et al (2017: page 5) define feedback from students' perspective as "a contextual reflection, relating to a particular aspect (performance or product) that is expressed by one or more interlocutors with the aim of starting up a metacognitive process." Other descriptions and definitions in the literature acknowledge that feedback is enhanced by 'personal teacher-learner relationships that seem to make... feedback comments more palatable to students' (O'Donovan, 2020: page 20), shifting the focus from a transmission-based definition to a learner-focused one. Carless & Boud (2018: page 1315) define feedback as a "process through which learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies", while Carless (2020, page 4) define feedback processes "as involving students using information about their work for the purposes of improvement" necessitating re-defining feedback at Strathclyde.

The conceptual shift to a learner-focused definition led to the emergence of a key concept: feedback literacy (Carless, 2020; Davies, 2023; Matthews et al., 2023). Feedback literacy can be viewed from both a teacher's and a student's perspective (Davies, 2023). Student feedback literacy is defined as "the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (Carless & Boud, 2018: 1316). Student feedback literacy includes "four inter-related features: appreciating the value of feedback; making judgements in increasingly sophisticated ways; managing affective factors productively; and taking action in response to feedback" (Carless & Boud, 2018: 1315). Teacher feedback literacy, on the other hand, is defined as "the knowledge, expertise and dispositions to design feedback processes in ways which enable student uptake of feedback and seed the development of student feedback literacy" (Carless & Winstone, 2023: 153). Davies (2023) and Carless (2020) both assert that these definitions align well with the learning-focused approach to feedback. More importantly, Carless and Winstone (2023: 150) stress the importance of the "interplay between student feedback literacy and teacher feedback literacy", since without a supportive environment fostered by a teacher, students' feedback literacy development might be very restricted. This reveals an important aspect of feedback literacies, namely partnership.

Partnership is defined "as a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Bovill et al., 2016: 197). Advance HE defines student-staff partnerships as "reciprocal initiatives where students can take joint responsibility for directing their learning and development, and staff can benefit from student expertise in being a current learner in higher education" (Peart, Rumbold, & Fukar, 2023: 4). Healey et al. (2014) identify learning, teaching, and assessment as

one of the key areas for partnership, while the four levels of partnership widely cited in the literature are: Consultation, Involvement, Participation and Partnership (Peart et al., 2023).

Although partnership approaches to feedback have not been extensively studied, Matthew's (2023) research shows that partnership can improve feedback literacy. Carless (2020) has also advocated for more research on partnership activities in feedback to improve understanding of feedback processes as a learner-teacher partnership activity (Matthews et al., 2021; Molloy, Boud, & Henderson, 2020).

Overview of literature: findings and analysis

In this section, we present an overview of our analysis. Firstly, in two tables, we outline the stated aims of the papers and the types of feedback that appeared in them. The remainder of our findings are then presented in ten sub-sections: who the partners are and how they were recruited; the discipline, academic year and geographical spread of the UG courses; the levels of student engagement; the outputs from the partnerships; the drivers and barriers for students and staff; the relationships between partners; the role of emotions in feedback oriented SaP; the impact of the partnership on teaching practice more widely; how students and staff are recognised for their partnership work; and finally, the absences identified in the literature.

Stated aims and types of feedback

The stated aim for most, though not all, of the reviewed literature was to change, improve or redesign existing learning-oriented feedback practices, outlined in table 3.

Table 3: Stated aims of reviewed articles

| Aim | No. of articles | Author, Year |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Changing, improving or redesigning feedback practices | 8 | <i>Handley & Eve, 2016; Gravett, 2020; Minnoni et al., 2017; Pitt, 2020; QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project, 2023; Rao & Norton, 2020; Reilly, 2020; Sambell, Brown & Adamson, 2021</i> |
| Developing/ exploring working with Students as Partners (SaP) | 3 | <i>Healey & Healey, 2019; Peart et al., 2023; Snelling et al., 2019</i> |
| Investigating and undertaking research into partnership approaches in the design of feedback | 1 | <i>Matthews et al., 2024</i> |
| Researching co-creation of the curriculum | 1 | <i>Kiester & Holowko, 2020</i> |

The 13 articles analysed deal with various types of feedback outlined in table 4 below.

It is clear there are many different types of, and descriptors for, feedback. Feedback is a key element to learning and has likely developed many different iterations because of this. Whilst this has no doubt improved feedback practices, it also risks creating a rather nebulous understanding of what feedback is, and how it can be used for maximum effect.

Table 4: Types of feedback mentioned in reviewed articles

| Type of feedback | No. of articles | Author, Year |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Summative | 2 | <i>Pitt, 2020; QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project 2023</i> |
| Formative | 5 | <i>Handley & Eve, 2016; Pitt, 2020; QAA, 2023; Rao & Norton 2020; Reilly, 2020</i> |
| Feedforward | 1 | <i>Reilly, 2020</i> |
| Dialogic | 4 | <i>Gravett, 2020; Pitt, 2020; Rao & Norton, 2020; Snelling et al., 2019</i> |
| Peer | 4 | <i>Gravett, 2020; Minnoni et al., 2017; Pitt, 2020; Reilly, 2020</i> |
| Direct teacher to student | 2 | <i>Gravett 2020; Pitt 2020</i> |
| Written | 1 | <i>Minnoni et al., 2017</i> |
| Audio/verbal | 2 | <i>Matthews et al., 2024; Reilly, 2020</i> |
| Compassionate | 1 | <i>QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project 2023</i> |
| Co-creation | 1 | <i>Keister & Holowko, 2020</i> |

The partners: who they are and how they are recruited?

The included literature outlines a diverse range of different partners within the student-staff partnership. The most straightforward consisted of only academic staff and current UG students (Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Minnoni et al., 2017). Alternative partnerships in the literature included various other stakeholders:

- Academic staff, former and current students (Hussain et al., 2019 cited in Peart et al., 2023);
- Academic staff, professional services staff and current UG students (Pitt, 2020);
- Academic staff, professional student mentors and current UG students (Snelling et al., 2019);
- Team of nursing education academics, 2 experts in assessment on staff of university; and a small team of student consultants (Sambell et al., 2021)

The breakdown of different partners is not always fully reported in the literature. Where it is reported, the ratio of students to staff varies considerably depending on the purpose and scope of the partnership activity (as explained later in this review). Where both student and staff

partners are reported, student-staff ratios range from 1:1 (Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Minnoni et al., 2017); 1:1.5, (Matthews et al., 2024); 2:1, 4:1, and 5:1 is (Snelling et al., 2019). Some literature reports figures for students, but not staff (Sambell et al., 2021; Reilly, 2020; Handley & Eve, 2016; Pitt, 2020 example 1/3; Hussain et al., 2019 cited in Peart et al., 2023) and in these cases, the numbers for student partners were 4, 36, 40, 70 and 202 respectively. In some instances, the number or ratio of partners is unreported (Pitt, 2020 examples 2/3 and 3/3; Sutcliffe et al., 2019 cited in Peart et al., 2023 and QAA, 2023).

While the size and purpose of partnerships vary, it is claimed to be “important for students to outnumber teachers in each group in order to counter the perceived power imbalance” (Snelling et al., 2019: p.65) and therefore “a greater student-to-teacher ratio in a co-creation time” (ibid: p.69) should be promoted. Notably, co-creation is just one type of student-staff partnership that is exemplified in the literature. The analytic frameworks used to code types of partnership are presented later in this review (figure 1).

On a practical note, for university educators interested in undertaking SaP work, recruitment of students and, to a lesser extent, staff partners is described in detail in a small number of articles (Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Matthews et al., 2024; Sambell et al., 2021 and Snelling et al., 2019). Some key features of recruitment included:

- Common interests of students and staff e.g. “[together] a passion for Star Wars and an interest in teaching and collaborative research” (Kiester & Holowko, 2020: p.69).
- Students invited to join, by personal invitation (Matthews et al., 2024; Sambell et al., 2021) or open call (Snelling et al., 2019).
- In course redesign partnership, some students invited to join the partnership had completed the course while others had not (Matthews et al., 2024).
- In an inquiry-based learning partnership, students who had been particularly engaged or particularly disengaged in inquiry-based learning were invited to join (Snelling et al., 2019).
- Timing – after end of year exams, during summer break (Snelling et al., 2019).
- Recruitment based on identity/ies, for example: “gender” and “overseas versus local students” can be a factor in the selection process rather than academic attainment (Matthews et al., 2024: p.29).

Discipline, academic year and geographical spread of partnerships

Data from empirical research demonstrates that partnerships focusing on learner-oriented feedback occur both within and across a range of disciplines, and can include one or more disciplines:

- A single discipline e.g. a vocational BSc (Handley & Eve, 2016); an electronics and engineering course (Hussain et al., 2019 cited in Peart et al., 2023); nursing (Sambell et al.,

2021) education (Sutcliffe et al., 2019 cited in Peart et al, 2023; Rao & Norton, 2020) and business (Pitt, 2020)

- Across multiple but related disciplines e.g. visual arts (QAA, 2023); health sciences and plant-based sciences (Snelling et al., 2019)
- Across multiple but diverse disciplines e.g. architecture, biology, business, dentistry, education, law, maths and midwifery (Matthews et al., 2024)

Though not reported in some literature (Matthews et al., 2024; Minnoni et al., 2017; Peart et al., 2023; QAA, 2023; Snelling et al., 2019 examples 1/3 and 3/3; Rao & Norton, 2020), where it *is* reported, student partners are drawn from within and across year groups. Some partnerships draw their student partners from a single year group (Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Pitt, 2020; Rao & Norton, 2020; Reilly, 2020) while others have student partners from two-year groups (Handley & Eve, 2016 and Sambell et al., 2021; Snelling et al., 2019 example 2). The year groups included in the literature we reviewed were as follows: first year students (Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Pitt, 2020; Rao & Norton, 2020 example 1); second year students (Handley & Eve, 2016; Reilly, 2020; Sambell et al., 2021; Snelling et al., 2019); third year students (Handley & Eve, 2016; Pitt, 2020; Sambell et al., 2021; Snelling et al., 2019 example 2) and final year students, post year 3 industry placement (Pitt, 2020 example 3).

Meanwhile, in terms of geography, our examples of partnership in feedback practice were mostly found in UK universities (Handley & Eve, 2016; Peart et al., 2023; Pitt, 2020; QAA, 2023; Rao & Norton, 2020; Reilly, 2020; Sambell et al., 2021), of which two were Scottish (Hussain et al., 2019. cited in Peart et al., 2023 at University of Glasgow, and Sambell et al., 2021 at Edinburgh Napier). A further two were from HE institutions in Australia (Matthews et al., 2024 and Snelling et al., 2019) and one each from Italy (Minnoni et al., 2017) and the USA (Kiester & Holowko, 2020).

Levels of student engagement

For analysis purposes, we adopted Healey et al.'s. (2014) framework which positions partnership as “a process of student engagement ... staff and students learning and working together to foster engaged student learning and engaging learning and teaching enhancement. In this sense partnership is a relationship in which all participants are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together” (Healey et al., 2014: p.7).

Firstly, we applied their four stages of student engagement model as shown in Figure. 1.

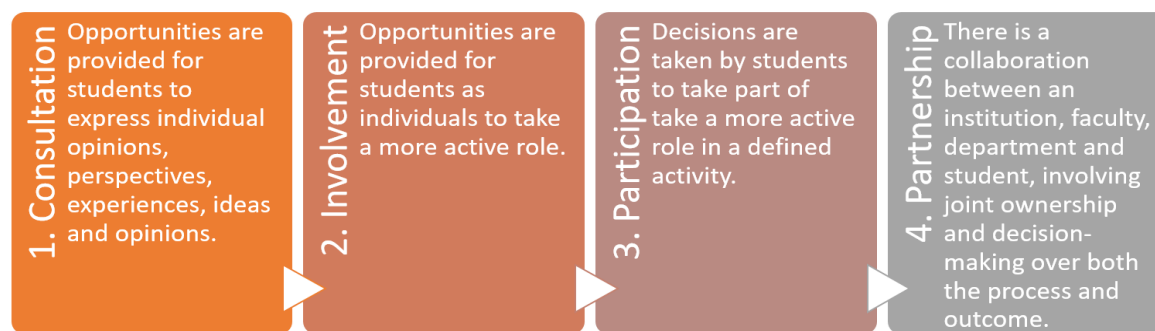


Figure 1. Student engagement model (Healey et al., 2014: p.16).

We coded each partnership reported in all the empirical papers to a partnership level as shown in Figure 2. Many papers are explicit about the level of student engagement, but some are not. In papers where the level of partnership was implied (Handley & Eve, 2016; Minnoni et al., 2017; Pitt, 2020) they were coded to one of the four categories based on the information provided and were positioned at the lower end of the partnership continuum.

| Consultation | Involvement | Participation | Partnership |
|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handley & Eve (2016) Sutcliffe et al.(2019) (cited in Peart et al. 2023) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handley & Eve (2016) Minnoni et al. (2017) Hussain et al. (2019) (cited in Peart et al. 2023) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rao & Norton (2020) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gravett (2020) Healey & Healey (2019) Kiester & Holowko (2020) Matthews et al. (2024) QAA (2023) Sambell et al. (2021) Sambell et al. (2019) |

Figure 2. Student engagement model with associated articles as part of this review (Healey et al., 2014: p.16).

In the papers where the level of engagement is explicitly stated or clearly described, it is variously characterised as a pedagogical approach (Healey & Healey, 2019; Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Matthews et al., 2024); co-design (Gravett, 2020; Reilly, 2020; Snelling et al., 2019); co-creation (QAA, 2023; Sambell et al., 2021; Snelling et al., 2019); co-construction (Sambell et al., 2021); inquiry (QAA, 2023); collaboration and cooperation (Rao & Norton, 2020). Notably the phrase ‘students as partners’ is a keyword for both Kiester and Holowko (2020) and Snelling et al. (2019). Indeed, the title of the former paper indicates this partnership was a transformative

threshold experience for both partners, disrupting the traditional HE power relations between the staff and student involved. As Cook-Sather (2014) argues that while “initially ‘troublesome’, given the norms in higher education that clearly distinguish faculty and student roles and responsibilities, once embraced, the notion of such Student-faculty partnership is transformative, irreversible, and integrative and promises both greater intersubjectivity (King, 2012) and a more ‘person-centered’ (Blackie et al., 2010; Fielding, 2011) approach to teaching and learning” (Cook-Sather, 2014: p.187).

Outputs of partnerships

While all the literature reviewed focused on learning-oriented feedback, the staff-student partnerships presented in the reviewed literature produced a range of outputs that broadly fell into the categories listed below.

- Guidelines: practical guidance on compassionate feedback practices (QAA, 2023); principles for inquiry-based learning (Snelling et al., 2019)
- Feedback design: for courses (Handley & Eve, 2016; Snelling et al., 2019; Pitt, 2020), specifically a tiered/multi-stage assessment and feedback structure (Hussain et al., 2019 cited in Peart et al., 2023; Reilly, 2020)
- Resources for students: flipped learning materials for a unit with traditionally low student attainment (Snelling et al., 2019) and a toolkit of pocket-sized flashcard resources to support students to engage with feedback in early clinical placements (Sambell et al., 2021)
- Co-design and co-facilitation of learning opportunities: a seminar for first year students about studying at college, critical reading and writing and introduction to sociology (Kiestner & Holowko, 2020); a two-day workshop for staff and students to co-design feedback and assessment for a new course (Matthews et al., 2024)
- Planned learning opportunities that support students to engage with and act on learning-oriented feedback: through dialogic feedback (Rao & Norton, 2020) specifically on their industrial placement year (Pitt, 2020)
- Publication: staff-student co-authorship of reviewed paper (Kiestner & Holowko, 2020); student co-authorship (Minnoni et al., 2017), staff co-authorship (Handley & Eve, 2016; Matthews et al., 2024; Pitt, 2020; Rao & Norton, 2020; Reilly, 2020; Snelling et al., 2019; Sambell et al., 2021).

Drivers

Feedback practices

For staff, drivers for reviewing and developing feedback practices with students is due to lack of student engagement with feedback (Rao & Norton, 2020). However, students seem to have more drivers regarding engaging in feedback review, including; improved learning (Handley & Eve, 2016; Pitt et al., 2020); deeper subject knowledge (Pitt et al., 2020); to become active in the feedback processes (Sambell et al., 2021); for personal reflection and growth (Minnoni et al., 2017).

Students as partners

Staff have several drivers towards engaging with SaP. Key reasons have been noted as: better course design and knowing the students (Keister & Holowko, 2020); to enhance student wellbeing (Handley & Eve, 2016); to facilitate an environment safe for feedback discussions with students (Matthews et al., 2024).

Drivers for students to be partners have been noted as: opportunity to be involved creating a toolkit to allow students to engage with feedback (Sambell et al., 2021); and to be involved with co-design of curriculum (Handley & Eve, 2016).

Furthering research within the area of student as partners has also been highlighted as a driver (QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project, 2023) and the paradigm shift that is occurring from merely providing feedback to understanding students' feedback literacies (Gravett et al., 2020).

Barriers

Feedback practices

Only two of the articles explicitly addressed barriers around feedback practices (Matthews et al., 2024; Reilly, 2020). Matthews et al (2024) identifies several barriers to changing feedback practices which included: Existing university policies; lack of time; disengagement with feedback processes from students; not acknowledging power dynamics. Reilly (2020) reports that students would like to have more inclusive feedback to allow those who perhaps have not engaged in written feedback to be able to receive it, via verbal feedback.

Students as partners

Despite the importance of SaP within HE, there seem to be several barriers. For staff, these include: time commitment (Peart et al., 2023; Rao & Norton, 2020; Snelling et al., 2019); level of organisation (Snelling et al., 2019); negative perceptions from fellow academics (Snelling et al., 2019); jeopardising authority (Keister & Holowko, 2020); emotional labour (Rao & Norton, 2020); and concerns that students who act as partners are already engaged therefore may skew the process (Snelling et al., 2019).

Students also have their own barriers towards being partners. Lack of confidence is highlighted (Sambell, Brown & Adamson, 2021) along with changes to peer dynamics (Keister & Holowko, 2020), not forgetting those with caring responsibilities and the need for paid employment while studying.

Traditional roles and power dynamics are key barriers towards SaP (Peart et al., 2023) along with the time it takes to develop these partnerships (Peart et al., 2023; Rao & Norton, 2020; Snelling et al., 2019). Current institutional policies have also been cited as a potential barrier (Peart et al., 2023) along with having to deal with negative emotions (Peart et al., 2023).

Relationships

Student as partners builds on relationships between students and staff. Five of the thirteen articles reviewed highlighted the power dynamics between staff and student (Keister &

Holowko, 2020; Matthews et al., 2024; Peart et al., 2023; QAA Collaboration Enhancement Project, 2023; Rao & Norton, 2020; Snelling et al., 2019). It has been identified that there needs to be acknowledgement of these power dynamics and to not under-estimate them (Matthews et al., 2024), to ensure the equality (Rao & Norton, 2020) of partnerships, and to alleviate the power imbalances (Snelling et al., 2019). It is also highlighted that to create a more equal partnership between staff and students, staff may require to relinquish some power for students to take on more responsibility and a more active role in their own learning (Rao & Norton, 2020). Students also highlighted potential changes to their relationships with their own peers where they may experience social separations (Keister & Holowko, 2020). Likewise, staff also fear criticism and negative perception from fellow colleagues/academics (Snelling et al., 2019).

Trust is a key aspect for student as partners (Healey & Healey, 2019) and is important for supportive environments and conversations to occur and to develop positive relationships between students and staff (Reilly, 2020).

Emotions

SaP feedback practices can be emotive. This can be both negative and positive. Students may feel they are being judged, not up to the task, or disadvantaged for partnering (Snelling et al., 2019). HE students continually highlight their dissatisfaction with feedback (NSS). This can also be emotionally taxing on staff who feel their feedback efforts are not appreciated (Gravett et al., 2020). Negative emotions need to be recognised, supported, and overcome as learning often comes with bumps in the road (Pitt, 2020).

It is argued that effective feedback ensures deeper learning and avoids the student feeling personally criticised (Minnoni et al., 2017). Keister & Holowko (2020) describe a student experience as generally positive and rewarding, whilst also generating some negative feelings related to perceived personal criticism. For staff, there are also some negative emotions regarding relationships with colleagues, where staff may feel criticised (Snelling et al., 2019).

Impact

Articles have highlighted the impacts regarding feedback. For example, the study by Sambell *et al* (2021) reports that working with a SaP created a toolkit that allows Year 1 students to understand different types of feedback. In addition, other studies have emphasised the importance of the development of feedback literacy on learning (e.g. ability to assess their own work and act on feedback) (Minnoni et al., 2017). Feedback literacy may also apply to both staff and students whereby all types of feedback can be engaged with and can lead to more inclusive assessment (Matthews et al., 2024).

Working with SaP can enhance feedback practices by allowing a two-way dialogue, and build relationships (Gravett et al., 2020; Rao & Norton, 2020; Reilly, 2020). The article by Snelling and colleagues (2019) reports on several positive impacts of working with SaP in co-designing 'best practice principles'. Feedback on these practices indicate that the positive feelings on students

being involved and valued and that peers could better help fellow students explain complex topics.

Recognition

Recognition in this context means any acknowledgement that was received by students or staff for taking part in SaP initiatives. This could be academic credit, certificates of participation, paid for time spent, or named on a published piece of work. Of the 13 articles analysed, nine do not state whether any recognition was received by students or teachers. Of the remaining four articles, one reports that students had been recognised for their contribution through receiving certificates of participation which they could use on their CVs. Interestingly, staff requested a similar acknowledgement (Snelling et al., 2019). Another discussed a research paper written by three students themselves, indicating that their recognition was becoming published, although this point is not expressly made (Minnoni et al., 2017). Similarly, in two papers, a student is acknowledged as a contributing author (Matthews et al., 2024; Kiester & Holowko, 2020). A third paper contains a general acknowledgement to the students involved, and several of them are named (Snelling et al., 2019). Two of these four papers report that students were paid to engage in SaP (Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Matthews et al., 2024).

Absences in the literature

While extensive effort has been made in the literature to define the terms in the SoTL literature, in relation to working with SaP, with a focus on feedback, it seems the same consideration was not afforded to ensuring the participants of the literature reviewed had a shared understanding of the key definitions, before starting the studies. In fact, in some cases, the need for a shared understanding is highlighted in the literature without it being made explicit that participants were working with a shared definition (Matthews et al., 2024). In many cases there is no documented evidence to suggest that communication had taken place to ensure participants were working with a shared understanding (Gravett, 2020; Kiester & Holowko, 2020; Pitt, 2020; Rao & Norton, 2020; Sambell et al., 2021)

Furthermore, there is a general lack of express consideration in the literature to if, why, and how formal recognition should be integrated into SaP models. SaP models can be time consuming, novel and challenging for all participants, and recognition is likely to be an important driver for participation. Not taking sufficient account of recognition as a motivating factor may therefore be a barrier to participation that ought to be addressed when designing future SaP models and frameworks.

Strengths and limitations of the literature reviewed

To evaluate the strengths and limitations of the qualitative literature reviewed, we adopt the eight “Big-Tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research as defined by Tracy (2010). The key

markers of quality in qualitative literature being: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence. Full evaluation of the literature can be found in Appendix 1.

The key markers in which the literature performs well are the identification of a worthy topic, sincerity, resonance and meaningful coherence. The markers in which it is identified that improvements could be made are credibility, where multivocality, member reflections and data triangulation was often absent. The absence of multivocality is particularly troublesome given that ensuring multiple voices and perspectives are heard is a crucial aspect of effective working with SaP. While situational and procedural ethics were considered often, only two papers, Matthews et al. (2024) and Sambell et al. (2021), reported that procedural ethics was granted.

Limitations of this narrative review

There are several limitations relating to this review, primarily the targeted nature of our search means that, without doubt, some of the SaP literature relevant to our topic will have been missed. The literature was screened and reviewed by five individuals considered novices in the field of SaP literature. A process of double screening would be considered more reliable and yield consistency in the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Future recommendations

Having reviewed the literature in terms of future recommendations, three overarching themes were identified: choice, time and space, equity and equality.

With regards to choice, Gravett (2020: 155) discusses the use of an “interactive coversheet” where students take responsibility, requesting feedback on a specific area of their work. This is further echoed by Snelling (2019) where it is proposed that students are more likely to return to and engage with feedback if they have choice in the way that feedback is received. Conversely, Reilly (2020) recommends providing opportunities - moving from drop-in/office hours feedback sessions, which students are not likely to prioritise, to individual appointments to encourage students to engage with the feedback process. Reilly (2020) also advocates that verbal feedforward should be a possibility without the requirement to submit written work.

The second dominant theme is that of time and space. Pitt (2020: 32) frames this perfectly as providing “somewhere for feedback to land”, by prioritising time and space within the curriculum for students and staff to engage with feedback and ensure a shared understanding. Pitt (2020) also proposes the provision of examples of work, of varying quality, to facilitate conversations and identification of both merits and areas of improvement in the work being reviewed. The QAA collaborative enhancement project (2023) acknowledges that time and space are required for compassionate feedback, focusing on empathy and sensitivity. As such, feedforward identified as a key opportunity to embark on a two-way dialogue in which the feedback is done with, not to students. However, interrogation of staff workload and environment is required to identify if the environment is conducive to compassionate feedback.

Healey & Healey (2019) encourage acknowledgement that working with SaP is a messy process, unique to each setting, and because of this, they advocate space and time to discuss up-front how participants will work in partnership. This should include identifying appropriate support and reward for working in partnership, being as it is a mutually beneficial professional development opportunity for students and staff.

Lastly but arguably most importantly the need for equity and equality is identified. Matthews et al. (2024) caution that working *with* students does not automatically equate to SaP. Careful consideration and management of the power dynamics is required to support “equal, although different, contributions” (Matthews et al., 2024: 36). Snelling (2019: 73) proposes that an “authentic culture of equality” can be fostered using the design thinking framework.

Additionally, Kiester & Holowko (2020) highlights that the way in which we invite students to work as SaP requires careful prior consideration, because SaP can further exacerbate existing inequalities of marginalised or underrepresented students. If the selection process is based on academic performance, only high achieving students are part of this process. Alternatively, participation favours students who can afford the time to participate, without the need for monetary compensation, meaning those in a privileged position are more likely to be able to participate. Keister & Holowko (2020) encourage future researchers in SaP to disrupt these traditional power structures and pay for participation to remove barriers to working with SaP.

Finally, the ethos of successful SaP is underpinned by trust, respect and a shared responsibility of authentic equality, which allows participants to enter into a meaningful relationship where staff really do work with students as partners.

To realise these aspirations in the context of feedback literacies, a concerted effort is required to enhance students and staff understanding of effective SaP and provide them with the tools to implement it.

Conclusion

Our narrative literature review has revealed that in recent years a small amount of high-quality, research-informed guidance has been published for university educators about the benefits of student-staff collaboration in the development of learning-oriented feedback practice. In parallel, we found there to be a paucity of empirical research that combines the two aspects, and we also found that the impacts of the projects have been variable.

Our findings reflect those of others who have explored working with students as partners (Healey & Healey, 2019). Involving SaP in learning-oriented feedback practice is as ‘messy’ but ultimately worthwhile as involving SaP in any other area of the university experience. The numerous barriers to SaP in general, are applicable to SaP in feedback practices.

Our review highlights that equitable student access to SaP, co-design and co-creation opportunities is essential to ensure that there are shared understandings of the aims and joint

ownership of the learning design. Proactive measures to promote inclusive recruitment at the co-design stage mean that the feedback activities are more likely to be accessible and effective in improving understanding and engagement for students. In this way, we understand SaP as an approach to teaching and learning. With feedback being integral to teaching and learning, true SaP can be characterised as a process rather than product.

This literature review will underpin the development of an interactive digital planning toolkit to help staff and students at the University of Strathclyde with the co-creation of UG courses that place at their centre, feedback literacy of students and staff. In this phase, we hope to welcome student interns, before then piloting the toolkit with teaching colleagues and UG students in different departments. We hope that this will ultimately lead to the ongoing development of feedback literacy by and for the benefit of both students and staff across our institution.

Reflection

Each of the members of the team has individually expressed what a positive, energising and uplifting experience it has been to be a part of this collaborative writing team.

It is important to make the distinction between a group and a team. A group is defined as individuals working together towards a common goal while teams are defined as having a common goal however, extending to acknowledging and embracing the individual roles and interdependence of the complementarity respective talents, working towards achieving a common goal (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

We appreciate the shared respect of our team members to allow us to feel comfortably vulnerable and supported, navigating this experience of being novices exploring the SoTL literature, in relation to working with SaP. This has and continues to be a truly rewarding collaborative experience.

The SaP (feedback) SoTL team would like to extend thanks to the University of Strathclyde, specifically Sean Morrissey, for this fantastic opportunity to be guided by eminent experts in SoTL, Ruth and Mick Healey.

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Appendix 1

Please access the link below to view the quality assessment document referred to in the text.

[Big-Tent criteria for excellent qualitative research](#)