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Student-faculty Co-inquiry Into Student Reading: Recognising SoTL as Pedagogic Practice

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Keywords

SoTL, Student researchers, Pedagogy, Higher education

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Abstract

This paper reports the evaluation of a student-faculty collaborative study investigating international students' perceptions of the role of reading in higher education. The study examined the academic reading and source-use practices of ten undergraduate students in a range of disciplines in one UK university. In previous research on student literacy practices, students are often positioned as research "objects" rather than as active participants with an investment in enhancing the student experience through engagement in pedagogic research. In this paper we present a case study of student faculty collaboration in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Drawing on the analysis of student and lecturer accounts of the collaborative research experience, we identify the benefits and challenges of student-faculty partnership approaches. We conclude by arguing that conceptualising SoTL as pedagogy may facilitate the engagement of students as co-researchers and expose to scrutiny a "hidden curriculum" of current approaches to SoTL.

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Introduction

It is argued that the challenge of reading in a second language is not only a result of converting literacy practices from one language into another, but also an outcome of the differing expectations of students and lecturers about how the texts of others should be used in written assessments (Ryan and Viète, 2009; Schmitt, 2005). Although there is limited empirical evidence that international students are more likely to plagiarise, non-native English speakers may be at greater risk of adopting reading and writing practices that can lead to plagiarised work without the intention to defraud (Abasi and Graves, 2008; Park, 2003).

Learning and teaching approaches have focused specifically on developing student writing and authorial identity as the basis for strengthening student understanding of authorship (Elander *et al.* 2010; Ireland and English 2011). Yet although reading is recognised as a significant challenge, the general "invisibility of reading" (van Pletzen, 2006, p. 106) has resulted in the neglect of a key issue for student learning. This gap in our knowledge about how reading practices are developed and understood by students informed the rationale of a qualitative study of international student reading practices in

the context of one UK higher education institution. The study was funded by a Higher Education Academy Teaching Development Individual Project Grant. An underpinning principle of the project design was to resist deficit accounts of international students' literacy practices in relation to "appropriate" ways of writing and instead to legitimise the ways in which students studying in the English-speaking academy might work with texts as readers and authors (Leask, 2006). This inclusive approach, aligned with a commitment to student engagement in the development and dissemination of the research project, was a key requirement of project funding.

Although there are examples of how students can be involved in shaping their student experience in university as participants, partners and, increasingly, agents for educational change, neither the lecturer nor students in this study had previously participated in projects that involved student engagement in teaching and learning research. This project therefore provided an opportunity not only to undertake a study of student reading practices that was informed by access to student voices but also to critically reflect on the experience of student-faculty collaboration in that research. Whilst the emerging outcomes of the study of student reading will be reported elsewhere, the role of student involvement in this project raises a number of important issues for the engagement of students in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Student engagement in SoTL projects is gaining ground as an important mechanism for assuring the authenticity of the research by including the student voice. The realities of an espoused inclusive approach to the research design and delivery, however, can pivot on inequalities of assumed authority and power between the lecturer and the students (Barnes *et al.*, 2010). Whilst inclusive approaches to research can attempt to disrupt these positions, these power inequalities are well-established in the traditional pedagogic relations between faculty and students in teaching and assessment. SoTL projects therefore operate within both the explicit and implicit pedagogic culture of the wider university context.

Drawing on a thematic analysis of lecturer and student accounts of their participation in undertaking their research roles, this paper presents a qualitative case study of student engagement in a SoTL project with the aim to explore the benefits, limitations and challenges of such student-faculty research partnerships. We argue that by understanding student-faculty relations enacted within collaborative SoTL projects specifically in pedagogic rather than research terms it is possible to expose to scrutiny the inherent "hidden curriculum" within current approaches to SoTL. We suggest that by being explicit about the nature of the pedagogic relations in SoTL it is possible to ensure that such projects can be transformative in terms of both the outcomes gained by participating students and the subsequent impact of SoTL on teaching and learning practices.

Engaging Students in Learning and Teaching Scholarship

The involvement of students as stakeholders in investigating and contributing to the development of the quality of their learning experiences in university is beginning to inform some enhancement activities of lecturers and researchers in the US and, increasingly, the UK. Moving beyond end-of-module student feedback on their learning experience as a way to access the student voice, there are now examples of students partnering staff in curriculum design (Bovill *et al.*, 2011, Mihans *et al.*, 2008), strategy development (Healey *et al.*, 2010) and pedagogic evaluation (Giles *et al.*, 2004; Bovill *et al.*, 2010). It has been argued, however, that engaging students specifically as pedagogic consultants within SoTL work "catalyzes a revision of students' relationships to their teachers and their responsibilities within their learning" whereby faculty can

benefit from the new insights into their practice that only their students can provide (Cook-Sather and Alter, 2011, p. 37; Cook-Sather, 2008).

Traditionally the student role in SoTL work “has been as a data source for academic investigators, who have ‘listened’ to, and then reported, the student voice” in project reports and publications (Partridge and Sandover, 2010, p. 4). Whilst student engagement has been important for a number of SoTL practitioners, the principal focus of advocates of SoTL has been to reconfigure the way teaching can be conceptualised as a scholarly activity in the context of increasingly polarised models of research and teaching practice in higher education. Within SoTL there are a number of arguments for involving students in independent and collaborative researcher roles in the inquiry into learning and teaching (Werder and Otis, 2010). Primary among them is that the active engagement of students in the study of teaching and learning ensures that the conversations that teachers and researchers have about pedagogy also involve those individuals who have the greatest stake in the quality of the learning experience (Gutman *et al.*, 2010). Student participation in research is also seen to have significant benefits for developing student meta-cognition and reflexivity (Barnes *et al.*, 2010).

When students are actively involved as co-inquirers, the benefits for faculty in terms of the quality of the research outcomes of SoTL work are widely reported. The experiences and perceived benefits for students participating as co-inquirers, however, have been less comprehensively scrutinised. It can be argued that including students in the research of learning and teaching may provide faculty with another opportunity to foster important teaching-research links in the curriculum by involving students in research-based learning processes (Healey and Jenkins, 2009). Yet whilst proponents of SoTL have pointed to the capacity of students to act as brokers in the translation of SoTL to classrooms with consequent enhancement of their own and their peer’s learning (Hutchings *et al.*, 2011), the more direct benefits to those students who have participated as co-inquirers have not been the primary focus of SoTL inquiry to date and have been assumed rather than evaluated critically.

McKinney *et al.* (2010) have suggested that, as a result of participating in SoTL work, students “may earn money or credit, develop relationships with faculty members, secure letters of recommendation, and discover new self-knowledge and skills” or, as one collaborating student explains, “working on this grant has helped me to really think about my learning as a student [...] and hopefully to learn better” (p. 89). It is these perceived benefits to students participating as co-inquirers in SoTL that are the focus for this SoTL case study. If, as Barnes, Hutchings and McKinney and colleagues have argued, collaborative approaches to SoTL provide a space to foster student-lecturer relationships and to enhance learner identity and meta-cognition in the company of both faculty and peers, student participation in SoTL not only informs the methodological and research outcomes of SoTL work but also constitutes a new but under-theorised pedagogic practice in higher education.

Conceptualising student-faculty partnership approaches to SoTL as a new pedagogic space in this way poses fundamental questions about the educational impact of this emerging practice that are now more routinely raised in the critical evaluation of traditional classroom or assessment practices. For Kuh (2008) the factors indicated in the following questions are fundamental to defining high-impact educational practices in terms of outcomes related to student retention, engagement and achievement. For example, does student participation in SoTL encourage motivation and investment in the learning experience; does it foster collaborative problem-solving and relationships within and across the academic community; does it facilitate opportunities to experience diversity and cross-cultural learning; does it provide opportunities for feedback on

student performance; does it enable integration, synthesis and application of knowledge to new contexts; and finally, does it make personal transformation possible?

In addition, whilst academic credit may be attached to SoTL projects in some cases, collaborative student-faculty research can often operate outside the formal curriculum. A supplementary question for evaluating student participation in SoTL in pedagogic terms, therefore, is how genuinely inclusive is this new educational space for those students with commitments – for example, financial, familial or cultural – that limit their access to educational opportunities that are not incorporated into the curriculum?

For the project reported in this paper, practice examples of student-faculty partnerships in the study of teaching and learning and the emerging theorisation of student collaboration in SoTL were used to inform the design of a student-faculty co-inquiry into international student reading practices. Acknowledging the tacit pedagogic dimensions of SoTL, what is also evident in reviewing the literature on student-lecturer collaborations is the need to interrogate and theorise the experiences of the students and the lecturer as co-inquirers in terms of their motivations, experiences and perception of their learning outcomes in relation to the project. In the next section, we summarise the design of the project and the methodology, the data collection methods and analysis of student perceptions of their experience of co-inquiry.

Exploring Student and Faculty Perceptions of Co-inquiry in SoTL

The project sought to investigate how international students conceptualise and approach the task of reading in preparation for written assessments. It used a participatory research approach by engaging international students as reflective inquirers into their own and others' literacy practices. The project was designed and led by the faculty member but a fundamental principle of the data collection phase was the empowering of student participants as co-researchers, providing a space for capturing the meanings they attached to their individual and collective academic practices and enabling them to participate in the various phases of the research, including data analysis and dissemination of the outcomes, as co-presenters at an academic conference on teaching and learning and as co-authors of subsequent publications.

In investigating the students' experience of participating in a SoTL project, a case study methodology was utilised to recognise both the specific phenomena of student engagement in research and the fundamental social and institutional context within which that engagement occurs. This methodology is appropriate for answering the question of "how" students experience research collaboration with faculty whilst also ensuring that their experience is understood as it is embedded in the real-life context of the lived experience of the university (Yin, 2009). As "insider" researchers in the analysis and interpretation of the themes developed through the study, we have sought to remain reflexive of our own positions, assumptions, values and beliefs as we draw inferences from the qualitative data. As Simons (2009) argues, subjectivity is a strength rather than a weakness of case study research. A key benefit in involving students in the data analysis, articulated by students during various stages of the broader study, is the possibility of both making "familiar" the experiences of other students in unfamiliar disciplines whilst also making "other" their own experiences through comparison. This enabled the students and the faculty member to explore critically their interpretative frameworks throughout the study.

Ten undergraduate students studying in English as a second language volunteered to participate in the study initiated by a faculty member in a central unit responsible for the enhancement of learning and teaching in the institution. The faculty member had no

teaching relationship to the participating students. In terms of demographics, of the ten participating students three were completing degrees in humanities, one in social sciences, three in medicine and the remaining in science-related subject areas. The students were at different stages of their undergraduate studies from first to final year during the project and this included medicine which is an undergraduate degree programme in the UK context. The study included five female and five male students. Five students were originally from mainland Europe and five were from Asia. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms for the purposes of assuring anonymity of participants.

The students were asked to select one written assessment they were required to submit for their programme of study and to collect all the materials – hard copy and digital – that they had read in preparation for the assessment, including any annotations and personal notes if appropriate. The majority of the students included a copy of drafts and final version of their essay in the materials they collected. All students participated in an individual semi-structured interview with the faculty member using the collected reading materials as prompts to explore their approaches to reading and understandings of appropriate source-use. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymised prior to data analysis. The students were then invited to participate in initial data analysis of the transcribed interviews to draw out themes from the interview data. Six of the students participated in this stage of the project. Students were given a brief introduction to the stages of thematic analysis of interview data and initial themes were developed by the students, facilitated by the faculty member.

Full institutional ethical approval was gained before the study commenced and focused specifically on the mechanisms used to assure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants in the context of a collaborative student-faculty project. Informed consent was required for both the interview and data analysis phases of the study before the collection of data. This included the provision of clear guidance on the issues of anonymity and confidentiality and student and faculty responsibility for maintaining this throughout the study. All participating students and faculty were able to review and redact interview transcripts and reflective accounts before analysis.

What is evident from this account of the research process is that the students were involved only after the research questions and research design had been developed by the faculty member. Their involvement in the data collection and analysis was therefore fundamentally framed by the faculty member's interests, assumptions and values. Within these constraints, however, it was still possible for students to inform the conclusions and potentially challenge interpretations that did not reflect their own experiences. In evaluating the experience of participating in the study all student participants were asked to participate in an asynchronous online discussion group and respond to the following prompts:

- What motivated you to participate in the study?
- What did you think were the most important outcomes of the data analysis meeting?
- Did you feel you had any influence on the direction and outcomes of the study?
- Did you think you have gained anything from participation in the study?

An asynchronous online discussion group was utilised on the basis that it could overcome the time zone differences of a geographically distributed group of students who had returned to their home countries at the time of the evaluation. It could also facilitate more detailed and reflective answers than face-to-face focus group discussion with students able to read and respond to postings by other members as it has been argued that computer-mediated discussion of this type can lead to greater equality in

participation. Given the attempts to be inclusive within the project, the potential informality of the online discussion group can also challenge the power dynamics of traditional research methods (Fox *et al.*, 2007). There were thirty-nine posts in the online discussion group with postings varying in length from one sentence to several paragraphs.

Subsequently three students volunteered to co-present the outcomes at a conference and then, along with the faculty member, independently wrote longer reflective accounts of their experience of co-research following the conference presentation in response to the same prompts and in addition were asked to reflect on their experience of collaborating in dissemination of the outcomes. The aim was to use this reflective writing process as a method of inquiry to explore further the experiential identity of their shared researcher role in the context of the study as well as the topic of the research (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). Firstly, in this paper we present these four reflective accounts of the research process to provide a rich, descriptive insight into the experience of the project in practice. The reflections are reported in full except where excisions have been made for the purpose of anonymising the reflective narratives and these are indicated by square brackets. These reflections illustrate both the holistic and integrative nature of the accounts of dual researcher and pedagogic identity for both the students and the faculty member as it is articulated within the individual texts. Including these accounts in full also signals the importance of acknowledging the different voices and different perspectives of students and faculty in our attempt to understand the phenomena of SoTL co-inquiry through the process of writing within the case study methodology.

An inductive approach to thematic analysis (Thomas, 2006) was used to develop categories from the careful reading and re-reading of the discussion group postings by the faculty member. This was then triangulated with the student-led analysis of the longer reflective accounts to validate the themes developed out of the analysis of the discussion group data and explore the emerging categories in more depth.

Gwen's Reflection (Student)

I decided to volunteer for this project because the advertised £50 reimbursement seemed like an attractive sum for what appeared to be a straight-forward, fuss-free study with an interesting topic. Indeed, it was easy money. Yet as the study progressed, my financial drive was replaced by enthusiasm. The project captured my attention; I wished to invest myself with the study as much as possible. Namely, I volunteered to co-present on the project's outcomes at a conference [...]. I expected the study to be uncomplicated and easy to take part in. My expectations were met because Fran was organised and professional at all times. I also felt that the amount of work needed from me as a study participant was sensible: I felt engaged enough to be strongly involved, but never asked to do what I would consider an excessive amount of work.

I worried whether being asked to collect my reading sources and handle them 'the way I always did,' which made me conscious of my actions, changed the way I engaged with my sources. I was also a little concerned whether Fran's desire to have a collaborative project was feasible. Whilst in this study student participants took up a more active role than is commonplace in studies of this type, Fran remained the organising presence behind the project. I felt it was important for everyone involved to recognise this and eschew any false expectations of collaboration on the same level.

Fran was the organising voice behind the project. She set up tasks for the student participants, and guided us throughout the course of the study. I did not engage much

with other students since most work was done individually, firstly as all students collected their reading data, then as Fran analysed it on her own. A fair amount of work occurred between Fran and each student in one-to-one interviews. Again, at that stage I did not interact with other students but with Fran. One exception to this pattern was the data analysis meeting. There, all students read through anonymised interview transcripts in small groups to report on emerging themes back to Fran. Another exception to this set-up was the preparation for the conference meeting between Fran, another student and I. As we sat down together to discuss the project, we had an involved conversation with both the project facilitator and another fellow student.

Taking part in this study confirmed my perceptions of subject-generated collaborative work. Conceived and overlooked by Fran, the project could never be subject-generated. Having said that, accomplished between Fran and students working together in joint intellectual effort, this project was somewhat more collaborative than other studies that treat students only as subjects.

Co-presenting at the conference was a valuable experience [...]. It is important to note, however, that my collaboration at the conference [...] was limited to my reflections on my own experiences. In other words, my collaboration never extended outside my observations about myself. This is unsurprising; I was only a study participant whereas Fran not only conceived and ran the study but also had subject-specific knowledge about its topics. I feel it is important to accept such a setup without raising unreasonable expectations.

Chris's Reflection (Student)

After the setback I faced in my essay writing modules last year, I have always wanted to find ways to improve my essay writing skills. This project provides a very good platform for me to improve, because it is designed specifically to investigate how international students using English as a second language to read and write, and it allows me to learn more about the [institutions]'s view on plagiarism. Moreover, since the project requires the participants to hand in our essays alongside any notes that have recorded our reading practices, I thought it was quite an effective way to monitor myself work better throughout the term. And of course, £50 to a student is indeed an attractive offer.

Even though we had a briefing section on how to collate data, I still wasn't sure what the researcher was expecting me to hand in as evidence of my 'reading practice', as I was not very familiar with my reading pattern. I was worried I didn't record down some important points that the researcher may be looking for. Also, I was not sure would I end up writing a very bad piece of essay, or even I was at risk of plagiarism. Yet after the first one-on-one interview with the researcher, I started to have a clearer sense and what I should look out for the study. During the project I didn't really have chance to interact with other participants until the later stage when we were doing the data analysis. It was a very valuable experience to see how other fellow students read for their assignments, and the differences in our disciplines just gave me new insights on the issue of learning and reading.

The concept of plagiarism was never taught in the A-level curriculum nor when I was [...] doing my secondary education. I was alarmed when I learnt the consequence of plagiarism in university, so I joined some workshops in my first year, but the only message I received was 'referencing well means avoiding plagiarism'. However during the study, I re-examined my own reading pattern at the interview, that until then I started to understand the aim of university assignments and the purpose of the

prescribed readings. The best way to avoid plagiarism is to read well, and using the sources effectively to support the arguments in the essay.

Rose's Reflection (Student)

I was made aware of the opportunity to volunteer for the project through a circular email and I was instantly attracted to the project because it specifically targeted international students. Academic reading has been such a big part of my university life and even in the last year of my degree, I feel as if I am still doing some adjustments to my reading practices and habits. I was also interested to know how my reading method compares to that of other international students. Although I am aware that reading is a personal activity and that there is probably no 'right' or 'wrong' method of doing it, the probability of finding out which method is better or preferred for academic reading was also my main motivation. The fact that the participants were included in data processing also attracted me to take part because [...] I am only used to conducting quantitative research and have no previous experience in qualitative research whatsoever. The prospect of gaining new research experience was very appealing.

I came to the first meeting without any expectation because I did not have a clear idea of how the study was going to be conducted. After we were informed of the reading and material collection task, I did feel a hesitation and thought of leaving the project because I was worried I would not be able to record my reading activities due to my unstructured reading habit. There were also some concerns over which written assignment to choose for the project because I had several essays and a report with deadlines within the timeframe of the project and therefore could be used for the study. The interview process also presented some difficulties for me because several questions demanded a recollection of things I did not usually pay attention to or necessarily knew the answer to and it was quite worrying because I realised that the interview would be analysed and therefore form the result/conclusion of the study.

The analysis stage was the most interesting and informative stage as we were given the opportunity to read through the interview scripts and find out how our reading methods differed from each other's, and how reading practices could influence the way a student approach an essay question. It was also interesting to see how others got around the issue of plagiarism and hear their experience. I found the discussion and the collective analysis to identify the common themes generated from the interviews very constructive although perhaps a little too unstructured. The role of Fran in the analysis was probably a bit too dominant, but it was probably inevitable because she needed to direct the discussion as many of the participants did not have experience in this kind of project. The follow-up online forum at the end of the study was also an excellent way of sharing any comments the participants might have about the project. Although I think that my participation in this study has been a valuable experience, I did not feel like I have gained anything that might influence or improve my academic reading and writing practices, which was what I first expected when I decided to participate in the project.

Fran's Reflection (Faculty)

To be frank the decision to include elements of student engagement in the project was entirely based on the requirements of the funding call. I had never undertaken research of this type before but in putting the bid together it seemed feasible to involve students in some parts of the study. Having done some reading around student involvement in research, the values underpinning student engagement seemed to tally with the philosophies that inform my approach to teaching. When I met the students I began to

be excited at the prospect of involving them. Talking to the students about the project I started to get a sense of how participating mattered to them. I was surprised. And I also got nervous because I felt a sudden pressure to make sure that what I did as a result of this project had to really matter too. This was no longer just an intellectual exercise for me as a researcher with some conference papers and some publications to deliver on – I had made a contract and had an obligation to these students willing to share their time with me and seemingly needing something from me too and I was concerned that I was going to let them down. When I subsequently read Wymer *et al.* (2012) as I was starting to write up the research I was relieved to see that they too had expressed that sense of their accountability to their students and how this was good for them as researchers.

As the project developed I was impressed by the insights the students were bringing to the parts of the project I had involved them in and regretted the limits I had placed on that in the original design. I began to be incredibly aware of how much control I had over the project – for all the claims of student involvement I could make I was still dictating the direction and determining the outcomes of the study. Co-presenting [...] was also a huge challenge – how could I genuinely involve students in that situation when I was asking them to come into my world? It was actually really hard not to feel during the data analysis meetings that, although I was encouraging them to draw conclusions from the transcripts, somehow or other I was manipulating this. When I then asked the students to evaluate the experience of participation I was distressed that some of the students had felt that they had not gained what they had hoped from that experience. Unsurprisingly the reason some students had participated in the study was that they were looking for practical help in relation to the topic of essay writing and plagiarism and I had failed to provide that.

The project has been quite a journey for me as a researcher – it has brought what I do as an academic right back to how it impacts on others and made me think again about the relationships within research that bid applications, ethics forms and publications often turn into abstractions. I am writing a new bid that includes students so something must have happened during this experience to draw me back to something that frightens and excites me at the same time.

Results

The thematic analysis of the discussion group postings and reflective writing identified four themes: participation in the academic community; power relationships between student and faculty; development of student understanding and meta-cognition; and the affective dimension of participating in co-inquiry. This latter theme emerged strongly from the reflective accounts but was significantly absent from the shorter discussion group postings. The other themes were found in both the discussion group and reflective accounts although not all themes were found in all participants' reports on their experience. Each theme is summarised below with illustrative quotes from the discussion group postings and reflective accounts.

Participation in the academic community

The primary motivation for engaging with the study was initially pragmatic for many participants. Financial considerations in terms of either fulfilling funding requirements or the availability of volunteer payments were important influencers on the majority of the students' decisions to participate as well as the faculty member's commitment to co-inquiry. Students, however, also provided other motivations behind their volunteering and their decision to continue with the study that reflected their sense of their relationship (both positive and negative) to the academic community. This was expressed through their perception of specific conventions of academic behaviour:

"I've had to write essays ever since my first year at uni [sic] ...and I wanted to know if I was doing it the way it should be done" (Vishwas).

"I thought I would gain insight into how to write essays better and what is expected of me" (Tia).

Participants also expressed sometimes shifting allegiances to different groups within the wider academic community. The focus of the study on the experiences of international students in the English-speaking academy was identified as an important motivation for volunteering to participate. Several students commented that they became interested in the study because, "firstly, the research aims directly at international students" (Tuyen). A number of the participating students noted, however, how the categorising of students based on their international status was ultimately not an appropriate category for encapsulating their specific experiences during the study:

"I think the main outcome was that there is no difference between the origin [sic] of international students but between departments. That is because there are different requirements and approaches to writing essays and assignments in different subject areas" (Kasia).

"Some departments (like mine) would take elaborate steps to coach students to conduct research and engage with sources. Others, however, seemed to think such practice was unnecessary and threw their students straight in to the whirlpool of reading academic texts. Without any lifeguard apparel!" (Gwen).

The metaphor of the "whirlpool" is apposite in describing the fluidity of student participants' perception of social allegiance to disciplinary or departmental communities as potentially unsafe whilst participating in a multi-disciplinary inquiry. Indeed when asked to propose any strategies for engaging students in this type of collaborative research, several students proposed a range of different ways to group students to facilitate comparisons and shared practices. These students explicitly focused on ways to configure and reconfigure group memberships as central to future studies, emphasising the significance of social group membership for participants in understanding the nature of the study:

"try to target a larger cohort of international students, coming from even more diverse backgrounds" (Vishwas).

"directly comparing students whose first language is English and international students from the same subject areas" (Kasia).

"intra-disciplinary study would certainly be beneficial and will probably be more effective in researching learning experiences because it will be able to eliminate the huge variation in reading and writing practices (as well as academic expectations) among the subjects, and focus on the common issues identified by students within the same subject area" (Rose).

One additional social grouping that was a significant factor for both the student and lecturer was the new community engendered by participation in the study itself:

"I considered dropping out of the study because it was very time-consuming and I had exams but there weren't that many participants, so I didn't" (Tia).

This sense of allegiance to the research group is also reflected in Fran's sense of her "accountability" or "obligation" to this newly-formed community and Gwen's account of her wish "to invest myself with the study as much as possible".

Power relationships between student and faculty

Previous studies of the role of student voice have emphasised the impact of power differentials in terms of authority, institutional status and expertise between the faculty-researcher and participating students. This was a factor raised in both Gwen's and Rose's reflective accounts, with the faculty member positioned as the "organising presence" and the perception that she adopted a "dominant" role at different stages of the study. Other students in the discussion group shared this view of the faculty member's dominant role in the project:

"I don't think I had any influence over the direction of the research because the aim of the study was decided before participants were involved. However, isn't that the way research projects always proceed?" (Kasia).

"I also felt reassured as taking part in this study confirmed my prior insights regarding subject authority. Whilst the desire to involve subjects in research projects is a positive drive, it is impossible to achieve an uncompromised authority balance between the researcher and the researched" (Gwen).

Gwen's significant adjective – "reassured" – suggests, however, that this power position is not perceived negatively but reflects the recognition and acceptance of a normative conception of the student-lecturer power relationships revisited within the power dynamics of SoTL practice.

Yet student participants also articulated a sense of their authority to influence the study from within and the impact this might have on the outcomes of the inquiry. This included the perception of the power of voice that they could effect either by withholding or misrepresenting their reading practices:

"I don't think I have any influence over the direction of the research, yet I am thinking would the data I reported was only the way I thought how approached my essay [sic]. In reality I might have done some other things that I didn't notice" (Chris)

"I do feel that the answers I gave in the interview somewhat influenced the direction of the research because they contributed to the common themes identification, which would then be used to generate the outcomes of the research" (Rose)

The perception of the power of student voice as a signifier of research authenticity was further articulated by those students who had participated as co-presenters in the conference paper. Gwen comments that the "choice of what to talk about was mine" and "my presence at the conference shaped the public perceptions of the study" whilst Chris notes that "When I spoke to fellow students about this presentation, they were glad that I had got the chance to voice out [sic] our verdicts".

Development of student understanding and meta-cognition

For a number of the students, participation in the study enabled them to reflect critically on their academic reading and writing practices as well as develop their understanding of plagiarism:

"I have actually become more aware of my own style and perhaps where I can improve on" (Vishwas).

"the research made me think about questions I have never thought of before, like why I read books and whether I am reading in the right way. I feel more assured of what I am expected when writing essays and reading books" (Tuyen).

"the project helped me realise how I write an essay which might be useful when writing the next essay" (Kasia).

Although Rose's longer reflection demonstrates that these were not universal outcomes for all students, these accounts of the benefits of participation reveal students' perceptions of their increased levels of criticality as writers, enhanced meta-cognition in relation to the topic of the research – their literacy practices – and greater understanding of the nature of these practices in the context of university study.

Other students, specifically those who participated in the wider dissemination activities of the study, also pointed to the benefits of participating in the research process itself and the specific opportunities to work within a different research and epistemological paradigm:

"I haven't taken part in a study like that before: in this project, I was asked to interpret data myself rather than rely solely on the researcher to do so" (Gwen)

"I am always interested in knowing how research works or what researchers are doing in general" (Chris).

"The fact that the participants were included in data processing also attracted me to take part because, being a science student, I have no experience in qualitative research whatsoever" (Rose).

These students saw the opportunity to undertake new research tasks such as data analysis and the possibility of gaining greater insight into the processes of researchers working in their institution to be key factors that influenced their decision to participate in the study and potentially achieve important learning outcomes.

Affective dimension of co-inquiry

The final theme that emerged from analysis of the discussion group postings and, to a greater extent, the reflective accounts was the role emotions played in the student and lecturer experience of research participation. A number of the participants signalled in the discussion group postings that they had anticipated that the project would be an "interesting experience" (Taddeo) and several students pointed to the cognitive skills that they believed that participating in the study had developed. For example, Chris noted that he "was given a chance to practise my public speaking skills". Yet in some focus group postings and in the reflective accounts these intellectual concerns were presented in parallel with expressions of enthusiasm, anxiety and emotional commitment that participation in the study had engendered:

"I left the first meeting feeling excited and have maintained that same level of excitement about the project ever since" (Gwen).

"I got interested in the study itself and excited about the outcomes" (Kasia)

In the reflective accounts, co-inquirers – both student and faculty – used a powerful and emotive language to express their experiences through the different stages of the study

with the authors all declaring they were, at points, worried, concerned, alarmed, distressed but also attracted, excited or found engagement in the project appealing.

SoTL as Pedagogy: Making Explicit the “hidden curriculum” of SoTL

SoTL is increasingly being proposed as a fundamental strategy for enhancing teaching and learning and the student experience in higher education. SoTL achieves this, it is argued, by engaging practitioners in seeing their teaching “as an object of investigation” for the purposes of impacting on “how faculty conduct themselves as teachers” in pedagogic contexts and publicly sharing these investigations (Bass, 1999; Hutchings *et al.*, 2011, p. 10). In seeking to fulfil the “transformational agenda” of early theorising of SoTL (Hutchings, 2000, p. 8), recent SoTL inquiry has also sought to engage students as active participants in the study of pedagogy – as evaluators, research assistants, collaborators and independent researchers. In focusing on defining teaching practice as *scholarship*, however, the shift towards engaging students as co-inquirers and advocating the learning outcomes for participating students has not been accompanied by a comparable recognition of SoTL as *pedagogic* in intent or function in relation to students.

The evaluation of student engagement in the small-scale study of international student reading practices presented in this paper provides insight into students’ perception of their participation in this type of research as a learning experience with anticipated learning outcomes. This process of co-inquiry provided opportunities to collaborate within and across new communities and improve self-reflexivity in relation to reading and writing practices, as well as facilitate personal growth through the integration of intellectual skills and emotion central to transformational learning (Beard *et al.*, 2007). Such outcomes accord with Kuh’s (2008) delineation of high impact educational practices. The theme related to power within the study, however, suggests an important dimension of the pedagogic relationships in SoTL that can be evaded through the simplistic framing of student participation in research as the unproblematic empowerment of student voice.

Whilst student engagement in SoTL is seen as inherently transformative for the outcomes of SoTL (Manor *et al.*, 2010), recent theorisation of student voice has significantly problematised the power dynamics of student agency within higher education enhancement (Taylor and Robinson, 2009). Recognising the inevitability of power discrepancies within the context of traditional higher education practices (Mann, 2008), conceptualising SoTL involving students as pedagogy calls for increased attention to the potentially normative functioning of a “hidden curriculum” (Portelli, 1993) that has been left unexposed in current theorisation of student engagement in SoTL. Whilst the explicit aims and practices of the study reported here sought to emphasise student authority and equality in research practice in ways that were intended to be transformative, the mutual and tacit construction of the power relationship between student and faculty within the study is reflective of traditional teacher-student relationships that can be fundamentally asymmetric.

Whilst potentially an important mechanism for enhancing research outcomes and impact, involving students in SoTL cannot automatically alter or transgress the established pedagogic relationships between students and faculty. Indeed SoTL practices may well perpetuate narrow assumptions about student voice and identity even while they espouse a different set of values and practices. For example, as Karnieli-Miller *et al.* (2009) have suggested, by seeking to ensure rich and illuminating data through building trust between faculty and students, the “warm, caring, and empowering character of qualitative interviews might conceal huge power differences, and the dialogue that takes

place in the interviewing process might be a cover for the exercise of power" (p. 283). Revealing and critiquing the "hidden curriculum" of the pedagogic practices embedded within co-inquiry with students is therefore a priority if SoTL is to become authentically transformative of higher education practices.

Conclusion

The implications of this evaluation of student participation in SoTL is that whilst engaging students actively in the investigation of teaching and learning is a powerful way to ensure that the outcomes of SoTL are authentic and aligned to the needs of students, student engagement requires researchers to rethink the pedagogic relations involved in engaging students as researchers. McKinney *et al.* (2010) suggest that student involvement in inquiry can sit along a continuum of roles from validity checkers to independent researchers, but it is fundamental to articulate how these different roles are predicated on, in some cases, normative constructions of the pedagogic relationship. Such constructions can be either based on unofficial or unintended messages on the part of the faculty-researcher or created by the student-researchers based on their prior experiences and expectations of power hierarchies that they accept as inherent in university contexts.

As with the call to resist deficit accounts of international students' identities within the English-speaking academy, it is also necessary to recognise and legitimate the transitional and potentially transgressive identities of students as they participate in SoTL. In seeking to develop SoTL it is important to find strategies for resisting approaches to student engagement that perpetuate or manipulate the traditional power relationships of the wider university, in particular the pedagogic relationship between student and lecturer. As this study has demonstrated, this relationship can even seep into SoTL collaborations where the student-lecturer relationship is not a direct one but where participants still occupy student and lecturer identities within the wider institution.

One strategy for responding to these challenges is to engage students in the design of SoTL inquiry at an early stage to ensure that research questions, methods and research roles are conceived from the perspective of students (McKinney *et al.*, 2010). As this paper has argued, framing student-faculty co-inquiry as pedagogy requires that we also expose to scrutiny the pedagogic relations within the social and intellectual dimensions of collaborative research practice. Applying the now well-established paradigm of student-centredness to SoTL also requires that we are explicit and open about the student role and responsibilities in inquiry particularly in relation to how the practices of SoTL enable student learning. In doing so we put under scrutiny the expectations, assumptions and values that both students and faculty bring to collaboration as part of the "hidden curriculum" of SoTL.

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