Pedagogical Partners: Designing Teaching & Learning Experiences that Foster Inclusion and Equity by Elevating Student Perspectives.

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Abstract.

This paper describes the 2023 pilot of a Pedagogical Partners project situated within the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL) at University College Cork (UCC). This project was intentionally designed to elevate and amplify student voices across diverse identities and perspectives with the goal of improving inclusive learning experiences and equity-minded teaching practices in higher education. Building on the literature on pedagogical partnerships and inclusive, equity-minded teaching, we share experience-informed insights from this pilot project at UCC. In this HEA/Path 4 funded initiative, undergraduate students selected for their rich array of intersectional identities were partnered with teaching staff interested in exploring how to make their teaching approaches more inclusive. The opportunity to focus on inclusive teaching practices informed by student observation, voice and Universal Design principles has proven to be highly generative and yielded enhanced learning experiences for all involved. Our explicitly equity-minded approach contributes to a growing focus of pedagogical partnership work, research and literature in recent years. As expected in any emergent practice, the supporting research for pedagogical partnerships focusing on inclusion and equity is sparse and there is need to add to this limited extant research. We respond by offering this exploratory case study and describing the design, structure, training and support strategies implemented in our pilot of this Pedagogical Partnership Project. It is our hope that sharing our experience will help others to pursue their own pedagogical partnerships aimed at elevating student voice to inform and enact inclusive educational approaches that enhance learning for all students.

Keywords: Equity; Inclusion; Pedagogical partnership; Student-centered; Teaching & Learning.

1.   Introduction.

This paper describes the 2023 pilot of a Pedagogical Partners project situated within the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL) at the University College Cork. This project was intentionally designed to elevate and amplify student voices across diverse identities and perspectives with the goal of improving inclusive learning experiences and equity-minded teaching practices in higher education (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013; deBie et al., 2021; Cook-Sather, 2018). Building on the literature on pedagogical partnerships and inclusive, equity-minded teaching, we share experience-based insights into how to structure and support pedagogical partnerships that focus on inclusive practices informed by Universal Design. Our approach aligns strongly with the definition of Pedagogical Partnerships (also referred to as Students As Partners projects), offered up a decade ago:

"…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 conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis." (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp 6-7)

In this HEA/Path 4 funded initiative, we partner undergraduate students selected for their rich array of intersectional identities with teaching staff interested in exploring how to make their teaching approaches more inclusive. The opportunity to focus on inclusive teaching practices informed by student observation, voice and Universal Design principles has proven to be highly generative and yielded enhanced learning experiences for all involved. Our programme's explicitly equity-minded approach joins an area of excitingly emergent work that in recent years has seen significant international growth. The practitioner-researcher pathway is developing fast (Mercer-Mapstone & Abbot, 2020; Ní Bheoláin et al., 2020) and is increasingly well worn. As expected in any emergent practice, the supporting research for pedagogical partnerships focusing on inclusion and equity is limited to date and there is both need and scope for related research. We respond by offering this exploratory case study and describing the design, structure, training and support strategies implemented in our pilot of this Pedagogical Partnership Project. It is our hope that sharing our experience and exploratory pathway will help others pursue their own pedagogical partnerships aimed at elevating student voice to inform and enact inclusive educational approaches that enhance learning for all students.

1.1 Contextualising the Pedagogical Partners Project.

Increasing access to equity deserving populations has been identified as a priority in Ireland's National Access Plan (Higher Education Authority, 2022), as well as internationally by UNESCO, identifying these as "*those who are marginalized or are constrained by existing structures and practices*" (Sabzalieva et al., 2022, p. 12). In higher education, these are the groups who have been disproportionately impacted by policies and structures that discriminate against them (in visible and less visible forms), significantly impacting their academic, personal, and professional lives. While local context influences which groups this encompasses, and to date, there is no agreed definition of equity deserving groups (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021), Sabzalieva et al.(2022) identify the following equity deserving groups prevalent in many societies: racialized people, indigenous peoples and minorities, people with limited economic means, persons with disabilities, women, LGBTQ+ persons, forcibly displaced people, and people from remote and/or rural locations. This definition, while broad, can be seen in the Irish National Access Plan which prioritizes individuals who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities and have disabilities, including intellectual disabilities (Higher Education Authority, 2022).

This project is situated within an inclusive HE context, University College Cork, which values and actively supports inclusive education (Higher Education Authority, 2022). Our contribution to the Path 4 2023 Inclusive University plan, undertaken in collaboration with other campus units striving to enhance students' experience, was a broader Co-Creating Inclusion and Equity in Teaching and Learning initiative with a goal to enact sustainable models of professional development fostering equity-minded inclusive teaching practices that are grounded in universal design and support the participation and success of all UCC learners. This Pedagogical Partners Project is at the forefront of this initiative. A close collaborating partner in this endeavour was Access UCC, which supports students who historically have lower representation in HE across the following categories: lower socio-economic backgrounds, mature students, students with disabilities, part-time/flexible learners and further education award holders.

To address the unique context of the University and implement an appropriate Student as Partner model, we worked to carefully contextualise our design and approach (Healey & Healy, 2019). This pilot project creates pedagogical partnerships with students with the goal of enhancing access for historically marginalised groups (Cook-Sather & Seay, 2021) by

embracing student voices and perspectives to enhance our ability to address equity, inclusion, and justice in classrooms and curricula (Abbot, 2023; Cook-Sather, 2020). Most particularly we actively explore opportunities for students from underrepresented groups to collaborate/help reinvent course designs and assessments for equity and justice (de Bie et al., 2021). Recruitment of volunteers to serve as Student Partners from within UCC was informed by Access UCC data on underrepresented student populations and offered up a clear representation of selected populations identified as equity-deserving in the definitions above and within UCC. According to their chosen self-identification, individuals who answered the call and were ultimately selected as partners. This included students with limited economic means/lower socio-economic backgrounds, minorities (/international/relocated), mature students, persons with disabilities, women, LGBTQ+ persons and part-time/flexible learners. We further attended to the ways that a Pedagogical Partnership approach focused on inclusion and equity intersects and aligns with the principles of universal design/UDL, a well-established feature of the UCC educational landscape.

2.   The Design of the Pilot Project.

Pedagogical Partnerships supported by Centres for Teaching and Learning come in a variety of sizes, structures and implementation models (de Bie et al., 2021; Peart et al, 2023; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; NSteP, 2021), just like their institutional homes. Having explored models for partnering with students and identified common features and divergent practices, we incorporated this analysis to inform our design and identify types of models and features encompassing: support for faculty; support for students; recruitment strategies; and level and purpose of partnership (Cook-Sather et al., 2019). Our Project's design was emergent and informed by elements of other pedagogical partnership projects as cited from the literature while also deeply contextualised for our university setting. As a pilot, it was further predicated on exploring possibilities with the resources at hand while building a structure that can be expanded once explored (Boville et al., 2016; Felten et al., 2014). As such, the initial pilot phase of this project consisted of:

•   5 modules - one from each College and Adult Continuing Education

•   Selected/taught by 5 Teaching Partners

•   10 Student Partners.

Together, comprising 5 Partner Teams (see Figure 1):

•   1 Teacher Partner and

•   2 Student Partners – drawn 1 from the College & 1 from another college.

Figure 1: Partner team structure & partners project logo.
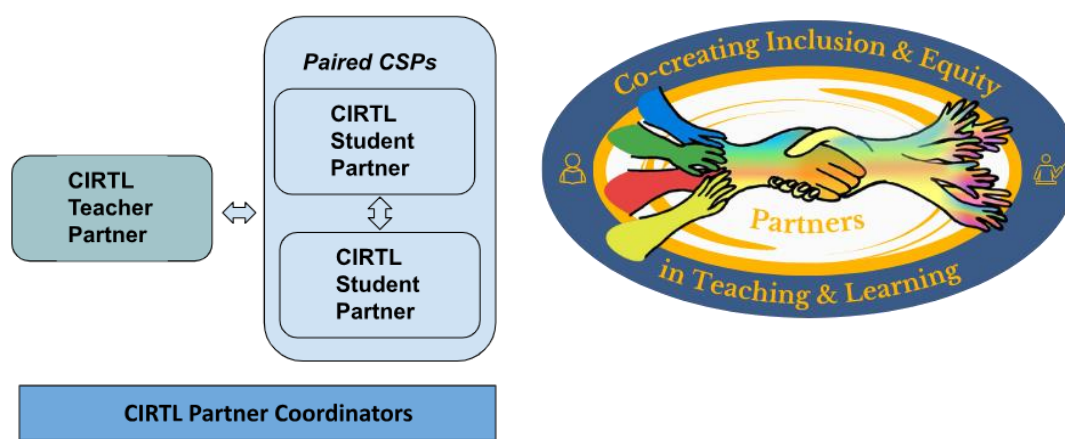
This design attends to issues of power dynamics between student-teacher interactions (de Bie et al., 2022), confidence and skills building and complementarity across paired Student Partners, while balancing and providing increased insight and perspectives encompassing student identity and backgrounds and accounting for sustainability and integrity of the pilot across the semester.

2.1 Partner roles and responsibilities.

Partner roles and responsibilities were shared from the inception of the project and were included in the invitation message to provide the foundation for the Interest Form that potential partners completed. These were central to the design of the project and its pilot, which was intended to create authentic relationships between Partners, building trust and challenging traditional power dynamics (Matthews et al., 2021; Iftikhar, 2021). These are captured and reflected side-by-side in Table 1.

Table 1: Partners responsibilities, contributions and participation benefits.

What Student Partners Do/Get	What Teacher Partners Do/Get

• Orientation Training [2-3 hrs]
• Attend module and observe/collect data about the teaching/learning interactions [3 hrs/wk]
• Conducting mid-semester module feedback [3-5 hrs]
• Meet with other Student Partners weekly   [1 hr/wk]
• Communicate regularly with Teacher Partners [1 hr/wk]
   o Email or Share insights weekly
   o Meet at least twice a month (as agreed between partners)
   o Reflect on module observations, identify potential actionable feedback
	• Orientation [2 hrs]
	• Communicate regularly with Student Partners
	   o First meeting with SPs - introduce module
	   o Read/respond to SPs' observations & insights (weekly)
	   o Meet with SPs fortnightly for joint reflection (as mutually agreed)
	• Meet with SPs to discuss mid-semester module feedback results [2 hrs]
	• Meet with other Teacher Partners and Partner Co-ordinators for support [1 hr/month]
	• Reflect and report on actionable feedback and changes identified based on student impressions, data and input [4 hrs, ongoing]
	• Teacher Partner final focus group feedback [1-2 hrs]

Expectations and Compensation: Expected Number of hours/activity and time commitment: **Total of 82 hours/semester** • ~ 6 hr/week for 12 semester weeks • +10 training and additional work hours before/during/after the semester. Compensation • Rate of €11.53/hour • EmployAgility Award Eligibility	**Expectations and Participation Benefits:** Expected Number of hours/activity and time commitment: Approximately **25 hours /semester** • Partnering with students and revising modules/teaching activities to facilitate learning for all students. • Leadership shaping initiative focused on creating an Inclusive University aligned with Strategic Plan. • Engagement in Continued Professional Development. • Allocation of €600 for project-related expenses and to relevant professional development. • Support reflecting on research/sharing practice including: o Teaching & Learning Showcase

What Student Partners Do/Get	What Teacher Partners Do/Get
	o Funding opportunities.

2.2 Partner recruitment and selection process.

The recruitment and selection process were designed, initiated and completed over the months of May through June in 2023. The sections below describe the data, considerations and processes along with the selection criteria used to finalise our Partner Teams.

Recruitment of Student and Teacher Partners involved open calls to teaching staff and targeted distribution of Interest Forms using existing support structures and communication channels with/to students potentially matched to target populations. The focus was on recruiting those who were intrigued by the idea of actively contributing to inclusive education at the University. Student Partner candidates were asked to share: why they were interested; what they saw as the unique identity and perspective they would bring; description of a challenge they faced as a learner and how they overcame it. Teacher partners were asked: why they were interested; and what advantages they saw in having a Student Partner observe and discuss the learning experiences in their module. We recruited mid-May through mid-June 2023, and felt fortunate to have responses from 36 students and 20 teaching staff. The quality of the responses and the backgrounds and experiences of both student and teacher partners (de Bie, 2022; Peart et al., 2023) made our selection process very challenging, while also offering us a strong foundation for expanding the pilot in the future.

Our open and data-driven recruitment and selection strategies were guided by provisional data gathered by our institutional Access programmes on student success patterns. This data was specifically explored and compiled to support this initiative, drawing from Access UCC data on underrepresented student populations served. Access UCC supports students who historically have lower representation in HE across the following categories: lower socio-economic backgrounds, mature students, students with disabilities, part-time/flexible learners and further education award holders (although the data available only included full-time students). Referencing this data we were able to identify programmes where access pathway students' learning experiences and retention were notably different than other classmates (retained at either higher or lower levels than non-access students). As a result, during both recruitment and selection stages, we looked for modules in programmes where enrollment of

access learners was high (related to college patterns overall and with percentages ranging from 12-100% priority preference and attention were given to percentages over 30%). We also looked for core or required modules with high overall enrolment (Bovill et al., 2016). This provisional data and operational categories provided information that guided both our initial distribution of invitations to complete the interest forms and subsequent outreach to additional target groups that may not have responded to the initial call. It also helped us in guiding our partner selection process and narrowing our candidate pools.

2.2.1 Selection of student and teacher partners.

From our pool of interested potential partners, we selected finalists based on their interest submissions and guided by the provisional data. Particular attention was paid to student self-articulated identity with a goal of increasing the range of characteristics that would enhance the representation of historically under-represented and marginalised groups. Once identified, finalists were invited to share more about their interest and potential as a partner.

• Student Finalist Conversations – Half hour-long '*Interviews*' with questions regarding the potential strengths and weaknesses they bring to the role (partner coordination and communication; understanding teaching and learning environments; giving/receiving feedback; problem solving).

• Teacher Partner Finalists Communications - Email responses to key questions offering: More details about their proposed module (programme context, year most students take it, approximate student enrolment range, credits); Perspectives on inclusive teaching; Role and/or influence in curriculum change /development.

Student Partner conversations were rich and informative and while the decisions were challenging, given the high quality of candidates, they provided us with what we needed to move from finalist to Student Partner. Teacher Partner finalists email responses were swift and generally comprehensive, providing everything needed to make final selections of Teacher Partners.

2.2.2 Selection criteria.

Selection criteria were established both prior to and throughout the process, most particularly in response to emergent information shared during communication with finalists. Based on the information gathered during these conversations and communications, we confirmed our selection criteria and identified partners based on the following:

Student Partners

- Articulation of self-identity related to historically underrepresented and minoritized populations.

- Learning challenges encountered and solutions enacted to overcome them.

- Desire to advocate for students across target populations & indications of empathy to enact this.

- Indications of readiness/willingness/ability to work effectively with Teacher Partners

- Association with a priority school programme (either success or challenge story category)

Teacher Partners

- Large enrolment module/course in a priority programme (either success or challenge story category)

- Articulation of interest in participating as Teacher Partner

- Articulation of interest in working with Student Partners

- Strategy for integrating feedback to develop inclusive teaching practices.

- Personal perspective on inclusive teaching

- Rationale for student partner contribution to module

- Strong indication of reflective teaching practice

Our selection resulted in 5 Teacher Partners and 5 associated modules (and 3 alternates, from which we needed none) along with 10 Student Partners (and 3 alternates, of which we needed all). The selection criteria were further codified into our partner selection rubrics to ensure that these would be available to guide future selection rounds.

2.3 Pedagogical partners representation range.

The Pedagogical Partners pilot encompasses a broad range and multiple levels of diversity. Modules represented include all colleges, success and challenge programmes, 5 and 10 credit 1st and 2nd year courses (one 4th year), large, mid-sized and smaller class sizes taught in varied modalities (in-person, hybrid and online) with cumulative enrollments of over 630

students. Teacher Partners' disciplines included Applied Psychology, Education, Business, Chemistry and Nursing. They represent a range of teaching experience, and many hold coordinating responsibilities whose ongoing efforts towards teaching enhancement qualify them as pedagogically aware academics (Clavert et al., 2015). Student Partners were undergraduate students drawn from all colleges and 8 different programmes and are primarily beginning their 2nd or 3rd years (with one 4th year).

2.3.1 Student partner matching.

Student Partners were paired for each module keeping an array of concerns in mind. One factor was disciplinary connection (pro and con), a consideration evident in other partnership models and expressed by both Teacher and Student Partners. In response, for each module we included one Student Partner from within the same College and second from another College. We also paid attention to the lived experiences, skills, perspectives, and characteristics each SP brought to the role to imagine the most complementary pairings possible. Reports, reflections and conversations with both Student Partners and Teacher Partners point to the fact that we succeeded. Finally, there was another, perhaps more important aspect of Student Partner profiles and experiences that factored into their selection and our pairing and matching approaches: their intersectional identities.

2.3.2 Student partner intersectional identities.

Student Partner intersectional identities are at the heart of our Pedagogical Partnerships model and approach and are the centrepiece of its design and power. Intersectionality has been described is a lens for '*seeing the way in which various forms of inequality operate together and exacerbate each other*' (Steinmetz, 2020, cited in Sabzalieva et al., 2022), which underscores the importance of attending to this aspect of our Student Partner profiles, realities and potential. McStravock (2022) points to students who tend to engage less visibly in student representative activities and has drawn from the literature identifying the descriptors associated with this increasing diversification of the student body in higher education as '*hard to reach*' (Shaw et.al, 2017) or '*non-traditional*' (Smith, 2008; McStravock, 2022, p. 2) Regardless of the terms used, the core issue is that we can hardly expect to see and advocate for the actions needed to foster more inclusive and equitable education in the absence of grounded experience and perspectives. The rich range of identities, backgrounds and experiences that our Student Partners bring to this role is the core strength of this pilot (See Figure 2). Their ability to articulate how their own identities and perspectives inform their

observational data (see Figure 2 for more detail) while empathising with the needs of other students is truly impressive. Indeed, their reputation within the context of these Pedagogical Partnerships has prompted requests for consultations from other teaching staff who are eager to learn with and from these Student Partners.

Figure 2: Student partner unique perspectives and insights oni Inclusive learning.

CIRTL Student Partners' Intersectional Identities

= Unique Perspectives and Insights into Inclusive Learning Practices
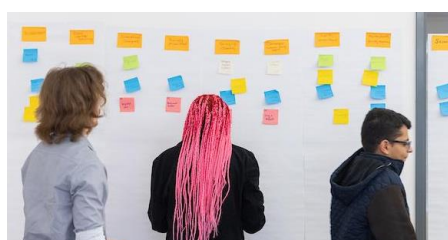
| |
| --- |
| **Neurodiverse** - Autism, ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia |
| **Mature** - returning, early school leaver |
| **International, immigrant** - 1st/2nd generation/ESL |
| **Socio-economic/Challenges** - financial, homelessness, family/community support |
| **Illness / Physical Disability** - chronic, recurring, barrier |
| **Mental Health** - anxiety, stress, depression |
| **Identity -** LGBTQIA+, belonging … |
| **Life experience -** Addiction, Incarceration... |
| **Learning Challenges/Resilience/ Strategies** |

2.4 Project implementation.

These pedagogical partnerships provide teaching staff with the opportunity to gain student perspectives on their course/module instruction, structures and effectiveness (Bovill et al., 2016). Once identified and matched with a Teacher Partner (TP), Student Partners undertake a full semester of immersive observation, attending all class sessions in a teacher-identified course/module and gathering information from students (Diamond, 2004; Payette & Brown, 2018). Teachers receive these insights throughout the semester via regular communications with Student Partners, including fortnightly meetings and weekly notes The strength of this structure lies with the Student Partners who are uniquely positioned to offer voice to fellow students regarding their learning experiences (Cook-Sather et al., 2019), particularly those who

may feel less confident or empowered to share their thoughts through standard feedback pathways.

2.5 The where of our partners work.

The work of Pedagogical Partners takes place in three primary venues: the Classroom, Regular Partner Meetings (generally in person), and virtual interactions through MS Teams (communications posts, repository of files - shared and private-, records of meeting recordings, etc.). This is summarised graphically in Figure 3. Each of these have their primary purpose and focus as follows:

Figure 3: Where Partners' work happens.
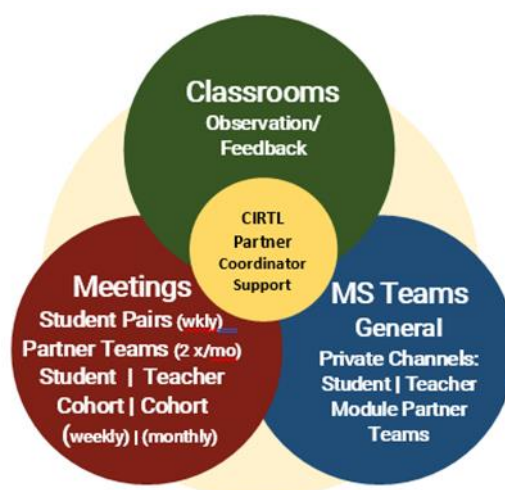
Classrooms - Observations, feedback surveys and suggestions are collected to reflect upon.

Regular Partner Meetings - Intentionally scaffolded meetings among various combinations of partners were key (Matthews, 2017). Individual and collective reflection prompted by regular communication ensured that observations were shared and discussed, and ideas were captured and considered.   Student Partner pairs met weekly to share and compare observations and decide together what and how to communicate these with their Teacher Partners. Student Partner pairs communicated weekly and met in person every other week with their Teacher Partners at mutually agreed and adjusted times. Cohort meetings on a weekly basis allowed Student Partners to build community and develop skills while sharing

insights and problem-solving. Teacher Partners met monthly as a cohort for similar reasons.

Virtual interactions through MS Teams - To keep communications clear and allow for the appropriate amount of virtual support and privacy, MS Teams was set up with an open General area and private channels for module teams and partner cohorts, with appropriate levels of private and shared files and folders.

2.6 Partner coordinators' support strategies.

Beginning with the Partners Project Orientation and Launch, Coordinators organised and facilitated regular Cohort Meetings for Student Partners as well as Teacher Partners, to address interests and needs. They maintained open communications via email, MS Teams and individual, module-based and small group meetings as requested and needed.

2.6.1 Project launch & orientation.

We began our work together during a day-long Orientation and Launch of the Pedagogical Partners Project. The launch brought all Partners together in their respective cohort communities and allowed for overlap, community building, strengths appreciation, orientation to tools and strategies and details regarding the project and the parallel research initiative that would help gather data from the pilot to inform future refinement. A summary follows here.

Welcome & Orientation for Student Partners (3 hrs)

- Introduction & Community Building Icebreaker (Partners Toolkit)
- What SPs Do (*Roles and Responsibilities)* and Bring *(Identity and Perspective)*
- Mapping Intersectional Identities
- SPs as Teaching and Learning Observers *(Tools/Protocols for Observation & Mid-semester Feedback)*
- Working with Partners (*Grouping Strategies, Communication Structures & Approaches)*
- Making the Partners Project Work *(MS Teams Overview, Timesheets & Pay, Cohort Group meeting Scheduling)*

Official Launch (20-30 min) - Guest officials/speakers & Conversations

- Networking lunch w/ all Partners (Student and Teacher) (45 min- 1 hr) - Getting to know each other, Preparing & Scheduling, Building Trust & Relationships.

Welcome & Orientation for Teacher Partners (2-2 ½ hrs)

- Introduction & Community Building Icebreaker *(Partners Toolkit)*
- What TPs Do (*Roles and Responsibilities)* and Bring - *Interest and Skills*
- Mapping onto Intersectional Identities
- Teaching Observations and Data Collection (*Processes and Tools/Protocols for Observation & Mid-semester Feedback)*
- Working with Partners (*Grouping Strategies, Communication Structures & Approaches)*
- Making the Partners Project Work – (*MS Teams Overview, Canvas Course Access, Partner Allocation and Disbursement, Cohort Group meeting Scheduling)*

Starting the Orientation with the Student Partners was deliberate and one of the strategies we intentionally designed with the goal to empower them with advanced knowledge and confidence throughout the Pilot. This was evident in their interactions from orientation through to project conclusion.

2.6.2 Pedagogical partners toolkit.

We gathered contributions from across campus to create a Partners Toolkit for each of the Student and Teacher Partners. It was intended to simultaneously provide tools to be used throughout the Partners Project, while also reflecting the range of support to student access and success across the University. Each Partners Toolkit included: Journal, Pen, Planner, Thermos-water bottle, USB Drive, Accessibility QUAD Cube, Phone holder, Infographic Bookmarks & Flyers and Socks all held inside a Sustainability Tote Bag. With each item donated by various support units on campusPartners immediately felt part of and appreciated by a broader institutional community working towards creating an inclusive learning environment for all students.

Figure 4: Table with contributions to the partners' toolkit from various UCC units supporting student access & success.

2.6.3 Weekly student partner cohort meetings.

These consisted of 10-12 meetings over the course of the semester where topics of focus included:

- Articulating Partnership Project Values
- First week experiences, observations, reflections
- Logistics - *Paperwork, Pay, Timesheet Logs & Shared Reporting*
- Communications Strategies and Teams Channels- Q&A
- Working with the Observations Tool (PAITE) - *Scenarios/Vignettes and coding challenges*
- Presentation Opportunities
- Taking a Strengths Approach
- Mid-semester Feedback - *Process Stages 1-3, Facilitation, Final Report and Debrief Conversation*
- Student Union Academic Rep Contacts - *Visit, Conversations & Connections*
- Observation Tool - *UDL*
- Consultations - *Options & Skills Practice*
- International Student Partner Connections
- Id+ Project Visit & Connections
- Preparation Support - *Presentation, Certification and Awards*

Meetings included a combination of updates on progress, responses to emergent questions, connections and information exchange with campus groups and projects offering insights into inclusive issues. These were combined with immersive activities offering opportunities to practise, develop and refine skills needed in their roles as Student Partners.

2.6.4 Monthly teacher partner cohort meetings.

Teacher Partner monthly meetings echoed the information and experiences covered during the Student Partner meetings, but modified, compressed and tailored to address the concerns, interests and needs of the Teacher Partners. Topics addressed in meetings included:

- Articulating & Comparing Partnership Project Values
- First week experiences, observations, reflections
- Communications Strategies and Teams Structures and Channels
- Strengths Appreciation and Partner Complementarity
- Observations - *Process, Vignettes, Feedback & Ideas Generated*
- Mid-semester Feedback Session Planning & Implementation
- Funds Allocation and Claiming Procedures
- Inclusive Teaching Strategies
- Preparation Support – *Presentation, Reporting and Digital Badge Awards*

The degree of attention to each of the points was adapted according to Teacher Partner interests, needs and guidance as influenced by their own partner experience and module.

2.7 Partner teams in the classroom.

For the module-based partner teams, the primary action took place in the five respective classrooms. They included three first year modules, one second year and a fourth-year capstone module. They took place in two large lecture rooms accommodating the two larger enrollments hovering between 200-300 students, one classroom for 50 students, a fully online module of 8 and a capstone module with 124 students that took place in a rotation of full lecture sessions, small cohorts of simulation rooms and small groups. This wide range of classroom settings, designs and structures used similar observation protocols and feedback models to gather information to inform conversations and considerations of changes that could be made to enhance the inclusive learning environment for all students.

2.7.1 Observation protocols.

Two observation protocols were selected to inform partner conversations about inclusive learning and equity-minded teaching: the [Protocol for Advancing Inclusive Teaching Efforts (PAITE)](#) and an observation tool reflecting the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

The PAITE Observation Tool and Protocol - This tested and validated protocol was selected for use based on its focus on inclusive teaching practices (Addy et al., 2023). Under this protocol and using the tool, observation focus centres on key indicators of inclusive teaching practice, including: Prior Knowledge Assessment, Comprehension Check, Diverse Examples, Diverse Visuals or Media, Real-world Connections, Community Standards, Relationship Building, Student Names, Verbal Affirmations, Growth Mindset Language, Address Exclusionary or Other Oppressive Acts, Questions Based on Group Identity, Equitable Participation, Active Learning, Student Choice, Accessible Materials, Other. Developers of PAITE, Addy et al. (2023) note that while this is a useful tool for gauging inclusive teaching efforts, it should not be the only one utilised.

The UDL Observation Tool - Universal Design for Learning is a well-established, research-based approach that according to developers CAST offers concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities (CAST, 2018). Building off of several existing checklists, we developed a simple, open-ended observational tool to use for a portion of the module observation period. Student Partners used this to guide observation of instruction, interactions, activities, course content, and assessments. Items designed to highlight ways to support all students and remove barriers from the learning process included 3 primary categories with subsections for recording related observations:

- *Provide Information in Multiple Formats and Media (Recognition Networks)*
- *Provide Multiple Pathways for Students' Action & Expression (Strategic Networks)*
- *Provide Multiple Ways to Engage Students (Affective Networks)*.

2.7.2 Mid-Semester Feedback

The Mid-semester Feedback (MSF) Process was conducted in the first third to half of the module and should thus likely be referred to as an '*Early Semester Feedback'*. It was largely facilitated by Student Partners, with a great deal of training, demonstration and support provided by the Partner Coordinators. There are many formats for gathering and sharing student feedback, but the primary purpose is to elevate student voice in a module by engaging them to share their learning experiences and offer input for constructive consideration for improvements (Blash et al., 2018). Based on an adapted Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) model adopted at University of Rhode Island, we implemented a 3-Stage MSF process:

> Stage 1 - Students answer questions individually online.
>
> Stage 2 - Analysis of answers to identify common themes.
>
> Stage 3 - Students rate their individual agreement/ disagreement to common themes identified in the first stage.

The process took different forms to match each module context so as not to disturb the flow and learning. Generally, it was facilitated in the following two forms: either fewer than 40 Students: One 30-40 minute session (contains all 3 stages), or greater than 40 Students: Two 15-minute sessions. In every instance:

> Students in module answer key questions:
>
> 1. What is really working for you that helps you learn in this module?
> 2a. What learning challenge(s) have you encountered in this module?
> 2b. What improvements could be made in the module?
> 3. What can you as students do to improve the module?

In all cases, information gathered from the stage 1 question responses was analysed in stage 2 to identify the most common responses/themes, which were thengiven back to the students in statement format in the stage 3 survey, in which students rated (likert scale) their level of agreement/disagreement with each statement.

Results from the stage 3 ratings were prepared in a curated summary to provide student feedback in a clear format offering highlighted evidence for conversations and co-created change. Teacher-Student Partner Teams met to review feedback and consider:

> 1. Which small tweaks might be improved/implemented right away?
> 2. What is good food for thought for next term?

3. What deserves addressing/explanation/clarification in closing the loop?

3.   Awareness, Dissemination and Impact.

Key to any project is dissemination aimed at increasing awareness and recognition for the work and its impact both within the institution and more broadly and externally in the field. Six events were organized within UCC to publicise and increase awareness regarding the Partners Project and the work being done. Impact of this project was seen in the numbers. Cumulative enrollments in the 5 modules included in this limited pilot encompassed over 735 students. As the 6 participating Teacher Partners observed that the insights gained will be used to inform their future teaching the longer-term impact is projected to encompass at least 2,510 students across the 32+ modules they will teach (plus 20 modules they coordinate) in each year ahead. Dissemination beyond UCC continues with eight conference presentations and two articles contributing to the growing literature on pedagogical partnerships.

3.1 The study inside the pilot.

Partners were actively engaged in both implementing and critiquing this pilot's structure and design through our ethics-approved study. A combination of regular cohort reflective meetings and discussions, journaling, guided reflections and focus groups elicited on-going observations and feedback. These data were questioned by participants, collected and systematically reviewed and analysed by project coordinator-researchers with the goal of determining project elements that were most effective.

3.2 Challenges encountered and lessons learned.

Any presentation of such a case would be remiss if it did not address challenges and lessons learned and while we have run out of space to discuss this, we share a few select *Challenges* we learned from.

- *Scheduling Partner Meetings and Events*
- *Importance of pay for Student Partners*
- *Difficulty of including part-time ACE students as Partners*

- *Best Tools for Observing and Recording Inclusive and Equitable Teaching Practices -* The PAITE Observation Tool (with slight modifications)
- *Guiding Partner Reflections*

Some lessons learned through success included:

- *Student Partner Pairing and Matching*
- *Mutual Appreciation and Equality in Partner Team Dynamics*
- *Transformative Nature of participating in the Partners Project*

One Teacher Partner captured this for all: "*This experience has been one of the most eye opening and rewarding since I joined UCC. The commitment, respect and enthusiasm throughout the project reminds me of the value of our students' voices and how important they are in what we do.*"

4.   Concluding Thoughts.

Built on international literature on pedagogical partnerships with an eye towards inclusive, equity-minded education, this project offers significant insights into how to design an approach that addresses emerging needs and balances local factors as tailored to and reflective of the specific context. This pilot is intended as a first step in creating an expanding community of Student and Teacher Partners who offer themselves up to work together to intentionally support inclusive and equitable teaching (Curren, 2017; de Bie et al., 2019), and who represent and respond to students whose learning needs are often invisible to standard approaches to curriculum development. By interrogating this pilot and the practices explored, we hope to offer insights into how to design partnerships that effectively engage and amplify student insights and contributions to improved curricula, teaching practices and ultimately learning. We acknowledge that we are not alone, and are heartened that the explorations of the power of partnership continue well beyond our single example. We are fortunate to be operating within an institutional and national context that values and promotes inclusive practices and is willing to both prioritise and fund efforts to explore how to create a more inclusive university focused on increasing access and responsive learning for all. Such an enabling environment is important to success. It is our position that if we are to reach this laudable goal, we must engage everyone involved in the learning endeavour to become champions of inclusive learning and

equity-minded teaching, and to join in partnership in doing so. Each time a partnership pro-gramme is developed and/or expanded, we all win. The more we grow and connect, the bet-ter the chances are that we can transform the educational landscape into something more meaningful. We applaud our university colleagues in country and abroad who are using the power of student voice and the promise of partnerships to address enhanced inclusivity and equity in our classrooms. One example closer to home we would like to point to is University College Dublin's Student Partnership Programme, which works to foster genuine and mean-ingful partnership between students and faculty by directly involving students in breaking down barriers to inclusion through **Universal Design, co-creating learning experiences,** and empowering them to advocate for a more inclusive university experience for all (UCD, n.d.). We believe that it is only by co-creating structures and expanding partner communities that we can hear and respond to all the voices needed to create the kind of transformative change within institutions that will carry us forward to the future we envision.

Acknowledgements

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