The University Student as Partner: Its Mediating Role in the Transition Towards a Professional Identity

Aina Franch Aguiló
Universitat de Lleida, Spain

Carles Monereo
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

Abstract

Given the rise of global concerns such as inequality, environmental crises, and social disengagement, education is increasingly expected to prepare students not only as professionals but also as responsible citizens. In higher education, this has driven growing interest in partnership methodologies that promote agency, co-responsibility, and co-creation. However, little is known about how students construct a "partner identity position" (I-pP) through such approaches, especially in large undergraduate groups. Grounded in Dialogical Self Theory, which views identity as a dynamic system of internal positions, this study explores how a group of undergraduate psychology students shift from passive recipients to active partners in their learning and how this relates to professional development. A mixed-methods design combined pre- and post-course questionnaires with semi-structured interviews to assess changes in perceived professionalism and I-pP development. Findings indicate that students who engaged in decision-making, reflection, and group negotiation developed stronger partner identities and reported greater professional growth. Key course elements included co-creation, structured opportunities for participation, and a climate of trust. These results suggest that well-designed partnership methodologies can foster the construction of I-pP and support students' professional identity in large university settings, contributing to the development of transformative pedagogies aligned with global educational goals.

Keywords

Partnership, Dialogical Self, engagement, agency, I-position as a professional

Practitioner Notes

1. Structure the course to include clear, scheduled moments where students co-create elements of the curriculum.
2. Allow space for negotiation by recognising students as equal participants with legitimate contributions.
3. Foster a classroom climate based on trust and mutual recognition, avoiding authoritative tones in discussion.
4. Use service-learning to connect academic content with real-world challenges and increase motivation.
5. Include weekly reflective activities to support metacognition and the development of professional identity.

Citation:

Franch, A., & Monereo, C. (2025). The University Student as Partner: Its Mediating Role in the Transition Towards a Professional Identity. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, 22*(2). https:// https://doi.org/10.53761/rtnegq42

Introduction

There has been a significant increase in partnership research and practice over the last decade and this interest is in response to finding ways to get students engaged (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Dunne, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The reasons for this interest might be varied, but from our point of view there is one idea that sums them all up: the need to promote more personalised teaching in order to develop students who are more committed to their learning, autonomous professionals that can continue their education, and citizens who are more responsible with the future of humanity and the planet.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (hereafter UNESCO), the international organisation that hosts the largest number of countries, pointed out in its 2015 report the major challenges facing citizenship education in the second half of the 21st century (UNESCO, 2015). These included climate change, responsible consumption, wars, gender inequality, global health, poverty, and world hunger. Against this backdrop, UNESCO (2021) advocates for a shift towards collaborative education grounded in real-world problems and reciprocal learning between teachers and students, considering it one of the most effective approaches for generating useful knowledge to address future global challenges, particularly in higher education.

Among the different approaches studied to promote an education that meets these characteristics, over the last decade, the partnership methodology has particularly stood out. This methodology conceptualizes education as a shared endeavour, wherein learning and teaching are conducted with students, rather than for them (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Dunne, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). It encourages a more active and engaged role for students, promoting their agency, commitment, and capacity for collaboration, which can foster their development towards a professional identity and a 21st-century citizenship.

Building on this context, the study's purpose is to design and implement a degree course based on the partnership methodology approach, drawing on the theoretical characteristics and prior experiences of this model. Through this course design, the study's main objective is to examine how this methodology impacts the construction of undergraduate students' professional identity, with a special focus on the emergence of the "I" position as a professional. Specifically, we aim to investigate: (1) to what extent students construct an I-partner-position (I-pP) and whether this relates to the development of a more professional identity; (2) what competencies and dimensions they attribute to the I-pP, and whether these align with the literature on their future profession (academic adviser identity); (3) which aspects of the course students consider to be responsible for this identity shift; and (4) what conditions are necessary to promote the construction of I-pP in large university groups.

We strongly believe that addressing these questions is particularly relevant given the current lack of research on effectively designing university courses that support students in becoming true partners in their educational process. This issue is crucial since, although the benefits of collaborative and reciprocal learning are widely recognized, it is still unclear how this methodology can be effectively implemented in large university settings, how the I-pP is developed, and to what extent it can foster a significant shift in students' professional identity. Understanding which specific strategies have the most impact in facilitating this identity shift and under what conditions

it occurs will enable educators to move toward a partnership-based pedagogy, aligned with global educational goals, and better prepare students to act as engaged professionals and citizens.

Moreover, we believe that working toward advancing a partnership methodology to promote student agency and professional autonomy within the classroom aligns with broader goals, such as preparing responsible citizens and committed professionals. By analysing how students experience and internalize partnership principles in a real course, and whether this contributes to their professional growth, we hope to contribute not only to the improvement of university teaching practices but also to the development of more socially engaged forms of higher education, in line with the direction recommended by UNESCO.

Next, we will define what a Partnership identity position entails (hereafter referred to as I-pP), along with its modalities and dimensions. We will also explore the characteristics identified in the literature that should be considered in a partnership course design.

Literature

The partner position as a continuum

Our research is underpinned by the Dialogical Self Theory (DST). According to Hermans (Hermans & Giese, 2012; Monereo & Hermans, 2023), a person's identity is a constellation of positions (I-positions or I-p) which constitute the ways of dealing with social situations, which are in continuous dialogue with each other and change in order to favour certain interpretations, attitudes, and actions towards the world.

In this sense, moving from an identity as a student to an identity as a professional involves gradually abandoning more passive and receptive attitudes and behaviours, marked by dependence on voices of authority such as researchers in the discipline, teachers, or experienced professionals, to develop a more autonomous and idiosyncratic voice of their own, which places the student as an equal, i.e. as a partner. Of course, we are not talking about a radical change from student to professional, but a gradual transition.

As depicted in Figure 1, the adoption of a partner position (I-pP) is a continuous process, with different levels of participation (Holen et al., 2020), rather than a fixed and stable state. This transition usually begins in contexts where the student maintains a primarily passive position, as is currently the case in most classrooms. In this context, students obey and comply with institutional and classroom rules imposed by the teacher, work mostly individually, and their behaviour in the classroom is basically listening and receiving.

At a more advanced level, we would refer to students as being in a participatory position, due to certain contributions they can make to the smooth running of a course (Dunne, 2016; Kuh, 2009). These contributions would include asking in class about doubts related to the pedagogical dynamics, as well as content issues; giving their opinion on the quality or effectiveness of the teaching activities; or forming part of some institutional governing bodies on a voluntary basis, representing classmates and being able to show their agreement or disagreement with some parts of the curriculum. Their position is primarily that of an adviser (Martens et al.2019).

A third level of collaboration would consist of adopting the position of co-creator (Bovill et al., 2016; Ryan & Tilbury, 2013), where the student adopts a much more active role, proposing changes, helping in the preparation of materials, and collaborating decisively with the teacher in

making pedagogical decisions, thereby assuming part of the responsibility for the teaching-learning process. Some examples of co-creation can be found in the literature: student collaboration in educational research projects (Dunne et al., 2011; Werder & Otis, 2010); their input in teaching quality assurance committees (Buckley, 2014; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013); providing feedback to optimise teaching courses (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Huxham et al., 2017), co-evaluating work together with the teacher (Deeley, 2014); or collaboratively writing a report with teachers (Marquis et al., 2016). However, while certain aspects of the subject can be negotiated at this level, the teacher still has the final say.

The most advanced level of collaboration would be that of partnership, in which learners are positioned as partners of the teacher, cooperating extensively in the design of the course (the content, activities, methods, type of assessment), and committing themselves to abide by the agreed decisions, as they would those of the teacher. There is thus a high level of co-responsibility and a wide scope for students to choose the what and how of their teaching. Examples of this level of participation include students co-designing courses and curricula with their teachers (Bovill, 2014; Delpish et al., 2010), students involved in course design review committees (Mihans et al., 2008; Rock et al., 2015), students co-evaluating courses (Bovill et al., 2010), or students supervising the planning and development of academic work (Kandiko-Howson & Weller, 2016).

There is some consensus that building an I-pP involves promoting competency in learners across three key dimensions: their level of agency in acting, the extent of their engagement with the learning process, and their degree of collaboration with their teacher and their peers.

Agency

Agency refers to the degree to which a person can make decisions that are not conditioned, or not entirely conditioned, by external determinants. While acknowledging that complete "free will" does not exist, and that social contexts and mediators always influence our decisions to some extent, recent views emphasise the presence of a significant degree of freedom in our actions. This explains why some individuals may not behave as expected and are capable of adopting alternative behaviours to those considered dominant. DST supports these considerations by arguing that not all the positions we adopt are driven by external demands or conflicts and that, on many occasions, self-induced internal dialogues lead to the emergence of a particular self-position (Hermans, 2018). As shown in Figure 1, the passive learner has little or no agency, basically obeying the teacher's commands. A minimum level of agency is found when the learner can participate in decisions by giving his or her opinion. In co-creation, the learner would already be expected to propose certain actions. Finally, the highest level would be the possibility to negotiate practically on an equal footing with the teacher.

One of the aims of our study is to see whether we have increased this perception of agency, and in relation to what aspects students may have experienced such an increase.

Engagement means taking responsibility for what has been decided and agreed. To take charge of it, taking it on as one's own and taking care of its execution. As Figure 1 shows, complying with external rules or instructions would be characteristic of a passive learner; in a participative position, the learner could volunteer for a certain task. A higher level of engagement would involve taking responsibility for some but not all activities. The highest level would be to share responsibility for all teaching-learning activities that occur.

One of the purposes of our research is to identify what aspects of the course and their learning process our students really feel engaged and responsible for.

Collaboration

To collaborate is to work together on a common task, contributing ideas and accepting the final decisions of the group. An interdependence between team members, who cooperate to achieve a common goal, is advocated for over either the independence of working alone or dependence on a single authority or leadership. Again, for Partnership, collaboration is a requirement that must be guaranteed at a minimum level, within the continuum shown in Figure 1. As opposed to the merely passive level of listening, there would be a more participative level related to choosing or voting between alternatives, a higher level linked to directly helping the teacher and, finally, the maximum level consisting of cooperating symmetrically in the development of the classes. Also, about this dimension, we intend to verify whether our pedagogic proposal has increased the students' levels of collaboration with the teacher and their classmates

Figure 1

Different Levels of Partner Position (I-pP)
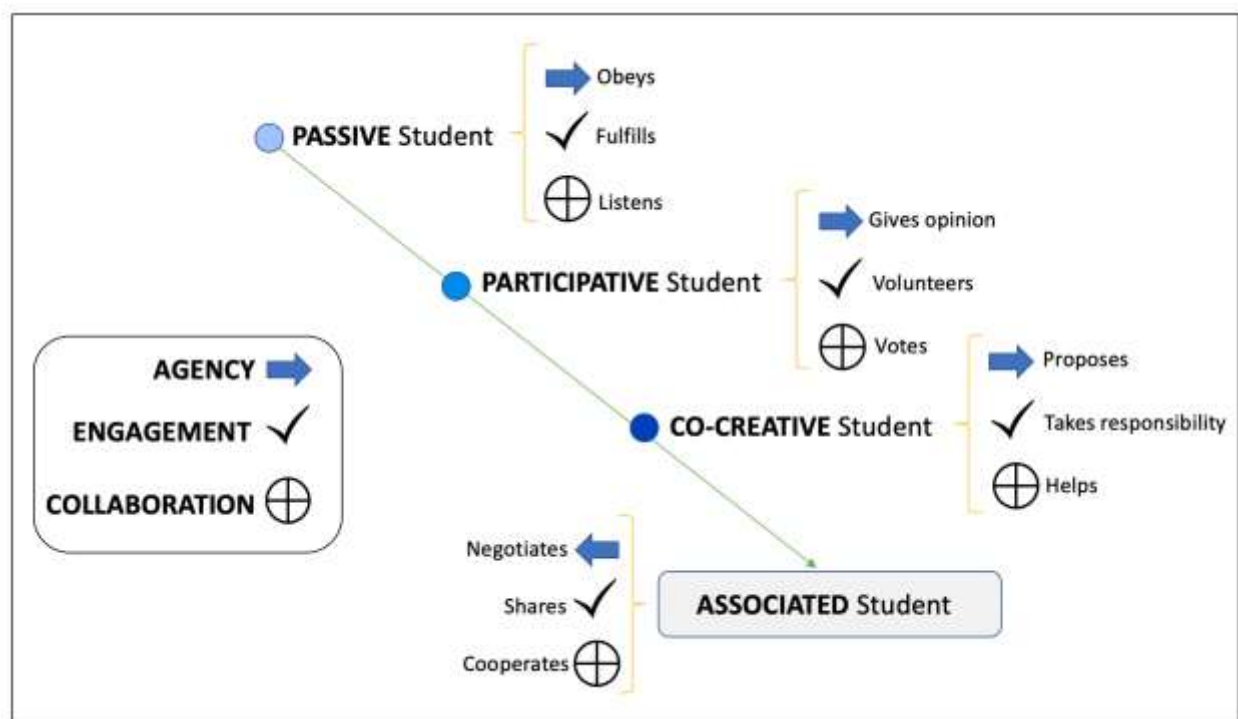
Partnership methodology on a whole-university class

Studies on the use of a partnership methodology on a whole-university class are rare, especially at the undergraduate level. Studies on seminars or small groups at the graduate and postgraduate level are more common (Bryson et al., 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The market-driven context in which many universities operate has led to increasing pressure for many institutions to

expand class sizes. However, the adverse effects of large class sizes have been clearly evidenced by the literature (Cuseo, 2007; Theophilides & Terenzini, 1981): large class sizes favour lecture-style classes; reduce students' active participation and personalised interactions with the lecturer; decrease moments of reflection in class; increase assessments based on short, rote and easy-to-mark answers, and are rated as unsatisfactory by students.

Partnership-based approaches need extra time to build trust, and to negotiate and share decisions. These processes become more complex in large group settings, leading to increased insecurity and uncertainty for teachers (Bovill, 2020). What is evident is that working with the entire class represents a more inclusive, less elitist, and less biased approach compared to methods that involve selecting students based on favourable characteristics (Bovill et al., 2016; Bryson, 2016; Marquis et al., 2018; Moore-Cherry et al., 2016). Furthermore, Breen and Littlejohn (2000) and Cook-Sather et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of respecting the possible desire of some students to participate differently or not to participate at all, based on their personal or cultural differences. Despite these challenges, there are successful examples of whole-class partnership approaches in various aspects of the education process, such as in curriculum development (Bovill, 2014; Huxham et al., 2015), study guide creation (Bergmark & Westman, 2016), teaching materials construction (Delpish et al., 2010), and co-assessment systems development (Bovill et al., 2010; Deeley, 2014). In our study, we implemented a partnership approach with a real and large class-group, which will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

Method

Context

The research was carried out with a group of 42 students, aged between 21 and 27, enrolled in a course titled "Learning Strategies". This is an optional course in the fourth year of the Psychology degree at a Catalan public university, consisting of four hours per week for one semester (from September to January). "Learning Strategies" is part of the initial training of a professional academic adviser, whose function is to advise teachers when they have difficulties in developing teaching-learning processes appropriately. The classes were organised so that each week two out of the four hours focused on theoretical aspects, while the remaining two hours were dedicated to conducting group assemblies where decisions were made regarding the subject matter, with a particular emphasis on the final project of the course.

The methodology of the course was based on Service Learning (SL), in which students, in groups of four or five, had to develop an intervention project in response to a request from a teacher (related to innovation in a subject or to a problematic individual case). Throughout the course, the students could keep in contact with the teacher of the case, with whom they collaborated whenever they considered it necessary, in order to complete their project. At the end of the course, they had to present the final project to the class group and to the advised teacher, who could also assess the suitability and usefulness of the proposal.

Applying the principles of partnership, the students could negotiate: the case or request they wanted to face, some of the theoretical topics to be dealt with in the classes, when and how they would contact the advised teacher, the type of evaluation they preferred (co-, self-, hetero- or a combination), and the rubric by which they would be evaluated, along with other choices that

would come up throughout the course, such as submission deadlines, who would present their project progress during the group assemblies, how they could organise themselves better as a group.

Obviously, all decisions were negotiated and agreed upon by the entire class group, including the teacher, who is also a co-author of this publication. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Tassone et al. (2018) and Suñé-Soler et al. (2022) to foster a more responsible, ethical, political, and practical approach to university research.

Objectives

Our research aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent have students constructed an I-pP, and does the construction of students' I-pP relate to a more professional identity?

2. What dimensions/skills/competences do they attribute (characterise) to this new I-pP, and do they coincide with the positions of the professional identity of an academic adviser reported in the literature?

3. What aspects of the subject do students consider having been responsible for this shift towards a more professional identity?

4. What conditions and requirements should be ensured to promote large group I-pP at university?

Methodological approach

The research utilised a mixed methodology approach, which involved administering pre- and post-questionnaires to the entire group and conducting semi-structured interviews with seven students selected based on their professional positions.

The study, which has an explanatory-interpretative nature, aims to reveal what, how and why the transition to a more professional identity occurs. To achieve this objective, two different questionnaires, C1 and C2, were administered to the entire class group. The first questionnaire (C1) was completed twice: Once on the first day of class and again once all the course activities had ended. It consisted of Likert-type questions that assessed the students' sense of belonging to the student and professional communities, as well as their level of engagement, agency, and collaboration both in the subject and in their anticipated professional practice. One week after the end of the subject, the students were asked to respond to the second questionnaire (C2), which included Likert questions regarding their perception of their learning, the level of professionalisation attained through the subject, their satisfaction with the course, any differences compared to other subjects, and their motivation to attend the class. Additionally, there were four open-ended questions in which students could provide suggestions for improvement, highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the subject, and share their experiences throughout the course. To ensure anonymity and facilitate data triangulation, students were asked to use consistent aliases when completing the questionnaires.

The differences between the responses given on the first and second C1 served as a reference point for selecting participants to be interviewed and analysed in-depth. Based on the perceived increase in professionalism, the 42 students were divided into four subgroups: those who decreased their perception (symbolised by, -1), those who maintained or slightly increased it (0

or one point, symbolised by, +0 or +1), those who significantly increased it (two points, symbolised by, +2), and those who experienced a significant increase (three points or more, symbolised by, +3, +4, or +5). Two students from each subgroup were randomly contacted for interviews, except for the subgroup with a reduced perception of professionalism, which had only one student. In total, there were 7 students interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Catalan, which was maintained for the transcription and analysis of the data.

Table 2 shows the number of students who participated in the interview, based on the subgroup to which they belonged:

Table 2

Sample of Interviewed Students According to Self-perceived Professionalism Level

Perceived Increase in Professionalism	Interviewed Students
-1	1
0, +1	2
+2	2
+3, +4, +5	2

During the interview, we asked them about their choice of degree and our course, their evolution in both, whether they thought the subject had had any impact on this evolution, whether this impact had been different from other course, what they considered to be the actions that had contributed most to this evolution, whether they saw themselves practicing as professionals, how they described themselves as professionals, as well as what they thought they still lacked in order to be professionals.

After the interviews, which lasted between 30 minutes and one hour each and were audio-recorded, the data were processed using Atlas.TI software (version 9). Using the software, the interview statements in which the participants talked about their development within the framework of the subject were transcribed. A statement was defined as the smallest unit containing a subject (e.g., "I"), a verb (e.g., "was trying to give"), and a complement (e.g., "tools to help people") that had independent meaning.

The analysis focused on the statements where the subject was the course, "Learning Strategies" (e.g. "in this course"), the interviewee (e.g. "I or we") or the class group (e.g. "my classmates", "the teacher"). Specifically, the analysis considered only those statements that included verbs reflecting the students' relationship with the subject and their degree of participation in it were taken into account (e.g., "it is what I liked the most"; "we planned the classes ourselves"), and those with descriptive-qualifying complements to the subject (e.g. "this subject is different"; "you see applicability"), specifying the specific characteristics of their perceived professional development (e.g. "not being prejudiced"), or made explicit the activities that promoted this development (e.g. "I was very good at doing the weekly reflections"). Additionally, sentences with

complements that included the interviewee through the use of pronouns or other linguistic markers (e.g., "develop a little my ability to give my opinion, to participate, to express myself") were also selected.

Once the data were selected, content analysis was conducted, assigning each statement to one of the previously established categories based on the theoretical framework (degree of agency, engagement, and collaboration) and the study's context (typology of activities) for questions 1 and 3, and other emerging categories for questions 2 and 4. In both cases, to ensure validity, data selection and codification, investigator triangulation was used. Finally, the findings were triangulated with the results from the quantitative questionnaires.

In the following, we present the most relevant results of our study.

Results and discussion

. The comparative data obtained from the C1 questionnaires show that all but one of the students in the class group increased their perception of at least one of the three categories by the end of the course, relative to their self-reported score at the beginning of the course. In other words, regardless of their initial punctuation of the first questionnaire, almost all the students have improved their position along the I-pP continuum. The integration of these data with the semi-structured interviews allows deeper exploration of the construction of this position, as well as its relationship with their perceived professionalism.

In Table 3, it is possible to see that the higher the percentage of partnership and co-creation statements, the higher the increase in perceived professionalism. Likewise, the table also allows us to mark differences between the selected subgroups according to the increase in perceived professionalism. For example, we can see that in the case of participant E1, who dropped one point in perceived professionalism, 60% of their statements are characteristic of a passive-active student position, 53.33% of which coincide with the passive student position.

In comparison, among participants who experienced a one-point increase in their perceived professionalism, passive-active statements ranged from 35% to 39%, while co-creator-associate student statements increased to over 60% in both cases. In contrast, among students who achieved a two-point increase, passive-active statements accounted for less than 30%, while co-creator-associate statements ranged from 71% to 78%.

Finally, in the students who increased their perceived professionalism by three and four points, passive-active statements are only around 5% of their total statements. Internal differences can also be seen within this last subgroup, since, despite both having 94-95% of co-creation-association statements, while the student who increased three points in perceived professionalism has 45% of co-creation statements and 50% of association, the participant who increased 4 points has 29.41% of co-creation statements and 64.7% of association statements.

Table 3

Results of Statements According to Participant and Degree of I-pP Construction

Participant	% Statements Per Category					
	PASSIVE	PARTICIPATIVE		CO-CREATOR	ASSOCIATED	
E1 (-1)	53,33%	6,67%	60%	20%	20%	40%
E2 (+1)	22,22%	16,67%	39%	38,89%	22,22%	61%
E3 (+1)	11,76%	23,53%	35%	23,53%	41,18%	65%
E4 (+2)	5,88%	23,53%	29%	47%	23,53%	71%
E5 (+2)	0%	22,22%	22%	27,78%	50%	78%
E6 (+3)	5%	0%	5%	45%	50%	95%
E7 (+4)	0%	5,88%	6%	29,41%	64,7%	94%

In some cases (E2 and E3) the students did not associate the emergence of positions of agency, engagement and collaboration so directly with the development of the course, but rather as a consequence of what they consider to be their "own personality" or the context in which they found themselves, since they say that they already "acted like this" before the course. This is in contrast to other students who specifically stated that they had never acted "actively" in the classroom, or in other contexts. The analysis of the interviews seems to indicate that these initial active positions facilitated those student's performance as partners, allowing them to participate, initially, more than their classmates, and to demonstrate relative ease in making decisions or proposals. This is evidenced by how they describe the difficulty that others had in adapting to the new methodology or when they argue that they were already used to working in this way.

> *E2: How frustrating it is to see that they have no idea how an assembly works. // They don't understand anything... They don't understand what it means to make decisions together.*

> *E3: But as I, in my day-to-day life, in the spaces I'm in, I already do these things. // It was easier for me...*

Triangulating the above data with the results obtained in the questionnaire, it seems that the differences in the initial positions have also had an impact on the construction of an I-pP, resulting in a lower number of co-creation and partnership statements, and on the perception of the professionalisation of the course, being lower in those students who already had "more active" initial positions (increase in perception of one point), and higher in those whose emergence of

positions of engagement, agency and collaboration has taken place within the framework of the subject (increase in perception of professionalisation of between two and four points).

It is also relevant to note that, in all eight interviews, students mentioned to a greater or lesser extent, either in themselves or in their peers, the promotion of the passive role by formal education, which they conceived in turn as an impediment or difficulty to act with real agency and engagement in this subject, especially at the beginning. However, when comparing these results, which are consistent with the theoretical framework literature, with those in the prior paragraph, they suggest the possibility that the greater the divergence between the students' initial constellation of positions and those required to act as partners in the subject, the more significant the construction of I-pP.

The interviews also provided insights into the aspects of the subject that the students believed had the most significant impact on the changes they perceived in their self-identity. Overall, in nearly all the interviews, students emphasised that the subject stood out as being distinctly different from others and had a substantial influence on both their professional and personal growth, and that it had enhanced their learning experience.

> *E5: I think I have changed as a person // also as a future professional.*

> *E7: This subject has given me a lot of things. // It has been the most complete subject I have ever had.*

As characteristics of the course, all interviewees, except for E1, who experienced a decrease of one point in perceived professionalism, highlighted Service-Learning as the main catalyst for the observed change. They emphasised how Service-Learning increased the authenticity of the tasks, leading to greater engagement with the subject. Similarly, five of the seven interviewees pointed out that the opportunity to make decisions (E7, E6, E5, E4, E3) and the weekly reflections (E6, E5, E3, E4, E2) were key factors that motivated them to act differently compared to their experiences in other university subjects. According to the students, the weekly reflections allowed them to contemplate, compare, and evaluate their own teaching-learning processes and the decisions to be made before discussing them in class. This process particularly enhanced their sense of agency but also fostered greater engagement and collaboration.

> *E6: It helped a lot to say, in this class I looked like this, in this one I didn't, I have to compensate....*

Finally, a small number of students E7, E4, E2 and E3 stated that working with randomly selected groups and the theoretical content worked on in the subject, respectively, were also aspects that contributed to the construction of the I-pP, impacting above all on the level of collaboration.

Apart from the aspects of the subject that the interviewees considered most transformative, most of them also gave great importance to two conditions that they characterised as indispensable for their change to begin. More than half of the interviewees agreed that they found it quite challenging to speak or actively participate in class, especially when they were in a large group, which is consistent with the literature and our previous findings about their initial passive learner positions. As a result, E7, E6, E5, E3, and E1 highlighted the importance of the teacher's role in creating a climate of trust and recognition, where they felt valued as individuals rather than mere numbers. This sense of trust and recognition was identified as a catalyst for increasing active

participation and played a crucial role in diminishing the influence of the teacher's authority, thus facilitating the emergence of I-pP.

> *E5: Being able to talk to the teacher and having the feeling that she knows who you are and that you are not just a number, that's the most important thing for me.*

> *E6: It scares me, but I have to overcome it, because I impose it on myself, in a safe context, which I know is controlled and at least I take the step. // Not every subject is a safe context and it really changes a lot.*

> *E7: You as a teacher gave me the confidence to be able to speak. // You feel that you have a voice, that you are being listened to, not as a boss-employee, but as truly colleagues, on the same level.*

In the same direction, another factor that reinforces the importance of generating a climate of trust in the classroom, in order to promote I-pP in large groups, is the fact that the only person who has lost professionalism and the one who has used the most passive statements during the interview, expresses on several occasions the difficulty she had to remain committed to the subject due to the group conflicts she had throughout the course.

The other factor highlighted by all students, with the exception of E5, was the importance of having clarity about what, how, and when they had or could participate. This emphasises the importance of creating specific moments within the classroom where the primary objective is to encourage active engagement, it is crucial to ensure that all students actively participate in the subject and feel compelled to contribute to the group's learning process. This can be achieved by involving them in decision-making regarding content or assessment, encouraging them to think about how they can assist their classmates or solve group management issues. Additionally, assigning specific roles, such as a group timekeeper, or coordinator, further promotes their active involvement. In essence, explicitly emphasising the necessity of acting and providing opportunities for students to act fosters a shift from passive anti-I-pP positions towards new, more active positions.

Ultimately, several dimensions emerged as central elements of the new I-pP that students believed they had developed throughout the subject. These dimensions include: reflection, self-knowledge and self-regulation, the holistic vision from a critical point of view, the ability to adapt and reach agreements, the ability to establish effective interpersonal relationships of mutual help (active listening, empathy and the absence of prejudice) and the theoretical knowledge acquired. In comparison, the positions or characteristics that the literature describes as necessary for academic advisers are: self-management of their own learning, engagement to those being advised, negotiation of decisions and actions (democratic values) and cooperation and support in their implementation and monitoring (Alcañiz, et al., 2012; Monereo & Caride, 2022).

Table 4

Relationship between I-pP dimensions and advisory identity positions according to the literature

Students	Literature

Reflection, self-awareness and self-regulation	Self-management of own learning
Holistic view from a critical point of view	Cooperation and support (mentor - advised teacher)
Theoretical knowledge	
Ability to adapt and reach agreements	Negotiation of decisions and actions (democratic values)
Ability to establish effective and mutually supportive interpersonal relationships	Cooperation and support (mentor - advised teacher)
	Commitment to advised teacher

As can be seen in Table 4, in our view, there is some agreement between the dimensions described by the students and those in the literature. Thus, we consider that when students talk about self-reflection, self-knowledge and self-regulation, as well as their ability to look holistically at the context in which they have to carry out the advising and being aware of the knowledge acquired throughout the subject and its applicability, they encompass two of the characteristic positions of an educational adviser: self-management of one's own learning, and cooperation and support for the advised.

> *E2: Like having that real interest in learning, **thinking about what I know**, what I lack, and being able **to help improve** people's educational process.*
>
> *E5: I have seen the need for **continuous training**, to be proactive in your work, to be able to understand, not only what happens in a classroom context, but also what happens in the world, to be able **to function well in the school context**.*
>
> *E8: In addition to the content itself, which also helps you to understand the context, I have been able to put it into practice and this has helped me **to reflect on its applicability**, to see how to use it in context.*

Their awareness of the need to negotiate decisions and actions with the advised teacher, as well as the importance of working cooperatively and feeling committed to providing support, were the most frequently mentioned dimensions in the interviews. They emphasised the ability to adapt to others and reach agreements, as well as their capacity to establish effective interpersonal relationships and offer mutual help. This was achieved through active listening, flexibility, understanding others without prejudice, and embracing differences as opportunities for progress rather than obstacles.

E3: Now <u>I understand the fact of receiving feedback from the person on the other side</u> as something fundamental, they can tell you: this works for me, this doesn't; and ask you things, have their point of view and think about how <u>you can adapt it</u>.

E4: Thanks to the subject I have changed a lot this vision of, well, being very rigid... of being able to say (simulates thinking out loud): well, E4, they don't see it like you, so turn it around, express it in another way, <u>generate contexts</u>.

E5: For me, I think active listening is something fundamental to be able to understand their needs without judging, and to be able to give an opinion without imposing it, comment on it <u>and come up with something together.</u>

E6: For myself, the fact of <u>wanting to do it well</u>, not just to pass it, but to <u>help this person</u> (advised teacher).

Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have presented a case study based on a four-month course in which we have attempted to implement a partnership methodology with a group of 42 students in the 4th year of the Psychology degree (educational specialisation). Our objectives were to assess the emergence of a partner position (I-pP) among the students and to examine whether this position contributed to their professional development, as suggested by some authors (Bovill, 2019; Kirchner & London, 2021; Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021). We also aimed to explore the professional characteristics they believed they had developed as a result of the course and whether these coincide with those highlighted in the literature. Furthermore, we sought to identify the aspects of the course that most contributed to the emergence of I-pP and identify which conditions should be ensured in large university groups to promote these I-pPs.

To achieve our objectives, we used methodological, data, and investigator triangulation, a widely accepted option for validating the results of qualitative research (i.e. Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). We also involved different methods of data collection, such as two different types of questionnaires, and a deep individual interview, dissimilar sources, such as the dimensions identified in students and cited in specialised literature and the data has been analysed and interpreted by several researchers.

We are aware that some of the conditions and methodological decisions adopted have entailed some limitations. Firstly, it is important to underline the fact that the course in which the research was carried out was optional, which may have influenced the results, as the students who opted to take it possibly had a greater interest in the course, thus facilitating greater engagement. In addition, as this is a case study, it is difficult to draw generalisable conclusions, so it would be interesting to continue research along these lines and increase the sample to verify how the increase in I-pP impacts on other variables, such as professionalism or motivation. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the use of additional instruments to obtain more evidence on these relationships. It would also be relevant to carry out similar research in compulsory subjects to assess the impact of partner identity in other contexts. It would also be relevant to explore the role of conflicts or incidents in the achievement of a partner identity, along the lines of other studies that have addressed the construction of professional identities in groups.

Despite these limitations, we consider that the recording and analysis devices used show sufficiently strong evidence to support our results.

The findings suggest a potential relationship between the construction of a partner position and a professional position. In terms of the perception of I-pP construction, the results indicate that the students experienced a significant degree of development of this identity position, while also perceiving progress in the construction of a more professional identity. Moreover, in all cases, the increase in the percentage of co-creation and partnership statements appeared to be associated with an increase in perceived professionalism. These findings are consistent with Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2018), who state that when students are able to develop a "partner identity position", their personal and professional development acquires transformative potential that extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom and positively impacts other scenarios and contexts in which they carry out their activities.

Regarding the increase in perceived professionalism, the students believed that, thanks to the subject, they have developed several characteristics that they consider to be typical of an academic adviser. These included reflective capacity, self-knowledge and self-regulation, as well as a holistic vision from a critical perspective, the ability to adapt and reach agreements, theoretical knowledge acquisition, and effective interpersonal relationships skills. These dimensions align with positions highlighted in the literature, such as self-management of one's own learning, cooperation and support for the advised teachers, and negotiation of decisions and actions. This suggests that the positions the students developed and perceived as professional align with those they will likely need in a possible professional future.

Additionally, the aspects of the course that students considered responsible for these changes encompassed both academic and practical elements. They emphasised the quality of the teaching, the content studied, as well as the exposure to practical learning experiences through the Service-Learning methodology employed in the course. The students identified this practical component as a key factor in recognising the importance and necessity of actively participating in their own training, thereby increasing their engagement and agency. Methodologically, the data indicate that providing opportunities for decision-making, combined with mandatory participation in reflective activities, facilitated the construction of I-pP by allowing students to reflect on their progress and consider course-related issues before addressing them in the classroom. This suggests that I-pP can be seen as a meta-position (Hermans, 2018). Finally, the students perceived that working in randomly assigned groups positively influenced the construction of their professional identities, particularly in terms of fostering collaboration among peers.

The research also suggests that in order to promote effective I-pP construction in large groups in the university context, it is necessary to guarantee certain conditions and requirements, in addition to the subject-specific aspects that the participants considered transformative. Firstly, in line with the existing literature (Kirchner & London, 2021), most interviewees pointed to the climate of trust created by the teacher and the feeling of being recognised as individuals, beyond being mere numbers, as a driver for them to start participating more actively and to adopt some of the authority of the teaching figure. They also highlighted the importance of having clarity about what, how and when they could participate, marking as a second requirement the establishment of roles or moments within the classroom in which the need to act is made explicit, again reinforcing the idea that I-pP acts as a metaposition within the student's constellation of positions. In line with previous literature (Bovill, 2020), the findings suggest that teachers should be aware of the difficulties' students face when participating in class and should actively work to generate a safe and enabling environment that fosters active participation and engagement.

We believe that the results found apply to most universities around the world by fulfilling three conditions:

- By being applied to a real and whole-university class, something unusual in research on the subject.

- By being based on common content in many university institutions (learning to learn, autonomous learning, self-regulated learning, etc.).

- By being introduced to an optional subject in the final year of the specialty, which favour's the motivation and participation of students and the possibility of introducing an innovative teaching methodology.

Finally, we consider that our study provides significant evidence that the partnership approach in higher education is an excellent alternative to ensure a fluid and consistent transition from the student to professional position.

Acknowledgements

References

Ahuja, S., Heizmann, H. & Clegg, S. (2019). Emotions and Identity Work: Emotions as Discursive Resources in the Constitution of Junior Professionals' Identities." *Human Relations 72*(5), 988-1009. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718785719

Baldry, S., Märtsin, M. & Eivers, A. (2018) Traveling Without a Destination? A Dialogical Analysis of Professional Identity Construction Among Australian Double Degree Psychology Students. *Identity, 18*(2), 94-108. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2018.1447483

Bans-Akutey, A. & Tiimub, B.M. (2021). Triangulation in Research. *Academia Letters,* Article 3392. https://doi.org/10.20935/AL3392

Bergmark, U., & Westman, S. (2016). Co-creating curriculum in higher education: Promoting democratic values and a multidimensional view on learning. *International Journal for Academic Development, 21*(1), 28-40. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2015.1120734

Bovill, C. (2014). An investigation of co-created curricula within higher education in the UK, Ireland, and the USA. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 51*(1), 15-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2013.770264

Bovill, C. (2019). A Co-creation of Learning and Teaching Typology: What Kind of Co-creation are you Planning or Doing? *International Journal for Students as Partners, 3*(2), 91-98. https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v3i2.3953

Bovill, C. (2020). Co-creation in learning and teaching: The case for a whole-class approach in higher education. *Higher Education, 79*(6), 1023 -1037. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734- 019-00453

Bovill, C., Aitken, G., Hutchison, J., Morrison, F., Roseweir, K., Scott, A., & Sotannde, S. (2010). Experiences of learning through collaborative evaluation from a master's programme in professional education. *International Journal for Academic Development, 15*(2), 143-154. https://doi.org/10.1080/13601441003738343

Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., Felten, P., Millard, L., & Moore-Cherry, N. (2016). Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: Overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms, and ensuring inclusivity in student–staff partnerships. *Higher Education, 71*(2), 195-208. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9896-4

Bramming, P. (2007). An Argument for Strong Learning in Higher Education. *Quality in Higher Education 13*(1), 45-56. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320701272722

Breen, M. & Littlejohn, A. (2000). *Classroom Decision-Making.* Cambridge University Press.

Bryson, C. (2016) Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. *International Journal for Academic Development, 21*(1), 84-86. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2016.1124966

Buckley, A. (2014). How radical is student engagement? (And what is it for?). *Student Engagement and Experience Journal, 3*(2). https://doi.org/10.7190/seej.v3i2.95

Carter, W. R. & Stickney, L. T. (2019). A Capstone for the Capstone: An Experiential Exercise in Strategic Management. *Journal of Management Education, 43*(3), 233-261. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562918823023

Cook-Sather, A. (2018). Listening to equity-seeking perspectives: How students' experiences of pedagogical partnership can inform wider discussions of student success. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(5), 923-936. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1457629

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C. & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. Jossey-Bass.

Cuseo, J. (2007). The empirical case against large class size: Adverse effects on the teaching, learning, and retention of first-year students. *The Journal of Faculty Development, 21*(1), 5-21. http://hdl.handle.net/1951/58765

Deeley, S. J. (2014). Summative co-assessment: A deep learning approach to enhancing employability skills and attributes. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 15*(1), 39-51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787413514649

Delpish, A., Holmes, A., Knight-McKenna, M., Mihans, R., Darby, A., King, K., & Felten, P. (2010). Equalizing voices: Student-faculty partnership in course design. In C. Werder & M. M. Otis. (Eds.), *Engaging student voices in the study of teaching and learning* (p. 96-114). Stylus Publ

Dunne, L. (2016). Design thinking: A framework for student engagement? A personal view. The *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.21100/jeipc.v2i1.317

Dunne, E., Zandstra, R., Brown, T., & Nurser, T. (2011). *Students as change agents: new ways of engaging with learning and teaching in higher education.* University of Exeter, ESCalate, & Higher Education Academy.

Hermans, H. (2018). *Society in the Self: A theory of Identity in Democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Hermans, H. & Gieser, T. (2012). *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory*. Cambridge University Press,

Holen, R., Ashwin, P., Maassen, P. & Stensaker, B. (2020). Student partnership: Exploring the dynamics in and between different conceptualizations. *Studies in Higher Education, 46*(12), 2726-2737. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1770717

Huxham, M., Hunter, M., McIntyre, A., Shilland, R. & McArthur, J. (2015). Student and Teacher Co-Navigation of a Course: Following the "Natural Lines" of Academic Enquiry. *Teaching in Higher Education 20*(5), 530-541. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1036730

Huxham, M., Scoles, J., Green, U., Purves, S., Welsh, Z., & Gray, A. (2017). 'Observation has set in': Comparing students and peers as reviewers of teaching. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 42*(6), 887-899. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1204594

Kandiko-Howson, C. & Weller, S. (2016). Defining Pedagogic Expertise: Students and New Lecturers as Co-Developers in Learning and Teaching. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry, 4*(2), 50-63. https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.4.2.6

Kirchner, M., & London, M. (2021). The Co-Created Classroom: Enhancing Students' Professional Identity through a Teaching Apprentice Assignment. *College Teaching*, *70*(2), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2021.1915235

Kuh, G.D. (2009) What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College Student Development, 50(*3), 683-706. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0099

Lubicz-Nawrocka, T., & Bovill, C. (2021). Do students experience transformation through co-creating curriculum in higher education? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1928060

Luescher-Mamashela, T. M. (2013). Student representation in university decision making: good reasons, a new lens? *Studies in Higher Education, 38*(10), 1442-1456. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.625496

Marquis, E., Jayaratnam, A., Mishra, A., & Rybkina, K. (2018). "I feel like some students are better connected": Students' perspectives on applying for extracurricular partnership opportunities. *International Journal for Students as Partners, 2*(1), 64-81. https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v2i1.3300

Marquis, E., Puri, V., Wan, S., Ahmad, A., Goff, L., Knorr, K., Vassileva, I. & Woo, J. (2016). Navigating the threshold of student–staff partnerships: a case study from an Ontario teaching and learning institute. *International Journal for Academic Development, 21*(1), 4-15, https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2015.1113538

Martens, S., Meeuwisen, S., Dolmans, D., Bovill, C., & Könings, K. (2019). Student participation in the design of learning and teaching: Disentangling the terminology and approaches. *Medical Teacher, 41*(10), 1203 -1205. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2019.1615610

Mercer-Mapstone, L., Dvorakova, S. L., Matthews, K. E., Abbot, S., Cheng, B., Felten, P., Knorr, K., Marquis, E., Shammas, R., & Swaim, K. (2017). A Systematic Literature Review of Students as Partners in Higher Education. *International Journal for Students as Partners, 1*(1). https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v1i1.3119

Mercer-Mapstone, L., Marquis, E. & McConnell, C. (2018). The 'Partnership Identity' in Higher Education: Moving From 'Us' and 'Them' to 'We' in Student-Staff Partnership. *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal, 2*(1), 12-29.

Mihans, R., Long, D., & Felten, P. (2008). Power and expertise: Student-faculty collaboration in course design and the scholarship of teaching. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 2*(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2008.020216

Monereo, C., & Caride, M. (2022). Becoming a Professional: Analysis of the Reciprocal Influence between I-Positions and We-Positions in a Group of University Students. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 35*(4), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/10720537.2021.1989095

Monereo, C. & Hermans, H. (2023) Education and dialogical self: state of art. *Journal for the Study of Education and Development*, https://doi.org/10.1080/02103702.2023.2201562

Moore-Cherry, N., Healey, R., Nicholson, T. & Andrews, W. (2016). Inclusive partnership: Enhancing Student Engagement in Geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 40*(1), 84-103. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2015.1066316

Rock, R., Foster, E. & Lamb, S. (2015). *Putting students at the heart of the curriculum change process*. Higher Education Academy.

Ryan, A., & Tilbury, D. (2013). Uncharted waters: Voyages for Education for Sustainable Development in the higher education curriculum. *The Curriculum Journal, 24*(2), 272-294. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2013.779287

Suñé-Soler, N., Monereo, C., & Skakni, I. (2022). The identity of the responsible researcher in education. In C. Monereo (Ed.), *The identity of education professionals. Positioning, training & innovation* (p. 285–310). Information Age Publishing.

Tassone, V.,O'Mahony, C., McKenna, E., Eppink, H. & Wals, A. (2018). (Re-)designing higher education curricula in times of systemic dysfunction: a responsible research and innovation perspective. *Higher Education, 76*(4), 337–352. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0211-4

Theophilides, C.& Terenzini, P.T. (1981) The relation between non-classroom contact with faculty and students' perceptions of instructional quality. *Research in Higher Education,* 15, 255–269. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00976420

UNESCO (2015). Transforming our world: the agenda 2030 for sustainable development: a new social contract for education. New York United Nations Publ. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication

UNESCO (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*. New York United Nations Publication. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707.locale=en

Werder, C. & Otis, M. M. (2010). *Engaging student voices in the study of teaching and learning*. Stylus Publishers.