Reflections of participating in a Students as Partners co-creator project in a second year Physiology subject: An example of an Internationalisation at Home experience

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Abstract

This paper showcases a partnership between students, and an academic to develop new and review existing learning resources in a second-year physiology subject "Systems Physiology" offered at Deakin University in Australia, from the perspective of both of students and the teaching staff. All involved participated in a collaborative, student lead project; it was a reciprocal process where all members contributed, in their own unique way to evaluate, design, create and implement an online activity to enhance the understanding of a concept, in this case cardiovascular physiology (both theoretical and practical aspects). This type of partnership encourages critical reflection and opens a door to new ways of learning and teaching in Higher Education. We propose that Students As Partners project could be designed to specially meet an Internationalisation at Home experience for both domestic and international students at Deakin University tapping into the diverse pool of experiences and skills that our current students already bring to the curriculum.

Citation

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Introduction

Internationalisation of Curriculum

Internationalisation of the curriculum prepares students for life and work in the globalized world and now must be considered by Higher Education institutions (Jones, 2017). There is no one single definition for Internationalisation of Curriculum as it has different meanings when applied to different scenarios and this concept continues to evolve (Beelen & Jones, 2015). The definition widely used by Australian Universities defines Internationalisation of Curriculum as "*Curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally / socially) in an international and multicultural context and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students*" (OECD, 2004). This definition was modified by Leask (2009) to include measureable outcomes as the strategy was designed to assist learners to become more aware of their own and other cultures.

Leask's (2009) definition is "*Internationalisation of the curriculum is the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery and outcomes of a program of study*" (p 209).

An elegant summary of the importance of internationalisation in tertiary programs was provided in Jones (2017):

> *When all students graduate they will live and work in an increasing interconnected, globalised world as both professionals and citizens. If they are to solve major global problems the crossing of boundaries using international and intercultural knowledge, communication skills and critical thinking will be essential. To successfully achieve this a commitment to ethical practice, global responsibility and understanding of and respect for cultural others needs to be addressed* (p 22).

Internationalisation of the curriculum is used by many tertiary institutions to engage students in "global learning". Internationalisation can be in the form of "Overseas Study Abroad" programs or the like promoting the mobility of students. These programs are extremely beneficial with value adds to student learning in global and intercultural awareness of issues (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001) and intercultural communication skills (Langley & Breese, 2005). However, not all students are able to take these opportunities due to costs, credits towards their degree program may not be fully recognized and such programs can prolong the length of their degree, delaying graduation (Jones et al., 2016; Shaftel & Ahluwalia, 2007). The challenge facing universities is to make such international learning opportunities available and accessible for all students. This inequality of access gave rise to the concept of Internationalisation at Home (Crowther et al., 2001; Wächter, 2003) whereby 'domestic students have access to an international higher education experience despite their own lack of mobility' (Harrison, 2015). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted student mobility with students from some countries showing much lower levels of interest (85% from 2739 respondents from China and Hong Kong) in going abroad (Mok et al., 2021). These challenges provide universities with an opportunity to re-think what may

be possible with the development and implementation of technologies moving forward to bring more internationalisation experiences into the degree programs.

Universities in Australia have diverse cohorts of students in the programs of study offered. Students enrolled in any one subject at university come from increasingly diverse backgrounds. In actual fact, the Internationalisation has come to the university in the form of international students, domestic students from different degree programs, different cultural and equity backgrounds, school leavers, mature age students, students who speak more than one language, This presents its own set of challenges for delivery of a subject (Lee & Buxton, 2008) but does provide a melting pot of experience as all have a wealth of different experiences and knowledge that are largely an untapped resource. These skills can be introduced, developed, and refined using internationalised / inter-culturalised formal and informal curriculum activities in a university setting (Jones, 2017) allowing students to develop competencies in this area.

Internationalisation at Home

Beelen and Jones (2015, p69) define Internationalisation at Home as "*the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments*".

The development and accessibility of recent advances in technology allows for easy communication and challenges all our students to learn how to engage internationally and this demands that they have global awareness, are international in their outlook, are able to work with and recognize diversity and have experiences both at work and life experiences to increase their capacity to work internationally (Jones, 2017).

So how does the university maximize this rich resource of experience already on our campuses to develop a greater range of an international experiences at home?

Examples of Internationalisation at Home experiences are diverse, but the overarching theme of such experiences is the creation of an environment that is inclusive, equitable and multicultural (Universities UK International, 2021). Examples include cross-university virtual teamwork project (Rauer et al., 2021); on campus hubs for global learning; Internationalisation events and student run projects delivered both on campus and in the community (Universities UK International, 2021).

Students As Partners Programs and Internationalisation

In this paper we discuss the Students As Partners program as an example of Internationalisation at Home. Students as Partners programs are an important issue currently being discussed in higher education with an increase in uptake of this initiative around the world (Matthews et al., 2018) including at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Students as Partners is a different way of "thinking and doing that repositions students and staff as active and equal contributors in a reciprocal process to enhance teaching and learning; curricula and practice and to engage in research" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). The concept of Students As Partners has been discussed in the context of internationalisation and also assessment and feedback, employability, flexible pedagogies, linking teaching and research, and retention and success (Healey et al., 2014).

In 2021 the Student As Partners program at Deakin University requested and emphasised equity, diversity, plus inclusiveness in the project brief; students of low socio-economic status, regional and remote, or indigenous backgrounds were encouraged to apply. Students As Partners programs with members having diverse disciplinary, cultural, and national backgrounds have been used to co-develop "rich global learning experiences both in the informal and formal curriculum" (Green, 2019). Internationalisation can be presented in many different forms and should be "a driver for change and improvement – it should help generate the skills required in the 21st century, spur on innovation and create alternatives while, ultimately, fostering job creation" (OCED, 2004) and assist with the development of employability skills.

With these ideas in mind, we propose that Student As Partners programs / projects can provide opportunities for internationalising the informal curriculum based on the definition of Leask (2009).

In this study we have used an example of a discipline specific Student's As Partners co-creator project offered at Deakin University to demonstrate how students with a diverse range of learning experiences working as a team successfully completed a project by designing, managing, creating and communicating a valuable online resource for a second year physiology unit that could be considered an "internationalised at home" experience.

This study examined the skills, perceptions, thoughts, and views of a Student As Partners team consisting of 4 students, and one academic to co-create a resource of value to the student whilst documenting experiences of participating in the program and reflecting on skills gained from the experience apart from discipline based knowledge.

Aims

1. To showcase the experiences / skill development of a diverse team of participants in the Students As Partners program (staff and students) and demonstrate how these meet the criteria of an Internationalisation at Home experience.
2. Based on our experiences provide advice on what made our Students As Partners project such a rich internationalised learning experience.

Methods

Students as Partners Program at Deakin University

The Students as Partners program at Deakin University is not part of the formal curriculum. Participation is voluntary (and competitive by application); not for marks or credit but designed to provide a value-added, extra curricula intra-university experience providing opportunities for students to get real world experience by working with academics on authentic projects of value.

This program commenced at Deakin University in 2018 with the aim of developing partnerships using a framework that conceptualizes different levels of engagement, giving students a voice and agency to establish partnerships with academic staff as well as their peers. This framework follows 5 guiding principles which has the student voice front and centre of the program. The principles are: (1) Add value for students; (2) Acknowledge different perspectives (3) Be respectful and inclusive (4) Be flexible and (5) Evaluate and optimise. There are 4 broad approaches to

Students as Partners. Students as (1) Sounding boards, (2) Influencers (3) Co-creators and (4) Decision makers (Students as Partners Framework: Approaches to Partnership).

Deakin's approach to Students as Partners is based on principles of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity (Bovill, et al., 2014) and embraces values of authenticity, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment, courage, and trust in everything we do at Deakin (Higher Education Academy (2016). Deakin aims to create a culture where these principles and values are part of the way we think, work, relate, teach and learn, whether participating in Students As Partners projects or not (Milburn & Jones, 2019).

This engagement approach recognizes and acknowledges the expertise of students in engaging with peers in their learning and enhancing the student experience for both current participants and future students. Staff like me consider a change of mindset from "creating for" students to "creating with" students for future students.

Participants

Ethics approval was obtained from the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Built Environment's Low Risk Human Research Ethics Committee (SEBE-2021-78).

In 2021 the Student As Partners program requested and emphasised equity, diversity, plus inclusiveness in the project brief; students of low socio-economic status, regional and remote, or Indigenous backgrounds were of particular interest. The projects were advertised by the Office of Dean of Students and interested students submitted an Expression of Interest. Our Students As Partners project had a "students as co-creators" theme providing four undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds an opportunity to work with a Deakin academic staff member in co-designing educational resources that bring real-world experiences to engage students, and in this instance, de-mystify some of the "hard to grasp" concepts in physiology. It provided a window for staff to see things from a student perspective.

One of the requirements of an internationalisation experience is diversity and having an opportunity to work with and engage with members of different backgrounds. Our team consisted of one academic staff member and four undergraduate student partners. The student partners came from various degree programs (Double degree Bachelor of Arts / Bachelor of Science ; Bachelor of Biomedical Science majoring in Infection and Immunity); Bachelor of Science double major in Animal Biology and Human Biology and Bachelor of Science majoring in Human Biology); all had different backgrounds and experiences which included attending university as a mature age student (i.e. not immediately enrolling post-secondary school), completing a degree with carer responsibilities, and having learning challenges. This mix of experiences contributed unique ideas to the project and provided valuable experience at Deakin by being involved in an authentic project that would be of value to future students.

Sample size was N=5; the one academic and 4 undergraduate students who participated in the Students As Partners project.

Procedure

The primary aim was to document personal experiences / skill development of a diverse team of participants in a Students As Partners project (staff member and students) and demonstrate how these meet the criteria of an Internationalisation at Home experience. To get a metric on the degree of diversity of learning style and skills, team members participated in two online surveys.

Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire
This is an online metric tool (https://www.webtools.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/) developed by Felder and Silverman (1988) to quantify the degree of diversity of learning styles within the group. The survey consisted of 44 questions. For each question participants choose only one answer from two available options. All questions had to be answered before the survey can be submitted. After submission a summary of their preferences on four dimensions of learning (active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, and sequential/global) is generated immediately. The survey results provide an indication of the participants learning preferences and an indication of the preference distribution of a group of participants (such as students in a class). The survey was used in this study to show the diversity in learning styles between individual members of our Students As Partners team. This enabled us to confirm not only a diversity in backgrounds and experience but also a diversity in learning style preferences which was important as the project set out to develop / create a learning resource for students with different knowledge backgrounds in physiology.

The Employable Skills Self-Efficacy (ESSE) Survey
Developed by Ciarocco and Strohmetz (2018), this survey was used to create a baseline measurement of skills and to determine if there was any evidence of skill development at the end of the project. This survey is a 51-item inventory that assesses four domains of employable skills, including communication, analytical inquiry, collaboration and professional development. This survey has been used for a variety of applications. For this study we have used it this survey to test the effectiveness of participating in the Students As Partners project in developing perceived global skill efficacy by assessing team members before and after participation in the project.

Students As Partners projects provide an opportunity for participants to develop some unique skills not generally part of mainstream curriculum. We do note that this survey does rely on self-reflection and personal assessment of individual team members. This can be subject to debate as the perceived level of skill may not measure their actual skill level and that team members were not solely working on this project during the period of evaluation, nonetheless it can still provide a measure / indicator for self-perceived skill development (Ciarocco & Strohmetz, 2018).

In addition to the surveys participants were invited to share their experiences of working in a Students As Partners team. All participants were provided with a series of 8 questions that were discussed at the end of the project and the dialogue recorded via Zoom (approx. one hour in duration).

Questions discussed:

1. What attracted you to apply for the Students As Partners Project?
2. What did you hope to accomplish in doing the project and did you achieve it? This can be more than creating the resource – your personal development skills? Experiences?
3. you give an example of how you have grown personally as being part of the project? Did you gain / learn anything that was "unexpected"?
4. What was a major challenge encountered when participating in the project and how did you deal with it?
5. What was your greatest achievement? Proudest moment?
6. Did working on the project increase your understanding of the events in one cardiac cycle? Can you provide an example? Did you learn anything from team members?
7. If you could start the project now, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?
8. The Students As Partners project – What else could the scheme offer students to assist their personal development?

A transcript created from the audio. Reoccurring themes were summarized using the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo 13 and supporting statements selected to provide a narrative of the experiences. The purpose of this was to identify any skills developed / experiences had not routinely assessed during an undergraduate degree to compare to other Internationalisation at home experiences.

Findings

Team composition

Following the five guiding principles model of Student As Partners at Deakin (Students as Partners Framework: Approaches to Partnership) of creating a diverse team, the learning styles of all team members were determined by scores from the Learning Styles survey of all team members is shown in Figure 1. This confirmed that members of the team not only had different backgrounds, had different experiences and faced different challenges but had different preferred learning styles.

The different parameters are explained in Felder and Solomon (2000): Active learners tend to retain and understand information best by doing something active with it—discussing or applying it or explaining it to others. Reflective learners prefer to think about it quietly first. Sensing learners tend to like learning facts, Intuitive learners often prefer discovering possibilities and relationships. Visual learners remember best what they see - pictures, diagrams, flow charts, timelines, films, and demonstrations. Verbal learners get more out of words - written and spoken explanations. Sequential learners tend to gain understanding in linear steps, with each step following logically from the previous one. Global learners tend to learn in large jumps, absorbing material almost randomly without seeing connections, and then suddenly "getting it."

Figure 1

Scores for individual team members (TM) numbered 1 to 5 from the Learning Styles Survey based on (Felder & Silverman, 1988).

Note: TM = Team Member

This survey does not "categorize" individuals definitely into one category but rather shows the tendency to favour one learning mode over another. A preference for one or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. Often to be an effective learner it is necessary to exhibit both modes in each of the categories. Our team showed individual differences but there was a strong tendency among team members to be "Sensing" (Felder & Solomon, 2000).

Employability Self Efficacy Survey

Skill development and experiences are one advantage of undertaking an internationalisation experience (Jones, 2013). To determine the perceived skill level all team members completed the survey at the beginning and the end of the Students As Partners project. The percentage difference between the results at the beginning and after completion of the project are shown in Table 1 for each team member (TM) labelled 1 to 5.

Table 1

Difference in values in the Employability Self Efficacy Survey from the start to the end of the project.

Employability Self Efficacy Survey Categories	TM1	TM2	TM3	TM4	TM5
Communication Skills	18.8	3.0	3.0	0.0	6.0
Writing Skills	37.5	4.2	8.3	0.0	7.5
Speaking Skills	25.0	4.2	0.0	0.0	3.3
Reading Skills	8.3	4.2	0.0	0.0	12.5
Listening Skills	4.2	0.0	4.2	0.0	0.0
Analytical Enquiry Skills	14.2	9.2	3.8	0.0	0.8
Research Skills	20.0	10.0	3.3	0.0	6.7
Information Literacy	8.3	8.3	4.2	0.0	0.0
Collaboration Skills	0.0	3.3	3.3	6.7	13.3
Working in Groups	-3.3	6.7	6.7	3.3	16.7
Leadership Skills	3.3	0.0	0.0	10.0	10.0
Professional Development Skills	31.3	3.8	9.0	0.8	0.0
Self Management	33.3	8.3	12.5	0.0	0.0
Professional Skills	35.7	0.0	4.7	2.3	0.0
Technology Skills	25.0	3.3	10.0	0.0	13.3

Notes: TM = Team Member. Blue shading indicates an increase from the first score, No colour indicates no change and yellow indicates the value at the end was lower than at the start.

Acknowledging that this survey does rely on self-reflection and personal assessment of individual team members but can still provide a measure / indicator for self-perceived skill development (Ciarocco & Strohmetz, 2018) all but one of the parameters from one of the sub categories from one team member showed a reduction in score. All other parameters in the 4 broad categories showed an increase or remained the same.

There are clear variations between individual team members which is not surprising in a diverse team of students. This further conforms the diversity within the team exists.

All major categories showed either a % increase or no change across all team members. The greatest number of "no change" recorded data from all team members was in the Communication skills category. Not surprising as communication is one skill that is embedded and scaffolded across all year levels in the degree programs the participants were completing at Deakin University.

Acknowledging the diversity in the group the highest average % increase was in the Professional Development skills category – self management, professional skills and technology skills (Figure 2). These are skills that are not generally assessed in the degree programs the students are completing and are more akin with skills a student may gain from an international experience.

Figure 2

The average % increase calculated from all team members (N=5) across all categories in the survey.
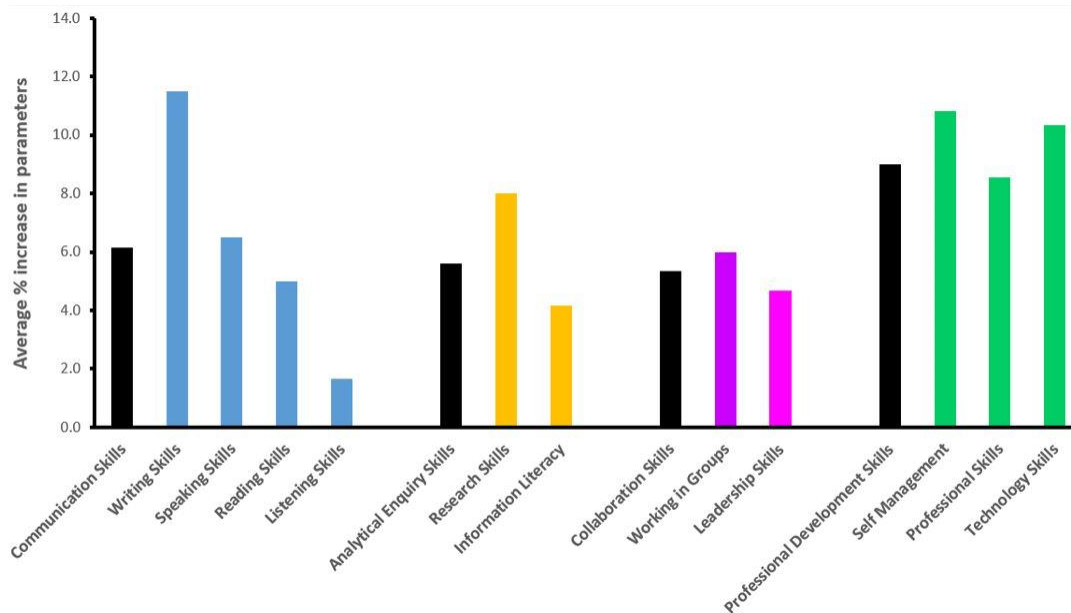
Notes: The major descriptor categories are in black. The subcategories for each are shown in blue (Communication skills); orange (Analytical enquiry skills); purple (Collaboration skills) and green (Professional Development skills).

Project experience

The student members of the team designed, managed, and led the project choosing the challenging concept of the events of one cardiac cycle for their co-creator project. The academic staff member was part of the team, so the students worked with the academic and not "for" the academic. Regular meetings were organised, tasks were delegated, discussions were had, feedback was provided and pondered, all of which resulted in the production of a creative, novel and useful resource for students. Statements from the transcript of shared experiences created from the Zoom meeting summarised and were analysed thematically (see methods).

Student partners were attracted to apply for the Students As Partners project for a variety of reasons. The major reasons stated were to gain experience, develop teamwork skills, challenge their thinking, consolidate knowledge in a real-world project by writing content and creating learning resources.

Comments from the student partners included:

> "*Formal work experience is super valuable…difficult to find work for disabled people and with the COVID pandemic that is manageable with study has been difficult*"

"*Just having the opportunity to further develop my teamwork skills and challenge my thinking by being involved in the teaching kind of side of things*"

"*Caring for my grandparents, I could provide a really unique perspective, especially from a real world case based learning point of view of pathophysiological processes*"

When asked what they hoped to accomplish in doing the project and if they managed to achieve this as part of the project responses from 2021 team members included: "*Gaining work experience and confidence and further developing those really essential skills of teamwork, communication, self-management, resilience.", "Teamwork is difficult for many students*" and "

Working in groups is intimidating. I don't particularly enjoy it but I knew that there were people, that I already enjoyed working with. So it was a good opportunity for me to gain confidence in working in a group setting".

These types of skills require consolidation and repeated opportunities to develop and refine throughout their degree. The student partners recognise this and saw the project as another opportunity to do this. *"I had seen an improvement in my communication and teamwork skills in general so I just sort of wanted to continue that and I think that's something that has"*

Interesting that resilience was listed as an accomplishment, showing that the situation of the restrictions posed by the COVID pandemic did provide learning opportunities

"*This experience was something I drew on during my MED school interviews, I spoke a lot about this project. Surviving in an ever changing world. Nothing stayed the same. The stress imposed by COVID restrictions made you resilient and adaptable to constant change*". [Team member, 2021].

Major themes about learning

Social aspects of learning – the importance of relationships with co-workers.

The partners did not consider the project another assessment task. This experience was not for credit towards their degree and was completed in addition to their normal study load although the student partners did receive payment. Comment from a team member:

Being involved in the project feels different. It was more enjoyable to create something for that purpose, rather than for the purposes of the grade. I really enjoyed getting to know everyone as co-workers and see where their skills are and where they want to push themselves and watching my co-workers push themselves in certain areas has been really satisfying [Team Member, 2021].

Group assignments are challenging for many students, and many would prefer to work individually as there are high stakes on offer for marks and for some international students, they have limited experience in working in teams. The student partners who have all experienced group work as part of their undergraduate degree commented that this project did not feel like an assignment and fostered communication on a different level.

We had more time to work together, which allowed me to work on not only the project itself, but also on the relationships with my co-workers. I think when you're working in a group with other students for an assignment it's totally different as a lot of students just want to get it done and ignore each other and pretend that it's just about the work, but here we were able to communicate with each other as people [Team Member, 2021].

We saw each other as co-workers and developed co-worker relationships, which is something I have not had a lot of experience in. So I really felt that was something new and unique part of the experience in a sense that we were communicating as co-workers and that did feel a lot different than I thought it would. I really enjoyed getting to know everyone as co-workers and see where their skills are and where they want to push themselves and watching my co-workers push themselves in certain areas has been really satisfying [Team Member, 2021].

Exposing and acknowledging perceived weakness

Partners appreciated the power of teamwork and the support that can be provided. They shared some very personal struggles.

I was able to come overcome one of my biggest weaknesses - asking for help. There have been times throughout the project, where I've been overwhelmed I've had personal issues, especially around caring for my grandparents that are often sick. I've felt so comfortable with this group. Now having had this experience with the group I feel comfortable participating in other group settings [Team Member, 2021].

Being confronted with situations that made them reconsider their usual strategy:

I'm really organized always but I was struggling with completing subjects and meeting the deadline for this project. Usually time management is something I'm really good with. Prioritizing things and blocking out my time was something that I've never done before, but now I really have to say that worked for me. I have an understanding of the value of being able to work under pressure [Team Member, 2021].

The student partners took ownership of the task and what makes the resource created so valuable to others is the documentation of the partners sharing their learning experiences. This does expose perceived weaknesses and importance of reflection became a theme in these discussions. Reflection on how they learnt the concepts but also reflection on how they could create a resource based on their learning experiences. This was challenging for the student partners as what initially seemed to be a rather straightforward task was more complex – student members struggled with this. Members had to be flexible and adaptable.

In the majority of assessments we didn't get the opportunity to drive and take control of the task. This project allowed us to do this and it was tough. So many good ideas with a restrained time period, it took us time to really set our ideas in stone. Which order should the concepts be presented? To be successful we had to rein ourselves in and concentrate on the critical stuff [Team Member, 2021]

Such learning experiences create authentic challenges including providing solutions to difficult concepts, understanding difficult content and having to make decisions that changed the course

of the project. Whilst challenges and difficulty in learning experiences can result in students feeling frustrated and confused and not sure of an appropriate way forward but can lead to productive deep learning experiences when appropriate support is provided (Osika et al., 2022). Making mistakes and "getting stuck" are part of the learning experience that students may not recognise as such. Often students don't want to admit there are having difficulties as they don't want to appear incompetent (Osika et al., 2022). The Students as Partners project provided an environment where students could be supported in their learning struggle where marks were not involved which promotes deep learning.

Empowering students through partnership not only leads to enthusiasm for learning, but also increased passion and enthusiasm for enhancement activities (SooHoo, 1993) which accompanies a sense of pride in the work completed. When students are involved in co-creation of curriculum as in this study it has been reported that there was greater sharing of knowledge, power and responsibility (Green, 2019). This also led to a stronger support system for team members where they felt comfortable sharing their feelings and asking for help. Something some students do find difficult.

These examples provide evidence of the descriptors of courageous, flexible, engaged, and open to challenge; characteristics of a good problem solver (Graduate Learning Outcome 5 at Deakin University. These types of experiences are not readily identified as experiences to meet graduate learning outcomes (Deakin Graduate Learning Outcomes). Students as Partners projects provide opportunities for students to gain these types of experiences.

Sense of accomplishment / pride

The participants did not consider the project as another assessment task and the partners reported on the overall sense of pride on what had been created was evident. The sense of achievement of the outcomes of this project was different to getting a good mark for an assessment task. This sense of ownership and value of the work that has been reported previously (Healey et al., 2014). The top 25 words from the transcript are presented as a word cloud in Figure 3 (words 3 letters or less have been removed).

Figure 3

Word cloud created from the top 25 words from the transcript using NVivo 13.

Comments from members of the project included:

I didn't expect to feel so proud. Watching the finished product, I found myself smiling, while I was watching it and I wanted to show it to everyone……I showed my little sister, my parents, my other sisters. I like being able to teach and instil that sort of meaningful change for students [Team Member, 2021].

It felt like work and work feels different it didn't feel like I'm here to get this grade but it felt like how am I going to put something out there that will help students, so that I can look back on it and go yeah I wish I had that was the student and I'm glad these students have it now. It wasn't about the end mark, which is how I feel when doing assignment this was about creating something that I genuinely thought was helpful [Team Member, 2021].

The product created gave the team a great sense of pride – this was not for marks but they were proud of the end product and they could see the worth of what they created.

Further development in subtle skill sets.

Participants reported increased efficacy of skills including multidisciplinary teamwork, leadership, communication, time management, and resilience. To try and provide an indicator of change in skill development the team completed the Employability Self-Assessment survey at the beginning and the end of the project. Noting that the project was not the only experience the students were involved in and that self-assessment is not always a true indicator of skill the differences in scores between the initial and final scores of the 15 parameters in the survey for the 5 participants (75 values recorded in the table only one parameter decreased in value (teamwork); 22 remained the same and 52 showed in an increase. Specific skill development has been reported as a benefit in Students As Partners projects (Coombe et al., 2018).

The skills highlighted as a result of participating in this physiology focused project could be applied to any discipline. The project provided an opportunity to practice team-based management, a skill they do not get many opportunities to do in their undergraduate degree particularly with international students who have only experienced assessment tasks that are primarily individual or exam based.

When asked about the reasons for applying to Students As Partners one team member stated they wanted to develop communication and teamwork skills. For one particular participant the scores based on the Employability Self-Assessment Survey scores did increase from 2.9 to 3.7 for teamwork and 4.4 to 4.8 for communication.

Subtle skills are skills that are often not assessed or are difficult to assess as part of a degree program. These are skills often identified by students but at first the connection to providing evidence for a graduate learning outcome is not directly obvious. Students as Partners projects can provide experiences for skills such as:

Understanding complexity

Student members got an inside view of what it takes to create learning resources for students and gained a greater appreciation for what was involved as supported by comments:

> "*It taught me that there's actually a lot more to teaching and creating resources and things that us as students actually don't realise like it takes a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of planning [Team Member, 2021].*

and "*How a small change such as changing the order that concepts are presented can potentially make big impact on student learning*" [Team Member, 2021].

Complexity is not just in developing learning resources but also working within a diverse team. How to manage different styles and what items different members put different emphasis on? Complexity in how to maintain regular contact during the pandemic when all meetings were online "*Communicating wholly online as a result of COVID was an added challenge and made things more complex but continued regular discussion was the key*".

Learning physiology is more than memorising facts and learning can be enhanced if students understand a concept and why it happens then memorizing facts becomes less important as they can explain a situation and link concepts together. As a result of participating in the Students As Partners project student members certainly demonstrated learning gain with the concept they were working on, "*Not just memorising information but understanding why particular events occur*" [Team Member, 2021] and,

> *100% I learned so much. I did this unit a year ago so that knowledge was buried under other knowledge. But, looking back, I was like oh yeah that's right, I remember this. One concept I definitely didn't understand was the Pressure Volume loop. That is definitely something I have learned.* [Team Member, 2021].

But they also gained an understanding of why this occurred i.e. how they their learning had developed:

> *Definitely helped my understanding I find the best way to learn is to teach. I showed our diagram to my little sister so she has no idea about the concepts of the cardiac cycle. I felt happy after my explanation she had a basic grasp of what it means to have a heart beat. This also solidified my learning and understanding of how other approach learning* [Team Member, 2021].

> "*Writing scripts and those concepts it really sort of unlocked that the Wigger's diagrams just concept it's not about reading the diagram it's understanding the concepts*" [Team Member, 2021].

Also, more importantly, they gained an appreciation for how different members of the team learn. From a team member with a learning challenge: "*I approach diagram differently to how other people approach diagrams because I'm approaching it from someone finds diagrams generally*

not accessible" [Team Member, 2021]. Other team members were made aware of issues they perhaps had not previously needed to consider.

Reflections: Student Partners and Academic

Student Partner's perspective

In this project student members also commented on the benefits of utilizing the diversity of expertise of team members in the creation of curriculum resources, valuing the input from others, and reflecting on the process. "*It's the culmination of we've done to finish this task. Now we get to reflect on how it's made us better workers and how the tasks might need to be improved in the future*" [Team Member, 2021].

The benefits of participating for both staff and students in a Students As Partners project have been well documented in the literature but include increased motivation and enthusiasm for learning, ownership of the project, increased awareness of their own learning and a deeper understanding of the content of the project (Coombe et al., 2018; Healey et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The benefits reported for staff and students participating in partnerships have had similar outcomes (Cook-Sather, et al., 2014). They categorised the benefits into 3 major outcomes: engagement, awareness and enhancement and the many of the findings from thematic analysis of the personal reflections of the team members would fall into one of these categories.

Academic's perspective

I have had a long-standing interest in engaging with students as part of professional practice placements and now Students As Partners. As a student myself, some concepts didn't come easily to me, and I had to work really hard to grasp them; so I understand the frustration of not to be able to understand a concept. I want to challenge students but don't want students to encounter obstacles that hinder their learning and I continually try different methods to engage students. Academics need to be flexible and try different avenues to engage students and enhance their learning. Feedback can be confronting but academics need to remain open-minded and consider student input carefully.

My strong tendency for learning is that of a visual learner and this most likely can bias how I present content and information to students. Graphs, diagrams, concept maps can summarize a large amount of information and I find that useful. I have taken for granted that so long as the graph / figure is nicely presented that all students will find it useful. I am now more mindful of colours and labels in graphs because of a comment made "*I have trouble reading graphs that are blue and red, with no labels*" [Team Member, 2021].

Graphs presented for the students may still be coloured but now they also include labels.

The scripts written by the team members for the video resource created provided a unique opportunity for me read about any difficulties they had understanding the concepts. I was challenged to change the order in which I present the material. One of these ideas was to teach the Pressure Loop diagram (a simpler diagram visually) before the Wigger's diagram (more complex); "*Why don't you present the Pressure Loop diagram first, then discuss the more complex*

Wigger's diagram?" [Team Member, 2021] *Why don't I*? From 2021 I modified the order of the curriculum and have presented the Pressure Loop diagram first and this appears to have had a positive impact. After this change answers to a question about the Wigger's diagram resulted an increase in the average class mark from 64.6% (2020) to 74.4% (2021). Noting that the student cohort is different there is still a substantial increase in score. Changes do not have to be dramatic to have a big impact.

Academics need to be open minded, prepared to be challenged and to reflect on the way you think about teaching. As a result of this project I am now more mindful about the types of learning resources provided. Students have different learning styles and if a range of different resources are not available this may not always be considered equitable as it assumes that learning styles, background knowledge, experiences and methods used for all students are the same. A diverse student cohort at Deakin has been supported via learning access plans for students with special needs that are more centred on assessment (Tai et al., 2022) but differences in learning styles should be noted to allow students to adequately prepare for assessments. Small modifications to resources can have a big impact.

Discussion

Internationalisation has come to the university in the form of international students, domestic students from different degree programs, cultural backgrounds, school leavers, mature age students, students who speak more than one language, students with learning challenges and students who are working while studying. This is a melting pot of experience as all have a wealth of different experiences and knowledge that are largely an untapped resource that could be utilized for an Internationalisation at Home experience through the program framework of Students As Partners.

Students As Partners Projects
Students as Partners projects can provide a rich learning experience for students and can be considered an example of Internationalisation at Home.

There are clear benefits for students and staff when participating in Students as Partners projects which can provide opportunities for skill development and refinement and evidence of achievement for a global skill base. Participants reported increased efficacy of skills including multidisciplinary teamwork, leadership, communication, time management, appreciation of other viewpoints and resilience.   These types of skills are also recognised as important in an internationalisation experience. Student - Staff partnership encourages critical reflection and opens a door to new ways of learning and teaching in Higher Education. Experiences from the academic point of view can provide advice for others interested in participating in the Students as Partners program and structuring these experiences as an Internationalisation at Home experiences.

Students as Partners is an example of Internationalisation at Home. Internationalisation at Home has been described as a set of instruments and activities "at home" that aim to develop international and intercultural competencies for all students (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Sercu, 2022). The experiences are specific to the context of the discipline and the program of study (de Wit &

Leask, 2015) and does not necessarily require the presence of international students although there are obvious benefits if they are included.

Expected benefits of internationalisation of the curriculum include providing, a contemporary, authentic education for students, who will be the citizens, entrepreneurs, and scientists of tomorrow. Internationalisation is considered to be a driver for change and improvement – it should help generate the skills required in the 21st century, spur on innovation and foster job creation (OCED, 2014). As universities become progressively more diverse, with domestic students from a range of multicultural backgrounds, having a range of different life experiences learning alongside international students, the inter-relationship between internationalisation and diversity in domestic populations is gradually becoming recognised (Jones, 2017).

The idea of using Students As Partners to increase engagement in their learning and in global learning was proposed by Green (2019). The study recognises students' diverse perspectives, skills and knowledge and provides a discipline-based case study for Students As Partners as an example of internationalisation at Home. It describes the challenges using the terms global learning versus Internationalisation of Curriculum and outlines the reasoning for adopting global learning, claiming students, through global learning,

> *become informed, open minded and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences; seek to understand how their actions affect global and local communities and address the world's most pressing and enduring issues collaboratively and equitably* (Association of the American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2015).

To ensure that students achieve "*purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments*", as defined by Beelen and Jones, (2015, p.69) via an Internationalisation at Home experience.

Internationalisation at Home
Internationalisation at Home is conceptually similar to Students As Partners. Both provide a multicultural, intercultural learning environment. Participants bring diverse backgrounds and experiences in a collaboration between students and academics. Internationalisation at Home aims to provide an international learning experience for on-campus students. Technological advances are an opportunity for virtual mobility for students and academics to collaborate globally. Table 2 is a comparison.

Table 2

Comparison: Internationalisation at Home concept and Students As Partners

Internationalisation at Home (IaH) https://www.eaie.org/blog/internationalisation-at-home-practice.html (Jones & Reiffenrath, 2018)*	Students As Partners (SaP) (Deakin University) https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/studentsaspartners/aboutus/
Can be an effective means of actively including diverse student cohorts – both internationally mobile incoming students and local students from a variety of backgrounds into teaching and learning processes.	SaP offers an engagement approach that recognizes and acknowledges the expertise of students in engaging with their peers in their learning and enhancing the student experience for both current participants and future students.
Is supported by informal co-curriculum activities across the institution. Learning not only takes place within formal classroom settings, informal activities, such as intercultural communication workshops, buddy programmes, language tandems, service learning activities or cultural programmes lend substantial strength to IaH and can help deliver comprehensive internationalisation	SaP at Deakin University is offered as an informal activity with an emphasis on engaging "hard to reach" students with diverse backgrounds.
Makes purposeful use of cultural diversity in the classroom for inclusive learning, teaching and assessment practice. IaH is strongly learner-oriented. Using cultural diversity as a classroom resource includes finding ways of integrating experiences and knowledge of both internationally mobile students and local students from diverse backgrounds.	SaP conceptualise student expertise through their lived experiences and seeks to harness those experiences, student' ideas, perspectives, and opinions in order to improve pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, services, or resources. The emphasis is on "Creating With" and not "Creating For".
Fosters purposeful engagement with international students. In both formal and informal learning settings, teaching activities and assignments are designed to stimulate exchange and collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds, whether they are 'domestic' or international. Successful IaH does not depend on the presence of international students.	The SaP program at Deakin is open to all students domestic or international. SaP projects do not necessarily all have international students but regardless student cohorts have diverse backgrounds.

*Note: * European example*

It has been proposed that Internationalisation at Home is a more equitable approach to Internationalisation, with the goal of producing inclusive internationalized university experiences that benefit all students (Almeida et al., 2018). An example of an Internationalisation at Home experience was designed to provide domestic students with Internationalisation exposure and awareness in the context of Content and Language Integrated Learning to promote language skills and develop professional knowledge (Eisenchlas & Trevaskes, 2003; Gosling & Yang, 2022).

Students As Partners projects have also been successful in developing professional practice learning resources for Engineers in developing an understanding of "Social Responsibility" (Ball et al., 2022) and engaging Students As Partners in Global Learning (Green, 2019). Such

programs could also be developed for science-based subjects which may be useful for students to study and develop language skills in a science context, attracting a greater number of international students to the institution.

In Australia the outbound mobility rate of students is relatively low (0.73% UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2021) but has a high inbound mobility rate (21.9% UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2021) shown in Table 3. The inbound mobility rate for international students is similar to that of UK of Great Britain and Northern Island but Australia has a lower unbound rate. Major Western countries which receive immigrants worldwide will be more culturally diverse than countries with lower inbound mobility rates e.g. China.

This shows the diversity between different universities in different continents which would need to be taken into consideration when developing activities for global learning and the concept of Students as Partners potentially more challenging to establish in countries where culturally, a hierarchical relationship is the norm between students and staff. Case studies such as the one reported here and others (Guimarâes et., 2019; Kor et al., 2022; Nilsson, 2003; Sercu, 2022; Zhang, 2022;) raise awareness of the benefits of 'creating with' students in such cultures but would need to be applied as fit for each cultural context. Such systemic issues would affect the objectives of an Internationalisation at Home experience so programs would need to be adapted appropriately. Students as Partners would provide flexibility and adaptability in project design and provide authentic learning activities that could be readily adapted to accommodate different environments.

The on campus international students would also benefit by participating in such programs as Students as Partners is a supported culturally diverse learning environment. It cannot be assumed that just because international students are studying in a foreign country, they will get the predicted skills from such an experience. Universities need to consider ways of engaging students in meaningful activities to develop skills such as intercultural competency (Soria & Troisi, 2014).

Table 3

Data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics – retrieved 2023.

Country	Inbound mobility rate (%)	Outbound mobility rate (%)	Net flow of internationally mobile students (Inbound – Outbound)
Australia	21.9	0.73	365,774
China	0.36	2.10	-799,650
India	0.12	1.02	-460,139
Sri Lanka	0.36	8.34	-27,953
UK of Great Britain & Northern Ireland	20.06	1.32	560,938
USA	4.59	0.57	73,0513

Note: Most recent data available 2021 (Recovery from the Pandemic) for all countries stated in the Table acknowledging these values are lower than pre-COVID values (pre 2019). All genders combined.

Skill development opportunities

One part of internationalisation is intercultural knowledge. Domestic graduates even if they never leave their home campus upon graduation they will be competing in an international, multi-cultural environment so they must have opportunities to develop these skills. The development of intercultural competence has been described as a dynamic, ongoing, interactive self-reflective learning process that transforms attitudes, skills and knowledge for effective communication and interaction across cultures and contexts (Freeman et al., 2009) and is entwined in internationalisation experiences. Whilst these terms are different there are overlapping themes.

Students as Partners has been described as a new way of looking at staff-student relationships where staff reposition their work from "creating for" students to "creating with" students, removing hierarchies and power imbalance relationships with the aim of creating a better learning environment for students (Milburn & Jones, 2019). Students in turn gain valuable experiences outside of the formal curriculum, employability skills, intercultural competencies to create a legacy to support the next generation of learners.

In support of this idea, studies have suggested that Internationalisation at Home experiences for example participation in on campus global / international activities, interactions with international students, participation in global/international co-curricular activities yield greater perceived benefits than study abroad for student development in global, international and intercultural competencies (GII) competencies (Soria & Torisi, 2014). Internationalisation at Home experiences have been reported to have higher rates of student participation and engagement

than some of the more traditional and formal study and travel abroad opportunities (Soria & Torisi, 2014). Like all programs there are challenges. Students both domestic and international often resist intercultural group work (Guimarães et al., 2019; Harrison, 2015). From my own personal teaching experiences students resist group work in general rather than the issue being specifically working with international students.

Internationalisation at Home has been considered as a comprehensive model to prepare every student with the required global competences to today's interconnected and diverse society and promotes intercultural, international and global learning (Agnew & Kahn, 2014). These encounters need to be intentional as whilst students are aware of cultural differences they are reluctant to become involved (Agnew & Kahn, 2014). Voluntary contact by students does not guarantee intercultural learning and connectivity will be developed. Students as Partners are small group work experiences on authentic projects with academics with enough structure to encourage the intercultural skills and with enough freedom to allow students to take control and develop as practitioners. The Students as Partners programs encourages underrepresented groups to participate fostering discussions on personal challenges to develop greater cultural understanding.

Intentionally designed curricular global/international experiences can expose students to others from diverse backgrounds, present opportunities to gain knowledge about different cultures and situation students within a globally framed context. Campus interactions an provide liberating encounters with people who represent other values, faiths and social practices and when there is genuine human interaction they hold the potential to prepare students to engage in cross cultural environments (Soria & Troisi, 2014).

Student – Staff interactions - Experiences from an academic point of view

Staff collaborating with students have an opportunity to review their current learning resources, how concepts are taught and consider alternative ways of delivering information especially to students with learning disabilities, from low socio-economic backgrounds, and from families where English is not their first language in order to improve the learning outcomes and the learning experience. Academics must be open minded, be prepared to listen, consider the feedback and implement change.

Our team had an eclectic mix of expertise with a range of preferred learning styles. All team members had a science background and the strong preference for all team members to be classed as having a strong tendency to be Sensors by the Learning Styles Survey (Felder & Solomon, 2000) is not a surprise as the interpretation of the survey defines the Sensor preference as: "They like solving problems by well-established methods and dislike complications and surprises, are more likely than intuitors to resent being tested on material that has not been explicitly covered in class; tend to be patient with details and good at memorizing facts and doing hands-on (laboratory) work; tend to be more practical and don't like courses that have no apparent connection to the real world". A study of learning styles in engineering and science studies

reported that learning style in students can be correlated with the different science disciplines with many students having a tendency to be more sensing and visual (Kolmos & Holgaard, 2008). There are clearly learning gains for both students and academics who participate in Students As Partners projects. I acknowledge that my experiences with Students As Partners were extremely positive with a highly motivated team of student partners who took control of the project from the very beginning. They came into the project with ideas, enthusiasm and a vision for the project. They shared ideas and were willing to push themselves out of their comfort zone. That said I know that not all academics who were part of the Students As Partners had this same experience. As an academic you must consider yourself a member of the team and not the leader of the team; listen to the ideas presented and carefully consider feedback because it can be a little confronting. Let the team members explore ideas even if you think at the time they may not work or be as valuable as first thought. Give the students the opportunity to take control; your role becomes a "guide" not "tell" role.

These projects provide an opportunity for students to try new ideas, you have to let them make mistakes and then you guide and support the learning. Tasks for the project were divided between all team members, me included. At meetings I did the same as all other members – presented the tasks I had worked on for the week, presented any challenges that arose, asked for feedback (and received it) and then contributed to the next steps in the project. Whilst our team was diverse, they were all known to each other none of the members had previously participated in a Students As Partners program. Frameworks for Students and Partners projects are built around authenticity of the task, empowerment, trust, challenge, and responsibility (Coombe et al., 2008) and our experiences reflect these descriptors. Students as Partners has benefits for staff and students including enhanced motivation and engagement, better communication, creativity, employability outcomes and reinvigorated teaching practices (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017) which were identified in our project.

Challenges for Students as Partners projects have been well documented, and some encountered with our project too. Common reported challenges experienced by participants in the pilot studies conducted by the University of Queensland was time management (76%), compared with communication (15%), managing power imbalances and dominant personalities (5%), and overcoming differences in experience and expertise within the teams (5%) (Coombes et al., 2018). The major challenge reported by our team was time management and this has been a common challenge reported in other Students As Partners projects (Coombes et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone, 2017).

The issue of time management is not just in relation to being able to complete the project but affects the ability of the team members to develop relationships and a sense of belonging and worth (Coombe et al., 2018). Our project was unique in the sense that the students had worked together previously in team activities and felt supported and comfortable with each other. This demonstrates the importance of having the time to develop rapport with other team members. Similar time challenges have been reported as it does take time for project teams to consolidate what the goals of the project are and deciding on goals and forming authentic relationships (Dwyer, 2018). Whilst you can see the students are struggling with these challenges, it is important for academics to resist the temptation to take over at this point as Students As Partners

is after all a learning experience for the student members and they must feel the freedom of design and implementation.

Time is also an issue for academics as this was not fully recognized in the academic workloads and the requirements were not just for the project but the recruitment of the students, reports and in our case presentations for the University Learning and Teaching conference but this did provide another great opportunity for the students to participate in (Coombe et al. 2018).

Conclusions

Our student cohorts already include students with diverse range of cultural experiences, multicultural backgrounds, life experiences, educational achievements, and curriculum tasks / experiences and this can form the basis to expand internationalisation experiences. The campus provides many resources that can be considered to internationalise teaching and learning: global case studies, guest lectures particularly with international connections, digital technology provides greater opportunities for international experiences and collaboration with companies and other higher education institutions (Beelan & Jones, 2015) which can ensure greater access to opportunities for all students both domestic and international. Current university classrooms are already culturally diverse so we have this under-utilized resource on our doorstep.

Students as Partners adopts an inclusive approach to curriculum and recognises the cultural insights which otherwise may have been overlooked. Our project demonstrates the impact of internationalisation experiences via the Students as Partners program which is based on principles of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity (Bovill, et al., 2014) and embraces values of authenticity, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment, and courage. These principles are features of internationalisation experiences. These projects can be adaptable and flexible and be applied to any discipline making them an appropriate method to deliver an internationalisation experience.

This study showcases a Student As Partners project demonstrating that there is great potential for engaging students in co-design to develop curriculum to assist the learning of others. The Students As Partners lead the project, designed and created an online educational resource for second year Physiology students to support their learning of a complex Physiology concept. The project documented what students found difficult in learning certain concepts through an online survey presented to current students which revealed some interesting information about what current students find most difficult. Such programs could be designed to specially meet an Internationalisation at Home experience for both domestic and international students at Deakin University. Interactive teaching practices and problem-based learning have also become globally applied strategies to enhance students' motivation and facility learning effectiveness. We hope this discipline specific example will encourage other academics to become involved.

Acknowledgements

Conflict of Interest

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