# STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN A COVID-19 ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**Lisa Fedoruk,* Alysia Wright, Anthonia Anowai, & Yolanda Osondu**
The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

*Address all correspondence to: Lisa Fedoruk, Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; Tel.: (+1) 403-975-7661, E-mail: lisa.fedoruk@ucalgary.ca

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed vulnerabilities in education systems globally, and one-year postpandemic, it is clear that change is necessary to sustain educational operations and delivery into the future. Higher education institutions have had to adapt to online leaning, and with it, the complexities of technology, innovative teaching and learning approaches, student engagement, assessments, and ethics, have become core topics of discussion and discourse. Because of the pandemic, "various policy initiatives are being launched by governments and tertiary institutions across the world to continue teaching activities… however, there is ambiguity and disagreement about what to teach, how to teach, the workload of teachers and students, the teaching environment, and the implications for education equity" (Ali, 2020, p.16).

The urgency of moving teaching and learning online added to the previous stress of academics struggling to balance workloads of teaching, research, and service obligations, in addition to changing work place environments to home-based spaces, often with little or no previous learning management system (LMS) experience, pedagogical knowledge, or support (Rapanta et al., 2020). Ali (2020) noted the pandemic exposed the deficiencies in LMS infrastructures, working from complex home environments, lack of online teaching experience of instructors, and overall information gaps.

Upon declaration of the global pandemic, the University of Calgary, Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning undertook a rapid two-week timeframe in which new processes needed to be implemented for teaching and learning continuation. Student-centered collaboration into the design and application of these processes evoked the concept of students as partners (SaP). The Learning Technologies Production Coaches (LTPC) program was developed to provide direct learning technology support to faculty, by graduate students (tech coaches), as they transitioned to online delivery. This reflective

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paper reviews the literature about the concept of SaP, outlines the LTPC Program, and synthesizes the narratives of graduate students who became collaborators in teaching and learning through an appreciation and interpretation of their lived experiences. Reflecting upon the severity and rigor of change evoked by the pandemic, the shift to long-term sustainable practices is now required in which students play a more equitable role in their education by contributing to design, implementation, and evaluation in higher educational contexts (Marquis et al., 2016). Involvement of students in post-COVID SaP programs may enhance motivation and student engagement, fostering a more collaborative, robust academic learning community (Deeley & Bovill, 2017).

## 2. STUDENTS AS PARTNERS

The concept and application of SaP encompasses the collaboration of students, faculty, and staff surrounding teaching and learning in higher education. This type of partnership is a "reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6–7). It is important to note that SaP is underpinned by principles of reciprocity, respect, and shared responsibility in teaching and learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

Healey et al. (2014) characterized SaP as "a relationship in which all involved—students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students' unions, and so on—are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together" (p. 12). Because of the diversity of partnership practices involved in SaP, Healey et al. (2014) designed a framework involving four overlapping categories where students and staff may engage as partners: subject-based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL); curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy; and learning, teaching, and assessment. "This model positions students and staff as co-teachers, co-inquirers, curriculum co-creators, and co-learners across all facets of the educational enterprise" (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017, p. 2).

Additional scholarship unpacks the beneficial outcomes of a SaP paradigm to include the potential for advanced student development. McCulloch (2009) and others posited that SaP can lead to improved citizenship through the enhancement of motivation, learning, and leadership (Bovill et al., 2010; Little et al., 2011; Nygaard et al., 2013; Werder et al., 2012) while establishing a sense of identity, self-awareness, and metacognition (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Cook-Sather & Abbot, 2016; Dickerson et al., 2016; Nygaard et al., 2013; Werder & Otis, 2010). Furthermore, improvement of teaching and classroom experiences through SaP has enhanced a learning community (Cook-Sather et al., 2014;

Curran & Millard, 2015; Nygaard et al., 2013). Employability skills and graduate attributes have also been affected positively (Dickerson et al., 2016; Pauli et al., 2016).

Although research highlights positive aspects of SaP, it is important to acknowledge challenges that exist in SaP work: "It is clear that genuine partnerships do not happen automatically and questions still remain—particularly if we wish to scale up partnerships working across an institution" (Curran, 2017, p. 3). Of great importance is the consideration surrounding the ethics of SaP. Failing to be intentional about the dynamics of equity, inclusion, and power relationships between students and staff can hinder SaP experiences (Delpish et al., 2010; Hutchings et al., 2013; Kehler et al., 2017; Levy et al., 2011; Matthews, 2017; Mihans et al., 2008). Furthermore, the culture and traditions of higher education through institutional practices and structures can create the challenge of finding common language for both students and staff to engage in partnerships (Bovill et al., 2016; Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013). Finally, transience (regular turnover of students) can be a barrier to consistency and sustainability in SaP programs (Curran & Millard, 2015; Little et al., 2011; Levy et al., 2011), and time constraints and funding have been seen as factors that negate SaP programs from being developed or proceeding (Marquis et al., 2017).

## 3. LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES PRODUCTION COACHES PROGRAM

The LTPC program was developed in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which caused educational institutions globally to transition to emergency remote teaching (ERT). This emergency transition posed significant challenges to students, academic staff, and administration alike. Note, we use the term "academic staff" to include faculty members, sessional instructors, teaching assistants, and other people who support instructional delivery at the University of Calgary.

Historically, the implementation of blended and online learning has required substantial financial, technological, and human resources, as well as significant time to conceptualize, design, and deliver courses. Therefore, the immediate transition to emergency online course delivery created stress and anxiety for students and academic staff who may not have otherwise chosen an online education (Ali, 2020). The University of Calgary transitioned to ERT in March 2020 and announced plans to teach remotely for the spring and summer in April 2020. The University of Calgary institutional administration provided emergency funding to develop a program that would provide direct learning technology support to academic staff as they transitioned to online delivery. In April 2020, an educational development consultant (EDC) began designing the program and recruiting active graduate students as tech coaches.

The EDC recruited 12 graduate students with prior experience in teaching and assisting in blended and online learning contexts and familiarity with institutionally supported learning technologies. Graduate students were hired to support student employment and to accommodate for the time-limited project. Coaches were hired to work up to 15 hours per week for approximately four months. This part-time employment was better suited to graduate students looking for supplemental employment than to full-time staff members in IT or consultation roles. The University of Calgary has 14 faculties. To support each faculty, each coach was assigned to two or three faculties, based on demand and size. This meant that each faculty had two or three dedicated coaches to support their staff. Coaches also supported nonacademic units and divided that work among the team.

The academic staff submitted requests to the LTPC in three ways: (i) online webform, (ii) faculty-assigned email, and (iii) the coaches' university-assigned student email accounts. The online webform was centrally located on the *Learning Technologies Production Coaches* website and included fields for the academic staff member's name, email address, faculty, and summary of their question. The webform requests were automatically routed to the general LTPC email account, and the EDC forwarded the requests to the assigned coaches. The faculty-assigned email addresses were explicitly created for each faculty by the EDC. Staff could use this email address (e.g., techcoacharts@ucalgary) to reach the designated coaches for their faculty. This meant that academic staff would have a consistent point of contact regardless of changes within the LTPC. For example, the EDC assigned additional coaches to the Faculty of Arts due to increased demand. While these coaches were assigned access to the faculty-assigned email, the Faculty of Arts did not need to change their contact process or learn new coach's email addresses. Finally, coaches could be reached directly by their university-assigned student email address (e.g., jsmith@ucalgary.ca). For example, a coach assigned to Arts might receive an email in the Faculty of Arts inbox and use their student email address to coordinate support. This practice allowed the coaches to have a central inbox to organize requests yet streamline the number of communications being shared with the entire faculty-assigned coaching group.

The coaches worked individually or in pairs to respond to requests within two to four hours between 8am and 5pm, and within four hours between 5pm and 9pm and on weekends. The LTPC functioned on an on-call, urgent model because staff were experiencing high levels of stress and uncertainty and the immediate availability of support was necessary. The faculty-assigned groups ensured that requests were coordinated in a timely manner and limited the number of requests that “slipped between the cracks.” In some cases, an email response with relevant resources and instructions was sufficient to complete the request. In other cases, coaches met with instructors via Zoom™ and utilized screen

sharing to demonstrate and help instructors use the learning technology in question. Requests and details were logged in an activity log in the shared online workspace in Microsoft Teams™. Upon completion of a request, an experience form was sent to academic staff member to measure the satisfaction and effectiveness of the support provided by the LTPC.

Although the LTPC program was led by an EDC, all tech coaches were instrumental in the development and delivery of the program. For example, when the program began in May 2020, it was little more than a kernel of an idea and was funded as a four-month emergency response program. The incredible leadership and vision exhibited by the tech coaches resulted in expanded professional development programming, the provision of vital one-to-one consultations with academic staff, and increased technological capacity that the coaches leveraged in their own teaching assistant roles at the university. With an aim to enhance the capacity of instructors to utilize learning technologies in their blended and online courses, throughout the first year of the program, the coaches completed more than 1,400 consultations. Because of the success of the program, it was extended for the remainder of the year and ultimately received confirmed funding for three additional years. This impact was a direct consequence of supporting SaP in the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the coaches' lived experience as students, which demonstrated that the need for dedicated learning technology support would be just as necessary when the pandemic-response ended.

## 4. GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

To provide student perspectives and how they made meaning of their experiences, two tech coaches explain their involvement in partnerships with peers and academic staff, the outcomes of their experiences, and how being part of this program enhanced their overall learning and skills acquisition.

### 4.1 Tech Coach Anthonia Anowai

The practice of SaP is a gradually emerging concept across higher education. At the beginning of September 2020, I was employed as a learning technologies production coach (tech coach), a supporting role providing technological assistance to instructors as they transitioned traditional learning material to various online platforms. Initially, I perceived my role not as a partnership but like any other employment experience: to learn new skills in a typical “customer service” scenario, work alongside colleagues to provide insightful solutions, and gain experience in providing technology support, which I could leverage in future career endeavors. Understandably, a power dynamic exists between instructors and students that would otherwise thwart the possibility of meaningful intellectual exchange and reciprocal learning between students and instructors. However,

in the context of a pandemic where both parties were equally impacted by the transition to online learning, the partnership of students and instructors has yielded positive results that transcend the exchange of knowledge. Having lived in this SaP experience, I can now understand the value of the concept of viewing SaP. In this reflective account, I hope to highlight some of the benefits and impacts of a SaP model from my own graduate student perspective.

The LTPC role involved enabling teaching, learning and assessments (themes common to Healey et al., 2014, SaP framework,) through online provision of support. Among the skill sets required to be successful as a tech coach were self-learning, collaboration, creativity in finding solutions, and communication. I enjoyed the idea of working in team settings and was highly motivated to expand my problem-solving ability, in this case, to technological platforms. In the beginning came the hurdle of learning the features and areas where academic staff had difficulty within the platforms—learning and picking up unfamiliar topics just as a student does. This professional development involved attending workshops, performing short searches to find answers, and operating independently to ensure I had the adequate expertise to approach an instructor on my own. As tech coaches, we held frequent learn-and-demonstrate meetings, where two tech coaches would demonstrate a scenario that one could face when helping an instructor and show the rest of the group how to resolve the issue. These activities were essential to building our expertise and positioning ourselves as knowledge bearers in future relations with instructors. We also benefitted from the comradery among tech coaches as we were all learning the same material and sharing our knowledge and ideas.

In an average week, I responded to about ten requests from instructors, including questions about setting up quizzes, creating online courses, providing feedback to students on assignments, and more—the knowledge transmission where the instructor becomes a partner. In these settings, it was important to be patient, understanding, and proactive in my endeavor to find and implement solutions. Instead of taking on and resolving the issues instructors presented myself, I adopted a do-it-yourself approach to reduce learned helplessness and after trouble shooting with instructors, I referred them to the University of Calgary, Taylor Institute Teaching Continuity website where additional instructional resources could be found to explain how to navigate the issue in the future.

As an example, instructors typically create an online course or “course shell” on the university's LMS. The process of setting up a course shell can be quite lengthy and cumbersome for instructors who are new to the platform. In situations like these, I spent 60 –75 min providing explanations and directions as the instructors shared their screen via Zoom. At times they expressed frustration over the lack of intuition with the software's design. These were very valid suggestions, which I and my colleagues agreed could be

relayed to the designers of the software. I met their frustration with reassurance that they were making significant progress in setting up their course. After working through course setup, instructors often expressed their relief and gratitude for my assistance and complimented on the usefulness of the LTPC team. Many even remarked that they wished this partnership had been developed sooner and implied that they would continue to look to the LTPC for future support. In this way, the benefits to instructors were quite profound. Many instructors did not use the LMS prior to the pandemic, and of those who did, most did not utilize the software's features exhaustively. With the partnership of LTPC coaches, instructors could have their queries resolved within an hour of sending their request to the general query intake form. The impact of the partnership on instructors is further exemplified in the nature of interactions with tech coaches after the instructor first made contact. Although academic staff initiated contact through a general email to which all coaches had access, many made subsequent requests through the personal email of the coach who helped them at that initial contact. This showed the high level of trust and assurance with which instructors perceived the partnerships with individual coaches.

With more challenging and elusive queries, I found that there was a greater need for collaboration and input from my colleagues and instructional designers. Essentially, we became a conglomerate of partners working to tackle an issue. I, and the two coaches assigned to my faculty, ensured that we kept one another in the loop when responding to instructors and more often than not, all three of us were involved in video conferences with instructors to provide support. The presence of my colleagues on video conference played a large role in increasing my confidence and comfort level when resolving faculty inquiries. In situations where the issue had never been addressed in the past, my colleagues would search for the solution in the background while I interacted with the instructor to find out more details. Not only did the added support quicken the time to resolve the issues, but the diverse experiences of my colleagues and I resulted in a variety of work-around solutions which we presented to instructors when there was no clear answer to their problem.

The partnership between tech coaches and faculty is one that leaves an indelible mark on all parties involved. Instructors felt empowered in their journey through online course delivery, with some indicating that they would have been lost without tech coach support, while others stated that the help rendered relieved the stress of teaching and consequently improved their relationships within their homes, as many had to contend with the added responsibilities of parenting and home-schooling their own children. I saw a progression in the abilities of instructors whom I worked with from the Fall 2020 semester to the Winter 2021 semester. Having them recognize the growth in themselves was as encouraging as when players on a sports team support each other to develop their skills. Working with

faculty gave me a perspective on lesson planning from the instructor's viewpoint. In my own studies, I understood what it meant to be an overwhelmed, busy learner. It was surprising to me that instructors too felt nervous and anxious over fumbling with technology in front of their students or when groups of students approached them to provide justification for grades they had assigned. This partnership was more than just the exchange of knowledge. It incorporated an exchange of experience, where the teacher became the student and received valuable knowledge of technology platforms from the student, and the student lived in the world of the knowledge-holder and provided information in relation to the instructors' courses, students, and technological issue.

Inevitably, the SaP model has the capacity to deliver an immersive learning experience for both instructors and students. Within the LTPC role, I have witnessed mutual learning, collaboration, displays of empathy, and the joys of achieving valuable solutions among instructors and peers. I would encourage mature students at the graduate level to explore opportunities working alongside faculty even if a career in education is not their goal. Even in the absence of a pandemic, there will arise times where it may be appropriate to engage students in discourse and harness their expertise as partners to academic staff.

## 4.2 Tech Coach Yolanda Osondu

In March 2020, like most students, I was deeply impacted by the transformations in the academic environment triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a short time, it became obvious that a good understanding of the intricacies of online learning technologies was an essential skill set to acquire, both as a graduate student and teaching assistant. I was given the opportunity to partner with professors when I secured employment as a LTPC. I was confident that I was a great fit for this position since I was well acquainted with the various technologies specified in the job requirements. More importantly, the job offered me an opportunity to assist professors while improving my skills in the use of online teaching tools. As noted earlier, all members of the LTPC Program team at the University of Calgary were full time graduate students. Tech coaches were assigned to specific faculty where they engaged with faculty members to help orient them with online technologies and assist with resolving technological issues. We also offered technology support and facilitated workshops organized by the university where professors across different faculties could deepen their knowledge of online tools.

Although I had previously worked at the university as a teaching assistant, my teaching and collaborative engagements primarily involved interactions with students. Interestingly, as a tech coach the reversal occurred in which partnerships were formed with professors by assisting them to navigate through a rapidly changing online academic environment. As a graduate student, partnering with a professor might seem somewhat daunting especially

since these individuals have years of teaching experience and are considered experts in their field. This power hierarchy unconsciously resonated in my mind during interactions, which highlights the position of Acai et al. (2017) who emphasized the important role of navigating power dynamics in the success of student-faculty partnerships. However, I believe when students and faculty collaborate, it builds mutual respect, reciprocity, and cordial collaboration between both parties, which often demystifies the power hierarchy commonly experienced in an academic environment.

Upon reflection, as a graduate student and teaching assistant, the transition from traditional face-to-face teaching compared to online teaching and learning initially created feelings of uncertainties and concerns for me. I also understood and empathized that this change could be a difficult adjustment for professors who had years of experience teaching face-to-face classes. To develop my own technical skill set, I devoted time to increase and refine my LMS knowledge, build my confidence by using online technologies, and hone my skills in order to train others. New coaches were also immersed in training development sessions and able to consult their colleagues on Microsoft Teams and Zoom when assistance was needed. From this experience, I realized empathy was an essential quality of a successful tech coach. As a result, when interacting with a professor in need of assistance, I was often able to speak about my own personal experiences transitioning to the online environment and share encouraging success stories. My personal narrative helped me break the ice and diffuse tense situations when resolving complex cases. By being patient and empathetic, my ultimate goal working alongside faculty members was to instill confidence in their skill set to become competent enough to solve issues by themselves rather than creating learned helplessness. This required constant support and encouragement, but also made me aware of how I could set boundaries—especially in situations when professors became dependent on my ongoing assistance in resolving technology issues in multiple classes, without attempting to resolve them independently first. Working in this position also enabled me to improve my time-management skills to balance my responsibilities as a tech coach and my workload as a graduate student.

I noticed that tech coaches needed to be good communicators. Before scheduling a meeting with a professor, I often sent resources as a preemptive guide to enable attempts to troubleshoot an issue. During Zoom meetings, I encouraged professors to share their screens so we were able to work collaboratively, and I ensured every discussion was intentionally geared toward ensuring that they became increasingly technologically independent. I also deepened my partnerships with faculty members by building trust through follow-up emails and by personally reaching out to collaborate with other tech coaches in order to gain their perspectives on cases that proved quite difficult to resolve.

Therefore, teamwork and communication between tech coaches played an important role in the success and collaboration in partnerships.

The success of the LTPC program cannot be measured through a single lens. In my experience, encouragement and success is achieved when faculty partners reciprocate interaction by asking questions, through their willingness to learn, and communicate positive responses and feedback when they grasp the concept of resolving their technology issues. As a tech coach, such interactions validate the time spent and energy expended. I can confidently say that my experience as a tech coach has enabled me to develop important skill sets such as teamwork, problem solving, researching, and customer service. In fact, the knowledge gained from this role has helped me to easily adjust to learning and teaching online—as a graduate student and teaching assistant.

The LTPC Program team at the University of Calgary is a good example of a working collaboration between students and faculty members in a COVID-19 environment. Indeed, a simple referral by a professor to any of their colleagues to seek out the help of a tech coach shows the trust that can be developed when students and faculty members collaborate. Additionally, positive feedback from the university community and personal acknowledgment from professors who have been assisted by the tech coaches attest to how deeply impactful and successful the SaP model can be.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Through the student's experiences, the design and ongoing development of the LTPC program has been seen to align with the three core principles of SaP: reciprocity, respect, and shared responsibility (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). In this section, we explore common themes encountered in the LTPC program and pose considerations for academic staff who are engaged in or exploring SaPs in their practice.

### 5.1 Balancing Inclusion and Power

Addressing power imbalances and taking action to rectify these imbalances must be an intentional effort made by academic staff who are working with SaPs. One approach is using a cyclical program management model (Cook-Sather et al., 2014) that encourages collaborative processes, open communication, and shared leadership at the onset of student partnerships, regardless of the phase of the project or program. Through the lens of the LTPC program, the initial group of newly hired tech coaches were directly involved in the development of the program to empower leadership through shared responsibilities, collaboration, communication, and equity. At the start of the program, tech coaches participated in learning technology workshops offered by the university, which provided a strong foundation of the fundamental skills necessary to support academic staff across campus. To maintain connectivity and provide guidance, the EDC hosted weekly meetings

with the coaches to review previous weeks, take up issues or themes as result of consultations with academic staff, and brainstorm suggestions for improving or streamlining LTPC program processes. These meetings were a space for sharing and learning, and engaging in reciprocity and respect through the acknowledgment of different sets of knowledge. For example, the coaches brought forward experiential knowledge that had grown from their consultations with academic staff and personal experiences in their own courses, while the EDC contributed institutional knowledge that had been learned through higher-level meetings and discussions related to emergency remote teaching at the university. Together, the team consistently refined the operational framework of the LTPC program and shared the responsibility for leading initiatives and updating internal resources.

Having contributed to building the LTPC program and training peers, it was seen that the confidence and ease in which the tech coaches interacted with academic staff in consultations lessened the power dynamics through a natural reciprocity, resulting in the establishment of authentic partnerships. It is significant to note that balancing inclusion and power in SaP programs is both rewarding and challenging, particularly depending on when students enter a program/partnership. Academic staff who are engaged with SaP programs may wish to consider the overall mandate of the project, their personal approach to leadership, the role of students in the project, and goals for student learning and capacity-building as a result of being a part of the initiative.

## 5.2 Developing Common Language

The use of language can serve as both bonding and exclusionary, used to determine socio-cultural positioning, intelligence, belonging, and other in-group/out-group distinctions commonly used for social organizing. Foucault conceptualized language through discourse as a component of power/knowledge, arguing that language directly constitutes knowledge and the understanding of, or lack thereof, such language is directly related to power and truth (Weiler, 2014). In the case of higher education, the use of language has been shown to reinforce and reify perceptions of authority between students and academic staff (Mercer-Mapstone & Mercer, 2018). It is therefore imperative to be intentional about the distinction between engaging students as learners versus SaP, particularly in project contexts (Matthews, 2016).

When engaging SaP, it is necessary to consider power dynamics and authority embedded in both the role of the students and their supervisors. For example, the tech coaches possessed both considerable educational experience in postsecondary environments and familiarity with the power structures that make up the system in which they were working. However, the tech coach role placed them in a position of being content experts that

required them to navigate complex power systems in which they were the “authority” when working with academic staff. This led to a persistent concern about their perceived legitimacy in the academic community, particularly related to engaging with academic staff as partners rather than as learners. The LTPC program effectively reversed this power structure, as coaches took on the position of teaching their professors. The challenge of positioning and legitimacy was addressed in three ways: (i) establishing the coaches as skilled and knowledgeable in learning technologies, (ii) engaging with academic staff and faculties in a professional manner, and (iii) acknowledging the existing capacity and responsibility of academic staff for their technological skills development.

Programs and faculties that develop similar interactive projects may want to consider how power knowledge and positions of authority influence the overall culture of the institution. This culture can inform how the program is developed, what qualities and skills students will need to be confident in their roles, and the relationships that will be nurtured as a result of the program. While the LTPC program was able to establish a common educational language and neutralized power imbalances in their work with academic staff, it was accomplished through a culturally contextual framework (Gourlay & Korpan, 2018). Common language refers to establishing a shared understanding of technological and instructional terminology that is frequently used to prevent miscommunication and escalated issues (Koen et al., 2001). Coaches were trained to listen then summarize the issues presented by academic staff, clarifying the technical terms or other information that the academic staff member may not have originally shared but was relevant to the issue. This practice ensured that the coach understood the problem, articulated different ways this issue could be addressed, and provided a repository of important context for similar requests in the future. The use of common language ultimately improved the LTPC's problem-solving capacity and skilled responses to common issues that were experienced differently across faculties.

It is advised that potential managers of SaP projects are acutely attuned to the institutional culture and potential sensitivities surrounding the work of students so that they can help bridge authentic relationships between students and those with power (Gravett et al., 2020). Such precautions will not only benefit current students but those who fill the roles of students who have moved on from the program.

## 5.3 Exploration and Implementation of Novel Ideas and Partnerships

A notable benefit of the path the LTPC program has taken from its inception until today is that it encouraged the emergence of appendages in the form of smaller student-led projects and collaborations. The LTPC program recognized the urgency with which learning delivery was pivoted to online platforms, and tech coaches were encouraged to

bring forward any ideas they had on how the program structure, communication, and resource development could be improved in order to further advance the provision of support to instructors. One such idea was brought forth by a tech coach who had a personal experience with the difficulties international students faced within the Canadian higher education system. It was found that few resources existed to support students studying outside Canada during the pandemic—particularly those new to the Canadian education system in Fall 2020. Thus, a partnership was devised between the LTPC team, the Students Success Center, and International Student Services. This collaboration yielded online resources, both student- and instructor-facing, to help with clear, intercultural communication, email templates for students communicating with instructors and vice versa, and best practices for online learning and teaching. Another example of student-led micro-partnerships was the creation of more than 50 technological resources developed in collaboration with the LTPC and the Learning Technologies Group at the Taylor Institute. Some of these resources included video tutorials, one-page how-to infographics, and quick-reference guides for various technology platforms. These resources were created in direct response to requests from instructors during LTPC consultations. Flexibility in adopting new initiatives can be an asset to the SaP framework as it complements many goals that a SaP program sets to achieve, increases team cohesion among individuals working on the project, and allows students to practice the skills developed from other areas of their role, including team leadership, project management, and effective communication. Given that they are within the scope of the program, novel ideas can progress the experience of the students as learners and partners.

Readied with knowledge of online technologies and the confidence to approach technical issues with instructors, tech coaches were further enabled to expand the scope of their role by engaging in projects that harnessed their individual strengths and insight from their personal experiences. The fruition of these projects was as a result of what Healey et al. (2014) termed a “working and learning … partnership” which enabled “thoughtful engagement with the contemporary landscape of higher education” (p. 20). It is important that such thoughtful engagement be encouraged within the SaP model as students have a unique ability to conceptualize issues pertaining to the student experience from their own first-hand encounters.

## 5.4 Accounting for Transience

The nature of working with students is that they eventually graduate and move on (Laycock Pedersen et al., 2019). This is a form of transience that can both catalyze innovation and destabilize progress, largely dependent on the overall approach to the work (Little, 2016). One way that the LTPC program accounted for transience was the

development of a peer-to-peer onboarding and training program for all new coaches who joined each term. The structure for this was based on knowledge transfer; that is, communicating and sharing project-specific skills and knowledge from departing coaches to new coaches (Bakker et al., 2011). Toward the end of a term, existing coaches offered workshops where they taught new tech coaches skills that they had honed throughout their experience in the program. This form of training and development ensured that valuable experience was not lost as coaches transitioned out of the program, rather allowing their replacements to build and expand upon the work that had been done. This resulted in a team with robust breadth and depth of skills that created consistency in the type of responses and support the LTPC program was able to offer to academic staff (Curran, 2017).

In addition, consistency in front-facing roles is imperative to the success of the program. SaPs particularly benefit from operating within a structure that has set them up for success (Healey et al., 2016). For example, new coaches in the LTPC program were introduced to their newly assigned faculties by the existing coaches and proceeded to shadow requests until they established familiarity with the group they were to support. This increased confidence and accelerated trust required to sustain partnerships with faculties and departments across campus. The provision of internal and student-led training is evidence of the incredible potential of effort and leadership of the coaches themselves. As discussed herein, positioning SaP in support roles can be a high-impact approach to providing necessary instructional supports to instructors, sustained financial and professional development opportunities for students, and increased student-driven leadership and collaboration (Cook-Sather et al., 2018).

## 6. CONCLUSION

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and urgency to move teaching and learning online, higher educational institutes have an opportunity to work as an academic community, in partnership, to implement and sustain educational operations and delivery. Specifically, this reflective paper has explored common themes that arose through the tech coach's perspectives from a SaP lens. The LTPC program has demonstrated that an approach to SaP has resulted in positive outcomes for both students and academic staff by way of learner engagement, increased skill development in technological pedagogy, strategy and leadership, awareness and mitigation of power hierarchy, and overall relationship building in an otherwise stressful and complex environment.

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