

# Students as partners – how can staff and students engage, co- construct and learn together?

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# Complexities of SE

- Slippery construct – is used to refer to so many different things
- The massification of HE
- Marketisation of HE
- White Papers BIS (2016, 2011)
- TEF
- Students as consumer (SaC) versus Students as Partners (SaP)

# Students as Consumers

- Students adopt a passive role in their learning where HE is viewed as a commodity
- Promotes a 'them and us' attitude
- Studies now show that a higher SaC orientation is associated with lower academic performance (Bunce, Baird and Jones, 2016)
- Emphasis on *employability* rather than student capacity building to think and act critically, ethically and morally in different contexts (Knight and Yorke, 2003)
- McCulloch (2009) criticised the SaC model, finding at least eight deficiencies with it that reduced the role of the student to that of a passive recipient.

# What works 1 found that...

(Thomas, 2012)

It is the human side of higher education that comes first—finding friends, **feeling** confident and, above all, **feeling** a part of your course of study and the institution—that is the necessary starting point for academic success.

# Benefits of Students as Partners

## Research shows that SaP:

- focuses on the **development of the learner** leading to improved citizens (McCulloch, 2009);
- enhances **motivation and learning** (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Little et al., 2011; Nygaard, Brand, Bartholomew & Millard, 2013);
- develops **metacognitive awareness and sense of identity** (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Dickerson, Jarvis & Stockwell, 2016; Nygaard et al., 2013);
- **improves teaching and the classroom experience**—prompting a learning community (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Curran & Millard, 2015; Nygaard et al., 2013);
- improves learning in relation to **employability skills and graduate attributes** (Dickerson et al., 2016; Pauli, Raymond-Barker & Worrell, 2016).

# Challenges of Students as Partners

## Research also questions/points out:

- How can we reconcile **power relations** between students and staff when we are working in a dominant SaC ideology? (Delpish et al., 2009; Hutchings, Bartholomew & Reilly, 2013; Levy et al., 2011).
- Transience, can be a barrier, **as partners move on** (Little et al., 2011; Levy et al., 2011) as can, **sustaining partnership work** (Curran & Millard, 2015).
- There is also the challenge of finding **a common language** (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Levy et al., 2011).
- **SaP can be a threshold concept** for both students and staff (Cook-Sather, 2014; Marquis et al. 2016).
- The complexity of SaP in different contexts means there is “**no one size fits all**” (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).
- Finding **time and funding** for SaP can present a stumbling block (Marquis, Black & Healey, 2017).

# Scaling up Partnership working

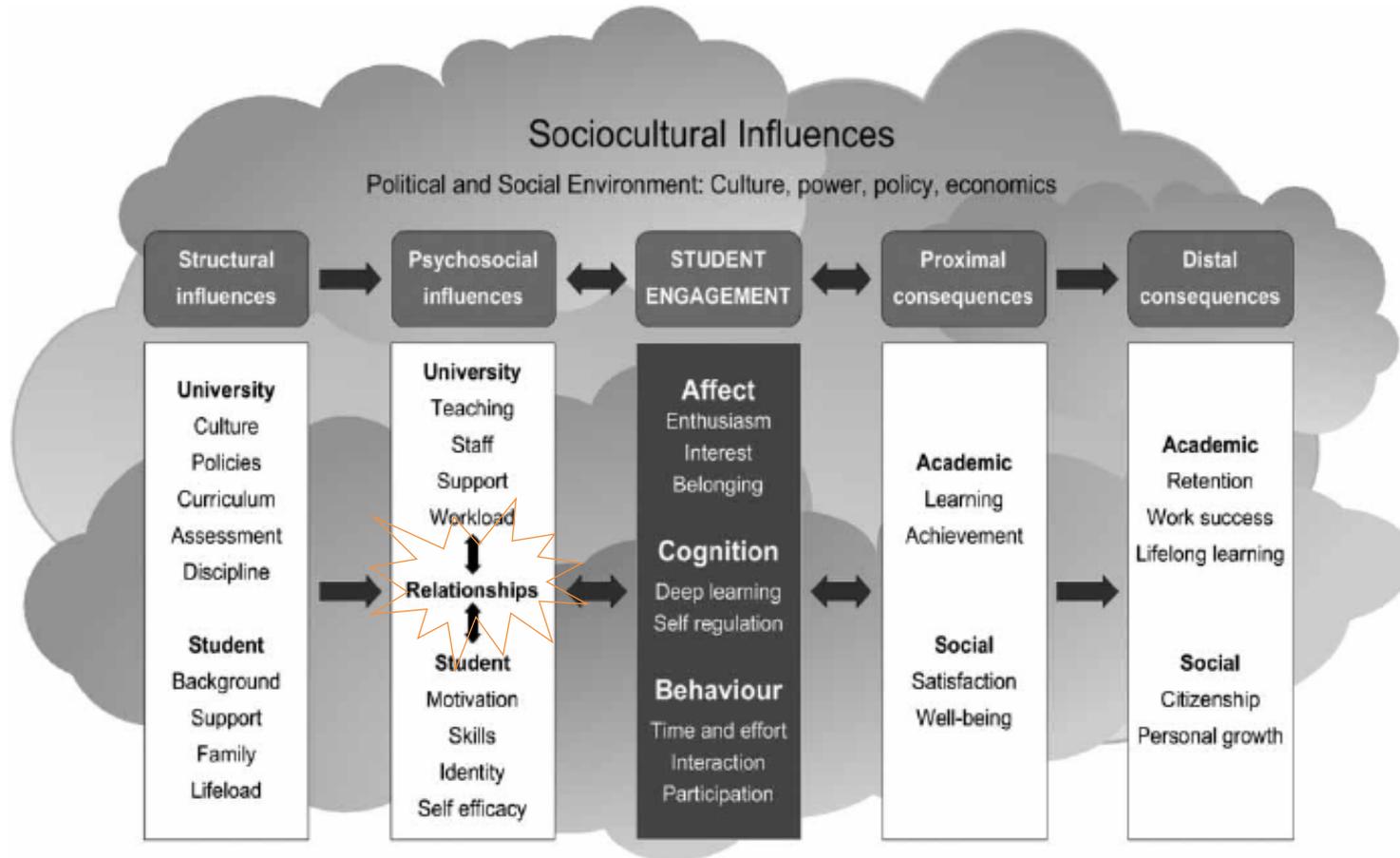
- a growing movement across the HE sector to capitalise on the benefits of SaP;
  - to fully realise the potential transformative nature of a culture change;
  - to challenge the customer-provider model of HE;
- we need to consider our SE approaches more holistically by considering all of its component parts.

# Dimensions of SE

- behavioural engagement;
- emotional engagement;
- cognitive engagement.

(Solomonides, 2013; Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010; Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004).

# Conceptual framework of engagement, antecedents and consequences (Kahu, 2013, p766)



# WW?1 and WW?2 have

developed our understanding, policy and practice about student retention & success (SRS)

## First-generation SRS—focused on retention

- ‘fixing up’ the needs of specific groups of students through additional support services to improve retention (*pre-What works?*)

## Second-generation SRS—focused on success

- student engagement and belonging in their academic learning context to improve success (*What works? 1*)

## Third-generation SRS—focused on excellence

- a whole institutional approach

# What Works at Ulster?

Ulster's involvement in 'What Works? Student Retention & Success 2013-2016'

Four key themes (activities that build **belonging**, **self-confidence** and **engagement**)

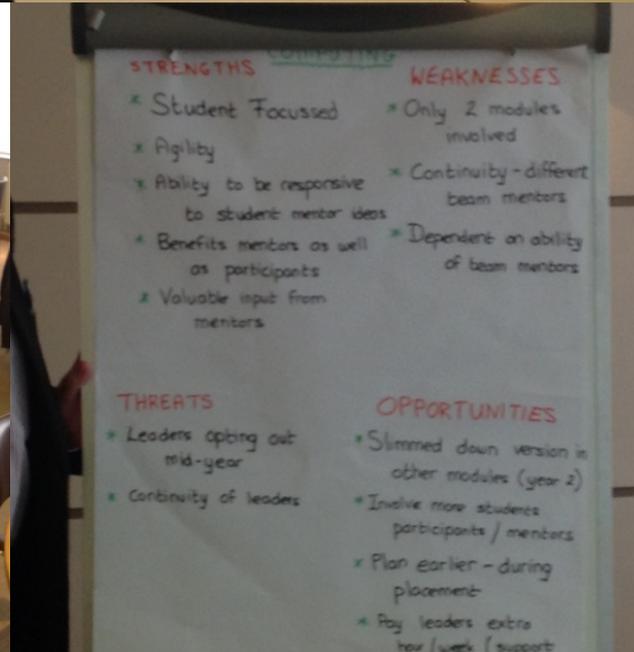
- pre-entry contact;
- mainstreaming pastoral care;
- ways of thinking and practising the discipline;
- peer support.

In addition, we have found that the **characteristics of effective practice** across the discipline areas have included:

- **building of trust relationships between staff and student and student-student;**
- **engagement through partnership;**
- **and the building of communities of practice which incorporate ongoing formative feedback.**

**No 'one size fits all'**

With seven areas, flexibility and creativity was essential, resulting in a diverse range of interventions aimed at **increasing *all* students' sense of belonging, engagement, and self-confidence**



# Effective interventions

## Student Engagement

### 1. Engagement through Partnership

#### Enhancing the learning climate:

Students engage when lecturers engage, There is a transfer of engagement. They distinguish between engaged and disengaged lecturers.

Group activities from an early stage of the course, field trips, workshops, active learning classes.

#### Enhancing the learning landscape:

Small group learning in flexible spaces, more **interactive, informal** and **social** types of learning. Learning across the year groups.

Small group sessions, use of student hubs, co-curricular workshops across years.

#### Early engagement:

Greater engagement with lecturers and peers. Developing peer networks and creating **links** with academic staff at an early stage

Pre-arrival activities, Induction, Academic Mentors, Drop in clinics, Drop in, don't drop out clinic.

# Student Belonging

## 2. Relationship building

### Supportive peer relations:

Peer mentoring from early stage.  
Linking students across year groups.  
Students want a formal mentoring system as a support network.

PASS, social networking, student ambassadors at induction, study skill, pre-placement sessions.

**Effective induction (longitudinal) process:** Activities that allow students to build relationships, meet academic staff, understand the expectations of the course.

Part of the curriculum, develop academic skills, getting to know you activities, involve student mentors.

Curricular/co-curricular and active learning activities that encourages attendance and sense of belonging

Active Societies, industry focused field trips

# Student Confidence

## 3. Individual feedback and growing of community

**Cohort identity and belonging:**  
'Feeling connected', introducing activities can develop knowledge, confidence and identity

Student-led Societies, consolidate shared student space, employer engagement at early stage of course.

Addressing student expectations at pre-entry

Summer Schools pre-entry, website, social media, induction, infographic

**Student progression:**  
Regular feedback on student progression

Diagnostic tests at an early stage, authentic assessments: real-life skills, group work, student choice

# Drawing together impact and learning, and reflection on the change programme process

This change programme has highlighted for us the *multifaceted nature of student engagement*.

The outcomes and impact of the interventions suggest the importance of maintaining a strong focus on the **affect** or **emotional** dimension of student engagement as well as the behavioural and cognitive dimensions.

# Qualitative study at Ulster

## What works? Student retention & success

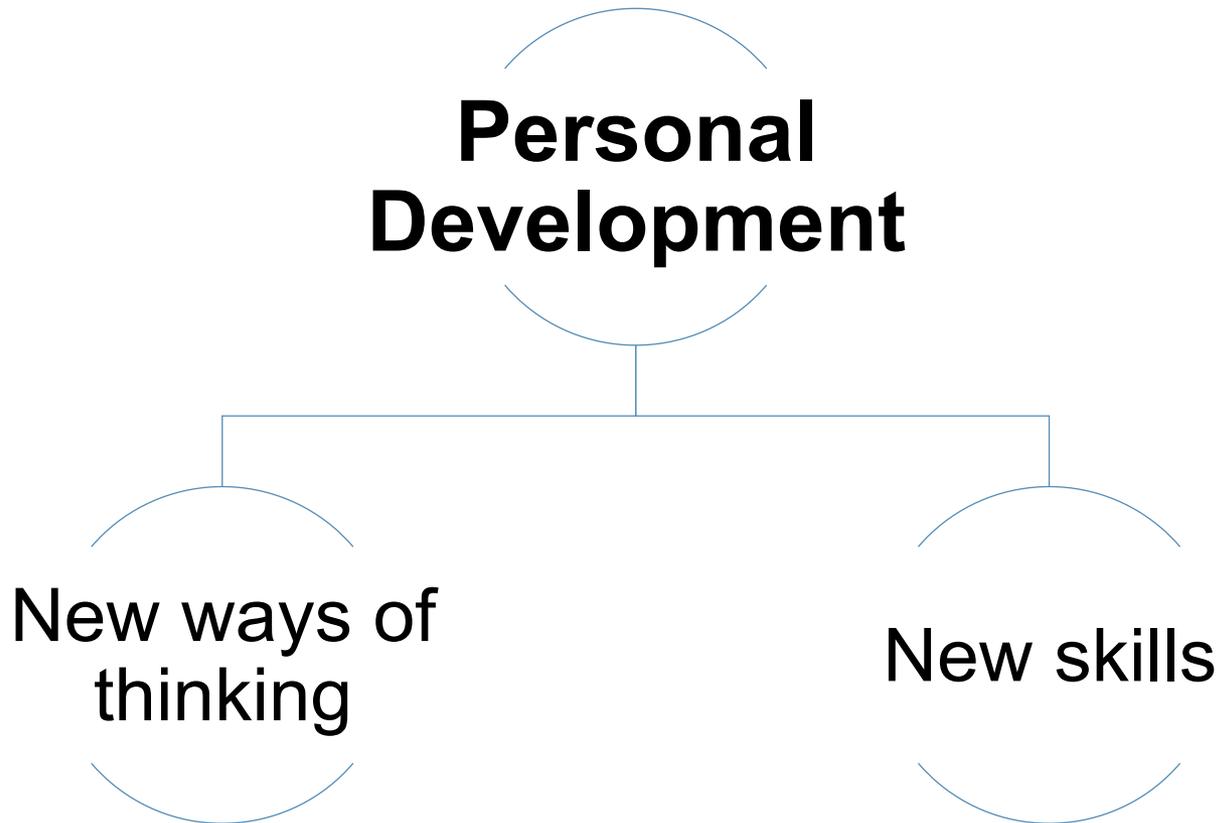
- *Seven discipline areas involving 145 participants—91 students, 54 staff*
- *Semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling (n=14)*

### *Research question*

*what is the impact of SaP on the individual staff and student participants involved and to what extent does this influence how they engage?*

# Results

Two main themes with sub-themes: theme 1



# Results

Two main themes with sub-themes: theme 2

## Enhancement of the learning climate

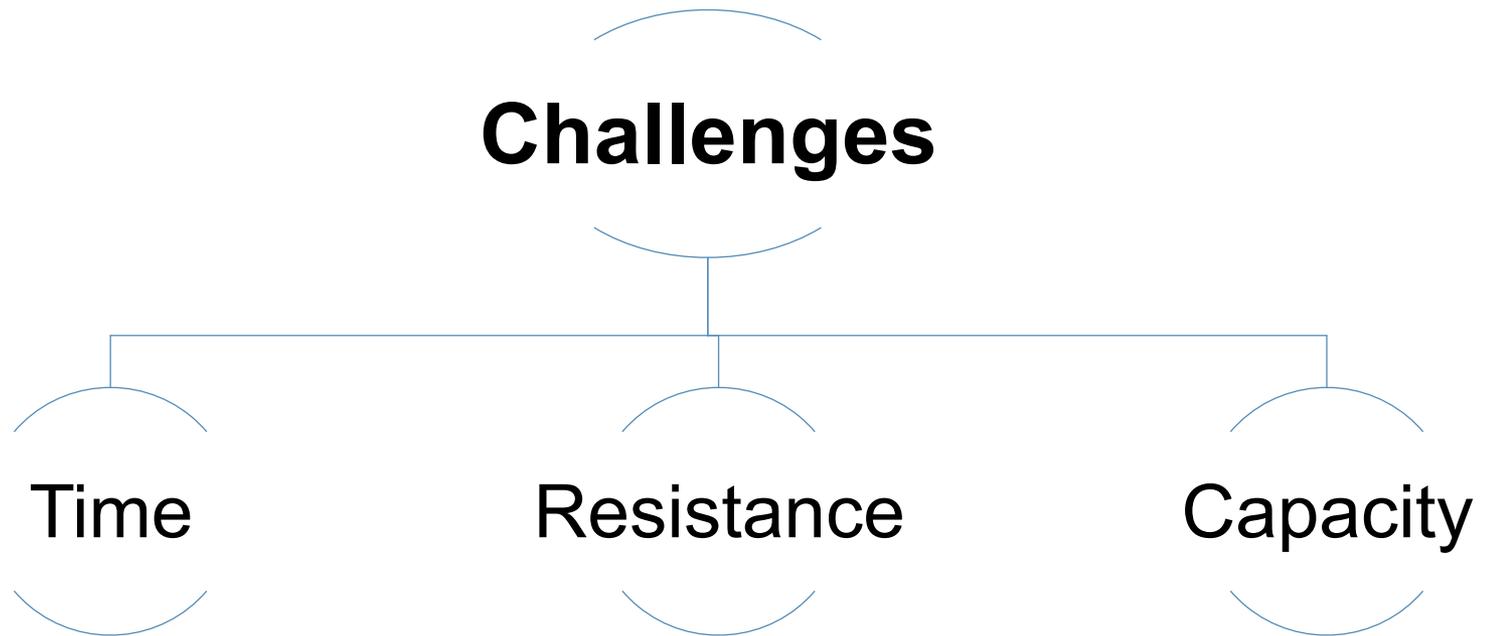
Builds  
relationships

Creates a  
ripple effect

Encourages  
active learning  
approaches

# Results

## Challenges

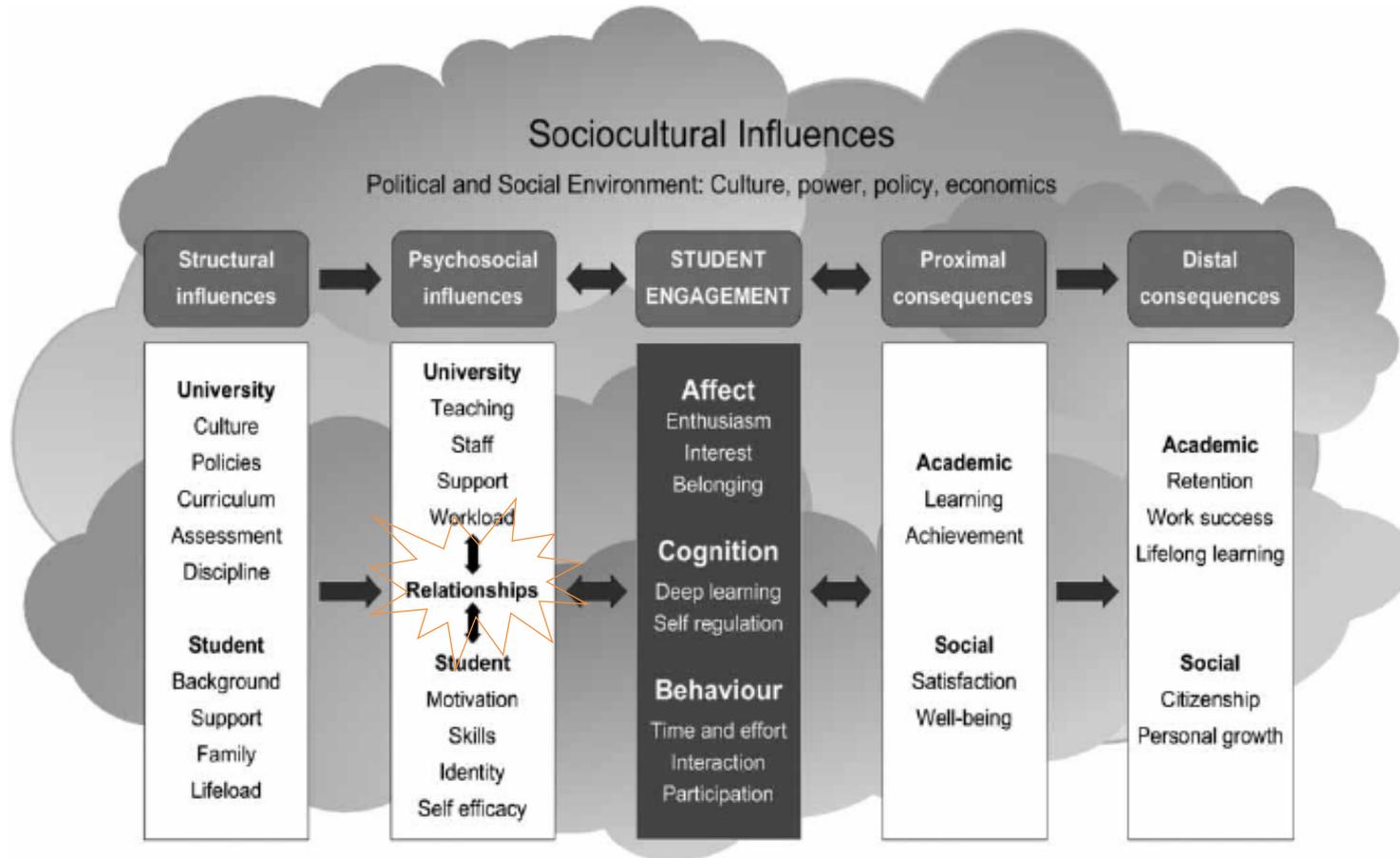


# Implications

## And scaling-up

- we need to recognize the importance of facilitating personal growth for both staff and students
- Three dimensions of SE are interrelated
- Emotion evident in the descriptions of lived experience
- Breaking down the 'them and us' attitude
- Can lead to enhanced curriculum design and delivery
- SaP as an ethos or process
- Language is important – language of SaP
- Need wider staff engagement
- Partnership with small 'p' rather than capital 'P'
- No one size fits all

# Conceptual framework of engagement, antecedents and consequences (Kahu, 2013, p766)



# Conclusions and limitations

- new understanding to stakeholders in relation to how this can help us think more **holistically about SE**.
- sample size in this study is small and from a single institution thus limiting generalisability of the findings,
  - evidence of personal development of both students and staff with the potential to enhance skills, motivation and self-efficacy of not just students—but staff too.
  - can also enhance the learning climate which is important in the context of creating opportunities for **all students** to benefit from partnership-working rather than the small numbers that tend to put themselves forward.
- Opportunity to **enhance curriculum design practice** across institution
- Consider how we support both staff and students to develop relational-based partnerships through recognizing the three inter-related dimensions of SE

# Take-away message

## Lessons learnt—we all play a part...

- Whole-institution approach – link to new curriculum design principles
- Understand our local contexts before selecting specific interventions (metrics and qualitative data)
- Mixed-methodology evaluation
- Ongoing evidence-informed programme of interventions...
- We need an enabling institutional environment
- Cross-institutional teams (enthusiastic champions and students, wider staff engagement)
- Monitor individual students

**EMPHASIS ON THE STUDENT VOICE**

**STUDENTS AS EVALUATORS OF THEIR EXPERIENCE (THE STUDENT VOICE)**

Students offer feedback, views and opinions and are listened to on an institutional basis, in order to build an evidence-base as a basis for enhancement and change. Decisions for action tend to be taken at subject and/or institutional level.

**STUDENTS AS PARTICIPANTS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES**

Students engage in institutional decision-making, in order to influence enhancement and change. Decisions for action tend to be taken collaboratively with staff and students.

**Integrating students into educational change**

**EMPHASIS ON THE UNIVERSITY AS DRIVER**

**STUDENTS AS PARTNERS, CO-CREATORS AND EXPERTS**

Students are collaborative partners in curriculum provision and professional development, in order to enhance staff and student learning. Decisions for action tend to be taken at subject and/or institutional level.

**EMPHASIS ON THE STUDENT AS DRIVER**

**STUDENTS AS AGENTS FOR CHANGE**

Students are collaborative partners in pedagogic knowledge acquisition and professional development, with the purpose of bringing about change. Decisions for action tend to be promoted by students and engaged with at subject and/or institutional level.

**EMPHASIS ON STUDENT ACTION**

# Holistic notion of Curriculum

## Concepts of curriculum

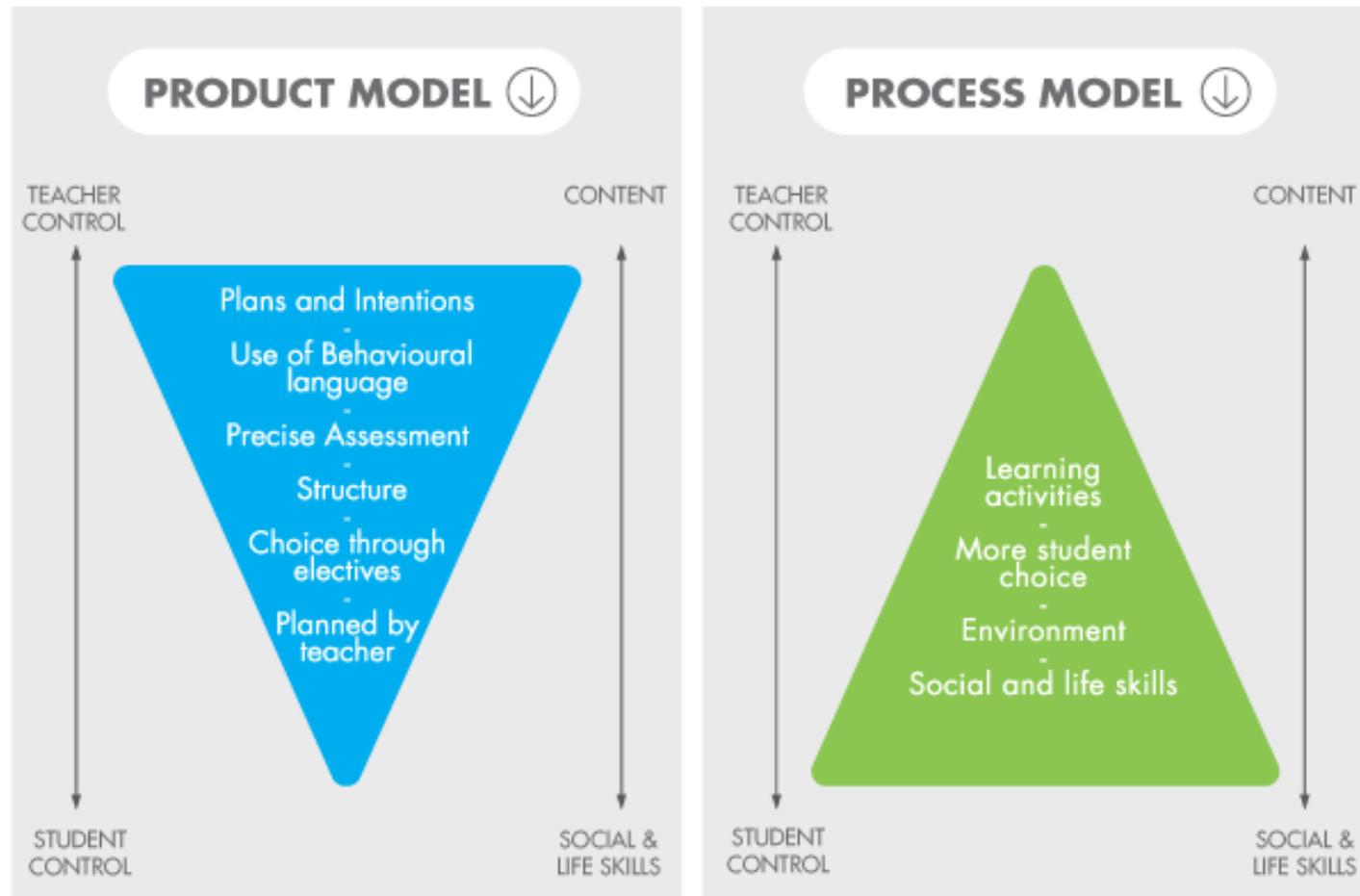
- Curriculum includes not only the subject content but also:
  - How knowledge is organised
  - How teachers teach
  - How students learn
  - How the whole is evaluated
- Curriculum design should therefore focus on:
  - What is to be learnt (content)
  - Why (rationale and philosophy)
  - How (process)
  - When it is to be learnt (structure)
  - How the learning will be demonstrated (assessment)
  - Effectiveness (evaluation)
- All of this should be shaped by the design principles and wider contexts (disciplinary, institutional, regulatory, political, societal)

# Curriculum paradigms

## Ideological and pedagogical orientations

- Academic
  - Subject-based, content-driven curricula in which the teacher decides on and transmits knowledge. Assessment is prescribed.
- Vocational
  - Skills-led, objectives-driven curricula in which the teacher guides students as to what to study, and assessment is summative and criterion-referenced.
- Developmental
  - learning-centred, process-driven curricula in which the teacher partners with the students, and assessment encompasses formative and coursework elements.

# Curriculum models



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<http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/programmedesigndevelopment/programmeeducationalphilosophymodels/>

## Opportunity or Chore?

- Module review (usually as part of Evaluation/ Revalidation) can be the time to critically examine whether your module/programme is:
  - Fit for purpose
  - Contemporary
  - Addressing current student needs
  - Making the most of opportunities for innovation
  - Coherent
  - 21<sup>st</sup> Century graduate -

# Five & Fifty

*Five Year Strategic Plan*

*Fiftieth Year Strategic Vision*

*2016 –2034*

Grounded in the heart of the community Ulster University will:

- transform lives, stretch minds, develop skills and raise ambitions
- deliver globally significant research with local relevance
- encourage a diverse university community
- make a lasting contribution to society as a whole.

# Priorities and Objectives

## Civic Contribution

- Employment & Widening Access
- Social and Economic Development
- Campus Identities
- Meaningful Networks

## Global Vision

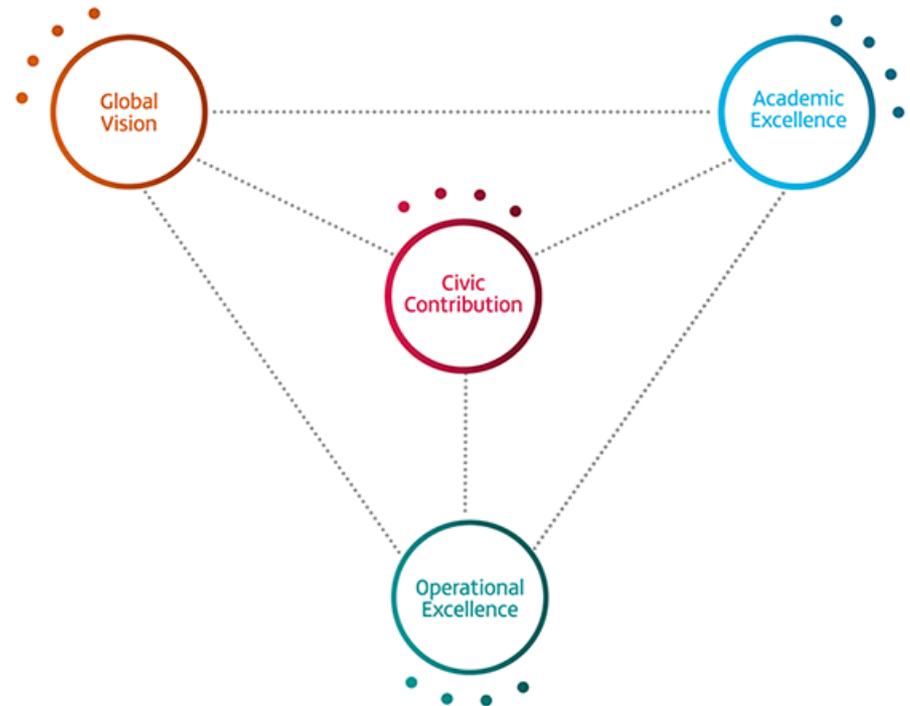
- Global Citizenship
- International Networks
- Global Challenge, Local Impact
- Diverse University Community

## Academic Excellence

- Teaching Excellence
- Student Experience
- Research with Impact
- Researcher Development

## Operational Excellence

- People and Culture
- Reputation
- World-Class Infrastructure
- Financial Sustainability

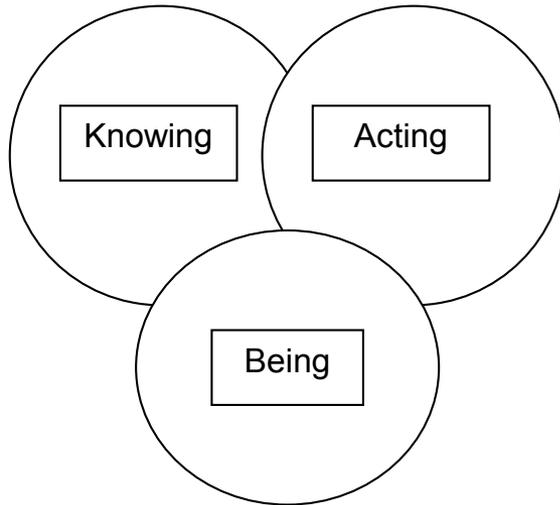


# *Academic Excellence - Teaching*

- Excellence in teaching at Ulster University will provide students with a high-quality, challenging and rewarding learning experience that equips them with the **knowledge, skills, and confidence** necessary to:
  - demonstrate critical intellectual enquiry
  - progress in their chosen career or entrepreneurial endeavour
  - adapt to change
  - become responsible global citizens making meaningful contributions to professional communities and wider society.

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century curriculum

## Curricula dimensions



Barnett and Coate, (2005)

- Knowing – consists of a **personal relationship** between the person and the intellectual field in question
- Acting – includes various activities which lead to the development of **discipline-based, generic and employment-related skills** and taking on the **identity of what it is to be an engineer, nurse, social worker, entrepreneur etc.**
- Being – how students develop **a sense of themselves** and their capabilities, how they gain in self-confidence.

Refreshing the Curriculum: Approaches to Curriculum Design

Mick Healey

# Curriculum Design at Ulster

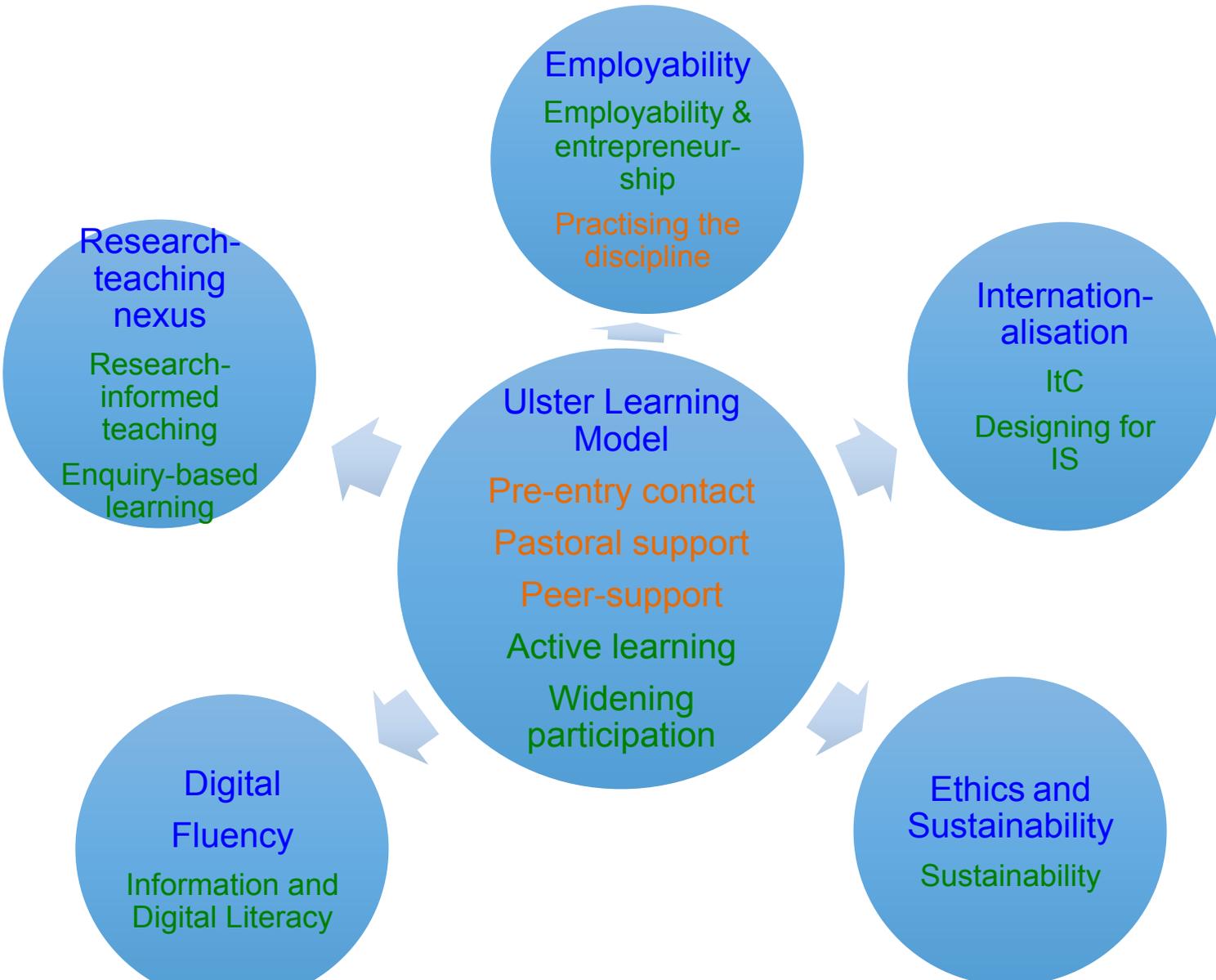
Designing for success: knowing, doing and being

- What does the student need to **know**?
- What does the student need to **be**?
- What does the student need to be able to **do**?

Roisin Curran and Colette Murphy

(Toolkit for curriculum design – work in progress)

# Mapping Student Learning Experience Principles to Curriculum design principles (process) and learning from What works



# Ulster Learning Model

Create conditions in which **all** Ulster students experience transformative learning, through participation and interaction with fellow students and staff, building relationships in which all partners are valued contributors within the learning climate.

*What opportunities are there for students to: build relationships, take on active roles, learn collaboratively and progressively and practise their discipline?*

# Ulster Learning Model

- Create a welcoming environment so that incoming students can easily make friends, find their way around, and get ready to learn in a different way.
- Foster student belonging through supportive peer relationships and meaningful interaction between staff and students.
- Structure learning sessions so that students obtain a deep understanding of the material through actively doing rather than passively receiving.
- Create opportunities for small group activities especially within large classes, encouraging mutual and constructive discussion between students and staff.
- Stimulate ongoing critical dialogues and collaborative exchanges between students, strengthening important life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and teamwork.
- Place students in different roles (e.g. as mentors, coaches or assessors), which casts students as active participants in partnership approaches.
- Design authentic assessment tasks which relate to professional practice and provides formative feedback.
- Provide clarity and direction to students regarding what is expected in terms of independent learning.
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in activities beyond the classroom (e.g. field trips, subject-based societies).
- Liaise with students regularly throughout their study, offering them informal and formal advice and

**Informed by research undertaken as part of Ulster's What works? Student Retention & Success Change Programme (2012-2015), the HEA Framework for Student Engagement Through Partnership (2014) and the NUS Comprehensive Guide to Learning & Teaching (2015)**

# Ulster Curriculum Design Framework (work in progress)



# Further development day on Curriculum Design

26 or 27 March 2018

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