60-Second SoTL

Episode 73 – Considering Time in Students as Partners

Featured Article

Transcript

(Music)

0:07

Jessie L. Moore:
How does *time*—including age, career stage, and historical moments—shape students-as-partners work in higher education? And what do we miss when we don't explicitly account for it? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

(Music)

0:30

In "Students as (Intergenerational) Partners: Considering Time in the 4M Framework," Kelsey Harvey, Katherine Cooper, Stephanie Hatzifilalithis, Elisa Do, Julia Cerminara, and Jacob Krone explore how age relations operate within the Students-as-Partners movement, and how incorporating the concept of *time* can deepen SoTL analysis of these partnerships. Their article appears in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, an open-access journal.

0:59

Although Students-as-Partners is often described as *intergenerational*, age itself has rarely been theorized in this literature. To address that gap, they draw on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, particularly the concept of the chronosystem, and the 4M Framework from SoTL and ask a central question: *What meanings do post-secondary students, staff, and faculty ascribe to age within intergenerational partnerships?*

1:25

The researchers conducted a secondary qualitative analysis drawing on three prior case studies connected to SoTL and Students-as-Partners work at a Canadian university. Together, these studies include 26 participants: eight students, four staff members, and fourteen faculty, with ages ranging from people in their twenties through their sixties.

Two of the original studies used mixed methods—combining surveys and interviews—and one used a critical qualitative, grounded theory approach. For the present analysis, however, the authors focused exclusively on semi-structured interview transcripts, intentionally excluding survey data because it did not address age relations directly.

Importantly, only one of the original studies explicitly asked participants about age. The other two did not. This allowed the researchers to examine how age surfaced *organically* in participants' narratives, rather than being prompted by interview questions.

All data were ethics approved, de-identified, and re-analyzed specifically to examine intergenerational meaning-making in Students-as-Partners work.

2:29

The authors used reflexive thematic analysis, first reading transcripts closely with the research question in mind and then inductively coding, guided by participants' own language rather than imposed categories.

To enhance rigor, two researchers independently coded each transcript, then met as *critical friends* to compare interpretations and refine codes. These codes were then grouped into themes. The full research team reviewed the themes to ensure they were grounded in the data and resonated with participants' experiences.

3:00

Four themes emerged.

The first, intergenerational ecosystems, highlights that higher education is far more age-diverse than primary and secondary educational contexts. Participants described working alongside people who were younger than them, older than them, or roughly the same age—sometimes blurring assumed hierarchies. In Students-as-Partners contexts especially, age often faded into the background as partners connected through shared interests, common goals, or collaborative work.

3:31

The second theme, individual and institutional changes over time, captures how relationships shift as people age and as academic cultures evolve. Faculty described becoming more "intimidating" with age, noticing changes in student communication norms, and feeling further removed from students' lived experiences. For some, this recognition was precisely what motivated engagement in Students-as-Partners—to better understand what it means to be a student *now*, not decades ago.

4:00

The third theme, academia as a gerontocracy, addresses power. Participants frequently linked older age with greater authority, leadership opportunities, and confidence within institutions. Even as older age was sometimes stigmatized socially, it still conferred institutional power. Some faculty actively worked to counter this dynamic in partnerships by inviting student voices and redistributing authority.

4:25

The fourth theme, age, intersectionality, and belonging, reveals how ageism intersects with gender, race, and status. Participants shared experiences of age-related microaggressions—being seen as "too young" or "unexpectedly young," or being excluded as an older student who didn't fit normative timelines. Importantly, several noted that Students-as-Partners relationships often *mitigated* these dynamics by fostering reciprocity, trust, and recognition of expertise across identities.

4:56

In their discussion, the authors map these findings onto SoTL's 4M Framework—micro, meso, macro or exo, and mega or macro levels—and argue that something is missing: time. By integrating Bronfenbrenner's concept of chronosystem, the 4M Framework becomes more dynamic and better equipped to explain how partnerships change. Chronosystem prompts researchers to attend to aging, historical moments, life-course timing, and cohort effects.

The authors suggest that attending to these types of time elements can help SoTL scholars and practitioners design more equitable, age-inclusive partnerships, surface hidden power dynamics, and better understand how students, staff, and faculty experience teaching and learning across changing contexts.

To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article.

5:48

(Music)

5:53

Jessie L. Moore:
Join us for our next episode of 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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