Introduction: Co-creation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

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CO-CREATION OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

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Introduction

The paradigm shift in higher education (HE) towards co-creation reflects a broader movement that recognizes the importance of collaboration, inclusivity, and active student participation. As Bovill (2020) argues, education is increasingly viewed as a shared enterprise, where students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but rather active contributors to their own learning experiences. Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized this shift, with concepts like student-centered learning, staff-student partnerships, and active student engagement emerging as central pillars of contemporary HE discourse (Zhou et al., 2017). As Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014) define it, partnership is a "collaborative, 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" (pp. 6-7). This approach not only transforms educational delivery but also advances critical goals of social justice and inclusion (de Bie et al., 2021).

Given the rapid changes in HE, Glover and Moulton (2024) assert that "the case for investing in staff-student partnership research has never been stronger." They emphasize that "it is imperative to centre student voices and understandings of the point, purpose and delivery of HE, as they will be heavily impacted by many of the coming shifts in practice and delivery." Staff-student partnership research, collaboratively co-creating educational innovations, offers one pathway to achieve this meaningful engagement. As Cook-Sather (2025) argues, embracing "unknowingness" can prepare students to navigate complexity and uncertainty while fostering greater equity within HE and beyond. Good relationships, both between teachers and students and among peers, form the cornerstone of this process, as relational pedagogy provides the essential foundation for successfully co-creating learning and teaching experiences (Bovill et al., 2025).

Industry partners play an equally crucial role in this collaborative ecosystem. Collaborations between academia and industry have taken various forms, from live projects to establishing school boards with industry representatives. They also participate in curriculum co-creation, where their involvement ensures learning outcomes are not only academically rigorous but also professionally relevant to contemporary workplace demands (Shrivastava et al., 2022).

These initiatives bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, ensuring that educational programs align with the evolving needs of industries and the job market (Boud, 2012; Korhonen-Yrjanheikki et al., 2007). Moreover, such partnerships provide students with valuable opportunities to work on authentic projects, better preparing them for future careers (Jackson, 2015). However, the path to successful co-creation is not without challenges. As highlighted by recent scholarship (Cook-Sather, 2022; Healey et al., 2014), educators must carefully navigate issues of stakeholder expectations, assessment quality, resource allocation, and ensuring truly inclusive representation. The risk of inadvertently perpetuating selective engagement, as noted by Kandiko, Howson, and Weller (2016), underscores the need for nuanced and thoughtful approaches to student partnership.

This special issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* (*TLTHE*) seeks to explore the complex dynamics of co-creation, with a focus on the practices of the Business School at Manchester Metropolitan University and Greenwich Business School at the University of Greenwich. This issue is driven by the efforts of two groups promoting scholarship of teaching and learning in the two institutions: Innovation and Teaching Excellence Learning Lab (I-TELL) at Manchester Metropolitan University and Scholarship Excellence in Business Education (SEBE) at Greenwich Business School.

This issue includes seven reflective essays that offer first-hand insights into student-staff partnerships, presenting both the promising potential and the challenges inherent in collaborative educational approaches. By drawing on experiences and insights from academics and students, we aim to do more than reflect on innovative practices—we seek to advance our collective understanding of how students, educators, and industry partners can co-create more dynamic, inclusive, and meaningful learning experiences.

The Business School Context: A Fertile Ground for Co-Creation

This special issue examines co-creation practices within two institutions in England, United Kingdom: Greenwich Business School at the University of Greenwich and the Business School at Manchester Metropolitan University. Both are post-92 institutions—universities that gained university status following the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992—with substantial student populations. Greenwich Business School serves approximately 8,000 students, while Manchester Metropolitan University Business School serves approximately 9,000 students. Both business schools have cultivated close relationships with industry partners, creating rich ecosystems for collaboration that extend beyond traditional academic boundaries. These large-scale educational environments provide distinctive contexts for exploring the dynamics of partnership and co-creation in HE.

Business Schools' inherent focus on practice-oriented education and applied learning, together with close links to industry, creates fertile ground for partnership initiatives. Business schools traditionally maintain robust connections with employers, industry bodies, and alumni. This natural proximity to industry creates abundant opportunities for integrating external stakeholder perspectives into learning experiences, curriculum design, and research activities. As evidenced in several contributions to this special issue, these connections facilitate authentic assessment opportunities and work-integrated learning experiences that would be challenging to replicate in more theoretically oriented disciplines.

A distinctive characteristic of business schools, particularly in post-92 institutions such as Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Greenwich, is their large and diverse

student cohorts. These institutions embrace a widening participation agenda, attracting students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, and prior educational experiences. This demographic diversity creates both compelling opportunities and significant challenges for co-creation initiatives. The sheer scale of business school enrolment —often numbering in the thousands—raises important questions about representativeness in partnership work: How can co-creation approaches be truly inclusive when only a subset of students can actively participate in certain initiatives? Whose voices are heard in partnership conversations, and whose remain silent?

This context makes business schools particularly fascinating environments for exploring co-creation approaches. The essays in this special issue grapple with these tensions, offering insights into how educators can design inclusive partnership opportunities that recognize and value diverse student perspectives while navigating practical constraints. Several contributors specifically address strategies for ensuring that co-creation benefits extend beyond the immediate participants to impact broader student populations, acknowledging that meaningful partnership work must be attentive to issues of equity and access.

Assessment approaches common in business education—such as consultancy projects, simulations, internships, and live case studies—naturally lend themselves to co-creation approaches. These practice-based learning methods are frequently co-developed and co-delivered with students and employers, offering rich insights into both process and impact. The essays in this issue demonstrate how these pedagogical approaches provide meaningful platforms for developing student agency while addressing real-world challenges.

Furthermore, business schools face increasing pressure to demonstrate graduate employability (Hewitt, 2020), societal impact (AACSB, 2020), and innovation in education (Goodwin, 2024)—all strategic priorities that co-creation practices directly support. This alignment makes business education a timely and relevant setting for focused exploration of partnership approaches. The multidisciplinary breadth within business schools—spanning areas such as management, marketing, entrepreneurship, finance, human resources, and events management—offers a diverse range of co-creation practices and perspectives.

Finally, while situated within specific institutional contexts, the insights shared in this special issue also point towards institutional culture, constraints, and enablers of co-creation that are transferable and instructive for other settings. By examining how co-creation approaches can be adapted to serve diverse student populations within complex organizational environments, these reflective essays provide practical guidance for educators seeking to develop more inclusive and representative partnership practices across higher education.

The Role of Business Education Scholarship Groups as Enablers of Co-Creation

The developmental journey of this special issue illustrates the instrumental role scholarship groups like SEBE and I-TELL play in fostering innovation and translating institutional strategic objectives into meaningful pedagogical practices. The seed of this special issue was planted during SEBE's annual Assessment Day in October 2023, which adopted co-creation as its central theme. The event featured a keynote address by Professor Alison Cook-Sather, a renowned scholar in student-staff partnerships, whose presentation inspired many colleagues to engage more deeply with partnership approaches in their teaching, learning, and assessments. This initial spark of inspiration, facilitated by SEBE's event, led to a dedicated symposium on the topic four months later, in February 2024. SEBE also provided funding to

academics working on co-creation projects within Greenwich Business School. To sustain this engagement, in June 2024, SEBE organized a special track for prospective special issue authors at its annual Learning and Teaching Festival, providing a supportive environment for colleagues to develop and refine their contributions. The special issue expanded to include Manchester Metropolitan University when two guest editors joined this institution, in recognition of its extensive and exemplary work in co-creative practice. I-TELL then hosted briefing sessions for potential contributors and organized a special track at its annual conference dedicated to disseminating the reflective pieces featured in this special issue.

This collaborative journey demonstrates how scholarship groups can nurture pedagogical innovation from initial inspiration through development and ultimately to dissemination. HE institutions increasingly recognize the value of enhancing student engagement through various forms of partnership approaches. For instance, the University of Greenwich has explicitly identified student-staff partnerships as a strategic objective: "By 2026, all programmes will be working with students as peers, through a university-wide framework, to co-create and negotiate a practice-based curriculum relevant to the demands of society" (University of Greenwich, 2022, p. 4). However, moving from institutional rhetoric to classroom reality requires dedicated support structures that can facilitate this transition. This is precisely where groups like SEBE and I-TELL demonstrate their value.

SEBE, established in January 2022, creates a community within Greenwich Business School that fosters a sense of belonging while providing a supportive space for sharing learning and teaching practices. By bringing together faculty members interested in business education scholarship, SEBE cultivates an environment where innovative pedagogical approaches, including co-creation initiatives, can be developed, tested, and refined. The group's annual Learning and Teaching Festival serves as a platform for disseminating effective practices and research findings within business education contexts. I-TELL at Manchester Metropolitan University was launched in July 2024 and operates as a dynamic space designed to foster teaching and learning innovation and experimentation. The name itself reflects its purpose—a laboratory where faculty members can exchange, experiment with, and disseminate ideas on pedagogical approaches, including co-creation methodologies. Through its "playful yet purposeful approach," I-TELL promotes excellence in education while simultaneously enhancing research capacity in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

These scholarship groups facilitate co-creation in several important ways. First, they provide essential resources and support for faculty members embarking on co-creation initiatives. Through project funding, mentoring, and practical training workshops, they offer inspiration and help address the resource challenges often associated with partnership work. Second, they create communities of practice where educators can share experiences, troubleshoot challenges, and collectively develop more effective approaches to student engagement and partnership. Third, these groups serve as knowledge repositories and dissemination channels, documenting successful co-creation practices and making them accessible to broader faculty communities through blogs, webinars, and resource sharing - and this special issue. This knowledge-sharing function is particularly important given the experimental nature of many co-creation initiatives and the need to build upon prior experiences rather than reinventing approaches with each new project. Perhaps most importantly, groups like SEBE and I-TELL provide safe spaces for experimentation and risk-taking—essential conditions for developing innovative partnership approaches.

The inherent uncertainties of co-creation work, where power dynamics shift and outcomes cannot be fully predetermined, require institutional structures that encourage brave pedagogical exploration while providing appropriate support networks. By connecting individual faculty initiatives to broader institutional strategic objectives, these scholarship groups help bridge the gap between aspiration and implementation. They translate abstract commitments to student partnership into concrete, contextually appropriate practices that acknowledge the specific constraints and opportunities within business education environments. For institutions serving large, diverse student populations, this mediating function is especially valuable in developing co-creation approaches that are both inclusive and practically feasible. The papers in this special issue demonstrate how these scholarship groups have successfully supported a range of co-creation initiatives across different disciplinary areas within business education.

The Special Issue Reflective Essays

This special issue explores diverse approaches to co-creation in business education, highlighting how staff-student and industry partnerships can transform learning, assessment, and curriculum design. Across these seven essays, contributors reflect on the relational, inclusive, and practice-oriented potential of co-creation showing how collaborative approaches can foster deeper engagement, develop real-world skills, and create ongoing networks of learning and collaboration that extend beyond the classroom.

The seven reflective essays can be meaningfully analyzed along two dimensions that capture both the structural aspects of partnership (*Partnership Configuration* dimension) and the depth of student involvement in the co-creation process (*Student Agency* dimension). Regarding *Partnership Configuration*, drawing on Cook-Sather et al.'s (2014) partnership typology, we classify each essay as representing one of three structures: (1) Student-Staff Partnerships (focusing exclusively on collaboration between students and academic staff); (2) Tripartite Partnerships (incorporating students, staff, and a single external partner, often from industry or the community sector); or (3) Multi-stakeholder Partnerships (involving students, staff, and multiple external partners, creating complex ecosystems of co-creation). This dimension is particularly relevant for business education, where the integration of industry perspectives and professional networks is often central to educational impact.

For *Student Agency*, we consider Bovill and Bulley's (2011) model of active student participation and Cook-Sather's (2022) framework for structuring student voice in higher education to identify three distinct levels: (1) Consultative approaches (where students provide input while staff retain primary decision-making authority); (2) Collaborative approaches (characterized by shared decision-making processes); or (3) Student-Led approaches (featuring significant student autonomy and leadership throughout the co-creation process). This dimension addresses how power dynamics are negotiated within co-creation initiatives and the extent to which business students exercise professional agency in their learning.

The following table presents an analysis of the seven reflective essays according to these two dimensions, offering insights into the varying partnership configurations and degrees of student agency represented across the special issue.

Table 1: Partnership configurations and degrees of student agency

Essay Title	Dimension 1: Partnership Configuration	Dimension 2: Student Agency
"Beyond Tangible Outcomes: The Impact of Staff-Student Partnerships in Conflict Management Training"	Student-Staff Partnership	Collaborative
"Co-creating Authentic Assessments for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Event Management Students: Developing Sustainable Communities and Enhancing Social Awareness"	Tripartite Partnership (Students, staff, and charity organizations)	Collaborative
"AI Skills Development Through Industry-Academia Co-creation"	Multi-stakeholder Ecosystems (Students staff, industry partners, alumni)	Collaborative
"From Learners to Co-Creators: Redefining Teaching and Assessment Strategy in Entrepreneurship Education"	Tripartite Partnership (Students, Staff, and alumni)	Consultative to Collaborative
"Co-created learning in auditing education: Transforming case studies into collaborative learning experiences"	Student-Staff Partnership	Collaborative
"Exploring Decolonising Events Tourism and Hospitality: Designing an Unworkshop with Students as Partners"	Student-Staff Partnership	Student-Led
"Co-creation Through Pushing Boundaries: Reflections on Working with BA Events Management Students as Partners on a Final Year Module"	Student-Staff Partnership	Student-Led

In "Beyond Tangible Outcomes: The Impact of Staff-Student Partnerships in Conflict Management Training," Cecilia Ellis (staff), Callie Lees (student), Mirta Momo Mochi (student), Gunita Maskalane (student), all of the Business School, Manchester Metropolitan University, argue that beyond the widely reported benefits, staff-student partnerships yield broader and potentially more impactful outcomes. This reflective essay is co-authored with three Human Resource Management (HRM) students who worked with an academic (Ellis, C.) on a workplace mediation project. The authors evaluate this educational project conducted through a staff-student partnership approach, drawing upon Kligyte et al.'s (2023) Partnership Outcome Spaces Framework. The findings support Kligyte et al.'s (2023) assertion that the framework highlights less tangible and distributed outcomes of partnership. The authors explain that creating tangible situation and knowledge outcomes was achieved through solid project design, but unlocking the deeper learning and relationship outcomes required careful navigation of complex power dynamics within the partnership. They recommend an intentional approach to relationship development during project design, a

graduated partnership model acknowledging that full partnership evolves over time, and reflective practice methodology to capture multidimensional impacts. The findings from this initiative suggest that while often overlooked, the most profound impacts occur in learning and relationship spaces, encouraging educators to broaden their definition of success beyond measurable outcomes.

In "Co-creating Authentic Assessments for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Event Management Students: Developing Sustainable Communities and Enhancing Social Awareness," Janine Priest and Karen Radcliffe, both staff at the Business School, Manchester Metropolitan University examine Manchester Metropolitan University's authentic assessment design through a tripartite partnership forming a community of practice between students, staff, and charity organisations. The co-creation approach differentiates between undergraduate single-module and postgraduate cross-module delivery while addressing resource allocation tensions through strategic stakeholder relationships. The matching process—whereby charities present missions and student teams compete for partnerships—represents the curriculum's most innovative co-creation aspect. Following Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, this approach integrates academic-industry nexus while advancing UN Sustainable Development Goals. Students develop emotional intelligence through the client feedback loop while maintaining autonomy in event execution. With £200,000 fundraised for charities and student testimonials confirming career readiness, this Work Integrated Learning approach demonstrates impact despite hierarchical assessment structures. Future directions include developing micro-credential opportunities with industry partners. This case illuminates how business education can meaningfully engage external partners in co-creation while negotiating the complexities of power dynamics, stakeholder expectations, and institutional constraints—providing valuable insights for similar initiatives developing co-created learning experiences.

In ["AI Skills Development Through Industry-Academia Co-creation,"](#) Opeoluwa Aiyenitaju (staff) and Tunde Mosaku (industry partner) at the Business School, Manchester Metropolitan University, discuss a case of co-creation aimed at supporting postgraduate students' employability and career readiness. Designed as an extra-curricular opportunity, CTLD resulted from the partnership between a department of Manchester Metropolitan University, an industrial partner (Salesforce) and a group of students from two postgraduate programmes. The essay provides a detailed account of the contributions of the different partners to the project, as well as of the importance of alumni for its success and in ensuring continuity of the initiative. The success of the project is evidenced by the positive feedback gathered from the participants, but also from the scaling up of the CTLD. More specifically, CTLD was extended to both undergraduate students as well as Manchester Metropolitan international partners. Such expansion led to increased visibility of the programme, both within the university, as well as the industrial partners. Such growth required however addressing some challenges; amongst those, the essay focuses on the integration of different technological solution, the need to ensure continuity of the partnership and the need to align expectations across partners.

In their essay, ["From Learners to Co-Creators: Redefining Teaching and Assessment Strategy in Entrepreneurship Education,"](#) Daria Samatoina and Catherine Farrant, both staff at Greenwich Business School, University of Greenwich, reflect on their experience of co-creating a second-year undergraduate entrepreneurship module aimed at improving student experience and satisfaction. Recognising that many students are general business majors, they sought to create a student-centric and inclusive module that allowed exploration of diverse intra- and entre-preneurial journeys. They adopted Bovill and Woolmer's (2018) approach, engaging both students and alumni to shape the curriculum. This collaboration bridged the gap between academic learning and real-world practice. The authors discuss ensuring equal partnership and addressing potential biases when only a subset of students participates (Bovill, 2019). They compare their experience with notable co-creation efforts in the same discipline (Canales, 2019). Despite not fully realising all guiding principles, the co-creation approach yielded valuable insights. Initial feedback indicates an enhanced appreciation for entrepreneurship education, even among students pursuing different career paths. The paper highlights the transformative potential of co-creation in higher education, emphasising the importance of engaging students and industry partners as active collaborators. It concludes with lessons learned and offers a practical guide for colleagues interested in similar initiatives, underscoring the creation of inclusive curricula aligned with real-world demands.

In ["Co-created learning in auditing education: Transforming case studies into collaborative learning experiences,"](#) Jun Wang, staff at Greenwich Business School, University of Greenwich, reflects on a pilot experience of co-creation in a postgraduate auditing module. The pilot is limited to a single session, involving one tutorial group. During the experience, students took control and ownership of the learning session with the purpose to ensure full class engagement. Students co-designed the tutorial and collaboratively developed content and resources. They rethought the session's structure, guidance, and activities linked to case study presentations, and they led the class discussion. This approach shifted them from passive learners to active co-creators, deepening their understanding of auditing concepts and developing essential skills, including decision-making, and their professional judgment. The initiative was successful in ensuring the active engagement of all the students in the session, which is often missing during student presentations. The experience also provided valuable insights into integrating co-creation in teaching and learning. Jun reflects on her transition from a traditional lecturer to a facilitator and co-creator, discussing plans to scale-up this

approach. Despite being small-scale, this pilot enabled her to identify potential risks, allowing her to consider how to mitigate them, and offering a roadmap for broader implementation.

In her essay "Exploring Decolonising Events Tourism and Hospitality: Designing an Unworkshop with Students as Partners," Joanna Goodey, staff at Greenwich Business School, University of Greenwich, describes a co-creation experience with a small group of students (Bryson *et.al.,* 2015). The reflective piece describes the use of co-creation as a way to implement decolonisation, especially to address a sense of perceived inadequacy from the teaching team in dealing with decolonisation considering their background and roles. A participatory design was introduced to engage with students as partners, with the ultimate objective of reducing power structures and promoting inclusivity. Students in the process took different roles (Bovill et al., 2016) and a set of conscious choices in terms of the format of the event and the approach from the teaching member of staff are discussed. Specifically, the unworkshop format is presented as particularly suitable to engage in a partnership with students and to promote inclusivity. The essay concludes with reflections on the challenges experienced by the authors in promoting and leveraging co-creation.

In "Co-creation Through Pushing Boundaries: Reflections on Working with BA Events Management Students as Partners on a Final Year Module," Ewa Krolikowska-Adamczyk (staff), Pamela Zigomo (staff), Jenny Hamblin (student), Joe Blomfield (student), and Lauren Gater-Moray (student), all of Greenwich Business School, University of Greenwich, examine co-creation in a final year Events Management module through Dollinger et al.'s (2018) dual-aspect model, establishing a democratic learning space emphasising freedom with responsibility and a culture of authenticity. Staff and graduates reflect on transforming teaching through Partnership Learning Communities and Bovill's (2020) whole-class approach, replacing examinations with transparent assessment expectations for student-led workshops and digital content creation (blogs, podcasts, vlogs). Power redistribution required long-term relationship building while acknowledging institutional constraints on complete equality. The methodology employed participatory action research with students pushing conventional boundaries, focusing on academic-industry alignment and developing employability skills—evidenced by graduates applying workshop facilitation, time management and digital skills professionally. Three themes emerged: establishing a supportive environment encouraging risk-taking; implementing organisational structures facilitating partnership; and developing inclusive pedagogy for diverse learners. Graduates particularly valued creating authentic assessments that accommodated neurodivergent perspectives and developed industry-relevant capabilities. Their reflections demonstrate how emancipatory knowledge frameworks positioned students as active agents, enhancing motivation while building professional competencies. The partnership approach created sustainable communities of practice where co-creation extended beyond module completion into ongoing collaborative reflection and scholarship.

Conclusion

The seven essays featured in this *TLTHE* special issue demonstrate the diverse manifestations and impact of co-creation in business education. Through these reflective accounts of student-staff partnerships, and co-creation with industry partners, we witness how co-creation transcends traditional educational boundaries to foster more engaging, and inclusive learning experiences. What emerges clearly from the essays' contributions is that successful co-creation involves more than procedural change; instead, it represents a fundamental shift in

how we conceptualize educational relationships and power structures. When effectively implemented, co-creation creates spaces where students develop not only professional competencies but also the confidence, agency, and critical perspectives essential for responsible business practice. The essays collectively highlight that while co-creation presents significant challenges—particularly in navigating complex power dynamics, managing stakeholder expectations, and ensuring inclusive representation—these challenges can be productively addressed through intentional design, graduated partnership models, and ongoing reflective practice.

The role of business education scholarship groups such as SEBE and I-TELL has proven crucial in this endeavour, providing the support structures, resources, and communities of practice necessary to translate institutional aspirations into classroom realities. By creating safe spaces for pedagogical experimentation and knowledge sharing, these groups enable faculty to navigate the inherent uncertainties of co-creation while connecting individual initiatives to broader strategic objectives.

Looking forward, the insights gained from these diverse co-creation experiences offer valuable guidance for the wider HE community. They suggest that co-creation approaches must be contextually appropriate, attentive to issues of equity and access, and designed with clear awareness of both opportunities and constraints. As business education continues to evolve in response to changing industry demands, technological innovations, and societal expectations, co-creation offers a powerful means of ensuring educational experiences remain meaningful, inclusive, and aligned with the complex challenges our graduates will face. The journey toward more collaborative and inclusive business education is ongoing. Through continued experimentation, reflection, and scholarship, we can refine our understanding of effective co-creation practices and extend their benefits to diverse student populations. This special issue represents not an endpoint but rather a contribution to an evolving conversation about how students, educators, and industry partners can collectively shape more dynamic, responsive, and socially conscious approaches to business education.

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