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# Learning Together: Exploring the value of patient involvement in digitally enabled physiotherapy education

**Key Message:** Co-produced digital learning moves students beyond technical competency, using connection, lived experience and relational communication to support professional identity and preparation for contemporary practice.

## Background

Professional identity develops through ongoing interaction and participation within professional communities, rather than being acquired at qualification [1,2]. Meaningful dialogue, reflection and engagement with others can therefore support students' learning and professional development [3,4].

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) is increasingly recognised within health professions education as a way of bringing lived experience into learning. At the University of Sunderland, **Patient, Carer and Public Involvement (PCPI)** is the term used to describe this approach. However, less is known about how students and PCPI participants learn together and negotiate participation, relationships and professional identity within digitally enabled environments.

As telehealth becomes increasingly embedded within physiotherapy practice, understanding these digitally mediated learning relationships is important for preparing students for contemporary, person-centred practice.

## Purpose

Explore how physiotherapy students and PCPI participants experienced co-produced telehealth simulation, with particular attention to learning, participation, relationships and professional identity.

## Methods

### Ethical Approval

The University of Sunderland, Research Ethics Committee approved this study. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, University of Sunderland, with approval reference number 022681.

All participants gave written informed consent before data collection began.

### THEORETICAL LENS

Symbolic Interactionism  
Meaning is constructed through social interaction

### Symbolic interactionism

...a framework that focuses on how individuals interact. People's actions are based on meanings they assign to things through language and symbols which can differ depending on the person, the environment and can change over time [5].

### Why symbolic interactionism?

To explore how students and PCPI participants constructed meaning, negotiated relationships and developed understandings of professional identity through interaction.

### Co-production

Occurs when citizens participate actively in delivering and designing the services they receive [6]

### Participation

...the willingness to be involved with confidence and without fear of not being accepted, within a professional and social context [4,7].

### Open Dialogue

...written, spoken or other conversational exchange between two or more people – promotes equal status and free space as the most important prerequisites of communication and the appreciation of differing personal beliefs [8].

### LEARNING CONTEXT

Co-produced telehealth simulation  
Students (n=11)  
PCPIs (n=5)

### PARTICIPATION & INTERACTION

Open Dialogue  
Lived experience  
Feedback

### DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured interviews  
Exploring participants' experiences and interpretations

### ANALYSIS

Reflexive thematic analysis  
Informed by symbolic interactionism

### INTERPRETATION

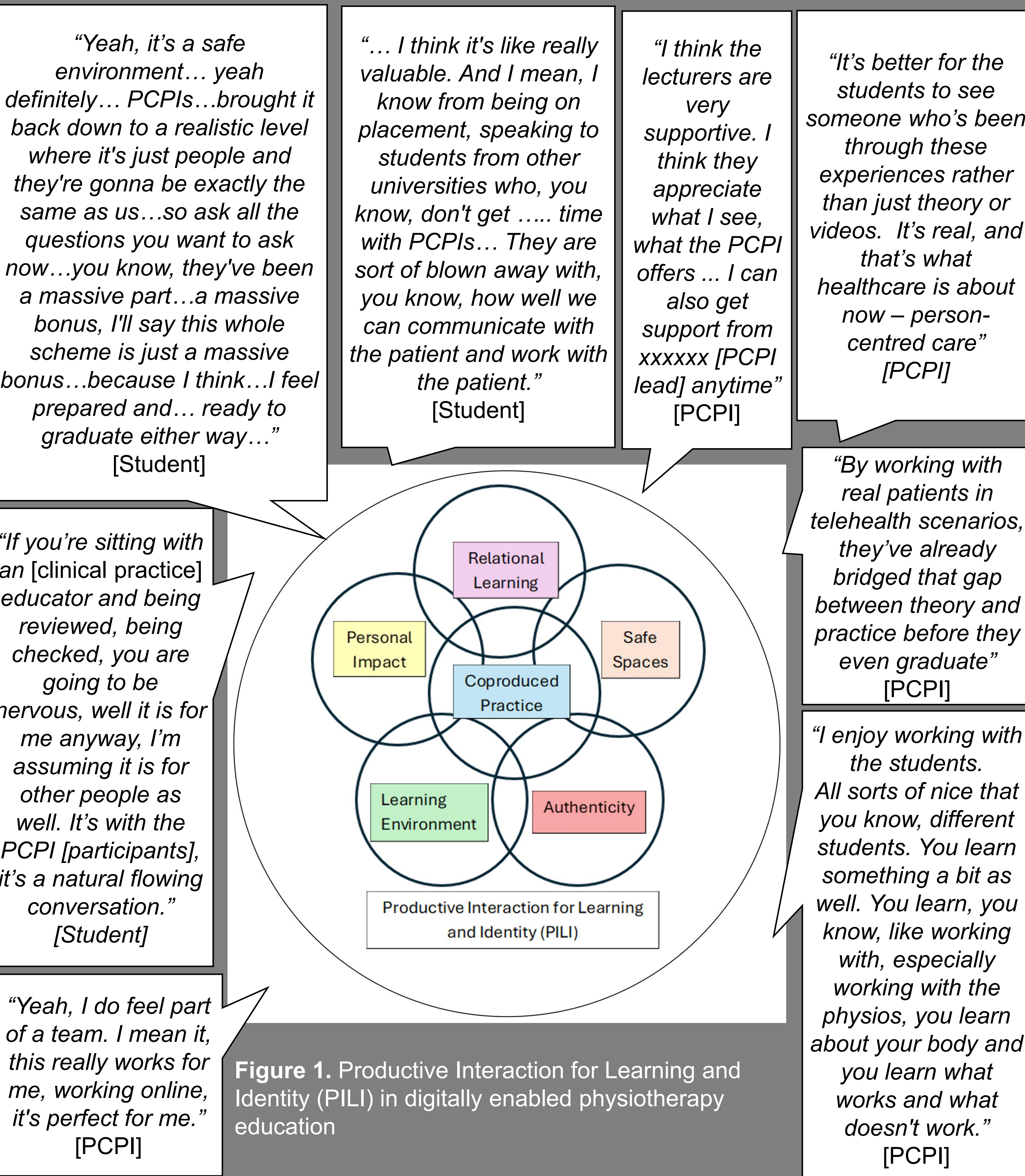
How participants made sense of learning and interaction

## Results

Learning within telehealth simulation workshops was not individually acquired by students but relationally co-produced with PCPI participants through authentic and supportive digital learning encounters. Students and PCPI participants did not merely participate in telehealth simulations; they navigated uncertainties, relational demands, and communicative adaptations associated with digital practice.

## Results

**Figure 1.** presents the emergent themes identified through reflexive thematic analysis. Themes are not only interrelated but also interdependent within a background of what we have termed '**Productive Interaction for Learning and Identity**' (PILI).



## Conclusion

### Learning through connection, not just competence.

Co-produced telehealth simulation supported relational learning, professional identity development and preparation for contemporary practice through open dialogue, lived experience and shared participation. The PILI framework has the potential to inform co-produced learning across physiotherapy and wider healthcare education.

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