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LISTENING TO STUDENT VOICES AS A STEP TOWARD STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE AND INTERCULTURAL TEACHING APPROACHES

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Introduction — Lorna's Journey

College faculty members typically labor in “pedagogical solitude” in that they plan, teach, and assess their work alone (Shulman, 1993). I am one such faculty member, and for 24 years I have felt lonely engaging with students from behind the barriers imposed by either a podium or a desktop computer. That changed when I started to develop ways to gather feedback from students as a step toward working with them in partnership to maximize effective teaching and learning in my classrooms. I have found that my teaching and my students’ learning have been enhanced through dialogue and sharing of diverse perspectives (Cook-Sather & Hayward, 2020), and with the goal of promoting student-centered instruction, I have collaborated with students and engage in an intentional dialogue about the reciprocal process of teaching and learning (Hayward, et al., 2018). Without such dialogue, the classroom felt murky, messy, and I often wondered what my students were thinking about. Participating in a dialogue with students inspired a sense of comfort for me, and I also appreciated learning from them, since I am genuinely curious about their perspectives on college, the job market, and teaching and learning.

It can be emotionally risky to ask students to provide feedback on the intensely personal profession of teaching. Asking for feedback shifts and levels the power dynamic that exists between teacher and student but, from my perspective, the outcomes are dramatic and positive. My own experience has borne out the efficacy of engaging in explicit and ongoing development of meta-cognitive skills through reflective practice, self-assessment, and self-regulated learning (Schon, 1983). I have found that, as a teacher, reinvestment in the learning process is part of my motivation to continue to learn and grow as a professional (Hayward, 2000) as I engage in the process of progressive problem-solving constituted by reflection or self-monitoring of routine practice within a specific context (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993).

The goal for this current reflective piece is to capture what I learned from two students about existing inclusive and exclusive practices at Northeastern University (NU) and to apply that to my own evolving thinking about how to make my classrooms more inclusive. This reflective piece documents the learning generated through single conversations I had with two female students, which raised for me questions I hope to explore in an extended study. One student, Aysha, is from Kuwait, and she participated in a seminar I teach called Contemporary Issues in Healthcare. The course involves service learning and requires students to engage with and apply

course concepts to problems that impact people living in the local community. The second student, Flavia, is from Dorchester, MA. She was valedictorian of her Boston area high school and is attending NU through grants. Her high school was not one of the 10 in Boston to which NU offers scholarships to valedictorians. Flavia immigrated to the US from Cape Verde and lives in the neighborhood that abuts NU. She is a friend of my daughter, Julia, who is a 2020 NU graduate. Julia and I talk often about education and research and Julia recommended that I contact Flavia because of the unique perspective she could share about her experiences at NU.

Understanding my students' perspectives is more important than ever before, as the classroom context has changed over the past 10 years to reflect an increasingly global and diverse student body. It is critically important for me to be curious about and include the perspectives of students whose voices are often underrepresented and unheard. Including a diversity of voices in my planning has the potential to increase relevance, expand perspective, and improve access to material, and it helps avoid the "danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009) or partial story about a topic under study. I offer below some background on what inspired me to embark on this journey to learn from two student voices as a first step toward my long-term goal of strengthening inclusive and intercultural approaches in my classroom.

Lorna's Perspective on What Inspired this Invitation into Dialogue about Diversity and Inclusion

The impetus for this reflective piece began two years ago when a group of colleagues and I began to explore the potential of student consultancy teams (SCTs) to optimize teaching environments and learning outcomes (Hayward, et al., 2018). Using self-determination theory, we explored the experiences of students serving on SCTs, faculty perceptions, and impact on class motivation. For this work, two sections of Psychosocial Aspects incorporated SCTs, while two did not. SCTs administered five two-minute papers to obtain feedback shared with faculty at three points during the semester. All sections completed the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) pre-/post-semester. SCTs completed midterm and final reflections, and faculty reflected after each SCT-faculty meeting. Results confirmed that serving on SCTs gave students a voice, increased motivation, heightened appreciation for the complexity of teaching, and promoted respectful communication. Faculty gained a wider perspective on classroom practice. MSLQ results indicated that test anxiety increased significantly for the control groups. Intrinsic value was significantly higher for the experienced instructor and self-regulation was significantly greater for the experimental sections. Using SCTs, faculty can establish classroom environments that facilitate students' internal motivation, active learning, and ultimately their intellectual development (Hayward, et al., 2018).

The results of this study were promising and intriguing. To extend this work, I wrote a grant to explore how to increase diverse and inclusive classroom practices in healthcare curricula by creating SCTs composed of students from underrepresented groups. I designed this project to begin to address the lack of diversity among students and faculty in health professions in the US and increasing diversity of the US population. Because patient-provider mismatches can lead to compromised health care and patient safety during health care interactions (Leavitt, 2010), I wanted to develop pedagogical approaches that support more inclusive and equitable classrooms

with the goal of helping health professions students develop the ability to effectively address the health care needs of all Americans.

In anticipation of working on this larger project, I wanted to start with some smaller conversations with students I already knew. I therefore invited Aysha and Flavia to meet for conversation. Below I share the insights I gained from those conversations and how those informed my thinking about my teaching practice. Interspersed with sections on the insights I gained are sections authored by Aysha and Flavia on insights they gained.

Lorna's Insights from her Conversation with Aysha

Aysha and I met over coffee with the purpose of establishing a dyad between a teacher and an international student to discuss strategies, from her particular perspective, for the co-creation of teaching and learning. I recognize that hers is one perspective and that she cannot speak for all international students, but since I already had a relationship with her, I felt I could build on the dialogue we had begun.

During our conversation, Aysha shared a critical perspective. Three major points from our discussion were epiphanies for me. The first was that Aysha was shocked by course material and assignments due to cultural differences. In Aysha's case, her service-learning location involved meeting with elders over 65+ living in community housing. The goal of the service was to combat elder isolation through intergenerational partnerships between students and elders. While elders living apart from family is common practice in the US, this is not true of Kuwait. Aysha's perspective follows:

Before volunteering in the elderly home, I thought that elders lived there because they cannot take care of themselves or have been abandoned by their children. In the Middle Eastern culture I grew up in, the concept of an "elderly home" is a place where elders live in because their family and children have chosen not to care for them. Through interacting with the elders in the elderly home, I understood that they have chosen to live in this home. I saw that they are a close-knit community of neighbors and friends. I was intrigued by how this elderly home is a supportive environment where the elders are surrounded by people that share the same interests which creates a community. I saw that the elders have chosen to live in a place that supports their lifestyle at this stage of their life.

Before hearing this story from Aysha, I had never thought about how certain assignments might be viewed by students from another culture. In Aysha's culture, and many others, elders would not live independently outside of their community or in an elder institution. My view is Western centric and I had not even considered how the treatment of elders, as such, might be viewed as shocking by students from other cultures. This experience was illuminating for me for several reasons. First, I had clearly missed an opportunity to ask for student feedback on their perspectives on the assignment—related to culture, tradition, or diversity. The entire class might have benefitted from the sharing of diverse perspectives on elder care in other nations. Boston is quite diverse and it would be important for all students to appreciate that cultural differences

may exist when they enter elder communities and provide service in these locations. As a teacher, I need to better prepare students through discussion for how cultural differences impact elder care. Ultimately, by gathering feedback from students, even though the content of feedback was unexpected in Aysha's example, I think I have become more aware, which is a first step towards maximizing inclusive teaching and learning environments.

The second insight I gained from our conversation was that some cultures place great value on a person's name. Aysha told me that certain cultures have longer names with family references. Everyone in a particular culture knows you by your name. A name brings with it an element of respect. Aysha shares her experience at NU below.

In preparation for graduation this spring, I was asked by the University how I would like my name to appear on my diploma and graduation program. Living in the US, for simplicity, my name includes my first and last name only. However my full name includes my first name, followed by my middle name, which is my father's name, followed by his father's name and so on. Therefore, I have many middle names. It is important for me to include my father's name on my diploma because it shows respect for my family and my upbringing. I could not reach this stage of my life without my father's support and so I am proud to be addressed with his name in my graduation ceremony.

Aysha's comments resonated with me because in my classes, I often have a hard time pronouncing students' names. As a result of this conversation, on the first day of class in a course I taught the semester subsequent to our conversation, I played a "name game." I used the name game as an icebreaker activity. I gave students index cards and asked them to write their name and a story about their name on the card. Then, each student shared with the entire class their name, how it's pronounced, and the story behind it. One revelation of this game was how many students chose to shorten their name to make it easier for some people to pronounce. Also, it was fun to learn about why students were given certain names by their parents. The main message for me was that people's names hold meaning and value and that teachers need to make an effort to learn how to pronounce students' names correctly as a sign of respect.

The final learning for me from my conversation with Aysha was her comment that teachers need to use global examples in lectures and assignments. Aysha, who is an industrial engineering major, mentioned that her teachers at NU discuss engineering and the elements that impact design solely from a Western perspective. She indicated that it would be helpful for students to hear how design, such as a bridge, might need to be structured differently in a climate such as the Middle East which is dry, windy, and different from many regions in the US. This story illuminated for me that diverse perspectives are critical for student success in a global workplace. I plan to expand my perspective on content in courses I teach in the future as it relates to other cultures. To do this, I wrote a grant, that was recently funded, which will allow me to gather perspectives from a diverse group of NU students regarding their perceptions of what is inclusive pedagogy. Engaging more students in this important dialogue will broaden my thinking about how curriculum generated by a western professor can be enhanced to capture a diversity of perspectives about a topic of study.

One area for growth within academia is diversity training where exploration of unconscious bias is welcome and processed. I am challenged to intentionally examine my classroom pedagogy to ensure that it simultaneously incorporates the development of specific subject matter knowledge and skills and the multiple perspectives of the clients and coworkers. As a teacher, I must be reflective, responsive, flexible, and intentional in the selection of teaching approaches.

Aysha's Insights from her Conversation with Professor Hayward

After meeting with Professor Hayward, I saw the many ways she is invested in making the learning process inclusive for everyone. I learned that curricula are always evolving and that teachers continue to promote diversity in the classroom. This includes providing opportunity for students to share different perspectives when applicable. Through opportunities like these, everyone learns. Promoting diversity can be overlooked easily and by learning how teachers intentionally include students helps make the classroom an inclusive environment for me.

As a student, knowing that educators like Professor Hayward recognize the diversity of students is a major milestone. This includes being provided with opportunities to share perspectives in the classroom when appropriate. In opportunities like these, both the educators and students learn from the different experiences. In my Contemporary Issues in Healthcare seminars, I engaged in a discussion that explained the healthcare system in my home country Kuwait and my experience exploring the healthcare systems in Taiwan and China from my study abroad. I then listened to my classmates share their experience with healthcare whether from a job, course or real world. In the many discussions we have had like these, we concluded them by tying the experiences to our learning goals. I was able gain a well-rounded perspective on one topic through conversations like these. I carried the knowledge gained into my course work and life experience. As an international student and speaker of English as a second language, I came to NU to gain a unique learning experience, and it has been rewarding to be able to offer my unique perspective in return in this inclusive learning environment.

Lorna's Insights from her Conversation with Flavia

After Aysha and I met, I continued to reflect on her comments. Aysha's story was just one perspective, and it stimulated my desire to speak with more students because I realized these were preliminary conversations that have raised my awareness but are the beginning of a long learning process because my knowledge seemed incomplete. Thus, I asked a second student, Flavia, my daughter's friend, who is a business major, to meet. Our conversation was very different from the one Aysha and I had.

Flavia shared three ideas that had a very powerful effect on me. The first was that while NU is located in her community and has a good reputation, she noted it is "here but not for the community." Universities have a reputation of encroaching on local neighborhoods through either building expansion or student housing. Universities are often viewed as not supporting

local communities due to their tax-exempt status, use of community infrastructure, and displacing people from underserved communities (Biened, 2017). Flavia shared:

During my time here at NU I have met a plethora of people of various backgrounds. Despite being surrounded by a factor often glamorized by the university, diversity isn't all inclusive. While the school is taking necessary strides to both diversify and broaden inclusivity, there is room for improvement. I grew up in the underdeveloped neighborhood of Dorchester and appreciate every little opportunity offered - especially academic ones offered by outside institutions. Outside help was necessary because the schools didn't possess funds to provide fundamental educational programs. For instance, my high school lacked resources to provide commonly offered advanced placement (AP) classes (of the limited amount of courses offered, AP Calculus was cut after several students including myself took a preparatory summer class at NU). Budget cuts were very common, so lack of resources such as SAT prep, AP courses, and language classes, made it hard to grow. It's very sad that while most of our neighborhood schools were in such depravity, surrounding colleges and universities were bustling and thriving – ready to accept “qualifying students.” In this case, it didn't matter how hard we worked, we were still at a disadvantage compared to others – many students were competing for opportunities they weren't even in the queue for. I lucked out, pushing through many hurdles, I barely made the cut. It's difficult when you give it your all and you hear, “sorry your school was not considered for the scholarship.” Although I am very grateful for the aid I received, I feel cheated, and other hard-working students will also feel this sort of defeat as they hear they don't make the cut (they were never really in the race start with). I urge universities such as NU to act to bridge this inevitable divide that many students growing up in the neighborhood face. If the university wants to support diversity more can be done to assist students in the surrounding schools of Boston, so that they might have a chance to be in the race along with the other students who come from all over the world. Giving students a real chance means supporting them starting from elementary schools through high school.

After hearing Flavia's story I realized that I need to be more mindful of the impact our institution has on the community that abuts it. Her comments underscore the need for me to deepen my own understanding and better prepare my students to serve the community, to remind them of how they may be viewed, as people of privilege, and that the community may not want them there. A class conversation, appropriate reading, or asking the community for feedback may be appropriate starting points to increase awareness for humility when engaging with others who may not be privileged.

A second example that Flavia presented addresses issues of privilege possessed by college faculty and the impact their classroom comments have on students who are less privileged. Flavia described how a professor in one of her courses mentioned that Americans need to do their part for the environment and only purchase products that are constructed from sustainably

grown fiber crops or recycled materials made in ethical ways, meaning the people who made the clothing were treated safely and paid fairly.

Flavia mentioned that for her, hearing that she should do her part was not possible. Sustainable brands are expensive, and people in college without a privileged background can't afford to buy them. If not privileged, a student who would like to engage in sustainable practices often can't and this leads to feelings of shame or that they are doing the wrong things. Her professor was blind to this perspective. As Flavia stated:

Although my professor raised some very valid concerns about sustainable practices, I don't believe the delivery was as intended. One cannot demand a sudden jolt of change as if it's possible for everyone. At this stage in life a student cannot stand alone and completely alter their lifestyle simply because it is the right thing to do. Society needs to become more inclusive of sustainability, but it's not practical to tell students they need to buy from highly marked up stores that are "sustainable." The price mark-ups at "sustainable" stores are beyond ridiculous. It is deceiving to think that a factory worker in the US or another country is getting a decent fraction of the \$100 jeans or \$300 sweater these sustainable stores sell. More ridiculous to expect a college student to buy their products, without knowing if their parents are willing to spend that much on clothing, or if a student who is barely making it on their own has that luxury. While this professor's intentions for discussing sustainability were mostly good, the message was lost through his delivery and very blunt opinions. We can support others or the environment, but it is not realistic to demand people buy from stores that cost five times the price of what they usually pay to "sustain" others. Here is the disconnect, if you can comfortably afford to buy from these stores, by all means do so, but to make others feel obligated to when their reality isn't the same, it's not okay. It might be a good idea to use both the power, wealth, and knowledge to put more pressure on the producers of sustainably made products in the market to lower prices to meet consumers at a middle point, where prices are more agreeable to most.

My conversation with Flavia reinforced what I had realized through my conversation with Aysha: that the student voice will help me to understand how to be more inclusive in my teaching, expose unconscious bias and privilege, and affirm what is going well. If I do not embrace the curiosity to change, unconscious and implicit bias will drive my classroom behaviors and interactions with students.

A final point that raised my awareness is that Flavia mentioned some students are not confident enough to share their "minority" view in a majority setting. To me this means that faculty are not doing enough to promote a classroom climate that invites diverse perspectives on course topics. Flavia's perspective follows:

For the sake of not becoming that guy or girl who doesn't agree with the professor and takes a little bit of extra class time to argue a different perspective, I have often held my tongue when I hear something that doesn't sit well. It seems as though a lot of students also end up doing this at one point or another, especially

when they have been cut off by a professor. Time doesn't always permit for long dialogues, but when conversations are started there will be multiple views involved – even if there isn't enough time, a professor should at least encourage the student to share his/hers opinions after class hours (not shut them down completely). Whether those invitations are taken or not, at least a space is created that welcomes different opinions or perspectives.

This point, in conjunction with the other insights Flavia and Aysha helped me gain, catalyzed a shift that caused me to examine more closely what I include, how I select topics, package information, and where I could be more contemporary in my design of curricula that better reflects the diversity of perspectives of students sitting within a classroom. Also, as a teacher, it is clearer than ever that I need to know who is sitting in the room and be more intentional in creating an environment that promotes inclusion of all voices. What I have noticed is that while some students will not speak up in a larger group, they will share more in smaller groups of three or four peers. While I feel like I have always invited inclusive conversation in the larger space, often with limited success, I know that different mechanisms are needed, such as small group case studies or problem-solving activities to enable students with varying viewpoints a chance to voice their perspectives.

Flavia's Insights from her Conversation with Professor Hayward

After my conversations with Professor Hayward I have come to realize that as a student I am always in the position where I get to learn something from every experience, whether pleasant or not. It is up to me and other students alike to use our voice to stand up for what we believe to be our own realities, not to be told by others what they are. If people are incorrect, even if they are supposed to be more knowledgeable than us, it is our responsibility to correct them so that they don't continue to generalize. There is a certain kind of danger of doing so as it strips the identities and realities of the individual. If we want to become open-minded adults, we need to learn to speak up now before it is too late and we risk becoming complacent adults. By being complacent we let a lot of injustices occur whether intentional or not. Our education system needs to allow for that kind of growing without limitations.

Conclusion and Future Teaching-Learning Plans

Based on these conversations with two students, I learned that students have particular perspectives, with unique potential to affirm and improve pedagogical approaches. All students' perspectives are colored by lived experiences and cultural nuances that inform their interpretation of classroom instruction, assignments and grading approaches. Both members in the dyad serve two reciprocal roles, learner and teacher. Their perspectives and role lend an expanded perspective on learning and teaching, legitimacy, and expertise. Because teaching is iterative and like a labyrinth with twists and turns that are often unexpected, I urge other teachers also to be open to the possibility of change. The insights from these conversations will help inform my future grant work, and the need to have students present to share their stories with the faculty I teach about inclusive classrooms.

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