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ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL VALUES THROUGH CROSS-COMMUNITY REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Professional values form an important element in learning and teaching in higher education. According to a recently released professional standards framework, they include embracing diversity, promoting equity of opportunity, adopting evidence-informed approaches, responding to the wider contexts of higher education, and collaborating for enhancing practice (Advance HE et al., 2023). Advancing equity and justice in higher education through pedagogical partnerships, which has gained significant momentum in recent years (e.g., de Bie et al., 2021), is a holistic approach for promoting these professional values in learning and teaching.

As an academic developer, I have worked with relatively large groups of students and colleagues to develop collaborative scholarship projects on inclusive learning communities (Tong, Standen & Sotiriou, 2018; Tong, 2023) – both for addressing institutional priorities as well as for contributing to the current debates on inclusive education. In this piece, I start by reflecting on my own experience in designing collaborative scholarship projects on inclusive education. By introducing our collection of 13 reflective commentaries featured in this special issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education (TLTHE)*, I will discuss how promoting and engaging with marginalized voices from different communities can help embed professional values in learning and teaching in higher education.

Promoting marginalized voices through collaborative scholarship…

Developing collaborative scholarship projects involves forming learning communities, and collaborative scholarship on inclusive learning communities should practice what one preaches. When I started working on an institution-wide curriculum initiative in 2015, I found myself asking the following questions:

1. What wider inclusion issues can we explore effectively through collaborative scholarship for informing practice?
2. What marginalized voices in the learning community do we want to feature and help support in the project?

We used these questions to guide the development of an open-access edited book with full-length chapters (Tong, Standen & Sotiriou, 2018). The idea was to foreground the marginalized voices of graduate teaching assistants (i.e., research students who also teach) as they share their perspectives on the connection between research and education (Clark et al., 2019). Our goals were to help develop a more balanced institutional culture across research and education, and to promote cross-disciplinary exchanges at University College London and beyond. We worked with a group of research professors who had won national and institutional teaching awards to support the 11 graduate teaching assistants and other students from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds in the project.

When I joined Northumbria University in 2020 to work on inclusive education, I wanted to explore ways to address the inclusion issue concerning the mode of expression in collaborative scholarship. So, I added the third question:

3. What alternative forms of scholarship output and genres of writing can we include in the project, so that the diverse marginalized voices can be heard loud and clear?

We used all three questions for developing our collaborative scholarship project on 'Fostering inclusive learning communities together' (Tong, 2023). We wanted to have a better understanding of the spectrum of diverse intersectional challenges that our students were facing – in the context of a modern research-intensive institution with a social mobility mission and a commitment to the regional and local economy. We therefore invited a group of 21 undergraduate and graduate students from diverse backgrounds to take the lead to write about their lived experiences and share their perspectives on 'student success.' Both academic and professional service colleagues were involved in the initiative as they presented their responses to the students' pieces. To embed inclusion in our project, our students, and academic and professional service colleagues all come from diverse personal backgrounds. We encouraged our authors to express their feelings and emotions through poems, short stories, and visuals (with academic commentaries), and to articulate their scholarly arguments and viewpoints in short opinion pieces and essays. The institutional contexts behind our collection of 29 short contributions are discussed in the two introduction pieces of a previous special issue of *TLTHE* (Tong, 2023; Parkin, 2023).

…and engaging with marginalized voices through reflective commentaries…

After the publication of the first special issue of *TLTHE* (Tong, 2023), I had wanted to find out more about the impact of the collaborative scholarship project on informing practice. And I therefore asked myself the fourth question:

4. In what ways can we visualize the wider impact of the marginalized voices beyond the boundaries of the collaborative scholarship project, which is essentially a 'case study' with its specific cultural contexts?

To shed light on this question, I worked with eight academics from diverse personal backgrounds and professional roles across education and academic development—four from other universities in England and four based in other countries (Australia, Italy, South Africa, and Uganda). They were invited to choose at least one of the pieces presented by our Northumbria students in the *TLTHE* special issue 'Fostering inclusive learning communities together' (Tong, 2023). They then wrote reflective commentaries with links to their own practice and perspectives on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Four of the authors (Clark, Naseem, Sotiriou, and Standen) were involved in the open-access book project (Tong, Standen & Sotiriou, 2018; Clark et al., 2019), thereby bringing the two previous collaborative scholarship projects as mentioned together.

To further expand the collection, Alison Cook-Sather invited several additional authors to write commentaries in response to essays written by student authors (or co-authored by student and

faculty authors and previously published in *TLTHE* (Burke, 2013; Ansari, 2021; Iftikhar, 2021; Abraha & Crowe, 2022; Brown, 2023). The authors, who are based in Australia, Pakistan, and Singapore, reflected on the significance of working with students as partners as well as the nature of power dynamics in pedagogical partnerships in diverse cultural contexts.

I am honored to present the 13 commentaries in this current volume of *TLTHE*. Our collection starts with a creative piece with a reflective commentary. In "WALK IN MY SHOES," Brown (2024) presents a poem and an image—in a nod to the student's creative work on which the commentary is based. She discusses the tensions between her dual academic roles and thinking as a disability studies scholar and an educationalist, highlighting the significance of reflective practice in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In the second part, we present three commentaries on creative and scholarly pieces by students whose experiences and backgrounds were significantly different from the authors' own identities. In "THE STIRRINGS OF CHANGE AND QUIET REVOLUTION: A COMMENTARY ON 'THE ONLY' AND 'IDENTITY-FIRST EDUCATION,'" Standen (2024) focuses on the importance of listening to our students' stories and being their ally. In her commentary on a creative piece and a reflective essay, she discusses the importance of changing practice and working with students as partners and reflects on her role as a Head of Academic Development.

Willison's commentary (2024), "GENDER INEQUALITY, INCLUSIVITY AND POWER," is centered on 'alienation,' covering gender inequality, minority students' experiences, and ethnic discrimination. As an academic in Australia, he emphasizes the importance of pedagogical sensitivity and working with students as partners. His piece takes into account the diverse lived experiences presented in three contrasting works by students.

As an expert in academic development based in Italy, Sotiriou shows in "EMPOWERED INDIVIDUALS AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT" the importance of speaking up (Sotiriou, 2024). She presents a personal response to a student's piece focusing on the serious problem of sexual harassment and violence experienced by students in higher education. As a female educator, she examines her own experiences in academia and poses a series of questions as part of her critical reflection.

In the third part, we feature the perspectives from an experienced academic and an early-career academic in a set of four short commentaries. In the first piece, "EDUCATION: THE EQUALIZER AND ENERGIZER," Chikoko highlights the institutional roles in building students' sense of belonging (Chikoko, 2024a) by showing the importance of partnership in achieving equity, inclusion, and decolonization. As a Professor of Educational Leadership in South Africa, he explores the power of universities by making reference to a student's reflective essay on two artworks in his second commentary entitled "UNIVERSITY: SOCIETY'S MAJOR INSTRUMENT" (Chikoko, 2024b). The two commentaries share a common theme on student hardship, and they both convey a clear message to universities in relation to their institutional responsibilities in advancing equity, inclusion, and diversity.

In "ENABLING STUDENTS TO FLOW IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION," Clark presents two commentaries on students' creative works and discusses their connections with her academic identities as a

former international student and an early-career academic. Her first commentary makes a direct link with the creative elements in the students' piece as she reflects on the difficulties experienced by international students (Clark, 2024a). The second commentary, "SNAPSHOTS," focuses on the importance of identities and human connections as graduate students and academics embark on their journeys in academia (Clark, 2024b), making reference to her role as the Chair of an Early Career Network.

In the fourth part, we present two reflective commentaries on the wider contexts of higher education in two contrasting national contexts. As an academic in Education and Social Justice, Naseem puts forward her argument about the importance of decolonizing the idea of 'student success' in "REFLECTING ON THE NOTIONS OF SUCCESS AND BELONGING." Reflecting on the idea presented in two students' essays (Naseem, 2024), she discusses on the influence of neoliberalism on higher education in the UK.

In "EDUCATION FOR THRIVING: BECOMING THE MUSIZI OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES," Mino (2024) reflects on the connections between her work as a co-founder of a new university in Uganda and the ideas about sustainability as proposed by a Northumbria student in his opinion piece. She discusses her student-centered approaches to higher education, including co-creating African indigenous knowledges in the curriculum.

In the final part, we feature three commentaries on working with students as partners—through different forms of 'co-reflection.' As an academic based in Pakistan, Tamim (2024) reflects on ideas from three student-authored essays in "JOURNEYS OF DECOLONIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH STUDENT-FACULTY/STAFF PARTNERSHIPS." With two of the essays written by her student partners, Tamin explores the cultural dimensions of student identities and empowerment in pedagogical partnerships.

In "LIVING AND LEARNING IN RADICAL SPACES: TRUST, AFFECT, AND NEEDS IN THE STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNER DYAD," Toh and Chng (2024) discuss the significance of building trust, attending to affect, and responding to needs as important elements in pedagogical partnerships. As experienced educators based in Singapore, they reflect on the possibility of a third space for student partners as co-facilitators and for redefining classroom dynamics through dialogues between students and educators.

Last but not least, Peseta and Suresh (2024) present their reflection as a dialogue in "FROM STUDENT TO STUDENT PARTNER: REVISITING STUDENT EXPERTISE AND POWER IN CURRICULUM PARTNERSHIP." As a student partner coordinating lead and an academic lead of student-staff partnership based in Australia, they discuss the significance of expertise and power dynamics in pedagogical partnerships viewed from different perspectives.

…for advancing professional values – together!

The commentaries in this special issue clearly demonstrate the significance of engaging with marginalized voices in reflective practice across different academic roles, career stages, and cultural settings. The cross-community engagement not only helps us visualize the impact of

collaborative scholarship beyond its cultural contexts but also allows us to show the intersubjective dimensions of reflective practice. This shift of reflective practice from introspective monologues to continuing open dialogues across institutional and national boundaries is a good way to help 'realize the potential of reflective practice' (Clouder et al., 2000). Cross-community reflective practice is particularly relevant to advancing professional values in learning and higher education in a holistic way. As demonstrated in our project, promoting and engaging with marginalized voices can help advance diversity and equity and respond to the wider contexts of higher education through evidence-based and collaborative approaches.

What is the key element that brings the communities with different priorities and cultural contexts together in this collection of commentaries? The answer may be linked to one of the themes that underpin all the commentaries in our collection: empathy. Our collection underscores the significance of empathy in pedagogical practice, which has also attracted significant attention in recent educational research (e.g., Meyers et al., 2019; Aldrup et al., 2022). Irrespective of their different backgrounds and professional roles, the authors in this special issue have all shown their understanding of the students' diverse experiences and emotions through the students' perspectives. They were inspired by the students' creative works and scholarly writing, and have turned the inspiration into new observations, personal pledges, changing practice, reinvigorated commitment to inclusive approaches, and more. Empathy has affective and cognitive dimensions (Meyers et al., 2019), and the mixed use of creative writing, visuals, and scholarly essays in our student-led project may have helped foster both dimensions of empathy in the reflective commentaries.

I would like to end this piece with a photo I took during my recent trip to Seoul. Reflections from nearby buildings, traffic, and the sky kept changing the appearance of the skyscraper. Reflective practice can be reimagined as a continuing open dialogue—supported by the helping hands of our pedagogical partners including students, professional service colleagues, and fellow academics from previously unconnected communities and contrasting cultural settings. I extend my warm invitation to you to join us in this open dialogue.

Acknowledgement

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