Journal of Education, Innovation, and Communication (JEICOM)

Special Issue - DOI: https://doi.org/10.34097/jeicom-7-4-1
Editors: Dr. Margarita Kefalaki & Dr. Fotini Diamantidaki
Guest editors: Dr. Jan Bamford, Dr. Sophia Karanicolas & Dr. Elena Elena Moschini

Liberating Student Voice: A Transformative Approach to Professional Development in Higher Education

Sandra Abegglen[1]
Mona R.S. Abdelgayed
Mohammed Alaqad
Jade Benn
Sandra Burns-Sinfield[2]
John Desire[3]
Fidelis Ejike-Ume
Katherine R. Fisher
Matthew J. Fisher
Janet Gordon[4]
Rudhara Gurung
Gulzhan Rysbekova
Helen Tennison

ABSTRACT

Student voice is so much more than feedback and evaluations; rather, it involves bringing students into the teaching-learning conversation: welcoming them as they are, valuing their experiences and contributions, and socially co-constructing knowledge within the curriculum space itself. Pedagogy and ethics need to be nurtured and developed to facilitate student agency and voice - and that is the role of our Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching (PGCert) in Higher Education programme. This conceptual paper explores the transformative impact of the programme as a case study of liberatory and experiential pedagogy that fosters student voice from within: with staff-as-students. Drawing on collaborative contributions from current and past PGCert participants, the paper weaves together short vignettes to reveal how co-created teaching, learning, and assessment practices have fostered student voice within participants - and how this, in turn, has allowed them to meaningfully integrate student voice, agency, and action into their own teaching and in support of their students.

Keywords: Student Voice, Liberatory Pedagogy, Experiential Learning, Co-Creation in Education, Higher Education Professional Development, Participatory Teaching and Learning

[1] University of Calgary, Canada - sandra.abegglen@ucalgary.ca

[2] London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom - s.sinfield@londonmet.ac.uk

[3] London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom - j.desire@londonmet.ac.uk

[4] London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom - j.gordon@londonmet.ac.uk

1 INTRODUCTION

Student voice in Higher Education (HE) is essential, without that education is a process of colonisation and subjugation:

Any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence… to alienate humans from their own decision making is to change them into objects (Freire, 2000, p. 66).

Thus, 'student voice' extends beyond seeking feedback and evaluations - important as these are - to actively integrating students into the teaching and learning dialogue This means valuing student experiences, welcoming them as they are when they arrive, and co-constructing knowledge with them rather than transmitting information 'at' them (viz. Freire, 2000 - 'teacher as co-learner'). However, this is a process that must be consciously developed – and it is something that staff who expect only to 'lecture' might need to learn. To nurture student agency and voice in and across the curriculum we need an ethics of care alongside a developmental, supportive and immersive pedagogy, and active, creative, problem-posing practice. This is the focus of our Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching (PGCert) in Learning and Teaching in HE (see Diagram 01), for if staff are to develop student voice within their curricula they must experience it within staff development praxes (and ideally within their broader academic environment as well) (Mag et al, 2017).

This conceptual paper examines the transformative impact of active staff development at London Metropolitan University, a UK inner-city university with a social justice focus. We are showcasing our practice as a case study of liberatory and experiential staff-facing pedagogy that fosters student voice, enacted within a PGCert that is definitely not just dry theory (Courteney & Loffman, 2024), but living practice. Through collaborative contributions from current and past PGCert participants, the paper presents vignettes (viz. Jeffries & Maeder, 2005) that highlight how active, playful and co-created teaching, learning, and assessment (TLA) practices have empowered student voice within the programme - and beyond in participants' own classrooms . That is, we argue these practices enable PGCert participants to integrate student voice, agency, and action into their own teaching praxes and support agentic, owned, and authentic learning (Sinfield et al, 2019).

In this respect our PGCert serves as a "third space" (Bhabha 1994, Gutiérrez, 2008) - flexible, amorphous, accommodating many voices: not didactically teaching, but immersing staff-as-students in student-centered TLA methods and empowering them to explore pedagogy, assessment and curriculum theory through the lens of practice, enriched by their own positionality and experiences. Participants engage in playful and creative activities (Abegglen et al , 2023; James & Nerantzi, 2019) over the course of three modules: *Facilitating Student Learning* (FSL), *Managing the Assessment and Feedback Process* (MAF), and *Curriculum Evaluation and Development* (CED). They co-develop assessment criteria, encounter 360-degree marking, and design liberatory and playful courses of their own across the modules and over the whole 18-month PGCert process. As such they experience first-hand, as students themselves, the liberatory potential of student voice as they learn to nurture and amplify the voices of their own students. This deep, experiential engagement allows them to critically interpret and reimagine these theories and practices for their own classrooms.

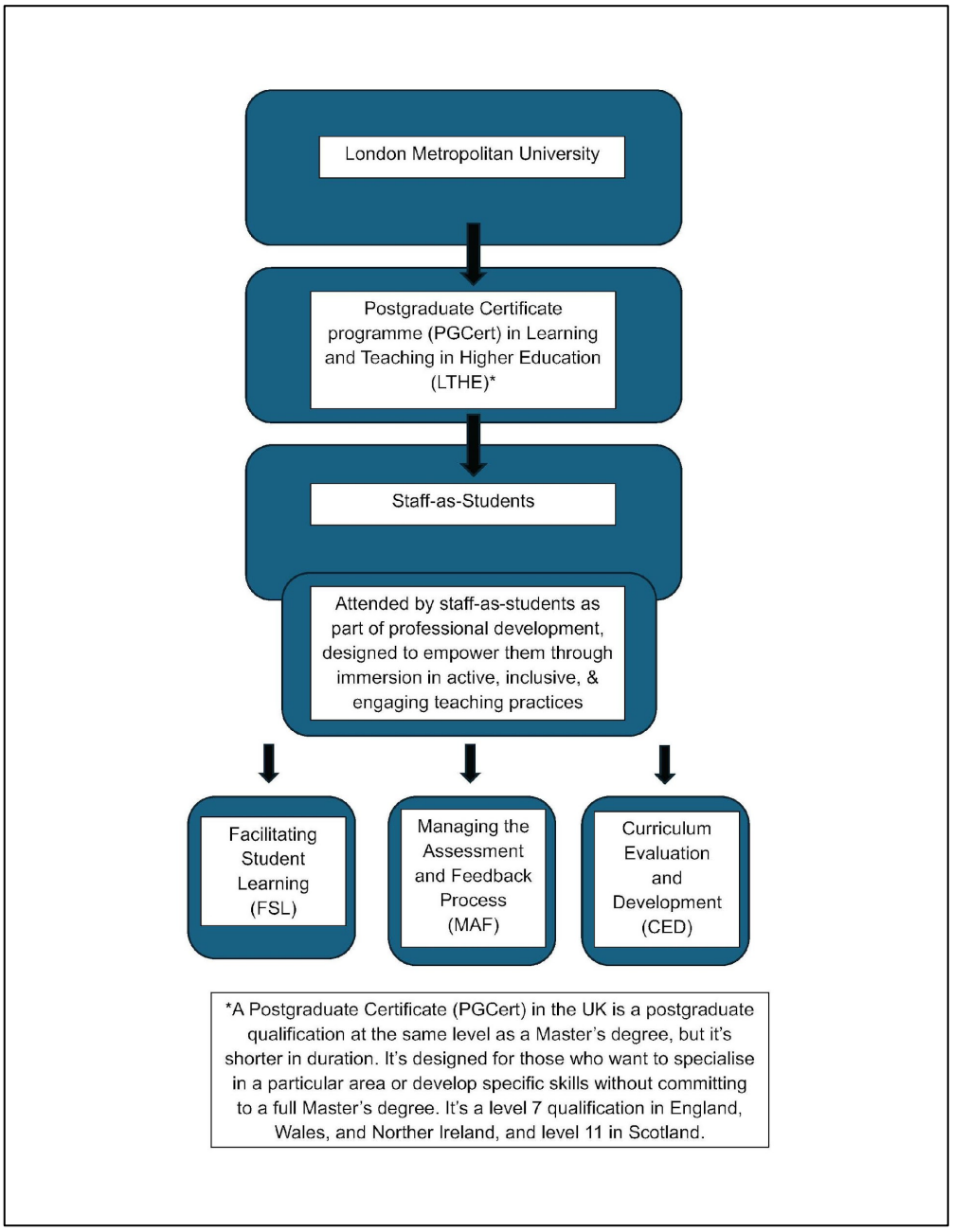

Diagram 01: PGCert Overview (graphic created by authors)

To initiate this writing adventure, we shared the Call for Papers with our participants and asked for volunteers to contribute to a co-written paper on student voice from the viewpoint of PGCert participants. "Together, we will highlight the ways in which pedagogic practice can be developed, enhanced and refined through an immersive PGCert LTHE predicated on active learning, agency, voice and reflection… We invite you to write a short, 500 words max, personal vignette for inclusion in our co-authored article, that highlights how you:

1. Find your voice as a student/student-as-lecturer in the PGCert programme, and/or
2. How you support your own students to find their voice - including some practical classroom examples (which could refer to key PGCert moments)."

By interweaving vignettes from PGCert participants, connecting concrete examples to broader pedagogical theory, the paper demonstrates how playful and liberatory practices in staff development

spaces can nurture empowered, participatory classrooms across an institution. We argue that whilst student voice should focus on students, it needs to be scaffolded with academics, particularly those new to the UK HE context who may need extra courage to take that leap into more experiential and creative TLA practices. The paper contributes to the discourse on professional development in HE by advocating for embodied, empirically judged liberatory practices that foster sustainable and transformative student voice.

2 STORY AS METHOD

We deliberately adopted a creative methodological stance as a research approach to reflect the openness, dialogic engagement, and interpretive freedom that underpin the pedagogical philosophy of our PGCert. Our approach draws on traditions of arts based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which support aesthetic and affective dimensions of experience as legitimate forms of knowledge. These traditions resist reductionist tendencies in educational research, which emphasise control, predictability and generalisability. These risk oversimplifying the messy business of education, which is inherently complex and situated. We wanted to embrace ambiguity and multiplicity as generative spaces for reflection and transformation. In this spirit, we invited staff-as-student participants in the PGCert to contribute vignettes - short, evocative texts that capture moments of teaching and learning from their perspective.

Thus, the adopted method is not an add-on, it is integral to the PGCert's design. It enacts the programme's commitment to fostering student voice by first cultivating voice within teachers. Through the creation and sharing of vignettes, our participants experience what it means to articulate and share voice collaboratively. In doing so, the method performs the very openness and dialogic engagement that the PGCert seeks to embed in educational practice.

The vignettes are deliberately presented without explanatory framing or authorial interpretation. They are not presented as data to be analysed or categorised, rather they are offered as personal experiential artefacts: provocations that invite readers into a process of meaning-making and reflection - creating a condition where voice is not only heard but actively engaged with.

Vignettes

Vignettes are an acknowledged form of research (Agostini et al, 2024). They can be various in form and typically constitute concise accounts or narratives to illustrate particular experiences, events, or perspectives. In practice, in this paper, we are harnessing the methods of collaborative autoethnography (Gillaspy et al. 2022; Lapadat 2017), the case study (Stake 1995) and bricolage (Wheeler 2018) to gain creative insights into the experiences of our own staff-as-students. That is, we offer vignettes that our PGCert participants have produced on the topic of student voice and that have now become part of our reflective exploration of our own practice.

Hence there is a broad range of responses to the challenge, and a similarly diverse set of interpretations of the brief with respect to their own practices Obviously this is not a neutral process and typically staff who were positively influenced by the PGCert would have been the ones to respond to this invitation. However, we believe this offers insights into the potential of liberatory staff

development practice as embodied in and enacted by our own PGCert to raise awareness of the importance of student agency and voice.

This collaborative process is intrinsically ethical as all authors are volunteers, responding to the call for papers, and to a request for participants to engage in this reflective process. We see this also as a way of mentoring our staff-as-students into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and increasing the range and scope of their own voices in the babel of academia. Of course this form of 'insider research' is neither neutral nor objective, rather we consciously centre our positionality and subjectivity, arguing that it brings deep knowledge and grounded evidence to our argumentation - whilst opening our words up to further enquiry and analysis (viz. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - Richardson 2000; Richardson & St Pierre 2005). The vignettes constitute individual voices, woven together to form a collective narrative - something new that transcends each singular experience: collaborative co-authorship (Abegglen et al. 2022; Burns et al. 2023; Jandrić et al. 2023), with every contribution valuable - with every voice counting.

3 THE PLAYFUL PGCERT

Typically, our University's staff and students arrive from either non-traditional and/or transactional education systems (London Metropolitan University, 2025). The students from the UK are often the first in their families to enter HE, arriving with low self-confidence and little awareness of the sorts of academic labour in which they will have to engage. Our international students, too, often feel like outsiders, unfamiliar with the forms and processes of UK HE. Similarly, our staff may also be very new to HE teaching, international themselves, or entering from industry, and thus tend to feel slightly on the margins of what it is possible to do with students to enact education as the practice of freedom (hooks, 1994). Many 'confess' that they entered with stereotypical notions that to be an HE academic means to lecture - to be the 'sage on the stage' transmitting knowledge rather than the 'guide on the side', igniting a desire to actively learn. Our task as staff developers is to enable our academics to become liberatory educationists capable of facilitating 'voice' and significant learning in all our students. In order to travel that road, we do not teach 'about' the power of creative, arts-based and ludic practice to transformTLA in emancipatory ways - we teach our staff by immersing them in the very processes that we hope they interrogate and adapt to make space for and enable voice in their own students (see also McIntosh, 2010; McIntosh, 2007).

We de-school (Illich, 1972) and un-school (Holt, 1976) staff so that together with their students they can find their voices as they critique and interrogate the system that they are entering - to make it more welcoming and accommodating - and also more joyful. Across the PGCert, we use creative and ludic practices (Abegglen et al , 2023; James & Neranzti, 2019) to deepen the learning experiences of our staff learners, to make space for them to think, see and be, differently - and to increase the repertoire of active and engaging TLA strategies that they can utilise in their own practices to make space for students to become academic on their own terms (Sinfield et al., 2019), speaking in their own voices. Typically, all our participants have multiple responsibilities, and, like their students, they are time poor and under constant pressure - but we find they are willing to explore their practice through the dialogic space that our course creates. We "make strange" (Shklovsky, 1990) taken-for-granted notions of education, moving staff to a place of "safe uncertainty" (Mason, 1993) - using playful exploration, creativity and collaboration as a catalyst for 'action' (Freire, 2000). We want our

participants to engage critically, mindfully and reflectively with our programme using it as a lens to interrogate their own ways of 'doing' and become their own academic selves, determined in turn to develop voice and agency within their own curriculum spaces.

We harness collage, making, drawing, poetry, role play, discussion, bricolage, image-, topic- and scenario-mediated dialogue - to explore education praxes and to reimagine education more inclusively and powerfully. We incorporate reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and reflective writing (Elbow 1998) with our staff-as-students as they develop their emergent teaching selves. Our staff-as-students undertake unfamiliar and challenging multimodal tasks to investigate assessment as and for learning and feedback as dialogic practice. All our staff learners are encouraged to keep and share their own learning logs, blogs and/or vlogs - to "learn out loud" (Jarche, 2014), together - to engage with their own learning and teaching practice and with that of their peers. These opportunities for dialogic reflection and meta-reflection feed into the design or redesign of modules and courses as a way of bringing together and realising all that they have explored across the PGCert as a whole. As such, they form part of the participants' professional development as they take ownership of who they are, what they know, and the practical and theoretical perspectives they are encountering - and developing. They are heard not least so their own students' voices are liberated.

OUR STUDENTS VOICES: THE VIGNETTE In the following we let our staff-as-students 'speak.' To introduce or explain each vignette would be to foreclose or limit the reader's engagement with the text (viz. Derrida's [1976] notion of 'difference'). We do not want to impose an authorial, authoritative and singular reading - but instead to open a space for dialogue and engagement. By refusing closure, we position the reader as a co-creator of meaning, echoing our PGCert's traditions that value relational knowing, criticality and reflexivity (Freire, 2000).

3.1 Rudhara Gurung - It works but those boundaries…..!

In a freezing December class, I am excited to experiment with those thought-provoking pedagogical strategies I learnt as staff-student in the FSL (Facilitating Student Learning) module of the PGCert. Students seem intrigued, as I say, providing colour markers and blank sheets to groups, "Please, draw your perspectives here based on your life experiences on this topic…". I added options for inclusivity and creativity, "If you think you would be better expressing in other ways, like lyrical composition, story-writing, poetry and any other forms of artistry, please go ahead with that''. And note, "We don't judge at all, any version is a good version here''.

Their sheer curiosity and palpable positive energy were all I could feel. To be precise, I had never seen that degree of creative noise, playfulness, active participation and engagement in my seminars before. With those chirps and laughter, they were discussing, clarifying, revisiting their Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and also inquiring with me. I could witness those individual views being merged, questioned, validated, and blended to their final 'takeaways', which demonstrated their academic rigor, elided and collided with their personal narratives. They were active participants, learning out loud; being creative and dialogic. Outcomes were amazing sketches, critical mind-mapping, to theories painted with some 'sarcasm' and 'criticism' of workplace and life experiences, eventually giving birth to a meaningful living artefact at the end.

“Mesmerising discovery, isn't it?” It certainly was way more than ‘just a task’ for both tutor and students: engagement led to the deep learning required for co-owning relevant knowledge claims. That would be a distant possibility otherwise, and not something that could have been constructed alone. This provoked me to reassess, reengineer and align my conscious Learning and Teaching strategies, in the fashion of creative active student agency.

“We want more activities like this!’’ a student says at the door, waving goodbye. This left me contemplating deeply whether and how those rigid systemic boundaries of institutions designed for quality and standardization can accommodate a myriad of creative voices and devices like this for the required enriched learning experience in our praxis?

3.2 Jade Benn - The container of not enoughness

Imagine how important I believed my work would be when I secured a role at a widening participation institution - a land of learners, all reflections of past versions of myself, all opportunities to do my own education over again. Properly.

As a Learning Developer (LDer), I believed my role was to prepare students for HE, which through my lens, or frame of reference, meant making learners ‘appropriate’. I believed they, like I, required ‘fixing’ to become something more suitable for the higher learning environment. I didn’t know that I was continuing a pedagogic legacy of learners-as-containers, carrying and performing transmissions (Freire, 2000).

Ever-ready to continue learning (or perhaps ‘fixing’ myself), imagine my surprise to find the PGCert course would be far more about questioning, reflecting and exploring. An incidental unlearning. The very first module challenged me, for the first time in all of the education I’d experienced, to bring myself into the classroom. The challenge was not in ‘smarting-myself-up’ sufficiently to overcome my own condition, and go on to do this for learners like me; it was realising a latent belief in my own ‘not-enoughness’, and that I had unconsciously supported that belief in other learners.

While not my intention, seeing learners as reflections of myself and aiming to equip them with tools to adapt and survive the fixed nature of both HE and the big wide world would only allow it to persist as it was. It became clear my task was to critically reflect on the possibility that HE (or education on the whole) needed to change and become more accommodating (hooks, 1994).

My understanding of my practice has been transformed with encouragement from the PGCert. I seek to use LD as a means to nurture self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence in students - the competencies the course nurtured in me. Supercomplexity invites us to look around ourselves with a deeper degree of criticality, however, the social divisiveness of HE can trick us into relinquishing our agency to commit to a ‘right’ way of being. As my previous approach questioned “how can I fit/students fit”, my renewed approach questions the very structure I sought to align with. I recognise equipping students to ask questions in preparation for a supercomplex world is tantamount both for their time in HE and their futures (Abegglen et al , 2020). They need to be able to speak out - and be heard.

3.3 Gulzhan Rysbekova – Unlocking Imagination…

Teaching Strategy often risks remaining tethered to abstract frameworks disconnected from the lived experiences of students. However, like many of the dialogic and immersive practices studied throughout the PGCert programme, the use of image-mediated dialogue (viz. Palus & Drath, 2001) can serve as an effective vehicle for students to articulate and co-construct their own understandings.

In one session, I asked my MBA cohort - diverse in cultural and professional backgrounds - to choose an image that, in their view, embodied the notion of strategy. What unfolded was a deeply generative and emotionally resonant learning encounter. One student selected an image of a scattered puzzle, expressing a mindset of sufficiency rather than scarcity: "I have everything I need," she remarked before reflecting that all she needed was time to fit the pieces together, a process both necessary and enjoyable. Another student was drawn to a serene seascape, suggesting that strategic clarity, when achieved, evokes peace of mind. A vibrant pyramid construction was interpreted as a metaphor for the coherent logic underpinning any successful strategy. One student saw rich symbolism that spoke to their cultural identity, while another, inspired by an image of colourful eggs, referenced an innovative business idea they preferred to keep confidential due to its commercial relevance.

These insights were profoundly revealing to me. They surfaced the emotional, intuitive, and tacit dimensions of learning and of my students - elements often overlooked or silenced by conventional pedagogies. This activity, rooted in student voice, demonstrated how meaning is not merely received but constructed at the intersection of experience, imagination and reflection.

Crucially, this exercise represents just one of many creative methods I have drawn from the PGCert. Others include the role-play simulation *Apocalypse Now*, the spiral reflective activity, collaborative writing that scaffolds reading and fosters peer-to-peer learning and many others. Each technique has helped reposition my classroom as a dialogic space where students are co-authors of meanings, reflecting a broader pedagogical shift - from a mode of passive transmission to active transformation.

3.4 Mona R.S. Abdelgayed- Integrating Student Voice into Curriculum

My engagement with the PGCert programme provided a valuable opportunity to experience the learning process from a student's perspective, thereby enhancing my understanding of learners' needs and expectations. Simultaneously, the programme supported my development through an iterative, reflective learning approach. This included observing and critically engaging with playful, evidence-informed teaching practices, applying them in my context, evaluating their effectiveness, and making strategic refinements based on observed outcomes. This cyclical process has been instrumental in advancing my professional practice and deepening my pedagogical understanding.

A key insight gained from the programme, particularly through the exploration of diverse teaching strategies and active learning techniques, was the significance of incorporating student voice in the curriculum development. Rather than relying solely on a traditional teacher-centred approach, I have come to value the co-construction of learning experiences, where students are meaningfully involved in shaping the curriculum, contributing to the design of learning materials and assessments. This learner-inclusive perspective fosters greater engagement, inclusivity, and relevance in the educational experience.

Accordingly, in my practice, I actively incorporate students' voices by regularly seeking their input on preferred learning approaches, tools, and support needs. A variety of inclusive activities have been

created for students to provide them with space to actively engage, reflect critically while also fostering their learning. For example, peer review exercises are integrated into practical sessions, where students are grouped to evaluate one another's work in relation to lesson content and assessment tasks; continuous follow-up through dialogic discussions and real-time feedback via Mentimeter Surveys. In response, support sessions linked to assessment were added to the module (course) curriculum to offer interventions tailored to each student's needs and to guide students back on track and promote academic success. This inclusive approach, combined with varied teaching strategies, helps uncover hidden needs and ensures a more responsive and effective learning environment that facilitates student voice.

To be continued…

3.5 Helen Tennison - Role Play for Essay Writing

For students studying theatre, academic writing is often met with feelings of overwhelm. The experience of immersive, lecturer-as-student learning on the PGCert prompted a re-framing of this challenge.

Inspired by studying active learning and the importance of heteroglossic learning environments, I developed a role-play for my Level 5 theatre students. It aims to facilitate exploration and clarification of the student's ideas whilst building their self-efficacy and enthusiasm for writing. The scenario draws on concepts from Augusto Boal's (1993) 'Theatre of the Oppressed', as derived from Paulo Freire's pedagogy.

Students work in groups of three, each playing one of the following roles: Judge, Defendant or Lawyer. The Defendant puts forward their case in the form of their proposed answer to the essay question. The buffoonish Judge proceeds to demand evidence and clarification on all points. The Lawyer has a copy of the set text and access to key research materials. At any time, the Defendant can call on the Lawyer for support in responding to the Judge's demands. Following the role-play, there is time for peer-to-peer feedback and free writing before switching roles.

Before starting the exercise, I asked my class to describe how they felt about the essay; responses included, terrified, confused, anxious and unsure, with just one student feeling confident. The moment we started, the energy, excitement and playfulness in the room soared. I noticed that the role-play wasn't just benefiting the Defendant; the Judge was engaged in critical thinking, and by researching for their peers, the Lawyers were expanding their subject knowledge.

In the discussion that followed, I was excited by how engaged the students were. I found I could address questions and misunderstandings I might otherwise have been unaware of. One student wrote that they felt "nervous-still, but-sure-about-exploration, inspired-to-understand", and one said the exercise, "helped me think about how I will support my choices". All students reported improved confidence and understanding, perhaps best summed up by one who, when asked how they felt about their essay, wrote, "Holy Shit - a little better now".

3.6 Fidelis Ejike-Ume - Development of Students' Success Through Dialogic Feedback

The traditional mode of providing feedback to students tends to stifle growth rather than forging a progressive pathway for future development. This is because feedback is sometimes structured as

command-prompts rather than an invitation to dialogue. For example, when enquiring from the students what they thought about feedback, many were less enthusiastic. Some claimed that they often ignore feedback when they do not understand the message of the lecturer. They also feel that some lecturers overanalyse their work, making them reluctant to seek clarifications because they are shy, and fear being considered incompetent. Rather, they prefer that feedback be more personalised and point-specific, referring to the exact place within the work that requires improvement, more than general comments. This is because complicated comments are often not directly actionable or usable (Li & De Luca, 2014; Orrell, 2006; Walker, 2009).

Interestingly, students would willingly seek feedback before the submission of assessments, but once the results are released, they often do not bother to access the feedforward post submission. Meaning that a lot of the students are not concerned with using feedback as a source of future development, but simply as an opportunity to score higher grades. So, instead of 'feedback as a process, they want assessment as a process'. Likewise, students who score higher marks tend to ignore their feedback than those who may have scored lower. This supports the belief that students have been moulded to become grade-focused rather than utilising feedback as an opportunity for course correction to improve. In their defence, students perceive that feedback often comes too late to be useful and provides insufficient opportunities for comments to be acted upon (Carless, 2016; Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001).

The institutional challenges that many lecturers face that may prevent them from providing effective feedback, however, consist of large class sizes (Evans, 2013), lack of time and resources, and the need to prioritise research (Carless, 2016). Notwithstanding, tutors must endeavour to integrate regular cycles of guidance and feedback into the course schedule, clearly defining goals, expectations and standards (Hounsell et al , 2008).

Prompted to think very differently about teaching and learning, and of assessment and feedback as an integral part of the learning journey, in my practice I have created a meaningful learning environment to support my students' development through active engagement and capturing their voices to co-create the teaching experience collaboratively, as we continually reflect on our experiences in class. Thus, leveraging the cognitive-constructivism theory, I now scaffold the learning process to suit their individual needs - and allow more space and time for their inputs.

3.7 Matthew J. Fisher and Katherine R. Fisher - Integrating Reflective Practices into Programming Courses

Inspired by our PGCert experiences, we designed an introduction to programming module for our Chemistry & Pharmaceutical Science students. While designing, we were conscious of the challenges we would face from Generative AI (as most introductory level programming tasks can be accurately addressed by current GenAI models), but we wanted to be able to authentically assess our students, while providing a meaningful learning environment. We decided on two assessments, the first being a 'conventional' summative final project, and the second being a reflective portfolio, with students submitting their weekly coding assignments, along with a weekly reflection, and a meta-reflection from the end of the course. We had been exposed to the notion of reflection through the PGCert course, and we also believe this prevents students' work from being wasted (Davies, 2015), which can be highly demoralising, and is at the heart of Angelo's principles (Angelo, 1993).

Since reflection-heavy practices are rare in Chemical Education, we provided students with a chance to gain feedback prior to submission. Taking another idea from the PGCert course, we utilized a formative 360-degree marking process for these portfolios: students marked themselves, before peers and lecturers provided marks and comments. For the two years we have run this course, we have had full engagement with this process, and students have commented that, while initially nerve-racking, the process ends up being empowering as they often find that they mark more critically (and at a lower grade) than their peers and lecturers grade them at (with the peer/lecturer marks in greater agreement than the peer/student marks).

The PGCert course has been inspiring, introducing us to various methodologies and prompting reflection on our practice to foster student agency and voice. Our experience is best summarized by Dewey's (1933, p. 78) infamous quote: "We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience".

3.8 Mohammed Alaqad - Enhancing Inclusive Teaching Practice Through Learning Journals

Standing in front of a group of master's students, individuals who have chosen to invest their time, energy, and finances in gaining new knowledge, enhancing their employability, and obtaining a higher qualification, is a tremendous responsibility. Being a lecturer is not simply a salaried role; it carries a deeper, ongoing commitment to improving the quality of learning and to cultivating an environment where all students can thrive.

Last semester, I had the privilege of teaching the largest cohort we have ever welcomed in a single module: over 90 home and international students. What made this experience particularly rewarding was the remarkable diversity of the group. Students came from a wide range of academic backgrounds and were enrolled in different master's courses. They represented various genders, age groups, and nationalities, including regions such as Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

This diversity offers a valuable opportunity for rich and dynamic learning. However, it also demands intentional, inclusive, and innovative teaching practices to ensure a high level of engagement. My engagement with the PGCert modules provided me with both the theoretical foundation and the confidence to meet this challenge directly.

During one of the lectures, I introduced a participatory learning journal activity. Students were invited to co-create the learning environment by contributing one PowerPoint slide on a topic relevant to the session. They then had the opportunity to briefly present their content in class. This strategy served several purposes: it amplified student voices, built confidence, promoted peer-to-peer learning, and fostered a sense of ownership in the learning process. It also supported formative assessment through observation and peer feedback practices, as advocated by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), who emphasise the value of student-generated content and self-regulated learning in effective feedback.

This was the second time I had implemented this method, having first adopted it during my completion of the initial PGCert module. This cohort also had the opportunity to view examples of slides created by previous students, as I had committed to incorporating those contributions into my teaching materials.

Importantly, this inclusive and participatory approach not only enhanced the classroom experience but also aligned with students' personal and professional goals. Many are strategically planning their

next career steps, whether seeking employment or aiming for advancement. Activities that develop public speaking, presentation, and collaboration skills are particularly valued by employers. By embedding these experiences into the curriculum, I aim to ensure that students graduate not only with academic knowledge but also with the practical, transferable skills and confidence required to excel in the workplace.

4 A DISCURSIVE CONCLUSION

Vignette construction, collection and presentation is gaining currency and international recognition as a research method (Agostini et al, 2024). For us, vignettes provided a way to both capture and demonstrate the richness and diversity of our staff participants' experiences and actions within and emerging from our playful and liberatory PGCert. Co-constructing a text, this text, with our students, working with their diverse voices and disciplinary contexts, makes this particularly suited to a piece on student voice. Together we, the staff and staff-as-student authors are co-researchers, individually and collectively drawing on lived experiences to offer an embodied sense of what happened (Davies & Gannon 2006) - and what emerged from that happening. The result is a rich assemblage of experiences designed to initiate deep conversations about what is needed at the staff development level to make student voice a reality in contemporary HE.

As we draw this paper to a close, we remain committed to resisting closure. The vignettes offered are not conclusions in themselves, nor are they presented with definitive explanations or interpretations. Rather, they are fragments, textual moments that invite the reader into a space of reflection, resonance and response. To explain or frame each vignette would be to foreclose the very interpretive openness we seek to cultivate - in our PGCert and in this reflective paper: they would corral, contain and restrain our students' voices.

Instead, we offer these vignettes as provocations - sites of possibility where meaning emerges in the interplay between text and reader. We acknowledge that our own authorial voice is present, we cannot help but be present, but we seek not to dominate the interpretive field. In the spirit of dialogic scholarship, we invite readers to linger with the ambiguity, to read between the lines, and to bring their own understandings to bear. This paper, then, is not a finished narrative, but an opening, a space in which to continue thinking, questioning, and conversing beyond its final sentence.

Similarly, the PGCert offered to our diverse staff was designed to operate as a third space, flexible and porous (Bhabha 1994, Gutiérrez, 2008 and also Abegglen et al , 2025), immersing participants in liberatory pedagogy in embodied, active and reflective ways. Through 'jamming' with playful and creative activities (Abegglen et al , 2025): making-, drawing- and writing to learn and image-, scenario- and topic mediated dialogue in the initial module, *Facilitating Student Learning*; project-led and peer-to-peer learning, co-developing assessment criteria and implementing 360-degree assessment and feedback on our *Managing the Assessment and Feedback Process* module; and designing and delivering peer-to-peer teaching and peer review of work in progress, within the *Curriculum Evaluation and Design* module, participants experienced first-hand the potential of student voice. As illustrated in the very diversity of the vignettes, this immersive engagement enables our staff-as-students to critically interpret and reimagine these practices within their own classrooms, to nurture student voice in liberatory, joyful practice.

The vignettes - ranging in scope from focussed 'miniatures' to broad-brush landscapes - illustrate how our participants utilise their PGCert experiences to release, harness, and amplify student action, agency and voice in their diverse disciplinary contexts. We see staff fostering inclusive and collaborative learning environments by being playful and lyrical. We hear about them changing their own focus and seeing neither themselves nor their students as 'deficit'. We delight in the use of creative and visual methods to foster deep and 'owned' learning. Some of our participants have developed inclusive teaching and assessment journeys to empower their students - with role play to liberate writing voices. We see students encouraged to speak up and build a teaching session and the introduction of trust and experimental reflection and meta-reflection in the STEM disciplines. Connecting these concrete examples to broader pedagogical theory and practice, the paper demonstrates how immersing educators in playful and liberatory practices can nurture empowered, participatory classrooms. If we want to seed and amplify student voice, we need to scaffold this with academics - especially with lecturers new to the UK HE context, who may believe that their role 'should' involve didactic teaching, transmitting 'knowledge' to passive students in the lecture theatre.

With Winnicott (1971) we argue that it is in play and only through play that our staff - and their students - will be fiercely themselves, fiercely learning. Play (viz. Abegglen et al., 2023; James & Neranzti, 2019), is not 'dumbed down' teaching but rather provokes the 'serious business' of real, engaged and authentic learning (Parr, 2014). Play gives our staff-as-students the freedom to experiment, to question, to engage - and to accept uncertainty: important in these lean, mean and supercomplex times (Abegglen et al., 2020; Giroux, 2014) where the present is uncertain and the future even more so. The transmitting of content - or fixed 'forms of knowledge' (Hirst, 1974) - and the developing of 'traditional' skills are no longer sufficient, if they ever were. What is essential - and what our participants experience across our PGCert - are methods that enable students to evolve and transform as they co-construct their knowledge in ludic ways (Sinfield et al,. 2019; Barnett, 2025). Staff development requires an epistemological shift: the integration of theory and practice (Bernstein, 2001) through active, creative learning. This calls for a PGCert that is itself a paradigm shift in motion - one that makes space for staff participants to engage fully: as students, as staff-as-students, as staff. Such a programme enables them to learn in embodied, cognitive, and affective ways how to cultivate student voice, foster meaningful action, and support agency.

With this argument, the paper contributes to the discourse on professional development in HE: if liberatory practice is to be fostered in our staff, if student voice is to be valued, heard, felt and liberated, it must be experienced also by staff-as-students in embodied ways, judged empirically by results, becoming effective and sustainable in participants' own praxis within and across the disciplines. This, in turn, can enable sustainable and transformative 'student voice' through methods that engage and liberate students and that become infused with deeper care and insight when modelled across programmes and courses and adapted by staff for their own contexts - in joyful and playful ways.

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