Special Issue

Reimagined Futures: Interpreting Pedagogy through the Student Voice in Higher Education

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EDITORIAL

This Special Edition of JEICOM aims to extend and contribute to our understanding of the engagement with the student voice in higher education. It brings together a collection of papers that evidence the editors' shared commitment to student voice, partnership, and agency in higher education. Under the theme Reimagined Futures: Interpreting Pedagogy through the Student Voice in Higher Education, the contributions explore how pedagogic practice can be developed, enriched, and reimagined when students are positioned not as passive recipients of knowledge, but as partners, co-creators, and collaborators in learning, teaching, and research.

Informed by Plato's dialogue in Meno, evidence that learning can be achieved through active participation, recollection and dialogue, the intention is to offer a democratic framing of educational spaces, reimagining futures through the acknowledgment of the importance of the dialogical (Plato, 1997, Wegerif, (2019). In this Special Edition we seek to adopt a democratic conception of education in which knowledge is generated dialogically and relationally. Whilst acknowledging inspiration can be drawn from Meno, an ancient text may appear traditional as the Socratic method is not new as a pedagogic practice, the current education environment presents us with new challenges. Wegerif (2019) contends that it is driving a shift in pedagogic practice in an

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age when reliance on electronic communication is expected. The focus on and inclusion of the student voice is innovative in its deliberate shift away from didactic transmission models towards pedagogies grounded in reciprocity, mutuality, and shared agency. Across the papers, students and educators are positioned as co-participants in meaning-making, curriculum design, assessment, and inquiry. In this way, the Special Edition responds to contemporary calls for higher education to foreground pedagogy as a site of ethical, relational, and future-oriented practice (Barnett, 2022, 2025; Nixon, 2012). In arguing for the primacy of the student voice, the authors promote a need for recognition of modes of understanding that develop the mutuality and reciprocity of human agency. Bamford (2020) has also recognized the importance of mutuality in the international spaces offered by transnational education. It is the potential of mutuality in all higher education spaces that is promoted and channeled through the various examples of the incorporation of the student voice provided in this Special Edition.

To frame and connect the contributions, we adopt an autoethnographic editorial stance (Starr, 2010). This approach allows us to situate the collection within our own professional journeys as educators and researchers working across different national, disciplinary, and institutional contexts. Our collective experiences have shaped a shared conviction: that authentic engagement with student voice is not an optional enhancement to pedagogic practice, but a necessary condition for equitable, meaningful, and transformative higher education to enable graduates to become self-regulated lifelong learners.

1 THE EDITORS CONVERGING COMMITMENTS TO THE STUDENT VOICE

1.1 Jan Bamford

Over her thirty-five years in higher education, Jan Bamford's engagement with the student voice has been shaped by a sustained concern with how students experience higher education as a lived reality, relational, and identity-forming space. Across her career, her teaching and research have been grounded in close attention to students' narratives of belonging, transition, and participation, particularly within UK and international contexts. An international perspective of the importance of understanding the student voice began as early as 2002 (Bamford, 2002, 2003, 2004, Bamford et al, 2006). Early work foregrounded the importance of listening to student stories as a means of understanding how institutional structures, pedagogic practices, and cultural expectations intersect in students' everyday academic lives (Bamford & Pollard, 2018, 2019).

This attention to lived experience of students, led to conceptualising pedagogy as a relational and dialogic practice, one that requires educators to consider not only the curriculum and assessment aspects of the educational space, but just as importantly, the affective and cultural dimensions of learning. Her research in transnational and joint degree contexts further reinforced the importance of mutuality, as students navigating multiple educational systems often articulated feelings of dislocation, invisibility, or marginalisation (Bamford, 2020). In response, her pedagogic approach

increasingly sought to create learning spaces that were dialogic, inclusive, and responsive to student voice.

More recently, Jan's work has moved beyond listening *to* students towards working *with* students as partners, co-researchers, and co-creators. Through participatory research and co-design initiatives—particularly in gamified digitally mediated and informal learning spaces—students have been actively involved in shaping pedagogic interventions and research questions (Bamford et al., 2022; Bamford & Moschini, 2024, 2025). These projects highlighted how partnership can foster agency, confidence, and a sense of shared ownership over learning environments and knowledge acquisition.

Across these contexts, Jan's work positions pedagogy as an agentic and cosmopolitan endeavour, capable of fostering ethical engagement, reciprocity, and belonging. This commitment to mutuality—between students and staff, and across institutional structures—provided a key impetus for curating this Special Edition as a space to showcase diverse enactments of student voice, partnership, and relational pedagogy.

1.2 Elena Moschini

Elena Moschini's research trajectory has been driven by a sustained commitment to democratizing digital education and challenging hierarchical assumptions about expertise, authorship, and control in learning design. Her early work explored the pedagogic potential of virtual worlds and game-based learning, not simply as novel technologies, but as environments in which students could experiment, collaborate, and construct meaning in ways that traditional classrooms often constrained (Moschini, 2008, 2010).

Situated within the Participatory Design tradition, Elena's scholarship positions students as active contributors to the conception, design, and evaluation of digital learning environments. Participatory Design, originating in Scandinavian workplace democracy movements, resonated strongly with her pedagogic values, particularly its emphasis on equity, shared decision-making, and end-user empowerment. In educational contexts, this translated into design processes where students were not treated as informants or testers, but as co-designers whose insights, creativity, and lived experiences shaped the learning tools they would ultimately use. Through projects involving gamified learning, simulations, virtual environments, and more recently AI-enhanced pedagogies, Elena has demonstrated how participatory approaches can transform students' relationships to educational technologies—from consumers of pre-designed systems to agents who actively shape their learning conditions (Bamford & Moschini, 2024, 2025). These projects revealed that co-design processes can foster confidence, professional identity development, and a sense of belonging, particularly when students see their contributions materially embedded in learning artefacts.

Elena's work thus exemplifies an expanded conception of student voice: one enacted through design practice, experimentation, and shared responsibility. Her contributions to this Special

Edition reflect a belief that digital pedagogy, when grounded in participation and partnership, can become a powerful site for relational learning, agency, and pedagogic innovation.

For Elena Moschini and Jan Bamford the journey into the discovery of participatory practices has involved various approaches to the inclusion of the student voice, culminating in inclusion of students as co-researchers on a university wide project to develop gamified digital tools as well engaging students to develop gamified digital tools for fans of a Premier League football club in more recent years, (Bamford, Moschini and Tschirhart, 2022, Bamford and Moschini 2024, 2025). The work of Bamford and Moschini might be viewed as being at the far end of the spectrum that incorporates the student voice into educational spaces. We witness all aspects of this spectrum when considering the field of appropriate literature, ranging from the established Students as Partners literature to the participatory design and research literature.

1.3 Sophie Karanicolas

Sophie Karanicolas brings to this Special Edition nearly four decades of experience across higher and vocational education, during which her pedagogic identity has been shaped by a deep and sustained commitment to student engagement, agency, underpinned by a pedagogy of care (Hoffman & Stake, 1998) in all learning and teaching contexts. The mutuality of her teaching practice was inspired by Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed that viewed education as a practice of freedom, dialogics and dialogue. Her early teaching in the 1980s was informed by active and socially mediated learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978), where learning was understood as inherently relational and co-constructed rather than transmitted. In these early face-to-face environments, she observed that students' willingness to take intellectual risks, engage critically, and develop confidence was inseparable from the quality of the interpersonal relationships fostered in the classroom.

Over time, this relational orientation evolved alongside changes in educational contexts and technologies. Sophie was an early adopter of student-centred and peer-based learning approaches, including Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) and Team-Based Learning (TBL), which redistributed authority within the classroom and positioned students as contributors to one another's learning rather than competitors for grades or approval. The later integration of technology-enhanced learning and flipped classroom models did not replace this relational focus; rather, technology became a means of extending dialogue, preparation, mutuality and participation beyond the physical classroom (Karanicolas et al., 2011; Karanicolas et al., 2018).

Central to this evolution, a pedagogy of care was enacted and fostered through relational ethics, emotional intelligence, and the validation of students lived experiences (Hoffmann & Stake, 1998). Care, in this sense, is not understood as pastoralism alone, but as a pedagogic stance that recognised and addressed power imbalances, attended to student voice, and deliberately created conditions of psychological safety where students exercised agency. Sophie's practice consistently foregrounded trust, ethical responsibility, and attentiveness to students' social, cultural, and emotional contexts as prerequisites for meaningful learning.

In more recent years, this pedagogy of care had aligned naturally with Students as Partners frameworks (Healey et al., 2014), in which students actively participate in higher-order aspects of curriculum design, assessment, and evaluation. Design thinking frameworks further provided a human-centred scaffold for these partnership practices, supporting empathetic listening, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective decision-making (Plattner et al., 2015; Snelling et al., 2019). From this perspective, student voice is not an outcome to be measured, but an ongoing relational practice—cultivated through care, dialogue, and shared responsibility—to underpin equitable and transformative learning environments.

1.4 Students as Partners and participatory pedagogies

The papers in the collection evidence that the incorporation of the student voice is central to our understanding of university encounters for students (SaP). One approach to incorporating the students' voice is through the Students as Partners discourse. Across literature, Students as Partners (SaP) has emerged as a dominant framework for conceptualizing student voice in higher education (Healey et al., 2014). Healey et al (2014) provide a conceptual frame for teaching approaches that focus on SaP. SaP challenges entrenched power hierarchies by advocating for reciprocal, respectful, and collaborative relationships between students and staff. Whilst many universities have created space for student participation, the value of the student voice is not always given sufficient attention within an institution (Matthews and Dollinger, 2023). The meaningful enactment of the student voice often remains uneven and marginalized leaving educators viewing their inclusion of SaP activities as innovative and cutting edge despite the literature evidencing activities in this field for over twenty years.

The papers in this Special Edition demonstrate that partnership is particularly significant for students from non-traditional and culturally diverse backgrounds, for whom relationality and recognition are critical to belonging and success (Cook-Sather & Seay, 2021; Eboka, 2019). Participatory research, co-created curricula, and collaborative assessment practices emerge as powerful mechanisms for redistributing agency and reconfiguring pedagogic power relations.

Participatory Design further extends this discourse by embedding student voice within the material and technological conditions of learning. In more recent years we witness the student voice discourse extending into a more embedded and collaboratory ethos to the educational space. Bamford and Moschini (2024, 2025) have exemplified this in their recent research, which engaged students as co-designers and co-researchers in a gamified intervention project. The co-design aspect of the project fostered students' confidence, allowed for recognition of their skills development and enhanced students' agency.

Originating in Scandinavian workplace democracy movements, Participatory Design (PD) is founded on principles of equity, collaboration and end-user empowerment (Clement and Pipek, 2013). Participatory Design key tenets resonate with constructivist, student-centred pedagogies where the students' role shifts from recipients to agents and partners in the co-creation of learning experience (Spinuzzi, 2005; DiSalvo *et al.*, 2017; Fernando and Marikar, 2017). In a context of

equal participation, the Students as Partners framework is focused on the concept of partnership as a reciprocal process based on respect, mutual learning and shared responsibility, with collaborations that can be implemented in various domains, from curriculum design to teaching and assessment and participatory research (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014; Mercer-Mapstone *et al.*, 2017; Matthews *et al.*, 2018).

Participatory approaches embodied in Students as Partners practice are recognised as innovative but also demanding. However, it can be also very rewarding, not just in terms of teaching and learning practice but also as a driver of institutional change (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014; Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill, 2020).

2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SPECIAL EDITION

The papers in this collection collectively illustrate a spectrum of student voice practices, unified by a commitment to mutuality, agency, and partnership.

Abegglen et al. through the inclusion of the participants voices on a PG Cert in Higher Education, using the vehicle of vignettes, offer insights of the experiences of such courses and how educators may bring students into the teaching and learning conversation through, valuing their experiences and contributions, and understanding the spaces where knowledge is socially constructed. The qualitative methodological approach taken allows the reader to engage with spaces that nurture pedagogy and ethics enabling student agency and voice.

Chuang et al. explore the importance of peer tutoring for student of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)and their attitudes and responses to an embedded peer tutoring approach. The authors acknowledge that although the introduction of peer tutoring still resulted in some students having a more passive role to tutoring dynamic, others responded more positively and the effects on a collaborative approach to tutoring were clearly witnessed. The importance of this research can be seen through the use of peer collaborative approaches in differing cultural contexts and the effectiveness of such approaches. The findings illustrate how peer tutoring can foster student agency in EFL contexts.

Glover et al. offer an example of the use of co-creation approaches to the development of teaching tools and the importance of reflection as a central aspect to co-creation. Their findings provide insights not only into the ways in which co-creation can be an effective teaching method but also in the ways in which co-creation can support the development of student confidence and be a tool for effective reflection. Their participatory study involved eight student teachers and four teacher educators and was achieved through the trialing and reviewing of existing reflective models. Through the students' experiences of reflecting on these models, a toolkit was co-created. This toolkit offers student teachers an evidence-informed framework to assist with confident and effective reflective practice.

A very different approach to the incorporation of the student voice is offered through *Maglaski's* paper. In this paper, which offers us a timely contribution to the possible impact of the use of AI in higher education, the students' voice is explored in the context of law and legal pedagogy. The authors offer us an innovative approach to research into the field of students as partners, as they combine doctrinal legal analysis and case-study-based educational inquiry. The authors position law students as partners in reimagining pedagogy using AI.

The paper by *Poudel* offers an autoethnographic insight to a student's transition from student co-designer to learning designer, highlighting how participatory design and gamification were used to develop a gamified digital interactive platform that was available in the students', virtual learning environment (VLE). The narrative illustrates the developmental benefits of involving students in design teams, the way they overcame challenges and long-term impact of co-design. The paper describes co-creation sessions, feedback loops, prototyping, and gamification design decisions in detail. The narrative of the author's transition from student involved in a participatory design project to a professional design role provides us with a powerful example of how the Students as Partners experience can be significantly transformative

Taken together, the contributions to this Special Edition affirm the student voice as a generative force in higher education pedagogy. Whether enacted through partnership, participatory design, co-research, or peer collaboration, these practices reframe education as a relational, ethical, and future-facing endeavour. Through this autoethnographic editorial, we situate these papers within our own journeys and invite readers to consider how reimagined pedagogies—grounded in mutuality and care—might shape more inclusive and hopeful futures for higher education.

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