Conceptualising an inclusive approach to student voice in higher education: A heuristic inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education seeks the student voice through various approaches. However, including students with diverse learner needs (DLN) in these approaches poses challenges when hierarchy is present. Through self-reflection and collaboration with co-researchers, I engaged in heuristic inquiry to develop a framework for engaging in an inclusive approach to gathering student voice. Nine co-researchers completed 14 individual conversational interviews with me to discuss their student voice experiences in higher education. Five key themes emerged: (1) needing a trauma-informed safe space to regulate emotions, (2) removing judgement through implementing trauma-informed practice, (3) embracing understanding and representation to enable authentic interaction, (4) removing fear by humanising those in positions of power, and (5) needing choice and autonomy. These themes demonstrated DLN students' desire to cease masking and become more autonomous and authentic in their experiences, thereby moving toward partnership approaches. Drawing on these themes, I present an Inclusive Student Voice (ISV) approach and recommendations for practice.

KEYWORDS

Student as partners, student voice, diverse learner needs, higher education, heuristic inquiry

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) directs higher education (HE) within the United Kingdom to gather students' voices to compare institutions (Canning, 2017; Carey, 2013a; Thiel, 2019). To improve where they are ranked, HE institutions create their own approaches to gathering the student voice (Canning, 2017; Hall, 2017) through non-partnership and partnership approaches. Non-partnership approaches involve student surveys (Ashton-Hay & Williams, 2023) whereby staff might make changes based on students' responses (Canning, 2017; Carey, 2013a; Seale, 2016; Thiel, 2019), but students are not involved in actionable change (Ashton-Hay & Williams, 2023; Dollinger & Hanna, 2023), rendering these approaches tokenistic. A somewhat more inclusive approach involves student representatives compiling a cohorts' experience, meeting with staff, and informing the cohort of the outcomes (Carey, 2013a; Carey, 2013b; Matthews & Dollinger, 2023; Young & Jerome, 2020). And finally, a student-as-partners approach (Canning, 2017; Seale, 2010) involves students working in partnership with staff, with their voices equally valued (Cook-Sather *et al*., 2014, pp. 6-7), to reduce hierarchy and complicate power dynamics (Cook-Sather, 2022; Felten *et al*,

2019; Kehler *et al*., 2017). Partnership projects can integrate student voices into explorations of pedagogy, learning, assessment, curriculum design and research (Ashton-Hay & Williams, 2023; Bovill, 2020; Cook-Sather, 2022; Cook-Sather, 2023; Healey *et al*., 2014; Matthews & Dollinger, 2023). However, partnerships can reproduce power inequities (de Bie, 2020), leading to 'epistemic harm' (de Bie *et al*, 2021), especially for diverse students who may fear being labelled for the challenges they experience (Seale *et al*., 2015).

Implementing inclusive practices and complicating hierarchies are important for enacting partnership approaches (Bovill *et al*., 2016; Cook-Sather *et al*, 2014; Seale, 2010). Successful partnerships with diverse students documented in the literature (Brown *et al*., 2020; Bovill *et al*., 2016; Cook-Sather *et al*., 2019; Cook-Sather, 2020; Cook-Sather & Cook-Sather 2023; Dollinger & Hanna, 2023; Hughes *et al*., 2024; Ristad *et al*., 2024; Schley & Marchetti, 2022) emphasise inclusion of diverse students. However, research has yet to explore the depth of Diverse Learner Needs (DLN) students' experiences and conceptualise an approach that ensures DLN students' voices are heard and acted upon. DLN encapsulates the complexity of students' characteristics pertaining to age, language, social, cultural and/or economic challenges (Samuels-Peretz & Powers, 2014).

Recognising oneself within a topic under study is a core component of Heuristic Inquiry (HI) (Moustakas, 1990). Therefore, as part of a PhD research project, I conducted a "self-search" as a self-identified diverse learner (Sela-Smith, 2002). I followed this self-search with an analysis of interviews I conducted with other DLN students (Moustakas, 1990) with the aim of conceptualising an "inclusive student voice" (ISV) approach since, Messiou (2019) states, voice cannot be expressed without inclusion and inclusion cannot exist without voice. An ISV approach can provide students with multiple tools to communicate, such as photos or artwork (Australian Council for Student Voice, 2024; Gillett-Swan *et al*., 2024; Jenkin *et al*., 2021; Sun and Holt, 2022). However, the objectives of the PhD research were to explore DLN students' experiences of partnership and non-partnership methods designed to access the student voice and the challenges associated with hierarchical structures.

In this article, I report on my self-search process, on the experiences of other students with DLN in utilising their voice in HE, and on how those experiences inform an ISV approach through a "creative synthesis" (Moustakas, 1990). Finally, I offer recommendations for an ISV approach that moves students and staff toward a partnership approach.

SELF-SEARCH

"Self-search" involves "introspectively" exploring the self in relation to the topic (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 11). This approach reflects Moustakas' (1990) process of "identifying with the topic of inquiry," capturing a moment in time within my "frame of reference," understanding, and awareness. A similar approach is described by other researchers (Haertl, 2014; Huxtable & Solomon, 2020; Kumar, 2019; Norton, 2017; Ockuly, 2019). I completed this process prior to conducting interviews in May 2022. I conducted a second literature search post analysis to minimise contamination (Sultan, 2019).

As a child with DLN, I was often disciplined for making mistakes, which led me to interpreting the body language and tone of voice of others through "hypervigilance" (Richards *et al*., 2014). I learnt to appease others to prevent conflict whilst my own voice was silenced (as seen by Wermes *et al*., 2018; Wessing *et al*., 2017). Attempts to use my voice were hindered by an internal voice that grew concerned about "making mistakes, being wrong, appearing stupid" (Hockings, 2011, p. 195). This silencing left me feeling alienated from my teachers and peers (also documented by Baroutsis *et al*., 2016). I realised I experienced trauma from making mistakes because my environment was unable to support my needs, mirroring the experience of others who felt shame and trauma from critical feedback, leading to avoidance (Clapton *et al*., 2018; McNulty, 2003). Austin (2001, pp. 22 – 23) defined trauma as "unbearable psychic pain and/or anxiety" leading children to lose their voice by following the voices of others (Batchelor, 2006; 2014; Rogers, 1961). I became curious about other DLN students' lost voices in partnership and non-partnership student voice processes in HE.

Diverse Learner Needs students' experience of partnership and non-partnership approaches to student voice in higher education

One approach to gathering student voice is the non-partnership approach of student surveys. Although student surveys enable more students to be reached, the data may lack responses from diverse students (William & Brennan, 2003; Lerer & Talley, 2010), particularly from males and some ethnic minority groups (Porter & Umbach, 2006). This may be due to complex language, question structure, and challenges formulating responses (Bennett & Kane, 2014; Canning, 2017; Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Furthermore, surveys rarely ask questions relevant to DLN students (Lerer & Talley, 2010). Fricker (2010, p. 153) called this "hermeneutic injustice" whereby DLN students' experiences are considered unimportant, causing DLN students to become passive in their learning (Winstone *et al*., 2021).

The student-representative approach mentioned above requires students to speak on behalf of other students, which has been deemed unethical due to differences in identity and experiences (Alcoff, 1991). Student representatives may provide relief for students with low confidence (Carey, 2013a; Carey, 2013b), but power and hierarchies between DLN students, student representatives, and staff could contribute to the silencing of students' voices. After all, it is HE staff who formulate the questions and decide which feedback is acted upon (Carey, 2013a; Carey, 2013b; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Student representatives and peers simply become "informants," leading to "testimonial injustice" and "silencing" (Fricker, 2010, p. 132 – 140).

Alternatively, there are successful examples of eliciting diverse students' voices within partnership projects that specifically relate to those students. In this approach, students began speaking more freely regarding their diverse identities and experiences (Bovill *et al*., 2016; Cook-Sather *et al*., 2019; Cook-Sather, 2020), demonstrating that DLN students can find their voice if given the opportunity to do so. DLN students may require additional support for challenging tasks (de Bie, 2020; Mercer-Mapstone *et al*, 2021). However, DLN students are less likely to be involved in partnership projects, and when included, accessibility support may not always be present (Bovill *et al*., 2016; de Bie, 2020; Mercer-Mapstone *et al*., 2021; Young & Jerome, 2020). This scholarship further

demonstrates the "systematic hermeneutic injustice" DLN students experience and the "structural inequalities of power" (Fricker, 2010, p. 156) that permeate higher education.

Partnership and non-partnership approaches to student voice can be critiqued for being developed by HE staff (Canning, 2017; Seale, 2010) rather than positioning students as active contributors, resulting in staff maintaining higher levels of power (Bovill & Bulley, 2011; Carey, 2013a; Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Consequently, DLN students' voices are lost, unheard, silenced, ignored, or spoken for them by others (Alcoff, 1991; Batchelor, 2006; 2014; Gibson, 2015; Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Lygo-Baker *et al*., 2019), demonstrating the potential to replicate the inability of obtaining "the authentic voice of the student" with DLN (Hooligan & Shah, 2017).

I suggest creating equitable approaches to gathering student voice whereby diverse students are encouraged to use their "authentic student voice" (State Government of Victoria, 2024) through utilising an ISV framework. Conceptualising an ISV framework will enable all students to contribute their voices to partnerships and non-partnership approaches, whether through "action," "participation," "silence" (Lygo-Baker *et al*., 2019), or interactions with peers (Canning, 2017). Through using an ISV approach, student voice approaches can value the unique characteristics, experience, and voice that DLN students can bring (Clegg, 2011).

Theories that could inform inclusive student voice practice

I discovered two theories that can inform an ISV approach in HE: "individuation" (Jung, 1953 reprinted 2010; 1959 reprinted with new material 2014; 1971 reprinted 2014) and "self-authorship" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Jung (1971 reprinted 2014) states that people conform to the voices and expectations of others by creating a persona that becomes one's identity. Jung (1953 reprinted 2010; 1959 reprinted with new material 2014; 1971 reprinted 2014) expresses the need to heal one's younger self to step away from the personas developed in childhood, a process known as "individuation." Although Jung (1971 reprinted with new material 2014) does not specifically explain the process of "individuation," he does express that the process is difficult and painful. It is important that staff become aware of the additional challenges this might bring to partnership and non-partnership approaches to accessing student voice.

"Self-authorship" was originally proposed by Kegan (1994) to explain students' development from using their internal voice to a voice that is projected externally. Baxter Magolda (1999a, p. 8) developed the theory further stating that students could use "self-authorship" to develop "their minds, their voice, and themselves" to become full and healthy adults. The stages identified by Baxter Magolda and King (2012) were "following external formulas," "entering the crossroads" of negotiation, "leaving the crossroads" to focus on their own voice and the "internal foundation" to live by one's own voice. "Self-authorship" often begins in the students' twenties and becomes more secure in people's thirties (Baxter Magolda, 2001), the age at which most students are attending university. However, self-authorship often only occurred in assignments rather than in the context of students' personal growth (Barber *et al*., 2013). Furthermore, students with DLN encountered unique difficulties when attempting "self-authorship" (Pizzolato & Olson, 2016; Du Toit & Naudé, 2020).

An ISV approach could support students with DLN to develop "self-authorship" by helping students "transition from being shaped by society to shaping society" (Baxter Magolda, 1999b, p. 630). DLN students could become more involved in teaching and learning, such as formulating learning outcomes or investigating pedagogical practice (Bovill *et al*., 2016; Carpenter & Peña, 2017). As students in these studies began to utilise their internal voice more externally in HE, they were more likely to take on further positions in which they could utilise their voice (Barber *et al*., 2013). Such examples could include partnership projects.

METHODOLOGY

After completing my self-discovery and exploration of the literature, I turned my attention to how to incorporate other diverse students in the research. I needed a methodology and research design that benefited from the openness of the primary researcher's experience. For this reason, I chose Heuristic Inquiry (HI) (Moustakas, 1990).

HI focuses on learning from both my voice and the voice of participants, known as co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). I began the "initial engagement" process by conducting a "self-search" (Sela-Smith, 2002) to "identify with the focus of inquiry" (Moustakas, 1990). I explored literature using self-exploration and revisited the literature in the analysis stage (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Sultan, 2019). I then proceeded to "immersion" (Moustakas, 1990) by moving between the "I-It" space of self-reflection to the "I-Thou" space in conversation with co-researchers where we felt understanding and empathy, known as "mutuality" (Buber, translated in 2010).

I implemented "self-disclosure" during the interviews to benefit from shared experiences (Jourard, 1968; Jourard & Friedman, 1970). Although I experienced the three student voice approaches above, co-researchers discussed student voice in a variety of contexts. We removed hierarchy through the mirroring of shared characteristics (Byrne, 2017) and the co-construction of new knowledge within the interview space (Sultan, 2019). I used person-centred approaches of "congruence," "empathy," and "unconditional positive regard" (Rogers, 1980 reprinted with new 1995) whilst exploring the complexity of co-researchers' past, present, and possible futures (Gendlin, 2003; Mann, 2001; Moustakas, 1990), known as "indwelling" (Polanyi, 1966; 1969). We discussed emotions that I or my co-researchers felt within the body (Gendlin, 2003; Moustakas, 1990) until "incubation" allowed the experience to fully come into our awareness (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990).

Using this method, the co-researchers and I constructed an ISV approach through the "illumination" phase, providing co-researchers with a degree of authority over the "explication" of the information shared and analysed (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019).

Research design

I initially conducted a pilot interview with pre-prepared questions, but this positioned me in a position of power, whereas conversational questions allowed co-researchers to guide the flow of the interview, improving the balance of power (Sultan, 2019) as seen in Cook-Sather *et al* (2018). For this reason, I chose conversational interviews (Sultan, 2019) and, to incorporate inclusive practice (Australian Council for Student Voice, 2024; Gillett-Swan *et al*., 2024; Jenkin *et al*., 2021; Mihalache, 2019; Sun &

Holt, 2022), I offered the option for co-researchers to bring artefacts, which could have included photos, drawings, paintings, diary entries and/or poems (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990). I obtained ethical approval from the University of Worcester (code: CAHE21220019-R) before recruiting nine co-researchers from two undergraduate courses across three-year groups from one university. Co-researchers consented to a one-hour interview in a private room at the University of Worcester, and interviews occurred consecutively (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019). Co-researchers chose pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality (Punch, 2014; Sultan, 2019; Thomas, 2017), and upon completion of interviews, I directed co-researchers to seek counselling support should they require it (Punch, 2014; Sultan, 2019; Thomas, 2017). I asked co-researchers if they would like a follow-up interview to provide a higher degree of engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Five co-researchers attended one interview, three attended two interviews, and one co-researcher returned for a third interview. This resulted in 14 interviews in total. Two co-researchers attended the interview with an artefact, and I obtained additional consent to take a photo of the artefact before the end of the interview.

Analysis

I transcribed the interviews, removing all identifying information (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Punch, 2014; Sultan, 2019) and sent them to co-researchers to verify the accuracy, known as member checking (Hiles, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sultan, 2016). I created "individual depictions" for each co-researcher (Moustakas, 1990), providing a high degree of description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and I also sent the depictions to co-researchers for verification and accuracy (Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990). I then analysed the "individual depictions" together to identify the 'universal experience' in the form of themes, known as a "composite depiction" (Moustakas, 1990). Next, I identified three co-researchers who exemplified the themes to produce "exemplary portraits" (Moustakas, 1990). The voices of co-researchers were maintained as far as possible (Mihalache, 2019). I used the themes to develop a "creative synthesis," presented in a creative format (Mihalache, 2019; Moustakas, 1990) that conceptualises ISV in partnership and non-partnership student voice work in HE. I use the approach to make recommendations for practice. The findings below focus on the analysis of three "exemplary portraits" (Moustakas, 1990).

FINDINGS

My analysis revealed five themes regarding co-researchers' experiences of student voice. These are the experiences of (1) needing a trauma-informed safe space to regulate emotions, (2) removing judgement through implementing trauma-informed practice, (3) embracing understanding and representation to enable authentic interaction, (4) removing fear by humanising those in positions of power, and (5) needing choice and autonomy. I drew on the data I gathered from three exemplary portraits (PS, GR, BA) and have presented these extracts below.

Needing a trauma-informed safe space to regulate emotions

Co-researchers found emotions difficult to navigate, possibly due to the limited emotional support they obtained as children. This led co-researchers to be silent and adopt avoidant behaviours when using their student voice:

> I never developed those skills needed to manage my emotions because they were not modeled at home. I never knew that it was okay to express my feelings, so I bottled them up and did not talk to anybody … it would benefit me if the University could implement an approach where we are looking at the person as a whole and not just their academic skills. If someone was to sit with me and explore all the emotions I was feeling, maybe I would have been a better emotional literate human adult (PS)

PA was hoping to receive holistic emotional support in relationship with another whereby "the person as a whole" is considered. This process is similar to GR's experience when working with the counsellor, whereby they "felt more listened to" (GR):

> Growing up, me and one parent argued a lot and I would sleep all day to shut out my emotions. … There have been times when I have come in [to university], but depression makes you tired … I reached out for counselling and thought it was unhelpful; she just gave me techniques that I would not use, and I just felt ugh. … so I went back and saw a different person and they were really helpful. She discussed techniques that I actually enjoyed doing and I felt more listened to (GR)

GR noted how one counsellor only imparted information, whereas the other took the time to find out which techniques worked best for GR, demonstrating the benefits of moving toward more of a partnership approach. BA also noted the importance of being supported emotionally with others "who physically feel" what it is like to experience 'trauma' alongside having DLN:

> My childhood was very traumatic and for this reason I cannot communicate how I am feeling … I would just shut down and go mute. I can get so overwhelmed [at university] that I am unable to concentrate or take anything in … There needs to be somewhere you can go in a crisis with a mental health first aider … If we had this safe space, someone who has been through this trauma would be there, who physically feels it and that helps because they know what it feels like. I need that trauma-informed practice (BA)

BA added to the need for working with others by requesting a 'trauma-informed' 'safe space' within university where they can be supported by another to regulate their emotions.

Removing judgment through implementing trauma-informed practice

Co-researchers often felt 'judged' throughout education for their diverse characteristics and choices, leading to their silence:

> I do not like the feeling of judgement because … then you can feel stupid almost for having those feelings and although they are not necessarily saying you are wrong,

> you can feel that they are judging you almost. If something happens where I do feel judged, it does affect my mood, I do feel like I would step back and not say as much (GR)

When asked to conceptualise an ISV approach, PS discussed removing 'judgement' by creating a 'safe' space:

> At school, I got called, "you're gay" and a "dike" as derogatory terms, so I avoided going. This was the time at which you are questioning and developing who you are, you do not need those social stigmas, labels and stereotypes put on you, because you do not even know your own labels at that point. Whereas, at university, we have no judgement on LGBTQIA or ADHD, but … sometimes you are receiving information from other people who have not had those experiences and that can be quite difficult … So, I think what makes it safe is that there is no judgement. You are free to be who you are (PS)

BA also discussed feeling safe to use their voice without judgement, demonstrating the importance of safety in student voice work:

> Mine is all about judgement from others, letting everyone down, or them thinking badly of me. I worry that if I am saying things to my personal tutor, who teaches me for some modules, that they will think that I am not good enough, that I am behind, that I have got issues, or that they think I am mental. This makes me think that it would be better to talk to someone you do not know. This person could be very open, welcoming with a friendly face, non-judgmental and inclusive about everything. I want them to give me positive praise, reassurance, and a trauma-informed approach (BA)

For BA, using their voice with others meant replacing 'judgement' with 'reassurance', 'praise' and a 'trauma-informed' approach.

Embracing understanding and representation to enable authentic interaction

Co-researchers acknowledged that understanding of a shared experience was an important element to having their voices heard in exchanges with staff, leading to silence when they did not feel understood:

> My biggest aggravation with everything like uni, home, everything is that I am always relating to people who do not understand me … So maybe if … the tutor was subtly like, I can understand why you feel like that because I have it too that would be helpful (BA)

BA acknowledges that representation was important for them to use their voice, whilst for GR, simply understanding 'mental health' was enough:

> The knowledge of mental health issues is well known but if you have not suffered with it, you do not understand what exactly it is to go through it … They do not feel

> what I felt … and I think if you know they understand more, it is easier to present or talk with them (GR)

Similarly, PS acknowledges that an ISV approach meant exchanging viewpoints in collaboration with others to establish true understanding of another's experiences:

> Many of my lecturers are parents or have been parents, so they are very understanding of my situation. So, I am very aware that you can only understand what you have experienced but … through discussions, we can educate each other. So maybe voice comes from collaboration (PS)

Therefore, understanding and representation was important in student voice experiences to enable authentic interactions. But where this was not possible, exchanging viewpoints would be helpful.

Removing fear by humanising those in positions of power

Co-researchers highlighted the fear they felt from those in positions of power, that either began within the home or whilst attending school, contributing to their silence. All three co-researchers learnt to conform to what others told them to do.

> I was always in a persona when I had to get home and do stuff for them [my parents] otherwise, I would be punished. Now, when I receive feedback [in university] … I need that regular reassurance that I am doing well or for someone to check in on me because I always ask myself, am I good enough? … but I have not spoken to anyone because I do not want to be a burden (BA)

BA created a persona to navigate the fear they felt in childhood. BA wished to see more emotional support in their relationships with staff because they did not feel 'good enough' to ask for it themselves. Similarly, GR seeks staff to ascertain their needs.

> When I first started getting anxiety, my family wouldn't know what to do. They would shout at me … As an adult now, if I am ever in an uncomfortable situation, I sort of avoid, pull back or I go silent because the anxiety makes you fearful … So, lecturers could help by taking the time to work out what I need rather than what I should be doing [and] … I think if you are friendly with a lecturer, it is easier to be positive (GR)

GR also expressed the need for friendliness that humanised those in positions of power, whereas PS discusses the fear felt from those in hierarchical positions:

> Everybody has fear, and from bottom up that is where fear grows but when giving feedback top down you can put that fear onto someone else. For instance, as a school rep … you are not taking responsibility for the voices that have been made from the power because you did not make those choices … I think that at the end of the year we could have a discussion rather than a survey … in a safe way, that is non-judgmental or in fear of being criticised or even being told that you are wrong (PS)

PS demonstrates an ISV approach that removes fear from those in position of power and the impersonal nature of surveys to one that incorporates more collaborative discussions. This approach can be implemented in conjunction with GR's point of humanising those in positions of power.

Needing choice and autonomy

Co-researchers recognised their own needs and used (or wanted to use) this knowledge to approach the appropriate staff member:

> There should be no reason why students cannot say, this is what we have been training for, we are in our third year now studying inclusion and when you're doing this in the curriculum, we can help you by showing you how to adapt this and that to become fully inclusive (PS)

PS has a desire to use their knowledge to improve the inclusivity of the curriculum, whereas GR pushes for the need for student choice:

> University is more of a choice; it is not compulsory. I think if you make that choice to not come in because of your mental health then that should be your choice (GR)

Conversely, BA finds benefit in listening to other people's direction and was able to use their voice to request more support for this. Although, BA did require bravery to use their voice:

> My specialist tutor is lovely … but I have been brave, and I have asked if we can have a planning session? A little deadline every week because if you tell me to read a couple of pages, I feel pressured to do it for them whereas I would not do it for myself (BA)

These examples illustrate that encouraging students to use their voice to become more autonomous in making choices can move students and staff toward more of a partnership approach.

DISCUSSION

This section provides a discussion for each theme and presents a 'creative synthesis' (Moustakas, 1990) as a framework for ISV practice within student voice work in HE. I added new literature in the analysis stage as recommended by Sultan (2019).

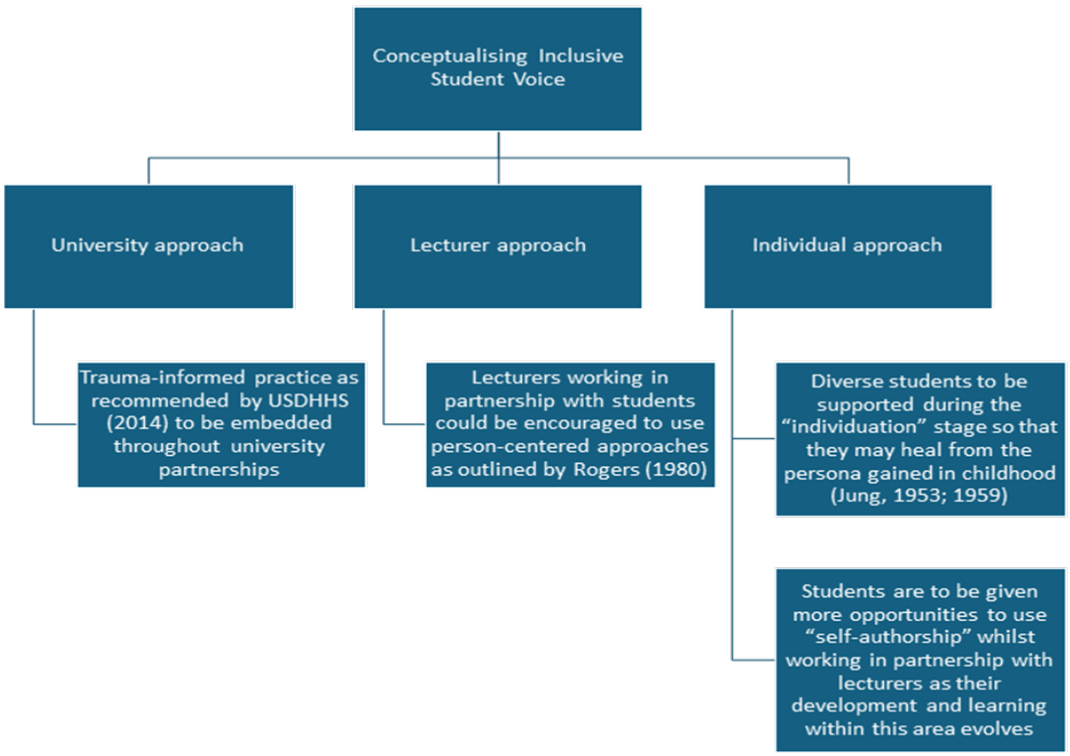
Co-researchers described a childhood that was unsupportive of their needs and how they learnt to avoid using their voice to express their emotions to protect themselves from repeating the discomfort they felt as children (Kalsched, 2017; Turner *et al*., 2002). Rogers (1961, p. 110) states that a child is often "guided by what he thinks he should be, not by what he is," consistent with co-researchers who "never knew it was okay to express emotions" (PS). Jung (1972, reprinted with new material 2004) states that society forces people to repeat personas assigned to them during childhood, evidenced by surveys avoiding questions relevant to DLN students (Lerer & Talley, 2010),

student representatives speaking on behalf of DLN students (Alcoff, 1991) without fully understanding or representing all diverse students experiences (Ashton-Hay & Williams, 2023; Cook-Sather & Graham, 2023) and working with staff who "rarely look or speak like" DLN students (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 4).

There is nothing more harmful than others assuming that "the psychology of one man [person] is like that of another" (Jung, 1959 reprinted with new material 2014, p. 441). For instance, the persona that BA refers to could be attributed to masking behaviours often associated with DLN students hiding their differences and conforming to societal expectations to avoid judgement (O'connor, 2023). This behaviour can result in 'affective harm' (de Bie *et al*, 2021) and in losing the ability to think or make choices independently (Perry, 1970 reprinted in 1999), and in disconnecting from their own "authenticity" (O'Connor, 2023). However, support provided for co-researchers was either non-existent or unhelpful, potentially leading students to cease requesting support (Ristad *et al*., 2024), leading to 'emotional harm' (de Bie *et al*, 2021).

Universities can provide ISV using trauma-informed approaches (see Figure 1) to encourage DLN students to use their voice when discussing their emotions (Kalsched, 2017; United States Department of Health and Human Services, USDHHS, 2014). This can be enacted in practice by asking students questions pertaining to emotions and needs in student voice work and by staff being open about their own needs, leading to co-creation approaches (Cook-Sather, 2022).

Figure 1: Creative synthesis: Aspects of an inclusive student voice approach



Jung's theory of 'individuation' (see Figure 1) (Jung, 1953, reprinted 2010; 1959 reprinted with new material 2014) could support DLN students in healing their childhood trauma. Students could seek out support for this by accessing counselling and mental

health services. However, Jung (1971, reprinted with new material 2014) warns that "individuation" is a challenging process because it requires focus and depth to reach the unconscious parts of ourselves. This is the space where co-researchers held a deep concern of being wrong or of being judged (Hockings, 2011) and was often accompanied by shame and anxiety when others reacted to them negatively (Nussbaum, 2004; Richards *et al*., 2014; Maack *et al.*, 2015; Wermes *et al*., 2018; Wessing *et al*., 2017). The perceived negative reactions from those in positions of power (perceived as judgment) increased the probability of co-researcher's silence, avoidance, and hypervigilance (Choi, 2021; Clark, 2020; McNulty, 2003; Richards *et al*., 2014). Therefore, staff could be replicating (potentially unknowingly) the degree of power experienced in the home and school environments by determining when student participation and voice are required, demonstrating the complexity of student voice processes (Cook-Sather *et al*., 2014; Cook-Sather, 2022; Thiel, 2019). An ISV approach requires "a balance of participation, power, and perspective" (Cook-Sather *et al*., 2014, pp. 136 - 137) by first removing judgement.

Ristad *et al*. (2024) stated that diverse students are unlikely to disclose their needs due to being fearful of the consequences of disclosing, such as receiving stigma, prejudice, and judgement. Judgement can be removed by staff being aware of their own body language and tone of voice (Jenkin *et al*., 2021; Richards *et al*., 2014; Wermes *et al*., 2018; Wessing *et al.*, 2017) when interacting with DLN students. I recommend an open posture and natural tone of voice that neither increases nor decreases alongside "positive praise" and "reassurance" (BA). Co-researchers felt less fearful and more understood communicating with others who shared their experiences and/or characteristics (also stated by Maté & Maté, 2022) because this provided "congruence," "empathy," and "unconditional positive regard" (see Figure 1) (Rogers, 1980 reprinted with new material 1995). The importance of empathy in supporting student voice is also identified by Cook-Sather (2022), with an emphasis on sharing personal characteristics in tutor (and peer) collaborations (Cahill *et al*., 2014; Matthews & Dollinger, 2023; McChlery & Wilkie., 2009; Walsh *et al*., 2009) and in sharing experiences (Cook-Sather, 2022).

Therefore, as stated by Cook-Sather and Cook-Sather (2023), it is important to reflect on which students and staff members are involved in partnership approaches to accessing student voice. Figure 1 recommends lecturers using Rogerian (1980) approaches alongside ensuring that tutors and peers mirror the characteristics and/or experiences of the DLN student. This can be achieved by increasing representation of diverse staff members and encouraging them to undertake partnership work with diverse students. Although this may increase 'like for like' within partnerships (Matthews, 2017), this research and other work show such work is beneficial for diverse students (Schley & Marchetti, 2022). Furthermore, staff could be "friendly" towards diverse students whilst they heal, as GR noted regarding humanising those in positions of power, concurring with Cook-Sather (2022).

Rogers (1961, p. 119) suggested that the 'mask' relating to conforming to others must be removed to enable more self-choices to be made. This can be achieved by DLN students reflecting on the question, "Am I living in a way that which is deeply satisfying to me, and which truly expresses me?" This kind of questioning aligns with the ISV approach of 'self-authorship' (see Figure 1) (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) and the ability to become more 'authentic,' defined as becoming "the true author of and authority on our own life" (Maté & Maté, 2022, p. 107). Baxter Magolda and King's (2012) model of "self-authorship" shows the intended progression of students moving between being

influenced by others to using their own voice and values to direct their own life. Therefore, in an ISV approach, DLN students need to be encouraged to use their voice to become more autonomous (Cook-Sather, 2022) (see Figure 1) and authentic (Kreber, 2013; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This concurs with the trauma-informed approach of enabling 'empowerment, voice, and choice' (USDHHS, 2014) a form of empowerment linked not only to being the voice of change but also to witnessing change (Ashton-Hay & Williams, 2023; Cook-Sather, 2022; Dollinger & Hanna, 2023; State Government of Victoria, 2024). Such empowerment can be achieved by enabling DLN students to practice using their voice and autonomy to make choices that matter to them (Brown *et al*., 2020; Dollinger & Hanna, 2023; Gillett-Swan *et al*., 2024). In turn, DLN students gain a sense of autonomy and agency that can help move them toward seeking and offering more partnership approaches to staff.

CONCLUSION

My research revealed that co-researchers with DLN may need additional support in regulating their emotions. This can be facilitated by those in positions of power by removing students' concerns of judgement and fear, increasing understanding and representation in student voice partnerships to encourage more authentic interaction and enabling students to have more choice and autonomy in HE. Co-researchers suggested roles in which they would be happy to use an ISV approach, such as consulting with university staff in end of year group discussions, thereby moving more toward partnership (Bovill, 2020; Hughes *et al*., 2024; Ristad *et al*., 2024; and as described by Ashton-Hay & Williams, 2023). Advising staff in training sessions and offering student feedback, while not necessarily partnership approaches (Cook-Sather, 2009; Dollinger *et al*., 2023; Dollinger & Hanna, 2023; Turner *et al*., 2002; Schley & Marchetti, 2022), can move toward a partnership model, similar to collaborating in pedagogical practice whereby staff value student contributions (Cook-Sather, 2022; Cook-Sather & Motz-Story, 2016; Schley & Marchetti, 2022). Although partnership may not remove harm experienced by students in HE (Cook-Sather, 2022), partnerships that address the themes from this research could encourage diverse students to utilise their voice and move away from being silent (Ashton-Hay & Williams, 2023)

These forms of partnership would include diverse staff and students working collaboratively to advocate for inclusion across the university campus, in which their personal experience and/or characteristics are valued for the unique expertise that they contribute to partnerships (Brown *et al*., 2020; Bovill *et al*., 2016; Cook-Sather *et al*., 2019; Cook-Sather, 2020; Cook-Sather, 2022; Dollinger & Hanna, 2023; Hughes *et al*., 2024; Schley & Marchetti, 2022). However, there is still a lack of understanding regarding what inclusion means (Dollinger & Hanna, 2023), especially the inclusion of diverse voices. I propose that by implementing an ISV approach in HE, diverse students could present a distinctive perspective in partnership that may not have been uncovered previously.

This research also addresses the issue of power dynamics (Cook-Sather, 2009; Cook-Sather *et al*., 2014) for DLN students to use their voice authentically in partnerships (Matthews & Dollinger, 2023; Williamson, 2013) by increasing representation of diverse staff members in HE. Furthermore, staff could utilise the ISV approach by becoming curious regarding individual students' needs (Schley & Marchetti, 2022), particularly

regarding their silenced voices (Gillett-Swan *et al*., 2024; Sun and Holt, 2022). This can be achieved by 'knowing' diverse students' past and present realities (Cook-Sather, 2022; Gibson *et al*., 2023) and the ISV approaches that students need to develop their own self advocacy skills (Ristad *et al*., 2024). Student choice has the potential to promote equity (Cook-Sather, 2022). Future research could implement the ISV approach in various contexts and assess the impact on diverse students' voices in partnership work.

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