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Reflecting on the application of duoethnography for learning: Engagement, transformation and shared understanding

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we reflect upon the use of duoethnography as a mechanism to explore and understand teaching practice, and as a tool for use within classroom contexts. Duoethnography is a research methodology used in the form of paired dialogue to prompt reflexivity, critical reflection and inquiry to generate data on a shared cultural context about which the two participants may have different views and experiences (Norris & Sawyer, 2012)

Initiated by the Centre for Learning and Teaching at Leeds Beckett University, we used duoethnography in a project to generate insights from our four Visiting Professors (VPs), through the exploration of tensions and agreements in their conversations. In paired conversations, we explored their narrative ideas about the core nature of teaching in higher education. The Visiting Professors used their duoethnographic conversations to focus on three key themes – student agency, belonging and challenge, which are at the forefront of current higher education policy and pedagogic, scholarly debate. We discuss these in relation to existing evidence and the future of course design. Our work makes a significant contribution to the scant scholarship on Visiting Professors in higher education with broader implications for academic development and practice also outlined.

Keywords: duoethnography, qualitative research, reflexivity

Introduction

This paper discusses the application of duoethnography as a useful methodology to explore aspects of teaching and learning practice, analysing how it impacts firstly on the conversation participants themselves, and secondly how it raises areas of dissent and agreement to stimulate further discussion and areas for priority.

As a starting point, it is useful to reflect upon the overall underpinning assumptions of the purpose of using duoethnography. Duoethnography is a form of dialogical research in which two or more researchers who occupy a shared cultural context generate data about that shared context through dialogue expressing their beliefs, histories and practice (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, 2017). What makes duoethnography distinctive from autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography is that two or more participants come together in the spirit of difference, in that they are embedded within the same cultural landscape differently (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), and that data are primarily generated through their dialogue (Carless & Douglas, 2021; Keles, 2022). Rinehart and Earl (2016) argue that duoethnography is thus distinguished from other methods because of its focus on the relationship between the two participants. Thus, the duoethnographic process may not necessarily arrive at consensus, but can instead produce a clearer representation of different positionalities within that context (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). The dialogic process and exploration were some

of the reasons for choosing duoethnography in our study because it has "its own stylistic direction as the conversations unfold naturally" (Sitter & Hall, 2012, p. 243).

Duoethnography as a research methodology has been used to explore the social sciences, humanities, and health professions (Ashlee & Quaye, 2020; Dunn & Ly-Donovan, 2021; Fox & Gasper, 2020; MacDonald & Markides, 2019; Shelton & McDermott, 2015). It has also been shown to be useful for peer mentoring in coaching settings within higher education (DeCino & Strear 2019). As an approach, it intends to prompt introspection and critical reflexivity. It is a collaborative research methodology which invites researchers to "model a state of perpetual inquiry" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 17) in the presence of another.

This inquiry was underpinned by our interest in pedagogic scholarship, an activity which is integral and fundamental to our own practice roles as educators. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has varied definitions (Baume & Popovic, 2016, p. 6; Felten, 2013) but essentially focuses on practitioners using literature and their own experience to then adopt a critical, reflective and scholarly approach to teaching and practice issues with the intent of enhancing teaching and disseminating it to the academic community (Trigwell et al., 2000). There is a wealth of literature that focuses on how SoTL research: i) positively informs teaching practice (Hutchings et al., 2011); ii) may be seen differently by different institutions and disciplines (Billot et al., 2017; Cashmore et al., 2013); iii) is regarded as an integral academic practice that provides professional development opportunities for staff colleagues and enhances students' classroom learning experiences. (Felten, 2013; Kim, 2023); and iv) often reflects the deep commitment of the researchers to improving the students' learning experience (Billot et al., 2017). SoTL is, at its core, about thinking, talking, reading and writing about teaching practice and Poole and Chick (2016), in defining it, advocate that more experts' collective and individual knowledge bases should be used developmentally as part of staff and student learning in higher education, and Fanghanel (2013) advocates for the importance of pedagogic innovations to be driven by stepped self-reflection through scholarship. Whilst there is literature exploring collective academic views of SoTL and its focus on communities of practice, its multidisciplinary and collaborative ethos (Fanghanel et al., 2016) and its variety of approaches and disciplines (Macfarlane, 2022), there are very few studies which use experts or VPs from different HE institutions with their own disciplinary-specific experience to explore their views and positions about specific issues relating to current SoTL, student-related, curricular and sector issues. This duoethnographic inquiry aims to fill that gap. The duoethnographic approach, which uses paired conversation, exploits the essence of the relationship between two experts by homing in on their shared and more polarized views. It allows the facilitator to explore a specific difference or similarity more precisely than when a larger focus group or group interview method is used for data collection. Whilst focus groups and group interviews are commonly and effectively used in educational research and can be an excellent way of seeking experiences and studying group dynamics (Cresswell, 2007) they can sometimes compromise opportunity for equal contribution, a more conversational approach and deep accurate analysis of controversial or disparate issues (Patton, 2002).

This paper is intended as a provocation for practitioners and aims to signpost the methodology as a mechanism through which to explore opportunities for developing a more responsive, innovative, critical approach to higher education. We used duoethnography as part of a wider project which explored understandings of current teaching and learning in Higher Education, from the perspectives of four expert professors in two sets of paired conversations.

Evolution of our approach

Our SOTL team, who are based in our University's Centre for Learning and Teaching, uses a pool of four Visiting Professors (VPs) as consultants and thinkers to inform our practice direction and stimulate opportunities for thinking. Typically, the VP role in the UK HE sector is to contribute to teaching and research throughout their three-year tenure. Uniquely, we also use our VPs to input their ideas to our leadership team and inform the direction of some of our activities and projects because of their valuable distinguished and longstanding scholarly and pedagogic research careers. Whilst sharing a similar cultural context through careers in HE, the VPs have often shown us (usually separately) new insights and understandings into HE pedagogic themes through their varied lenses and experience (see Table 1). Their natural curiosity, their spirit of consistent inquiry and diverse experiences about unexpected opportunities and radical thinking made them a good fit for modelling Norris and Sawyer's conditions for adopting a conversational duoethnographic approach to data generation (Norris & Sawyer, 2012) and supports Burleigh and Burm's (2022) view that candidates who participate in this sort of methodological study provide the most interesting data if they "engage in meaningful self-study in the presence of another" as they approach issues from different angle and explore their conflicting views. Initially, the VPs were invited to a focused panel event at an internal annual learning and teaching conference in 2022 and their discussion about teaching, higher education, pedagogic research and the student experience generated dense content, food for thought and excellent feedback from staff and students.

It was not until the moment when we had them together at an internal conference panel event that we recognised the powerful and distinctive focus of their collective and their combined and separate critically reflective lenses (Brookfield, 2017) which they used to explore and articulate various pedagogic practice issues. The VPs are all active experienced scholars of pedagogy themselves and familiar with using active research methods in education to further critical inquiry and reflection relating to themselves, others and wider educational issues. They regarded this opportunity to work collectively as a group at the conference as potentially powerful and informative and were intrigued by the methodology we proposed. What really fascinated us was that during the panel they were highly engaged, as the issues interested them, but did not all agree on everything. Specifically, they held different perceptions about the current and future priority issues in higher education, and they used different teaching approaches with students depending on their own past experiences and background. Whilst on one level this is unsurprising, it was their diverse views and backgrounds that catalysed their own articulated 'awakenings', increased their engagement, deepened their (and our) understanding of learning and teaching issues and began to generate some shared understanding around some core values in teaching and learning, whilst simultaneously revealing different aspects about each professor, how their backgrounds shaped their teaching approaches, and how shared values about teaching and learning can be generated through diverse critically reflective lenses (Brookfield, 2017).

It was at this point we felt there was potential to explore this specific and interesting group further. VPs are not currently reflected in any samples of studies which use duo ethnographic methodologies and this work potentially fills that gap. We specifically wanted to use the articulated nature of their conversations, utilize and strengthen the understandings and relationships that had emerged from all four of them meeting initially at the conference and build on the detailed ideas and thinking exposed through their paired discussions. We hoped this might generate further insights from any ideas (shared or different) about the core nature of teaching in higher education which emerged from their narratives.

Process methodology

This qualitative study drew upon interpretivist theory to adopt a duoethnographic approach towards interviewing, facilitating deep reflection between the VP participants. This interpretive duoethnographic approach provided us with the opportunity to understand the emergent subjective meanings articulated by the study participants as they interacted with the subject matter and explored their experiences in pairs (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Sawyer & Liggett, 2012). We were interested in researching the meanings the participants themselves assigned to their own experiences. This methodological approach was chosen because it was particularly appropriate for research that focusses on producing contextually sensitive knowledge which is value-laden and multiple (Divan et al., 2017; Tilley, 2019; Webb & Welsh, 2019), in keeping with participatory approaches to data gathering (Warwick-Booth et al., 2021), and relevant and suitable for exploring issues related to learning and teaching in higher education.

Following their recorded panel discussion at our internal conference, ethical approval was obtained, and the VPs were approached individually to explore if they would like to participate in this duoethnographic study to explore key issues in learning and teaching which they found particularly significant to them (Stage 1).

We then requested that the VPs analysed the transcript of the recording from their panel. This panel contained discussion of key sector pedagogic priorities and key personal learning points for them. A reflective question template was sent to the VPs to help them, asking them to note: i) the top three points that excited and engaged them the most in relation to teaching and the HE landscape in the transcript; ii) the top three ideas/issues that could practically be implemented for students and colleagues in the HE sector; and iii) which points made them feel uncomfortable, unsettled or that they disagreed with.

The VPs returned the completed templates (Stage 2) and the analysis of the content by the researchers highlighted the potential questions and direction for the paired duoethnographic conversations (Stage 3) The broad areas of thematic discussion for the conversations (i-v below) were shared in advance via separate email with the VPs (Stage 4). Areas of difference were also included in the discussion question list for the facilitator to strengthen engagement, augment personal positions, and widen discussion (Roulston, 2010; Wilson et al., 2016).The themes (i-v) were significant as they reflected important concerns for current pedagogy and teaching practice in directives, and literature relating to higher education, e.g. Torres Castro & Pineda-Baez (2023) on student agency; Edmunds & Leggett (2022) on social integration and wellbeing; and on current pedagogies (Beetham et al., 2024). This timely information informed the paired conversations.

As a result, our interview schedule focused on facilitating conversation around:

  i)   student agency and voice;

  ii)   building learning relationships through trust and a sense of belonging and mattering;

  iii)   which pedagogies really work and the best way of teaching;

  iv)   whether discomfort is a good thing for learning; and

  v)   how to accelerate a paradigm shift.

We conducted two semi structured dialogic interviews in which each professor was paired with another professor and a facilitator. The authors paired the VPs purposely to maximise positional difference and enhance their engagement. Each paired conversation lasted for an hour and was recorded. We used a

duoethnographic approach to inform the conversational and dialogic nature of the interviews, to amplify the voice of the participants, foster self-learning and augment changing ideas. This approach is a collaborative research methodology in which two or more engage in a dialogue on their disparate histories around a given issue or phenomenon (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012). The paired conversations were facilitated online via MS Teams, an advantageous approach in terms of reducing research time and travel for participants who are geographically disparate (Archibald et al., 2019). That said, we were mindful that online meetings can lead to disengagement (in larger meetings), reduction in rich quality data, difficulty in seeing facial expression and unpredictable technology and connectivity risks (Barrero et al., 2021). Prior to deciding whether the conversations were to be conducted in person or virtually, we discussed the issues and risks with the participants, sought their preference and because the virtual meetings were only for three people maximum who had time and geographical constraints, we used strategies to retain engagement during the conversations i.e. interesting personal questions, rests, facilitated equal participatory contributions and a clearly specified end time.

The anonymised transcripts from both these paired conversations were then thematically analysed specifically identifying dissent and consensus by two of the authors, though not the facilitator, to ensure greater analytical distance (Stage 5). The themes generated from the analysis of the paired conversation transcripts were then supplied to participants who were invited to comment, ensuring member checking took place to enhance the validity of our research process (McKim, 2023) (Stage 6). These three key emergent themes (i.e. belonging, agency, and discomfort as outlined in the discussion below) were important to our VPs and to them represented current, visible, significant areas in learning and teaching in higher education which are worthy of discussion.

In summary, the narratives from our VPs took the form of firstly speaking (through the conversations) and secondly through separate writing exercises, feeding back on their initial thoughts from the conference panel, prioritising areas of interest for discussion and sharing insights post-receipt of the paired conversational transcripts. Figure 1 is an accompanying detailed flow chart of the project's stages.
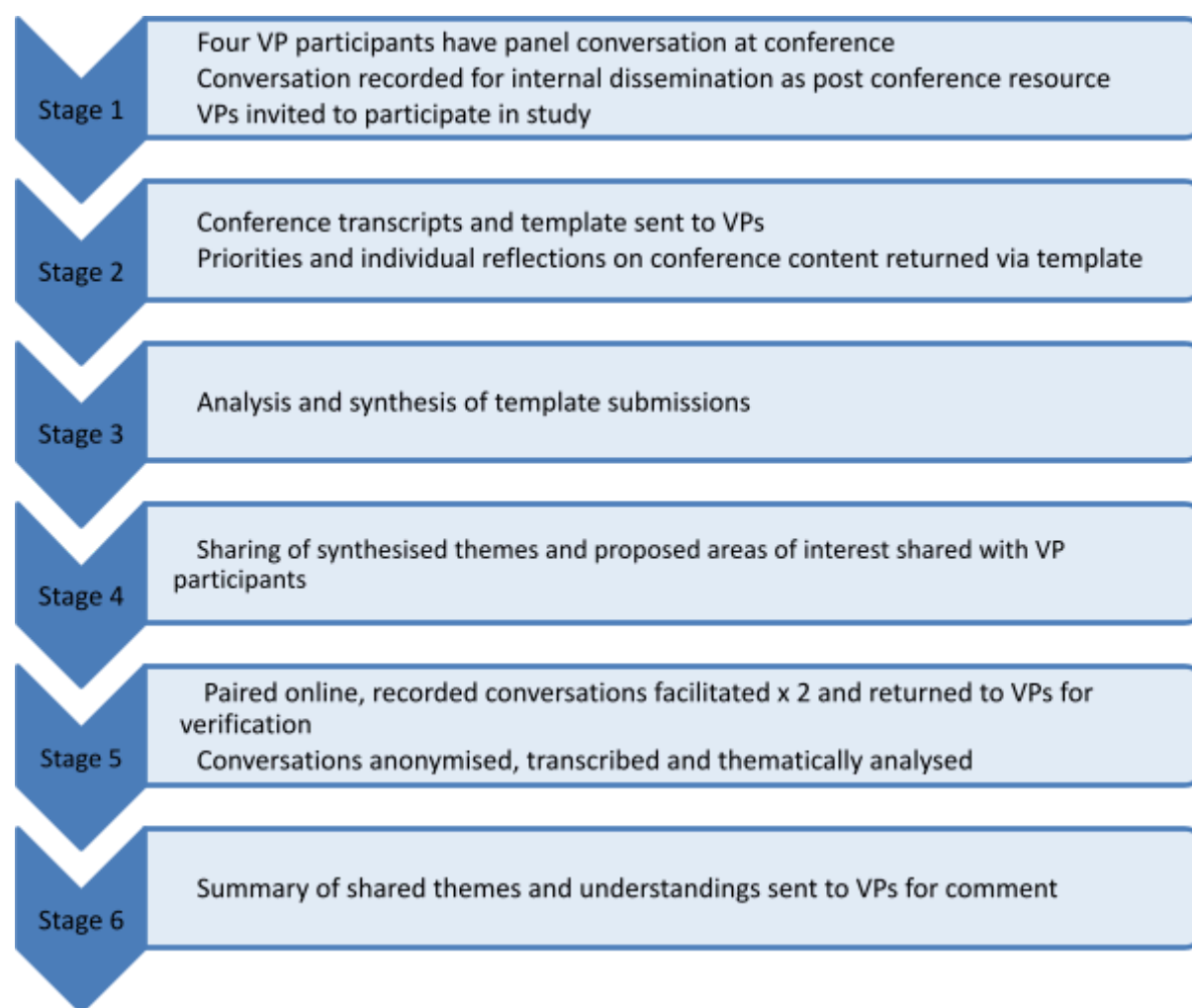
Stage 1
Four VP participants have panel conversation at conference
Conversation recorded for internal dissemination as post conference resource
VPs invited to participate in study

Stage 2
Conference transcripts and template sent to VPs
Priorities and individual reflections on conference content returned via template

Stage 3
Analysis and synthesis of template submissions

Stage 4
Sharing of synthesised themes and proposed areas of interest shared with VP participants

Stage 5
Paired online, recorded conversations facilitated x 2 and returned to VPs for verification
Conversations anonymised, transcribed and thematically analysed

Stage 6
Summary of shared themes and understandings sent to VPs for comment

Figure 1 Summary of the project stages.

Ethical considerations

To ensure ethical rigour, the following practices were adhered to. Firstly, the interviews were conducted by the same researcher for consistency. The interviews were voluntary, with written informed consent gained prior to them taking place. VPs knew they had been paired to maximise positional difference. Confidentiality in this study may not be maintained because deductive disclosure, also known as internal confidentiality (Tolich, 2004) is present as the traits of our participants make them identifiable (Kaiser, 2009). However, to protect participants as much as possible, anonymity of contributions is provided in this paper. Our participants were able to withdraw at any time before, during or after the interviews, though none wished to do so. The interviews were recorded, and MS Teams transcriptions were generated, and subsequently edited to ensure that they did not include identifiable information. Data security was maintained through password protected systems, and adherence to GDPR rules.

The characteristics and context of the participating VPs

Four VPs in Teaching and Learning, holding a range and wealth of experience (they range in their professorship duration from 2-15 years) were sampled for inclusion in this study. The professors were all from different disciplines, all had experience of running pedagogic research groups/centres and all are

widely published themselves in matters relating to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Whilst they share the same cultural context in terms of having long careers in higher education and a deep commitment to higher education, they have diverse views, experiences, backgrounds, routes into higher education and different career trajectories, interests and learning priorities. We wanted to capitalise on this unique expertise and their diverse backgrounds. (summarised in Table 1).

Table 1 Dialogue participants' summarised contextual backgrounds.

Professor	Age	Gender	Race	Current place of work	Main current subject Discipline	Main L & T scholarship and research areas	Length of time as a Prof (years)	Length of time in HE prior to becoming a professor (years)
A	50-60	Male	White British	Post 92 University	Social Work Education	Critical pedagogy Social justice in Higher education	7	23
B	50-60	Male	White British	Russell Group	Digital education	Digital education Technologies	2	20
C	50-60	Female	White British	Post 92 University	Public health	Critical pedagogy and evaluation	6	10
D	40-50	Male	Black African	Post 92 University	Psychology and Psychotherapy	Therapy and Counselling	4	6

Reflexivity

It is important to recognise that there are not many professors of learning and teaching, so to get them together on two occasions (the conference panel and the conversation) was a unique opportunity to distil information from diverse academics who are individually at the top of their profession, expert and influential. Their privileged position, as external to our university, ensured that that were free to speak radically, as learning and teaching activists and forward thinkers; therefore, they acknowledged that many academic staff (for example, those in precarious part time teaching roles) are less lucky and may feel more reluctant to assert views on pedagogy. In addition, many duoethnographic studies are written up reflexively by the participants themselves, (often they are academics) as the dialectic process of creating duoethnography is designed to be transformative to the writers (Charura & Smith, 2024; Hills et al., 2023). In this case, the research team were the writers rather than participants, though the participants did see the transcripts of their conversations and were encouraged to use this data to write up their own transformations. Breault (2016) recommends that the role and relationships of participants be more clearly defined, and that researchers explore ways of making conversations transparent enough to witness the

transformative process that is central to the method. The research team, therefore, questioned if we could have done more to explicitly elucidate the transformative effects that the conversations had on the researcher participants. However, some participants reflected specifically on key learning points from their conversation partner during them. For example, professors A and C explored different views on belonging and articulated their different starting points, and professors B and D spent time teasing out their varied perceptions and understanding of different terminologies, such as 'learning outcomes' and 'learners'.

Despite this, the duoethnographical approach was participant centred, and participant led, with the VPs generating the priorities for discussion on issues they felt were key. VPs were open to learning from each other, able to challenge assumptions, listen to answers, and acknowledge their limits. Duoethnography as a methodology fosters connection, and critical reflection; it is a tool for critical dialogue and if used in the classroom can be useful for exploration of issues and the development of collaboration. Thus, it is a methodology useful for exploring scholarship of teaching and learning, and mirrors the skills we wish to foster in the students i.e. posing questions, listening, sharing and respecting different views with the possibility that something new and workable might emerge from a synthesis of the thinking. Our duoethnographic paired conversations were micro classrooms with an informed facilitator. Some of the VPs felt that this approach was a more meaningful kind of engaging self-study, writing and talking in the presence of another. Akin to classroom experiences, some questions stimulated discussion and engagement more than others, and there were differences of opinion and a slow move to agreement in some areas.

Discussion

As stated earlier, this paper is intended as a provocation for practitioners and aims to signpost the methodology as a way for exploring opportunities for developing a more responsive and critical approach to higher education within the wider context of SoTL.

The VPs came together explicitly mindful of and valuing their differences in terms of gender; one woman and three men; ethnocultural heritages being African and English, and different trajectories towards their professional positions. The VPs in the conversations highlight differentials in privilege emerging along lines of gender, race, and class. The conversations enabled and encouraged 'people of difference' to reconceptualise their experiences of education and teaching in higher education in juxtaposition with one another. The participants were specifically encouraged to use their own biographies/experiences/ backgrounds as sites of research to create dialogic narratives, and so they provided multiple perspectives for the research team. They used their dueoethnographic conversations to focus on three key themes – student agency, belonging and challenge. These three areas relating to belonging, agency and sustainable challenge for self-belief and learning are at the forefront of current higher education policy and pedagogic, scholarly discursive debate and impact student learning (Bjork & Bjork, 2011; Pedler et al., 2022; Stenalt & Lasseson, 2021) We discuss them in terms of trying to clarify best practice to inform and future proof course design.

Firstly, our VPs discussed belonging, noting how times have changed, how more students work in paid employment, how the focus is now not on extracurricular activities and social engagements catalysing the belonging but on offering learning spaces where students (who must ruthlessly prioritise their activities and juggle jobs and commuting) can explore communities, fun activities and a sense of belonging in their course activities. Belonging, mattering, and the building of community to avoid loneliness, isolation and building confidence was discussed and how it should be woven primarily into the lectures, seminars, and workshops where student engagement has the potential to be most impactful and powerful, and where students have

a very good reason to turn up. Building belonging amongst students requires empathetic, understanding, and supportive academic staff and students spending time with each other (Blake et al., 2022; Pedler et al., 2022). Linked to belonging is the expanding field of research relating to students' perceptions of what it means to matter in educational institutions, to their instructors, and their peers. 'Mattering' in higher education can be defined as feeling that one is valued by or that you are adding value to another person or space as signalled by the relationships and interactions they have with other i.e. that students feel noticed and valued (Zawada, 2024). Mattering has been shown to promote student engagement, achievement, and overall well-being (Cole, 2021). VPs discussed their different approaches and strategies of promoting belonging and mattering in terms of building good relationships and trust with students, mutual disclosure and sharing vulnerabilities, modelling feedback and supporting international students through the sharing of music, artefacts and resources. Whilst all agreed on the need to create belonging, and to ensure that students felt they mattered, there were differences in perspectives on how to achieve this. For example, one VP moved the conversation from a structural perspective to the importance of emotional connections linked to identity and intersectionality. In this conversation, VPs came to an agreement through their reflections, with their views eventually coalescing around their intentions and values. In instances where VPs felt differently, their conversations involved listening, reflection and responsive self-learning. Another VP felt strongly about the importance of learning spaces to ensure that they involve students from the beginning, including in course design. VPs articulated cynicism about university approaches, including strategies to decolonise the curriculum, recognising that institutions are set up to suit some groups of students more than others, as processes, approaches and language can be alienating for some.

Secondly, the VPs reflected on agency and associated power. Student agency in HE is under researched and there is little consistency in terms of best practice to facilitate it (Torres Castro & Pineda-Baez, 2022). Student agency in HE is defined as students' capabilities and judgment to navigate and influence their learning and education pathways and utilise the assets that are accessible in the learning environment (Saarela et al., 2021). Improved student agency appears to be linked to better learning outcomes (Oldac et al., 2023; Stenalt & Lassesen, 2021), and better mental health and satisfaction in learning (Edmunds & Leggett, 2022). Student agency, where students take control of their own learning, springs from intrinsic motivation, interest and feeling of agency in learning, but can be developed with educators' help throughout one's academic path particularly through low stakes assessment and careful feedback (Edmunds & Legget, 2022). For the VPs, students do already hold power and agency although they differed in their views about how much power students really had and how it was manifested. They debated ways in which to give students the spaces and opportunities to use the power that they already have more effectively. They also felt that there was a need to recognize and understand the power of fresh eyes in curriculum design, which can be provided by external examiners, former students, and other staff within institutions. The facilitator targeted focused questions and left space and time for full interaction after noting in the conversation that there were specific differences in the ways VPs questioned the extent to which staff can cope with their own discomforts related to shifting power dynamics. The VPs differed in their individual views about whether they felt academic teaching colleagues managed their own discomfort well in the classroom. In one duoethnographic conversation, one VP felt teaching colleagues were generally poor at this, ignoring their own and their students' classroom discomforts to the detriment of the student experience. However, the conversation led to a shared view on different ways teachers might address difficult issues and a greater understanding of why teachers might be reluctant to confront tricky issues.

All agreed that institutions are grounded in consumerism and irrespective of how staff emotionally respond to this, it is the case. Student fees underpin a commercial relationship in which teachers are a resource and students have individualised learning experiences; one student's learning gain does not necessarily relate to another's. The VPs shared agreement about how many teaching colleagues have a problem with building student agency and relinquishing their own security and knowledge base. Therefore, discomfort for staff must be experienced, to encourage students to be empowered and learn. Some of the VPs felt that some colleagues, especially those with less experience, take issue with that as it undermines any power perceptions they might have. For example, when students come back responsively about their feedback, some teachers feel it is an attack on their professional ability and status. In one conversation, the VP participants moved towards an understanding, through self-learning, that their positions mean that they hold more power than other colleagues, which can be used in positive ways to support students directly. For example, one of the VP participants spent a lot of time dissecting and interrogating learning outcomes with their students whilst others developed a less defensive, more developmental approach to dealing with student feedback.

Thirdly, discussions about discomfort continued in relation to student learning, and the student experience. While universities are imperfect institutions, their purpose is to cultivate critical thinking. Learning requires that we welcome some level of discomfort and challenge our long-held ideas about the world. When done correctly, encouraging people to think with new perspectives provides them with unparalleled opportunities for intellectual growth. Discomfort in the pedagogical context is linked to students 'comfort zones', the feeling of uneasiness that is disturbing someone's comfort rather than the production of pain or suffering (Zembylas, 2015). The approach known as pedagogy of discomfort is a teaching intervention whereby students are urged to interrogate their taken-for-granted beliefs, assumptions, and privileges, to pay attention to their own and others' emotions, and to work for personal and social transformation. Experiential learning and reflection are often used to support pedagogies of discomfort (Boler, 1999) where new and difficult learning about conflicting conceptual views can be addressed for deeper understanding and transformation through the learning (Mercer & McDonagh, 2021; Millner, 2021). The educational context has changed with the emphasis now on psychoeducation, pedagogies that enhance kindness and pedagogies that support students to learn critically while feeling safe and connected (Grant & Pittaway, 2024; Slavin et al., 2014). There is some work examining transformative pedagogical developments which make use of discomfort and criticality, including the suggestion of 'brave spaces' (Winks, 2018), and duoethnography allowed us a format and method to explore challenge, uncertainty, risk and discomfort in teaching and learning. Engaging in meaningful, challenging activity can be good for medium to long term mental health, resilience and wellbeing (Thomas & Asselin, 2018; Wu et al., 2013). However, competitive classrooms reduce performance and wellbeing (Johnson et al., 1981). The VPs held different views on pedagogies of discomfort, one did not like the terminology, preferring instead notions of "challenge" or "stretch". Others felt that teachers live with discomfort in the classroom anyway in listening to student voice and experiences about racism, misogyny and inequalities. One VP felt drawn to pedagogies of discomfort, based on their own intersectional characteristics and life experiences. All agreed that challenge is beneficial to learning, and that this can be managed safely, for example, through careful induction, via teachers articulating their own discomfort as a way of modelling and through students mutually disclosing their own discomforts, and background details, in safe spaces where prior experiences can be discussed without fear of criticism. Staff should also be encouraged to face discomfort, given that it is such an important part of higher education learning.

Conclusion and implications

Our study contributes to the evidence base through applying what we learned from completing this study to draw out practical classroom and teaching implications. We make the case for incorporating this useful duoethnographic approach into a wider canon of methods for exploring practice in higher education, mainly (and especially) when working with a peer.

Our VPs are no different from all other teaching staff given that our views, teaching styles and approaches mirror the social worlds we each come from and return to. They authentically reflected on and analysed their own practice and knowledge as experienced teachers and researchers. They enthusiastically engaged in the dialogic process, thriving on the critical discussion of the different positions and issues. The duoethnographic conversations drew out three main themed areas for discussion and reflection: student belonging, agency and challenge. To develop a more responsive, critical approach to education, our VPs suggested that trust must be built with students to facilitate belonging and increase their agency. Students and staff also need to be prepared to experience discomfort; students from induction onwards, and staff through working with feedback from others, sharing their own identities and associated discomfort. Teaching staff should be authentic (and professional) too; as their confidence grows like the students, they too can use their own experiences (students like authentic anecdotes and stories) to build their teaching approaches. This models a situation for the students and offers them the opportunity to feel they belong and matter and that their stories count. These practices contribute to the creation of safe spaces in which both staff and students feel able to articulate prior experiences and identities without fear of criticism.

We can link this duoethnographic methodology to the use of other reflective frameworks and practices used in higher education teaching (Brookfield, 1998; Schon, 1983). The VPs seemed to naturally move through several reflective zones during their conversations. When they veered off the three key areas the facilitator used Brookfield's (1998) four lenses to focus the questioning. This models and mirrors the goal of the critically reflective teacher which is to gain higher awareness of his/her or their own teaching from as many perspectives as possible (Brookfield, 2017). For this purpose, Brookfield (2017) developed four lenses in his model for critical reflection. Based on our research with the VPs, teachers can facilitate their own critical reflection by applying these four lenses/perspectives. Firstly, the autobiographical lens is useful to enhance practice through analysis by teachers who should focus on the ways in which they teach, and the assumptions they hold which underpin their own practices. This can cause discomfort, though this is an important site for learning. The second lens is through the student's eyes, consideration of the student experience, including belonging, mattering, and agency. The third lens is colleagues' experiences, which include internal and external review, as well as reflection on interactions, collaborations and disagreements with colleagues. The fourth and final lens is through the application of theoretical literature, such as pedagogical approaches facilitating discomfort in safe spaces (pedagogies of kindness).

In addition, what the duoethnographic approach does is safely expose differences between people. The safe environment and the conversational approach allow participants to be authentic. The 'real' views explored, and the augmented 'tensions' and 'gap' allow authenticity of self. This is mirrored by the VPs' views about teachers offering environments where students feel safe to discuss and disagree. It is only in such arenas that conflict, tension and difference of opinion can be exposed and then shaped and facilitated by the staff. There are obvious parallels between duoethnographic methodologies and authentic classroom discussion whether individual (between a PhD student and their academic supervisor) or in diverse group classroom settings where ideas emerge loosely from a casual point and run, spiral, augment or die depending on the energy of the participants. Therefore, there is worth in using a modified duoethnographic

supported conversation around polarised issues in paired work with students in classroom sessions to ask them to reflect about and report upon their movement of ideas, transformation, learning experiences and areas of consensus. Students can use their own backgrounds, experience, and social experiences to analyse and discuss a contentious but common issue and see how far they get. This approach requires preparatory work by them to ensure that they can participate in safe ways, with clear dialogue management and facilitation to ensure safe spaces. Such an approach could potentially be an alternative major project initiative, used as an alternative to a dissertation. For example, after the prepared conversation, the students could explore and prepare research-informed knowledge in advance, bring it to the conversation, assessed by the lecturer, and then also supplement an individual critical piece of work reflecting on their own "movement" and self-transformation having heard the other student's view. Questions, however, do remain about how trust and belonging can pragmatically be scaled up for large cohorts. We suggest that clear supportive resources are made available online (including videos of successful paired conversations), ground rules are established for all, and there are informal and timetabled opportunities for students to see staff, though we are mindful that this requires staff capacity and effort. Further discussion of the limitations and challenges of this model with larger cohorts are required. Where reflective paired conversations are challenging, and this challenge is reflected in individual written pieces submitted for summative marking, students should not be penalised for this, given that the process of critical reflection is being assessed rather than the outcome. We conclude that duoethnography is a useful mechanism to explore and understand teaching practice, and as a tool for use within some classroom contexts especially in paired work between student peers.

Biographies

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