Building Individual Confidence, Responsive Practices, and Community for Wellbeing: Insights from a Review of Reflective Writing about Co-creation

Alison Cook-Sather (Bryn Mawr College) and Mary Cott (The Windward School)

Introduction

Wellbeing has emerged as a critical area of attention in higher education around the globe, and educational research over the last 15 years has increasingly focused on emotions and wellbeing at all stages of education (Hill et al, 2021). The stress and uncertainty prompted by climate change (Charlson et al, 2021), racism and social injustices (Williams and Etkins, 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic (Hews et al, 2022), the cost-of-living crisis (Montacute, 2023), and the lack of motivation and higher incidence of mental health issues associated with growing concerns about job prospects and income (Chowdhury et al, 2022) have intensified the focus on wellbeing. Definitions of wellbeing vary, but most emphasise "good quality of life" across several dimensions, including:

> "subjective wellbeing (high positive affect, low negative affect, high satisfaction with life), psychological wellbeing (self-acceptance, mastery and competence, positive relations and engagement and growth), meaning in life (framework for looking at life and sense of fulfilment), and quality of life (in the context of spiritual, religious and personal beliefs)" (Nair et al, 2018, p 69).

While co-creation does not address every one of these dimensions or eliminate the realities with which students and staff wrestle, it can enact and support a focus on aspects of wellbeing

that helps students and staff find strength, clarity, and energy in pursuit of good quality of life. By co-creation, we mean "shared decision-making, shared responsibility and negotiation of learning and teaching" (Bovill, 2020, p 2). Such work is also called pedagogical partnership (Cook-Sather et al, 2014) or students-as-partners work (see Cook-Sather et al, 2018, for a discussion of this terminology). Specifically, we focus on co-creation by students and staff of curricular, pedagogical, and programmatic structures and practices. The essays we reviewed suggest that the benefits across these activities are in the relationships they build; indeed, it is in the strengthening of relationships between the participants that the potential to enhance wellbeing lies.

In the following discussion, we offer selected findings from a review of 13 years' worth of reflective essays published in *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* (*TLTHE).* We chose to focus on this journal because it is the longest standing of its kind, founded in 2010. Like *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change* (*JEIPC*), founded in 2015, and *International Journal for Students as Partners* (*IJSaP*), founded in 2017, *TLTHE* features student-staff partnership work. Unlike *JEIPC* and *IJSaP*, *TLTHE* is not peer reviewed. Created and edited by academic staff member, director of a pedagogical partnership program and first author, Alison Cook-Sather, *TLTHE* is more accessible to those who wish to publish on their co-creation work, particularly students, but also staff, because it does not require the peer-review process. *TLTHE* has published reflective essays by academic staff, professional staff, and students writing from different institutional types and regions of the world, including Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Canada, China, England, Hong Kong, Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Uganda, and the United States. While many of the essays we reviewed were published pre-pandemic, there is much that can be learnt from them that can inform how co-creation might support students and staff in facing both current challenges and those the future will no doubt hold.

To conduct the review, former student partner and second author, Mary Cott, engaged in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; 2019) of 245 essays published between

2010 and 2023 across 36 issues of *TLTHE*. Cott used an inductive approach, letting themes emerge as she read, and as these themes emerged, she selected quotations that captured the authors' lived experiences and analyses of co-creation. While many forms of partnership work, and likewise many of the themes Cott identified in her preliminary analysis, focus on teaching and learning practices that foster meaningful and empowering learning opportunities, the three primary themes we focus on from the larger set Cott identified are the potential of co-creation to: (1) build and boost confidence for individuals; (2) nurture the development of practices responsive to identity, diversity, and inclusivity; and (3) contribute to community building and relationship-centred engagement.

In this article, we move through one theme at a time, drawing on excerpts from *TLTHE* essays to illustrate how confidence boosting, responsive practices, and relationship-centred community building inform wellbeing. We conclude with a call for recommitment to co-creation as humanising work that can nurture wellbeing through meaningful and reciprocally affirming relationships among students and staff.

Co-creation as building and boosting individual confidence

The boosting of individual confidence applies to both students and staff. We focus primarily on students, since they reflect on this phenomenon more frequently. Typically, students come into co-creation lacking confidence. The structures and experiences of pedagogical partnership build confidence by recognising students' lived experiences and knowledge, shifting power dynamics, and positioning students to carry their confidence beyond their partnerships. For staff, co-creation experiences can affirm and expand capacity.

Embarking on co-creation without yet feeling confident

In the inaugural issue of *TLTHE,* published in 2010, one of the advisory board members articulated the underlying premise of the journal – that students are "capable and active agents

in their own development and in the development of classrooms they co-habit and co-construct with faculty [academic staff] members" (Thiessen, 2010, p 1). This premise is itself confidence building, as one student partner and contributor to that first issue notes regarding how her confidence grew through her co-creation work: "After just two semesters, I noticed a new confidence in myself, and an awareness of my impact on my own education" (Seaborne, 2010, p 1). Confidence, as another student partner explains, is "realizing and acting on one's power and influence in a situation," and it is very important "because it can change everything. I need confidence to speak in class, offer my opinions, perhaps disagree with someone, and perhaps that someone is the professor. Those are all acts inspired by confidence for me" (Evans, 2011, p 3). The words "confident" or "confidence" appeared 188 times across the 245 essays we reviewed, suggesting the centrality of this experience to co-creation work.

The confidence that student partners develop does not come automatically, however. Furthermore, the process of building confidence is as important to wellbeing as feeling confident. Most students harbour significant self-doubt as they enter into co-creation work, expressing uncertainties such as "'What can I possibly offer?'" (Wolkoff, 2014, p 1). Underrepresented students can experience this lack of confidence especially acutely. As one student partner reflects: "I believed that I was somehow less prepared than my peers to participate in class because I had not studied in an American high school and English was not my first language. This belief pushed me to undermine the value of my contributions, hindering my ability to participate confidently and sometimes even at all" (Colón García, 2017, p 1). This lack of confidence that some students experience is created by the common structures of schooling that do not typically recognise or affirm the diversity of identities and experiences students bring to educational contexts (Nganga et al, 2021). Whether because of particular dimensions of identity or because they see themselves as "just a student" (Tariq, 2023, p 1), rather than those with expertise and essential perspectives, many students doubt themselves and their capacities when they embark on co-creation.

Recognising students' lived experiences and knowledge

The experience of co-creation builds confidence in students by recognising their lived experiences and their knowledge and encouraging them to share both. As one student partner notes, "affirming students' unique perspective" not only benefits staff partners but also ensures that "students will have the confidence and the tools to share their insights" (Bahn, 2015, pp 4-5). Another student partner affirms this process of confidence building, asserting that participating in co-creation work "gave me the confidence and the capacity to embrace partnership and make change in ways I never could have imagined" (O'Hara, 2015, p 7). A third student partner reflects on the confidence-building potential of co-creation that "has helped me to find my voice as a student when interacting with professors. That has definitely bolstered my confidence" (Teaching and Learning Insights, 2011, p 4). Finally, a fourth student partner asserts that the student-staff partnership program in which she worked "affirms the power of my perspective as a student and makes me a stronger, more confident student in my own courses" (Perez-Putnam, 2016, p 2). Importantly, as this last reflection makes clear, the confidence student partners build informs both their co-creation work through partnership and their own course work.

Shifting power dynamics

As one *TLTHE* advisory board member notes, co-creation work dismantles the usual hierarchy of the professor with power and the student without (Felten, 2011). This rebalancing of power allows students to centre themselves in classroom spaces and fosters the growth of self-confidence in students' agency, voice and involvement in classroom-focused decision making. In other words, the "positioning of undergraduate students as knowledgeable participants" acknowledges the vital perspective students have on their learning (Cook-Sather and Perry, 2010, p 1). The focus on student voice showcases how "we, as students, hold much more power over our education than we realize" (Evans, 2011, p 2). It is also the case, as students argue, that "this experience translates" to other aspects of life: "I have the confidence it takes to talk with my superiors rather that allow myself to be talked at. I have confidence that my unique

perspective matters. I have the confidence to be sure in my tone, my approach and my attitude when interacting with others" (Teaching and Learning Insights, 2011, p 4).

Carrying confidence beyond partnerships

As the examples above illustrate, the confidence student partners build through co-creation "seeps into a variety of other contexts," as one student partner puts it (Mathrani, 2018, p 1). Another student partner reflects on how he "became more confident of my own authority … I developed a clarity of thought and the comfort in expressing those ideas" (Lee, 2021, p 3). Another student partner shares that they "have been able to become a stronger and more active listener, learned how to speak with conviction, and more often than not felt like my perspective on issues is worth sharing" (Perez-Putnam, 2016, p 2). While confidence is not automatic and needs to be built through co-creation, the benefits are significant over the longer term, as Hill et al (2021, p 15) argue, since "partnership enhances in students the academically resilient behaviours of self-efficacy and self-regulation, boosting learning outcomes and maintaining wellbeing."

Affirming and expanding staff capacity

Co-creation also builds confidence in staff partners. For instance, a staff member in Economics uses words such as "affirmed" and "reassured" to describe how co-creation with a student partner affected her and explains how, "encouraged and with renewed fortitude," she created a lesson she had been wanting to teach (Binder, 2016, p 3). Similarly, a staff member writing about his work with a student partner to make a chemistry course more inclusive reflects: "My confidence in addressing sensitive topics has certainly grown, and I see how that confidence is carrying over to my other courses" (Gerdon, 2022, p 3).

Connecting students and staff building confidence to wellbeing

In relation to this first theme, co-creation as building and boosting individual confidence, we see students and staff using terms that suggest ways in which partnership fosters three of the forms of wellbeing identified by Nair and colleagues (2018): “subjective wellbeing (high positive affect, low negative affect, high satisfaction with life), psychological wellbeing (self-acceptance, mastery and competence, positive relations and engagement and growth), [and] meaning in life (framework for looking at life and sense of fulfilment)” (p 69). These can counter the stress and uncertainty prompted by threats to wellbeing we noted in our introduction (racism and social injustices, the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.).

Co-creation for developing practices responsive to identity, diversity, and inclusivity

This second theme shifts attention from individual confidence building to the diversity of identities and practices that intersect to create (or undermine) conditions for student and staff wellbeing. In their essays on co-creation, both student and staff partners reflect on developing practices responsive to dimensions of identity, diversity, and inclusivity. The term “responsive” was used 262 times across the 245 essays Cott reviewed; the terms “identity” or “identities” showed up 120 times; the term “diversity” appeared 153 times; and the term “inclusion” was used 125 times. In both enacting and supporting the development of practices responsive to identity, diversity, and inclusivity, co-creation can foster wellbeing but also potentially pose a further threat to wellbeing.

Co-creation for developing practices responsive to identity

Numerous student partners reflect on how they see themselves mobilising their identities (Cook-Sather et al, 2019) to support the creation of more inclusive practices. For instance, one student partner explains: “as a black person who has gone to PWIs all my life, I have experienced first-hand what a Eurocentric curriculum looks like,” noting that partnership work

"let me use my perspective as a person of color at a predominately white institution (PWI) to inform my conversations with my [staff] partner" (Latin, 2022, p 1). A second student partner reflects on how, in her dialogue with her staff partner, she wanted "to bring in the experiences of my fellow Black, Latinx, low-income, and first-generation peers and combine that with my own ideas that were backed by literature to give recommendations for the course" (Abraha and Crowe, 2022, p 4). Another student partner, a woman of colour in STEM, describes how she disagreed with her staff partner's idea of "making an intentionally difficult assignment" without telling the students he was doing that because this approach "would disproportionately hurt students from marginalized backgrounds … who are questioning their place in a natural science classroom." When she expressed this concern to her staff partner in these terms, he "immediately changed his focus and began to think about his practice differently" (Mathrani, 2018, p 5). When students' own identities and perspectives become legitimate sources of insight and inform curricular and pedagogical design, those students are affirmed and acknowledged, which contributes to their wellbeing and gives them a sense of agency under conditions of uncertainty that threaten wellbeing.

When staff and student partners co-create understandings and practices regarding identity, staff feel more comfortable tackling such complex realities in their classrooms. For example, a staff member reflects on her dialogue with her student partner about gender issues in her classroom, and notes that this work made her "more confident about broaching issues with students" and, specifically, "feel like I could confront these issues more explicitly" (Goldsmith and Gervacio, 2011, p 4). Another staff-student pair explore the "intersection of identity and language study" in French and Francophone Studies, and the student partner offers recommendations for "ways to speak to people without gendering them," even in the context of studying a gendered language like French, so that students can "feel respected and recognized" (Corbin and Diallo, 2019, p 2). A third essay focused on the intersection of partner identities. A staff member in Physics who identifies as "a mixed-race White and Hispanic woman from a low-income urban" background worked with a student partner who was "an underrepresented student who had been dissuaded from a STEM field by her experience in

undergraduate classes" (Perez, 2016, p 1). The staff member explains that the student partner "validated my own experiences with classroom environments that, while not explicitly unwelcoming, left us feeling isolated" and "supported the 'bravery' needed to question the traditional boundaries of what is discussed in an undergraduate physics class" (Perez, 2016, p 2). The trust built in partnership work facilitates increased understanding and willingness to sit in discomfort in the classroom – a capacity that also counters the stress and uncertainty prompted by threats to wellbeing.

Co-creation for developing practices responsive to diversity

Student and staff partners reflect on a range of ways that they both name and work to affirm diversity. Student partner Amaka Eze reflects on "structural issues of diversity, inclusion, and access" that she and her very-different-from-her staff partner explored in relation to the staff member's department. In her words: "By leaning in to the discomfort of our relationship, and of our very different positionalities, [my staff partner] and I were able to better identify systemic issues within the department and propose new channels for authentic collaboration" (Koltun-Fromm and Eze, 2019, p 2) – an experience that can first threaten wellbeing, but ultimately enhance it through reciprocal affirmation. In another essay, a staff member in Chemistry reflects on the moment in his course when he invited students to consider the experiments of chemists that led to current understanding about the structure of an atom and asked them to tell him what they saw: "They saw a lack of diversity immediately and they saw a group of people that did not look like the group of students sitting in the room" (Gerdon, 2022, p 2). Committing to "take time throughout the semester to spotlight a diverse group of chemists," this staff member explains that his student partner's "support gave me the courage to not back away from this and our weekly meetings gave me the chance to practice my delivery with a friendly but critical partner" (Gerdon, 2022, p 2). Here, too, that which can be initially destabilising can ultimately prove empowering as staff and students labour during times and under circumstances that threaten wellbeing.

Co-creation for developing practices responsive to inclusivity

Striving for inclusivity is central to many partnerships and, when it is foregrounded both in partnership work and in the work of teaching and learning upon which the partnership work focuses, co-creation can contribute to experiences of wellbeing. One student partner explains: "As a woman of color and as an ambassador for other underrepresented students, I seek and advocate for both personal and institutional inclusion" (Perez-Putnam, 2016, p 1). A staff member in the Health Sciences explains she chose to engage in co-creation because "the student voice will help me to understand how to be more inclusive in my teaching, expose unconscious bias and privilege, and affirm what is going well" (Hayward et al, 2021, p 7). In their essay describing their experience of co-creation, Ardizzone and Cheaye note that co-creation work requires staff "who are open both to reaffirming and to rethinking their pedagogical practices in order to achieve the common goal of creating a more inclusive classroom" (2022, p 1).

Connecting students and staff co-creation of responsive practices to wellbeing

Co-creation for developing practices responsive to identity, diversity, and inclusivity expands the fostering of wellbeing to include attention to the particular dimensions of who people are and what they have experienced as those inform learning environments that are conducive to wellbeing. As the excerpts from student and staff reflective essays suggest, co-creation contributes to several of Nair and colleagues' (2018) dimensions of wellbeing: subjective wellbeing (particularly high positive affect and low negative affect), psychological wellbeing (particularly self-acceptance, positive relations, engagement, and growth), and meaning in life (particularly sense of fulfilment). Although the process of working through some of these co-creation relationships may lead to discomfort, which might initially detract from wellbeing, the relationship building at the heart of co-creation, these essays suggest, enhances wellbeing on the whole.

This enhancement is not automatic, however. The same partnership structures and practices that can support participants working across differences of identity and through differences of position and perspective (Cook-Sather, 2015) are not always open to all (Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill, 2019) and can reproduce the epistemic, affective and ontological harms that many equity-denied students experience (de Bie et al, 2021). Furthermore, the emotional labour involved in co-creation work, particularly for equity-denied students, can be detrimental to wellbeing if it is not recognised and compensated (Cook-Sather et al, 2023). Attention to, and revision of, partnership structures and practices are therefore essential to co-creation that supports wellbeing.

Co-creation as community building: relationship-centred learning

In addition to building individual confidence and supporting the development of practices that attend to identity, diversity, and inclusivity, co-creation builds community and relationship-focused engagement both within the partnership work and in the classrooms on which that work focuses. The word "community" appeared 185 times across the 245 essays Cott reviewed, and the word "relationship" appeared 236 times, but we see this theme in reflections without these specific terms. As members of the inaugural advisory board of *TLTHE* explain, through co-creation, "expertise comes together *in the process* of inquiring together" (Werder and Trujillo, 2011, p 2, emphasis in original). Doing this kind of inquiry through co-creation, as one former student partner writes, means that participants are "welcomed into a unique community … where interpersonal relations are consciously constructed to allow for difference and where relationships have the time and space to grow into meaningful connections" (Powers, 2012, p 2). Indeed, Meacham et al (2013) suggest that it is useful to think about co-creation within the frame provided by Communities of Practice, which are "formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor" (Wenger, 2006). Co-creation at once enacts relationship-centred learning, for both student and staff partners, and fosters its development within staff members' courses.

Enacting relationship-centred learning through co-creation

Student partners emphasise the particular importance of connection and sense of community during the stressful pandemic years: “During this time of social isolation, the need for supportive partnerships is all the more important” (Impastato and Topper, 2020, p 4). However, community is always important. Reflecting on community prior to the pandemic, one student partner appreciated “the communication of lived experience from one person to another through shared space” and credited the partnership program in which he participated with supporting him in “establishing new connections, learning to speak a common language, find[ing] shared experience, and really validat[ing] myself as well as others” (Bernstein, 2019, p 3). The community building supported by co-creation does not assume sameness of participants; rather, it draws on a key point in the oft-cited definition of partnership: “a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis” (Cook-Sather et al, 2014, pp 6-7).

This relational focus and reciprocity affirm connection and collaboration in college and university contexts that can often be isolating and competitive, qualities that are detrimental to wellbeing. As Ryan Rideau notes, partnerships can “promote a culture of collaboration that works against the individualistic reward system of higher education” (2022, p 1). A student-staff pair describe how their co-creation work “began with a relationship founded on trust, respect, and vulnerability, which led to a collegial and communicative partnership”. These partners further describe how “learning and growth evolved from the co-creative aspect of this relationship and was continued through real-time, adaptive, dynamic reflection on teaching and learning”. All of these elements, they suggest, “were oriented towards a final vision, or purpose: an inclusive and effective classroom environment” (Pelletier and Perillán, 2022, pp 5-6). Such co-creation embraces what one former student partner calls the “complementary expertise” of staff and students, which can “help [staff] members create comfortable and productively challenging classroom environments” (Pallant, 2014, p 1). Leaning into co-creation

of understanding and practice, one former student partner notes how she "learned to speak easily with my [staff] partner in ways that affirmed what was working in her classroom and let us talk together about what could be working better" (Alter, 2012, p 2).

Fostering relationship-centred learning in courses

As discussed above, when student and staff partners build community between them, they can also conceptualise and develop classrooms as communities. One staff partner describes working with a student partner to develop ways of "getting to know at least a little about who the students were and why they were in the course" (Oberfield and Wu, 2011, p 8), and regarding her role in supporting the gathering of student feedback in a class, former student partner Samantha Allard notes that "each perspective and experience is woven from community" (2021, p 1).

A key component of building community and a particular focus in higher education in recent years is fostering a sense of belonging (Rueda and Lowe Swift, 2024), which has been linked to positive student experiences and outcomes, including transition into higher education (Meehan and Howells, 2019), academic performance (Ahn and Davis, 2020), mental health and wellbeing (Bye et al, 2020; Larcombe et al, 2021), and persistence and graduation rates (Gopalan and Brady, 2019; Lewis et al, 2017), including for students from historically excluded groups (Hausmann et al, 2009). Student partners write about how partnership work fosters a sense of belonging for them (Colón García, 2017; Perez-Putnam, 2016) through making them feel that they are essential members of the community built through partnership. For instance, former student partner Emily Cunningham writes: "Each semester, no matter the department, my partners have always made me feel that my perspective and presence in their class is useful and valuable" (2012, p 2). In turn, staff and student partners explore ways to foster belonging in staff members' classrooms. For instance, Modry-Mandell and Nguyen describe how in their regular partnership meetings they "shared ways in which we could enhance engagement,

amplify the voices of marginalized students, and create a supportive classroom climate that addressed and valued student wellbeing and belongingness" (2022, pp 1-2).

Connecting students and staff building community to wellbeing

Tennant and colleagues (2007) assert that wellbeing includes not only psychological functioning and life satisfaction but also the ability to develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. The points that staff and students make in their reflective essays about community building fostering relationship-centred learning both through, and as a result of, co-creation affirm the potential of co-creation to contribute in this way to wellbeing.

Discussion

The human-focused reciprocity of individual confidence building and collaborative commitment to developing culturally responsive practices are essential to students' and staff members' mental health and wellbeing. Our review of student and staff reflective essays published in *TLTHE* affirms that a focus on human connections and commitments that foster wellbeing should be prioritised in co-creation work going forward. Specifically, co-creation work should (continue to) focus on the mutually beneficial and affirming relationships forged and fostered through pedagogical partnership that constitute the potential to enhance wellbeing and should be vigilant about not recreating harms visited on students, particularly those from equity-denied groups, in higher education (de Bie et al, 2021).

The affirmation and legitimisation of student knowledge as enacted in partnership allows students to see themselves as valued knowers and as having ownership over their education. This ownership builds students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and capacity to dissent. In combination with the confidence staff build through partnership work, the confidence individual students feel affirms those students' mental health as a priority in the classroom space. Hill and colleagues (2021) note that the reciprocal relationship between affective and

cognitive learning can be consciously directed to support student resilience and wellbeing. The terms staff partners use in their reflective writing to describe this work – including "affirmed," "reassured," "encouraged and with renewed fortitude" (Binder, 2016, p 3) as well as their direct assertions of how their confidence "has certainly grown" and "is carrying over to my other courses" (Gerdon, 2022, p 3) are consistent with the definition of wellbeing that Hill et al evoke: "'A sustainable positive mood and attitude, health, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences' in their educational environment' (DEECD, 2010, 1)" (2021, p 6). We have touched on only some of the ways in which co-creation builds confidence, and we encourage those who engage in and support co-creation to consider this potential in their own contexts and in relation to the particular challenges and opportunities those present.

When students partner with staff members in conversations concerning identity, diversity, and inclusivity in classroom spaces, this unique advocacy role amplifies the voices of students without concern of harming grades or how those students might be perceived in the classroom space. Baik and colleagues (2019) assert that the goal of improving student mental wellbeing can only be achieved through an effective partnership between students and institutional actors. Through co-creation, student partners can advocate for a focus on the mental health of all students within the classroom, and staff benefit from having this set of eyes in the classroom to peek behind the curtain from a perspective different from their own. The diversity and inclusivity that student-staff partnerships focus on, as illuminated by the reflective essays we reviewed, also contribute to the positive sense of self and of relationship that Hill et al highlight as characteristic of wellbeing.

Finally, to co-create a learning community that is relationship-centred, students must feel that they belong and matter – connected not only to the material, but also to the community members in the classroom space. Scholarship offered by academic staff (Bye et al, 2020; Larcombe et al, 2021) and students (Colón García, 2017; Perez-Putnam, 2016) regarding the benefits of belonging for mental health and wellbeing is complemented by emerging arguments

regarding the experience of mattering that co-creation work fosters – an experience that does not depend on any particular context or on fitting into it (Cook-Sather et al, 2024).

Conclusion

Student and staff authors' emphasis on having space and support for developing a sense of confidence and capacity and for connecting with others, affirms what student partners articulated as most important with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic – a need to start with and sustain the human (Cook-Sather and Bala, 2022; Cook-Sather, forthcoming). The premises of respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility that underlie partnership (Cook-Sather et al, 2014) emphasise the human, the relational, and the attention and care necessary to nurture both individuals and the interactions among them. The themes we have drawn from looking across 13 years' worth of reflective essays published in *TLTHE* convey how building and boosting confidence for individuals, nurturing practices responsive to identity, diversity, and inclusivity, and contributing to community building focused on relationships constitute support for – and can continue to foster – wellbeing. We encourage others to support and enact co-creation that builds wellbeing – co-creation that supports students through a process of confidence building; celebrates and mobilises individual contributions, including of knowledge and experience, drawing on differences of identity; and that builds community and relationship-rich education (Felten and Lambert, 2020; Felten et al, 2023).

Across the themes we discuss cuts the common thread that all of these outcomes – confidence, inclusivity, community – are co-created in, and through, the partnership work upon which staff and students reflect in the essays we reviewed. This is a version of Horton and Freire's (1990) argument that we make the road by walking. It means we do not need to know exactly where we are going or how we will get there, but the learning comes through the doing, together, in partnership. As we go, we can nurture good mental health and a sense of wellbeing, even – perhaps *especially* – in the face of stress and uncertainty.

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