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Let's keep sprinkling magic!

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As the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme reaches its 20th anniversary, we spoke to past winners about what the award meant to them and the impact it had on their careers. Here we speak to 2015 NTF Chrissi Nerantzi, of Manchester Metropolitan University.



Do you remember how you felt when you found out you won the award back in 2015? What did the recognition mean to you?

If you know me, you may have noticed that ideas seem to pop into my head all the time. Some of them are even good ones. However, applying for an NTF wasn't my idea. Others encouraged me, many of whom were or became NTFs. Academic developers help others develop. When I received the top secret notification, I lit up internally. I could not stop smiling. My family knew but nobody else, nobody, except my line manager. Keeping it a secret was actually easy for me as I am not really that kind of person who would shout about my own achievements. The award ceremony was a special celebration. I noticed that almost all other NTFs had proper academic titles. They were either a Doctor or Professor. I was just Chrissi, a PhD student at the time. I felt inspired to be among so many distinguished colleagues.

What have been your main achievements?

In a nutshell, my biggest achievements are the diverse collaborations I have had the opportunity to develop, grow and sustain over the years. To help others and also further develop and grow as an academic developer. I love working with others. My motto is, I work with anybody who wants to work with me. This approach has enabled some diverse collaborations and outputs and I got to know some really interesting individuals.

How has becoming an NTF impacted on your career?

I am still a Principal Lecturer in academic CPD in the University Teaching Academy (we used to be the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching) at Manchester Metropolitan University, in the same role I was before I became an NTF and since joining Manchester Met in 2013.

I have had many opportunities externally, nationally and internationally. An example is my work with the UNESCO [programme Open Education For a Better World led by the Novi Gorici University](#) in Slovenia. In 2018, I was a mentor together with Naomi Wahls on a nation-wide professional development project for academics teaching English in Uzbekistan led by Dr Alisher Abidjanov, from the National Research Centre for Development of Innovative Methods in Teaching Foreign Languages in Uzbekistan and in 2020 I was invited to be the mentor co-ordinator for this global and highly successful programme.

In 2019 I was invited to be the Programme Chair of the Open Education Global Conference “Open Education for an Open Future”, organised by the Open Education Consortium (now Open Education Global) and hosted at Politecnico Milano. This was such a rich learning experience and I am grateful for this opportunity to Paola Corti, Susanna Sancassani from Politecnico and the whole [Open Education Global team](#).

Activities such as the above have helped me bring back fresh energy and ideas to my everyday practice within my own institution, but also to connect institutional colleagues externally with people, networks and projects that have inspired them to further engage with learning and teaching and scholarship.

Such an example is my dear colleague Dr Gerasimos Chatzidamianos, a Senior Lecturer in Psychology. He was my student originally when he completed his teaching qualification, and still is as he decided to do the full MA in Higher Education. Beyond this student-tutor relationship we are also colleagues, peers and have engaged in collaborative scholarly activities many inspired by [FLEX](#). FLEX is a practice-based professional development initiative utilising reflection and digital portfolios with formal and informal pathways. I created this shortly after joined Manchester Met that has spread within the institution and has also been adapted to be used with students. Externally, FLEX attracted interest from Australia and Ireland. Currently, I am collaborating with Gerasimos and Dr Nicoletta Di Colla on [a special issue around block teaching](#) that will be implemented across Manchester Met in the next academic year.

Gerasimos was shortlisted for the Best Postgraduate Supervisor Award internally, and I am really proud of him and the work he does with his students.



One of my other success stories is Haleh Moravej (above), another very dear colleague. Haleh is a Senior Lecturer in Nutritional Science. I first met Haleh shortly after arriving at Manchester Met in 2013. I could see that Haleh was a rough diamond, with unlimited passion for inspiring her students to learn, become creative

and active citizens and professionals. A free spirit that pushes the boundaries, a proper innovation rebel, who creates trust relationships with her students and truly stimulating learning experiences.

I have seen her in action and also co-facilitated modules on our MA in Higher Education with her and team teach on her Nutrition in Practice module despite the fact that I am not a subject expert in this area. Our collaboration is harmonious and we complement each other really well. Her work has led to multiple successes. The award winning student-led social enterprise [MetMunch](#) is just one of them and more recently the [GROW café](#). At some point I felt Haleh was ready to apply for the NTF, so I encouraged her as I felt that she definitely deserved this recognition. I was super happy when Haleh became an NTF. We have continued working together even more closely than before.

I would also like to mention my collaboration with Prof. Alison James, a fellow NTF. We met at a SEDA conference in 2013. We co-edited a [double Creative Academic Magazine Exploring Play in Higher Education](#) and the book [Play The Power of Play in Higher Education](#), co-wrote the [LEGO® for university learning: inspiring academic practice in higher education](#), co-edited the special issue [Discovering innovative applications of LEGO® in learning and teaching in higher education](#) and have organised and co-facilitated events and workshops. I love working with Alison.

What, for you, encapsulates teaching excellence?

Teaching excellence empowers students to learn. Not just students, but learners. And I include myself. The reality is we can't feed anybody knowledge. It is just not possible, and I wouldn't want to do it anyway. I want to help others think, help them develop self-

belief and confidence. To dream and wake their inner curiosity for the world we live in and embrace life as learning and learning as life. Learning has to be infectious, right?

Therefore, I feel that creating special professional trust relationships with our students is really important and can make such a difference. Only then can we take them on exotic learning journeys and experience learning adventures. Do the unusual, the wacky, experiment, play, be creative and critical. Dare to try, like I often say. At times there will be fun and laughter as well as seriousness and discomfort. Learning is messy and complex.

This is why caring and daring go together. Teaching excellence for me means that students are learning and are hungry for more learning. Teaching excellence means change and transformation: from re-active to pro-active; from dependent to independent; from competitive to collaborative; from insensitive to caring; from surviving to thriving; from fear to hope and action. Students don't need super models, what they need is real models. When we reveal our human side to our students, when we learn with and from them, we truly connect.

Away from academia, what do you like to do to relax and/or have fun?

My world outside academia is as colourful as it is inside academia. Maybe even more colourful.

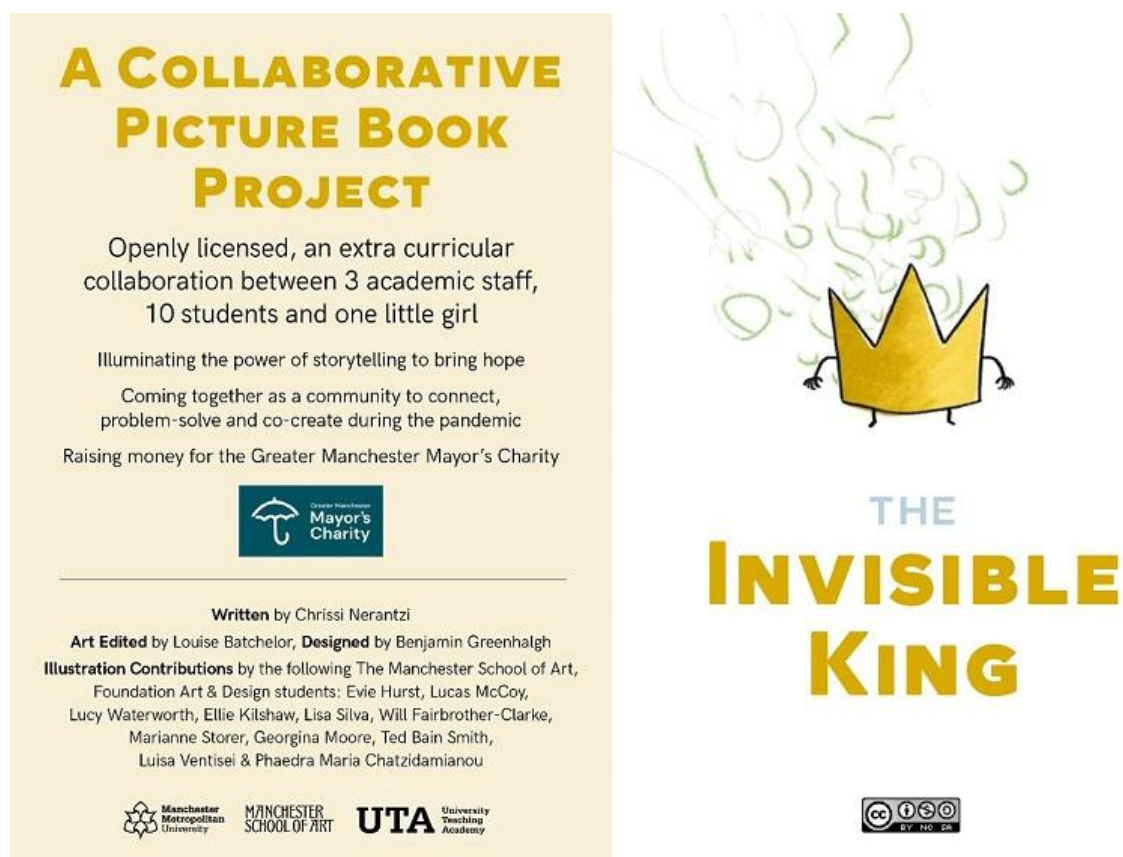


I am a passionate hobby crafter. I have a special retreat in our garden, a little wooden house. Making stuff helps me express creatively, relax and re-energise. We all live a busy life but making time and space for an oasis of happiness is really important for our wellbeing. My love of making has always been present in my work as an academic developer. Constructionism (learning through making) is probably one of the learning theories I can relate to that characterises my work. But now, I am bringing what I have learnt and gained through crafting into another forum, the MAKE community for staff and students at Manchester Met we developed in collaboration with #creativeHE, MetMunch and GROW.

Writing picture book stories is another passion of mine and I hope some of them will find their way into the hearts of (young) readers. I started writing many years ago, when I was working as a translator mainly of literary works including children's literature. Currently, I am studying towards an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Salford, which is helping me to become a more experimental writer. I love the course, working with the lecturers and my peers and really feel that these

experiences enrich me as a creative and academic writer and academic developer as I can see links and opportunities.

During the pandemic, I have collaborated with my colleagues Ben Greenhalgh, Louise Bachelor from the Manchester School of Art, ten of their students and one little girl to create the collaborative picture book "[The Invisible King](#)", which we made available under a creative commons license to engage children creatively and collaboratively in reading and storytelling while also raising money for the Greater Manchester Mayor's Charity and those in need.



I must not forget to mention photographs. I got this love for pictures from my dad. I create visual memories, just like he did many years ago when I was little.

Travelling with my three boys is another favourite of mine. We are explorers and feel that travelling is really widening our

horizons as individuals and see the world as a much more connected place where people meet and enrich each other's lives. I have lived in three countries so far, Germany, Greece and the UK. I suspect this has, and still is, influencing the way I see things.

Higher Education has become more competitive than ever before. How can we free ourselves and focus on what really matters? How can we foster open and connected collaborations for the social good? How can students AND staff be happy, feel supported, valued and succeed? To create caring communities and a society that celebrates diversity, creativity and humanity.

"What do you think success is?" asked the boy. "To love," said the mole.

Mackesy, C. 'The Boy, the mole, the fox and the horse' (2019)

I would like to thank Prof. Norman Jackson, Prof. Sally Brown (NTF) and Prof. Phil Race (NTF) for the inspiration and all colleagues and students, internally and externally, I have had the opportunity to work and learn with and from.

Happy anniversary to the NTF awards scheme, everybody in making this scheme such a success and all NTFs wherever you are.

Let's keep sprinkling magic!



Share your #NTFSis20 story with us on Twitter and join the **Advance HE Connect** group especially for National Teaching Fellows.

National Teaching Fellow 2015 Chrissi Nerantzi used to be a translator of children's literature and taught Modern Foreign Languages for many years, before moving into academic development. She is a passionate and creative academic developer. Her approach is playful and experimental and underpinned by scholarship and research. Follow her on Twitter @chrissinerantzi and take a look at her [personal development blog](#).

About

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Available online at <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/lets-keep-sprinkling-magic>

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