Becoming Socially Just Educators: A Trioethnographic Study of Exploring Professional Identity Through Dialogue, Ethics of Care and Creativity

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Background

The initial idea for this research project emerged from critical incidents and subsequent discussions we experienced in our voluntary, public roles within the BALEAP English for Academic Purposes Social Justice Special Interest Group (EAP4SJ SIG). Examples of the critical incidents included receiving public and private challenges to what is meant by the term 'social justice', whether the concept is relevant to English for Academic Purposes and whether in some of the work we undertook we were centring the needs of one marginalised group over and above another. Some of these challenges were thoughtfully constructed and shared via email reflections on events we had hosted. Others manifested in anonymous mocking Padlet responses following an invitation for community members to respond to blog posts from colleagues sharing underrepresented perspectives within the field of English Language Teaching. All the challenges prompted reflection and discussion across our EAP4SJ SIG committee, and some acted as catalysts for further work.

In engaging with our work in the EAP4SJ SIG committee, we do so not from a position of being experts, but from a motivation to strive towards self-discovery and self-fulfilment professionally and personally. Our commitment to achieving this through public acts is underpinned by educational philosophies of scholarly activism which suggest that words, deeds and the responses to these can generate new and more socially just ways of being and doing in the world (Arendt 1998; hooks 1994; Kubota 2020; Lorde 2007). In addition, our work in this arena is one of our responses to a building call to action to EAP practitioners to step out of the margins and start to influence more widely within our higher education institutions and across the sector (Bond 2020; Ding and Bruce 2017).

Based on the above, we realise our work within the EAP4SJ SIG, and indeed this research project, could be perceived within the sphere of public pedagogy in that we seek to hold space for learning and unlearning situated beyond the formal structures offered by state-sanctioned education systems (Biesta 2012; Sandlin, Schultz and Burdick 2010). We are also mindful that public pedagogy can be conceptualised in many ways. Our interpretation aligns with that put forward by Biesta (2012) who suggests in his critique of differing interpretations that public pedagogy should reject the: '"politics of learning" i.e the tendency to turn social and political problems into learning problems, so that, through this, they become the responsibility of individuals rather than that they are seen as the concern of the collective' (ibid.: 693).

Instead, he positions pedagogy as the enactment of a concern for the public quality of human togetherness. Neither teaching nor learning are the aims of this approach. Instead, it is about creating space within which the spontaneity of public citizenship (Mihăilă et al. 2016) can manifest as a result of individuals feeling the freedom to share their opinions with their equals, and importantly, to be heard, in order to foster reflection, thought, judgement and action (Topolski 2008). The public pedagogue in such interactions is one who interrupts, with interruptions being a thought, experience, or event that challenges the homogeny of our being (Biesta 2012). It is such

interruptions that have the potential to foster a citizenship of strangers within which plurality is preserved and actively pursued to ensure all members of the community feel recognised (Leubolt 2015, cited in Mihăilă et al. 2016) and free to disclose their distinct uniqueness in an effort to garner human togetherness in a common world (Gordon 2001, cited in Biesta 2012).

As a sub-group of the EAP4SJ SIG, three of us chose to explore our experiences as ELT/EAP practitioners focusing on critical moments in our careers which steered us towards social justice. When approaching this research project, we wanted to experiment with Biesta's (2012) interpretation of public pedagogy to see what it could offer us in our own learning and our educational practice. As a small group who have both convergent and divergent backgrounds and lived experience between us, we wanted to deepen our understanding of how the intersections of our personal identities have impacted on our professional identities and practice within the field of EAP and on our journey to becoming socially just educators.

Our guiding principles

At this point, we wish to transparently declare that this project was never driven by a quest for 'book knowledge'. To start from that point would have felt dehumanising on a project that is centred in the human togetherness of being, knowing and becoming. To truly understand the complexities of our identities, we knew very early on that we wanted to build our knowledge with and through each other using methods which would cultivate shared and individual understanding. With this in mind, and, building on the notion of an interrupter as key to a wholly democratic and ethical public pedagogy, we were immediately drawn to taking a dialogic approach (Bahktin 1981) to generating and analysing data.

Bahktin (1981), suggests that the opportunity for learning from and with each other presents itself because we each bring our own perspectives of the world, and all that is located within it, to our interactions. Consequently, our interpretations and associated articulation of the world are unique to us as individuals. A key reason for this is that the connotations of the language we use are derived from the specific historical, social, meteorological and physiological context within which our utterances take place, which Bahktin (ibid.) refers to as 'heteroglossia'. Bakhtin (ibid.) goes on to assert that this distinct language of each individual, will be seen by anyone else as *cuzoj*, which translates to 'alien' in English, and it is this 'alien-ness' to each other that makes dialogue possible. However, similar to the educational philosophies cited earlier, Bahktin (1981) suggests that to achieve active and engaged understanding of the *cuzoj* of others requires both listening and response as: 'Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other, one is impossible without the other' (p.282).

Aligning our commitment to a dialogic approach, with a recognition that we were researching our emerging identities as social justice educators, we adopted duoethnography methodology in our research design. Developed by Sawyer and Norris (2013), duoethnography positions an ongoing dialogue between researchers at the centre of the research process. Similar to the notion of an interlocutor in public pedagogy, the dialogue is believed to generate opportunities for disrupting metacultural narratives, allowing the researchers to reconceptualise their life events. For reconceptualization to happen, the researchers are encouraged to explore the differences between their lived stories as they are seen as having the biggest transformative potential.

It is acknowledged, however, that critical dialogues can be uncomfortable, illuminate unexpected details and reveal deeply-held values the researchers can be unaware of. Such conversations can stimulate highly emotional responses, as was the case in our project too. Consequently, another

key tenet of the methodology is that the researchers enter their dialogic research space with trust and ethics of care. Trust is needed to open up with one's own story and to accept the comments which can challenge one's values or worldviews, while care is necessary in the process of data collection and writing to ensure that researchers as well as those present in their stories are not the focus of the research. This is because duoethnography positions the researchers not as subjects but as sites of research placing the discussed social phenomenon, in this case the emerging socially just educator identity, at the heart of the research.

Another core tenet of duoethnography which appealed to us is its polyvocality. Rather than blending the researchers' voices into a single narration, the reader of duoethnography is welcomed to the dialogic research space by being able to 'hear' individual voices of the researchers in the published text. These typically take the form of reconstructed dialogues or stories/vignettes (e.g. Banegas and Gerlach 2021; Lawrence and Nagashima 2019; Lowe and Kiczkowiak 2016).

As a group of three researchers, we have used duoethnography tenets in our research design but are choosing to use the term trioethnography as is used by Hooper, Oka and Yamazawa in Lowe and Lawrence (2020). In communicating key outputs from our project, we have opted for extracts from our poems and associated stories to represent us, rather than dialogue. In other words, while we strived to enter into critical dialogues with each other's stories, we were equally keen to ensure the readers can have an insight into our respective *currere*, or lived experience (Pinar 1975, in Sawyer and Norris 2013).

Our methods

Inspired by an article by Dillabough (2020) which builds on the work of Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur and Stuart Hall to illustrate the importance of storytelling with and in relation to others, our starting point was documenting our stories. We sought to reflect on our journeys within and outside the classroom, constructing an ecosystem of knowledge of our lived and professional experiences as English language teachers.

To trigger refection of the critical incidents in our professional careers, we decided to narrate our stories around the following themes: hurting place; joyful moments; and turning points/catalysts. We identified a structured approach to fostering deep engagement with, and reflection on stories shared in Edge and Olan's (2021) paper in which they utilised Langer's (2011) 'Five Stances'. The Five Stances encourages researchers to take an iterative approach to reading stories through different lenses. We interpreted the five stances to encourage us to move our thinking from individual responses to the stories we read, toward a collective, collaborative sense-making process that sought to understand the phenomenon being researched. Our process of implementing those five stances is as follows:

1. We responded to each other's stories after reading them for the first time (by adding comments, emailing each other back and forth, summarizing our reactions on our Teams Channel and our WhatsApp group).
2. We kept responding to each other's stories after subsequent readings.
3. We met on Zoom to make sense of each other's responses to help elaborate on our individual stories further; the meetings and the discussions were transcribed.
4. Some of us started journaling/editing/modifying our personal stories and the responses by generating Wordclouds summarizing the most frequent words and themes in our stories.
5. We redacted all outputs through the blackout poetry approach to produce final poems.

In addition to Olan and Edge's (2021) research, a further inspiration for exploring poetry as a

method for sense-making is its strong tradition of exploring issues of belonging amongst academics we respect (e.g., bell hooks, Audre Lorde), including Adrienne Rich who speaks of the power of poetry in the extract below:

> It's potentially catalytic speech because it's more than speech:
> it is associative, metaphoric, dialectical, visual, musical;
> in poetry words can say more than they mean and mean more than they say.
> In a time of frontal assaults both on language and on
> human solidarity, poetry can remind us of all we are in
> danger of losing – disturb us, embolden us out of resignation
>
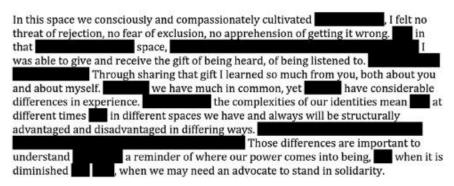> Interview with Adrienne Rich – *Radcliffe Quarterly* (Fall 1998)

We wanted to experiment with the possibilities of what poetry could afford us in articulating the myriad of emotions that we anticipated would surface through the research process. To create a blackout poem a writer/poet takes a marker (usually black marker) to already existing text, such as a journal article and redacts words until a poem is created (Kleon 2010). We were inspired to use this method of inquiry not only by its use within Olan and Edge's (2021) research, but also by our attendance at workshops on the use of such poetry as an analysis and teaching tool. With a continued focus on ethics of care, we were also mindful that blackout poetry would give us the freedom to control what we were and were not willing to disclose within the process whilst allowing us to explore the various themes, intentions and messages within.

In the following section we each share an extract from one of our poems and offer our theoretical and personal reflections on the extract and the research process. These are followed by a joint discussion of the themes we have identified across our experiences related to the phenomenon of becoming a socially just educator.

Our stories

Lorraine's story

Extract from: The Gift of Being Heard

In this space we consciously and compassionately cultivated ████████, I felt no threat of rejection, no fear of exclusion, no apprehension of getting it wrong. ████ in that ████ space, ████ I was able to give and receive the gift of being heard, of being listened to. ████ Through sharing that gift I learned so much from you, both about you and about myself. ████ we have much in common, yet ████ have considerable differences in experience. ████ the complexities of our identities mean ██ at different times ██ in different spaces we have and always will be structurally advantaged and disadvantaged in differing ways. ████ Those differences are important to understand ████ a reminder of where our power comes into being, ██ when it is diminished ██ ██, when we may need an advocate to stand in solidarity.

As I sat down to muse on and share my career trajectory – including highs and lows – with Iwona and Tomasz, I had three realisations. The first was that it had been a long time since I had protected some time to critically reflect on my practice as an educator, the second was that I had rarely conducted that reflection before in conversation with others who were not observing my practice, and the third was that I really did not know Iwona and Tomasz very well! As our participation on the EAP for Social Justice Special Interest Group committee is voluntary, there tends to be limited time to get to know each other beyond that shared endeavour. Indeed, at the

point of writing, we have yet to meet each other in person!

Against that backdrop it may seem like a brave or foolish endeavour to share moments of conflict and discomfort as well as successes with relative strangers; I am so pleased that we were all courageous. As is expressed in the extract above, sharing my story, hearing their stories, and coming together to retell our stories and sense-make collaboratively was a site of hugely transformative learning for me. Listening to Iwona's and Tomasz's stories highlighted significant gaps in my knowledge of historical, geopolitical contexts which occurred close to the continent I was living in, but were far outside my frame of reference as I grew up. Their experiences held a mirror up to privileges I was unaware that my second-generation immigrant, British-born, working-class background had afforded me. Everyday occurrences that I had taken for granted, such as having access to a range of fruits all year round and the ability to purchase Coca-Cola from the local shop, were illuminated as moments of rarity and wonder in Tomasz's and Iwona's childhood and adolescence.

Through our conversations, I realised that some of my ignorance was based in fear. A fear of asking questions. A fear wrapped up in the violence of the question we had each experienced in personal and professional contexts, 'Where are you from?' often followed by, 'No, but where are you really from?' or other iterations of follow up questions to indicate you had not provided the person asking with their desired response. A response that would satisfy their will to position you as 'other' in opposition to 'belonging'.
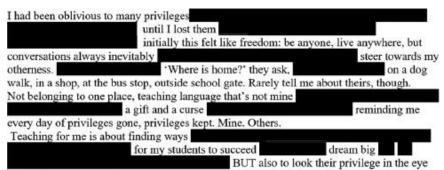
A key moment of learning for me in this project, was realising that my conscious determination to avoid interactions that may fall foul of othering the people I have met through my life, may have inadvertently resulted in many missed opportunities in broadening my global knowledge and further enriching personal and professional relationships. I continue to reflect on how systems and acts of oppression which seek to silence marginalised people, can also serve to deepen divides between marginalised and centred communities by discouraging conversations between them.

That said, as an educator who aligns with social constructivist epistemologies and critical methodologies, I have always held the learning I gain from my students as equally valuable to the skills development and insights I am able to provide them. I now realise that numerous colleagues along the way have also played an invaluable role in my process of becoming a socially just educator. Whether in my hurting places or moments of joyful resistance it has been a collaborative effort.

I am mindful that this realisation has emerged from a process that from the outset was steeped in a will to engage, a mutual respect and an approach centred in care. We each afforded each other the time and space that human-connectedness requires and deserves. In doing so, we cultivated nurturing conditions which served as an essential element of building trust amongst relative strangers. These conditions allowed us to move beyond the superficial, othering query of 'Where are you from?' and instead explore 'Where have you been? Who were you then? Who are you now? And where are you planning to go?' in the spirit of garnering mutual understanding of our shared and differing experiences.

Iwona's story

Extract from: On Privilege and Power

I had been oblivious to many privileges ████████████████
███████████████ until I lost them ████████
██████████ initially this felt like freedom: be anyone, live anywhere, but
conversations always inevitably ██████████████████ steer towards my
otherness. ███████ 'Where is home?' they ask, ████████ on a dog
walk, in a shop, at the bus stop, outside school gate. Rarely tell me about theirs, though.
Not belonging to one place, teaching language that's not mine ██████████
████████ a gift and a curse ████████████████ reminding me
every day of privileges gone, privileges kept. Mine. Others.
Teaching for me is about finding ways ██████████████████
████████████ for my students to succeed ██████████ dream big ██ ██
████████████████████ BUT also to look their privilege in the eye
and realise it comes with a responsibility.

Becoming a socially aware educator has been a path of awakening for me. Growing up in politically enforced monocultural, monolingual and predominantly white country emerging from 50 years of communism, I perceived English as a language of everything I was denied: civic freedom, multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic diversity and richness. English was exciting until I started TESOL degrees where diversity was given lip service and where a very reductive view of English and its speakers was truly valued. For example, deviating from the RP accent was penalised and mocked by teachers, dissertation supervisors and sometimes peers. The colonial past was mentioned but not explored; only one particular type of linguistic native-like proficiency enforced. English became torturous and my second-class status cemented at the ELT workplace, where birthplace decided opportunities and pay. After four years, I desperately wanted to leave received pronunciation and ELT behind.

Moving to Scotland initially felt like freedom, but as described in the poem, in time it also brought challenges. Here, I became the 'other' mostly outside my profession. It was through the dialogues with Lorraine and Tomasz that I felt ready to explore (confront?) how this positioning had been affecting my identity and practice. Conversely to the experience of teaching English in Poland, and in the international EAP classroom at a Scottish university I feel at home, while outside of it very much a stranger. I am perceived and evaluated through the lens of what my interlocutor(s) believe, know or experienced about Poland and my fellow countrymen. Group identity, something also adopted towards international students in the UK, is not necessarily a negative experience if you come from a place/group which are familiar and/or desirable to your interlocutor, as one of my students said beaming with pride: 'I didn't know I was Italian until I came to Scotland!'. Yet, the seemingly neutral: 'Where is home?' can also forcefully position one as a stranger, despite their desire to belong. It can be a powerful reminder that those in power ask, and those without it, have to answer, not unlike in the classroom.

Reflecting with Lorraine and Tomasz on orienting myself towards social justice informed education, I realised that the experience of being othered, imposed or adopted (internalised?), has had a profound impact on me, much more than I was happy to admit prior to our discussions. The process of cyclical reflection and dialogue adopted in this research helped me understand how much the experience of displacement (even though not forced) set me on course to a more culturally, linguistically and socially responsible teaching practice. Becoming a migrant and then a parent transformed how I view the world around me and continues to determine what kind of teacher I want to be. These two powerful forces led to my engagement with the EAP for Social Justice Special Interest Group (SIG), which nurtured and extended opportunities to consider societal, political and cultural privileges beyond those bestowed by language: such as gender,

sexuality, race or social class.

Many of those privileges, and/or lack of, emerged in our reflections for this chapter. Critical dialogues with Tomasz and Lorraine, full of emotions and insightful yet compassionate comments, resonated strongly with so much of the learning I have been doing for some time, but went beyond what I currently understand, leaving me with a desire to explore more. Discussions on power, privilege and injustice are not common in the field of EAP, and when they are discussed they often focus on the positionality of EAP students, precarious employment conditions of the teachers or their marginalised status within their institutions. Race, gender, class, sexuality, neurodiversity, native-speakerism and migration are not explored much, though. This project showed me how little I knew about my colleagues' struggles and achievements, and how much can be learnt by reflecting on those openly, with care and respect. Most of all, the collaboration with two creative and daring individuals helped me open up to uncertainty, which is no small feat for someone with a strong need to control everything. For that lesson, I am also very grateful.

Tomasz's story

Extract from: The English Language – my Saviour and my Oppressor

"I was 21, I had £50 in my pocket [redacted] no fixed plans or expectations [redacted] feeling liberated [redacted] not worrying about some mundane things [redacted] I landed in London [redacted], it was 20 July, one of the hottest days in the UK on record. The sun was shining bright, I put my tinted sunglasses on, [redacted] I had dreams and I had… English."

What you see above is an excerpt from my story of turning points and hurting places trying to deconstruct my identity as an English Language Teaching practitioner. My adventure with the English language started on a high, and for the first few years, I was definitely in the honeymoon phase with it. In the stories shared with Iwona and Lorraine, I initially struggled with revealing the more intimate moments from my professional ELT life. For example, instead of really reflecting on the critical incidents in my ELT career, I took a shortcut, and simply sent them my already submitted Senior HEA application thinking this would do the job: how naive was I!

It was the dialogic playfulness of Bahktin's (1981) heteroglossia that eventually opened me up. If I had not engaged with Iwona's 'alien-ess' as a privileged Pole, a woman and a mother, a feminist, another 'non-native speaker' with a different background story; Lorraine's narrative revolving around her never-ending fight with different forms of oppression and othering in ELT as a black woman; and the genuine support I had received from both of them, I would not have been able to come clean to fully reflect on my own trajectory.

My narrative revolved around the double-faced nature of the English language industry in my life – I presented it as a saviour, but also oppressor. While I glorified the English language as a 'door opener', a sort of capital enabling me social mobility moving away from my working-class roots, a gateway to liberate my sexuality as a queer person, a language allowing me to reimagine myself as whoever I wanted to be, it is also the same English language that later rejected me and bullied having a knock-on effect on my confidence, belief in my English language abilities, teaching skills, public speaking, writing and trust in general.

In her story, Lorraine talks about the ugly side of working for the ELT industry, and being treated as a sort of 'English language ambassador' whilst working abroad and how uncomfortable she felt being made to 'impose' awfully inappropriate English language rules/content on people hoping to use English as a commodity for social mobility. Lorraine's stories echoed with my own experiences

of being a sort of English language ambassador when being sent away abroad on an English language assessment mission to interrogate and patronise 'the other'. I very quickly realised English and the ELT can be political. It was at that point that I understood my honeymoon phase with the English language was over. I suddenly felt incredibly uncomfortable working in an industry which to some extent legitimised colonisation and oppression. I realised what language as power meant – here English was used as a product to prevent, rather than enable, social mobility. So, is the English language and the whole bureaucracy around it used as a camouflage for what is actually a 'softer', continuous, and recycled colonisation of the oppressed, of the 'Oriental' others, non-Western people? What happened to English language sold as an enabler and saviour that is sometimes used to empower citizens to be conscious of their ability to form social bonds and work together to better the world?

I believe it was the very same English Language which 'saved me', and the industry that had gifted me with access to knowledge and power, that has sometimes transformed itself from Dr Jekyll to Mr Hyde and made me doubt myself, made me sick and made me feel like an imposter. But there is hope. The more secure jobs I have had over the years have allowed me to reimagine myself and steer more activism into my daily routine. In my current work I have developed a new module revolving around tackling native-speakerism ideology and promoting curriculum innovations building on global Englishes, and I supervise relevant, socially-just oriented PhD and Master's projects. I also started involving my students in volunteering placements, training them to teach vulnerable adults building on trauma-informed pedagogy. Furthermore, the work we have done together within the EAP4SJ SIG has also empowered me further to keep disturbing the status quo of the traditional role of an ELT practitioner. Having experienced the good, the bad and the ugly of the English language industry, I actively challenge the various obstacles, including representation in the ELT industry, I rewrite curricula to include 'the other' and weave in practical examples of activism, enabling students to become not just English language users but active and proud global citizens. But is that enough to become a socially-just educator?

Discussion

We embarked on this research project wanting to deepen our understanding of how the intersections of our personal identities have impacted on our professional identities and practice within the field of EAP and explore the phenomena of an emerging socially just educator identity. Based on our conversations and on reviewing each of our choices in poem extract and stories – which we each wrote independently – an evident core theme is that our experience of being marginalised in our personal and/or professional life has acted as a catalyst for centring social justice in our professional practice. It is our deeply personal experiences of being othered that mobilise us to try to foster belonging in the educational spaces we facilitate.

Being othered

Our stories of hurting places pivoted around moments of being othered. These included examples of direct comments from colleagues which indicated they felt we did not belong in the professional space, witnessing unethical practices within programmes we have worked on and/or feeling complicit in systems that uncritically use English Language Teaching and English for Academic Purposes as a method of enforcing power over others. In our reflective conversations, we realised that those moments of hurting often consciously or unconsciously threw us back to our personal experiences of feeling like we did not belong, and thus mobilised us – when we felt safe to do so

– to use our agency to foster belonging within our teaching practice. We acknowledged these as moments when we chose to challenge the ways in which we may have unconsciously reinforced systems of oppression in our professional lives and reminded ourselves that, 'the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy' (hooks 1994).

The issue of safety was something that we discussed frequently in this research project. We recognised in the early stages of designing our approach that our personal experiences of being marginalised, along with some of the critical incidents that acted as a catalyst for this research project, were moments of feeling unsafe. It was important to us to ensure that we each felt safe throughout the project, hence our commitment to the ethics of care which are embedded within the trioethnography methodology.

Ethics of care

However, we would argue that we went beyond ethics of care in our approach, and that we adopted what hooks (2001) describes as a 'love ethic'. She describes this way of being in the world as one which rejects ideologies underpinned by systems of domination and notions of pitting groups against each other. Instead, living by a love ethic embraces love and care for oneself and others as a means of casting out fear and building human interconnectedness (hooks 2001). It may seem far from academic to speak of love in a research project, but if we use hooks' understanding of love 'as the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth' (Peck 1978, cited in hooks 2001: 10), you can see from our poems and stories that love was an essential ingredient for establishing the trust required for the transformational learning we each speak of.

In reflecting on our turning points and moments of resistance, we recognised that we were affording similar love and care in our EAP practice. This resulted in fruitful discussions within which we reassured ourselves that it is vital our work as socially-just educators prioritises empathy, compassion, and understanding in the education process. This echoes with Bali's 'Pedagogy of Care' (2021), which recognises that as we come from different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, we should actively seek to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that nurtures our growth and development. The Pedagogy of Care emphasises building relationships and creating a sense of community in the classroom, where teachers act as facilitators, guides and caretakers of the learning process. 'Committed acts of caring let all students know that the purpose of education is not to dominate, or prepare them to be dominators, but rather to create the conditions for freedom. Caring educators open the mind, allowing students to embrace a world of knowing that is always subject to change and challenge.' (hooks 2003: 91).

Regarding an emerging socially just educator identity, we recognise that we have just started to scratch the surface of what that process of becoming entails, and that this will be unique for each individual. However, what we have learnt through this project is that our decision to adopt a trioethnographic methodological framework, which centred a dialogic approach in the data collection and analysis, encouraged us to listen attentively to one another and be in meaningful conversation with each other. Through our discussions, we challenged our biases, confronted differences, crossed boundaries and recognised sites of solidarity, and in doing so we realised the potential noted by hooks (1994) of meaningful dialogue as an essential tool for building community and enriching our individual and collective research and teaching practice. Our loving, creative, dialogic approach undoubtedly fostered a sense of community, of belonging to a shared endeavour of understanding. There was no expectation that we would fully understand each other's direct experience, but we wholeheartedly committed to listening to, and hearing each other's experiences to gain a better sense of ourselves in relation to others and to identify sites of shared and differential power. Our attention and intention fostered a dialogue which allowed us to move beyond reductive

concepts of identity such as class, race, gender and sexuality, and instead welcomed the plurality of our experiences (Dillabough 2020).

Conclusion

This trioethnographic study strengthened our communal sense of belonging and fostered a sense of accountability and interdependence. Exercising ethics of care, empathy and respect for each other and ourselves, helped us create a supportive and inclusive research environment with shared responsibility towards the well-being and needs of all involved. In her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, bell hooks (2008) writes: 'a beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural complexities that shape who we are and how we live in loving and supportive ways that enable us to develop a strong sense of collective belonging.'

In our journeys to become socially-just educators, we connected with each other to create a solidified base and community through which we practised, but also engaged more deeply with learning and unlearning about our own individual epistemological biases. As we engaged with public pedagogy (Biesta 2012) through learning and unlearning and making sense of the injustices observed in the ELT/EAP sector (public spaces and cultural institutions), it was the other critical observers/interlocutors with whom we interacted and communicated that played a key role in the process of interrupting the homogeny, or uniformity, of our experiences. This interruption of homogeny challenged our existing understandings and beliefs, leading to transformation in our thinking and learning.

We feel grateful to have created the time and space to both give and receive insights into our experiences through our personal life and professional career. To listen to someone – really listen to someone – and to be afforded a precious insight into their experience, and in turn to be truly heard and know that you have each afforded each other space and perspective for sense-making, well, that is a very precious gift. A gift that we rarely make time for, but a gift that we hope we have articulated through this piece, and that can be hugely transformational.

In EAP scholarship, as we desperately strive for legitimacy as a community within our organisations, we feel compelled to follow the 'rules' of what constitutes an illustration of 'quality' / 'serious' research and scholarship. Fearful that deviating from those rules will further hinder our collective pursuit for legitimisation of the discipline and profession, we often remain conservative in our scholarly efforts, which ironically can have the opposite effect by preventing EAP practitioners from developing wider knowledge of research methods and epistemologies. Certainly, as we took the decisions to engage in a research project adopting dialogic, creative, love-led approaches, we knew we were running the risk of ridicule and the validity of our work being undermined. There were moments throughout the process of doubt, and concerns around our professional and personal wellbeing. But, in the infamous words of Susan Jeffers (2007), we chose to feel the fear and do it anyway. If any of what you have read has resonated or inspired you, we would encourage you to diverge from the norm and build and share knowledge through creative, collaborative, compassionate experimentation as you continue on your journey to becoming a socially just educator.

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