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Qualitative Studies

Critical Reflections on Collaborative Writing:
Editorial Experiments in Fostering Equitable Dialogue

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Drawing on our experience of creating an innovative co-edited book form, we consider the risks and possibilities of experimentation in high-stakes writing and editorial work. Writing and editing conventions that value parsimony, individuality and objectivity can result in sparse writing styles that disconnect authors from their texts. In applied disciplines, such as Education, academic writing can be a barrier to communication with practitioners and fail to connect research to practice. To foster a connection, academics, educators, practitioners and alumni were grouped to undertake dialogue-centred collaborative writing about equitable engagement in global citizenship education. We found that "critical and liberating dialogue" (Freire, 1993, p. 39) in this third space (Bhabha, 1994) challenged dominant writing conventions, and invited critical consideration of liminalities beyond the self as writing became linked to knowing differently. With large parts presented in dialogue format, our article reflects on the editorial challenges and pleasures of fostering dialogic, collaborative writing for equity.

Keywords: dialogic writing; experimental; critical reflection; academic writing; equitable editorial practices

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Buckle Your Seatbelts, You're in for a Different Style of Writing

Shona: Hello. I'm Shona.

Sarah: And I'm Sarah.

Shona: We're delighted to contribute to this special issue by co-writing a paper that models a method of foregrounding dialogue in text. We do so because dialogue, though central in the verbal exchanges underpinning academic knowledge production, rarely appears in academic writing itself.

Sarah: We're not claiming that we invented the inclusion of dialogue in academic writing. We see verbatim quoting in several forms already. For instance, the literature is regularly quoted, acknowledging the unique perspectives of given scholars. Study participants are also directly quoted– an act that implicitly recognizes the importance of individuals' language and perspectives. Yet there are far fewer examples of academic pieces where co-authors speak directly to one another in the text. We see great value in dialogue, both on and off the page.

Shona: In this article we critically explore the potential of dialogue. For example, we see dialogue as a way to illustrate divergent perspectives, something that narrative writing masks. Conventional academic narrative presents ideas as a consensus, presenting a false sense of value-free neutrality (Bhavani, 1993). While co-authors may have negotiated phrasing, there are few opportunities for readers to view the ways thinking may have differed. In other words, academic writing traditions can disconnect the authorial textual voice from the often more tentative authorial verbal explorations that produce the text.

Sarah: We also see dialogue as a potential way to disrupt patterns of privilege. For instance, in educational research, traditional academic writing can reinforce power hierarchies between scholars and practitioners, limiting participation in knowledge production to those that "know the rules" of academic writing in a field where permissible writing is narrowly defined (Hartley, 2008).

Shona: Some consider rigidly conventional writing as "lumpy, heavy and pretentious" (Badley, 2016, p. 514).

Sarah: But we see dialogue, both in the creation of writing and in the product, as a way to engage in the deliberate equity work that Freire (2012) argues for. His dialogic approaches emphasise the importance of deep and critical listening, of people coming together to unearth inequities and of collaboratively working towards new solutions.

Shona: We recently engaged in an experimental collaborative and dialogic writing project that attempted to address both these areas. While it was certainly not without challenges or flaws, we saw considerable promise worth sharing. We write as co-editors of a book about Global Citizenship Education (GCE) that purposefully aimed to connect academics and practitioners researching and working in this area, groups that generally work separately from each other. We set out to minimise disconnects across theory/practice silos and found critical dialogue a helpful tool to make room for plural perspectives. We wanted to ensure that academic knowledge, which sat comfortably in a published book, did not dominate the practical knowledge of educators, unused to academic conventions.

Sarah: Readers, you'll see that we move back and forth between more conventional narrative sections and dialogue. This mirrors what happened in the book. The conversational tone purposely departs from academic writing and moves towards an exploratory new space. The ideas in the narrative sections illustrate points of consensus between us. They also serve important organisational purposes, helping readers by contextualising, analysing or framing dialogue sections, a challenge we discuss more fully later in the article.

Shona: This format means we can also present our own perspectives by attributing our words to our names. And we can engage in textual conversation, with one another or talk directly to you, the reader. Not only does this model the technique we developed in the book, but it illustrates how collaborative writing need not be presented as consensus. We stand by our words, literally, attaching our names to passages that reflect our perspectives. Nevertheless, the final written dialogues were edited and refined for textual flow and have been crafted for presentation in an academic journal. Inevitably, our perspectives have also shifted in response to one another through writing this way. Even so, many closely reflect real-time conversations Sarah and I

had with one another over Skype, where we alternated between writing and discussing our ideas aloud.

Sarah: We realise that you might find it disorienting to have dialogue in places you are accustomed to having narrative. Readers might crave traditional literature reviews, for instance, but we embed our references into conversations throughout. As unusual as it might be, there is a precedence for centring on dialogue. We draw on the experimental work of others who have been writing off the beaten track (*inter alia* Lillis, 2011; Childers et al., 2013; Handforth & Taylor, 2016) and acknowledge the work of qualitative methods journals, such as this one and Qualitative Inquiry for instance, that provide spaces for experimental academic writing. Please bear with the discomfort of the unfamiliar and reflect with us on the potential these approaches present.

Shona: In the book project, we saw how surfacing dialogue enabled contributors to better understand their own and others' perspectives, resulting in writing that informed equitable pursuits of GCE and social justice practices. New, equitable, spaces for knowledge-sharing emerged. While the work in the book brought benefits such as new ways to approach equitable GCE, the process of bringing it into being relied on a great deal of synchronous and asynchronous behind-the-scenes editorial work with chapter groups. This was time-consuming, tiring, frustrating at times, and editorially challenging. We offer our reflections on the process to you without suggesting we have solved all the issues it has presented.

Sarah: Interestingly, though not altogether surprisingly, the dialogues, verbal and textual, that we had as editors and as co-authors were instrumental in the final form of the book and of this paper, and our experiment shaped our understanding of our respective perspectives and raised questions about equity and editorial practices in conventional academic writing.

We continue this article with contextual information about our book and positionalities. We present the origins of the book and catalysts for its eventual form. We reflect on the behind-the-scenes dialogues amongst contributors while preparing to write then transition into the challenges with representing those dialogues in writing. Finally, we end by exploring the

ways that we, as editors, navigated the tensions of producing unconventional writing in a sector with pervasive normative conventions. Throughout this paper, we use dialogue interspersed with narrative, the former relating to individual perspectives and the latter for presenting shared views. We hope that the paper prompts you to reflect on the potentials of unconventional academic writing in your own field.

The Dialogic Book Project

The book we centre on, Enacting Equitable Global Citizenship Education in Schools: Lessons from Dialogue Between Research and Practice (Lillo Kang & McIntosh, 2023)), intentionally sits at the knowledge intersections of academia and primary/secondary schools, with contributors and audiences from both domains. The text brings together thirty-six authors and two editors from six continents with a shared interest in promoting equitable GCE in schools. Contributors from a range of professional backgrounds include academics from several disciplines, primary/secondary educators, young climate activists, school administrators, school counsellors, educational consultants, and researchers. Reaching across researcher/practitioner silos was an intentional strategy to connect different perspectives on GCE.

The book is divided into two parts; Part One focuses on dismantling normative understandings of GCE (Shona was the Part One lead editor) and Part Two focuses on optimising GCE practices through dialogic exchange (Sarah was the Part Two lead editor). Each part included six to seven contributor chapters and one cross-thematic dialogue chapter. The book also contained an introduction and conclusion.

While a two-part book with an introduction and conclusion may sound conventional, we included dialogue in the text to mirror the dialogic processes that were occurring behind the scenes as each co-authored chapter was constructed. The cross-silo chapter teams, based on different specialisms, spanned geographic, language and/or professional divides; authors, in most cases, did not previously know one another. We challenged them to use dialogue to critically explore provocations, which we wrote to reflect specific GCE expertise, and to capture those conversations in their chapters.

The resulting chapters were atypical in that they were multi-genre in nature, with a mix of narrative writing and script-style dialogues. Contributors were asked to include explicit positionality statements and write using the first person. After contributor chapters were written, we, editors, identified cross-cutting themes from each part and invited relevant contributors to engage in further writing around those. The result was editor-curated, script-style dialogue chapters to end Part One and Part Two. Dialogue was further infused into the introductory and concluding chapters, giving readers insights into the editorial conversations that framed the book.

We saw the approach as an experiment in purposeful dialogue, drawing on Freire's (2012) promotion of liberatory dialogic practices. We hoped, as Freire (2012) noted, that such interactions might enable contributors to "'re-consider,' through the 'considerations' of others," (p.112). These re-considerations emerged through generative intersections in third spaces (Bhabha, 1994) and opened expansive possibilities for connecting with others. By exploring beyond established boundaries of self/other into liminal spaces, where space is meant in the sense of unfamiliar territory, we find "the third space [which] is a challenge to the limits of the self" (Bhabha, 2011, p. 10). In the book, authors experienced this challenge through dialogue between themselves and with us; they encountered new viewpoints that became part of their own. In this way, individuals' positions frayed a little at the edges, softening to allow an expansion that accommodated others'. This personally expansive process, supported through liberatory dialogue, was neither academic nor non-academic, producing a hybrid where academic and practitioner contributions were presented as equally valuable. This equity, between two often separate domains, pushes against exclusionary hierarchical conventions, particularly in education, that values academic above practice-based knowledge.

Our Positionalities

As editors who are both also qualitative researchers, we feel it is imperative to acknowledge our positionalities and practice reflexivity through positionality statements, as advocated by many including Merriam and Tisdell (2016). In the book project, while not a formal study, we asked all contributors to critically reflect on their respective upbringings, educational

backgrounds, experiences, and contexts, making these core influences visible within their chapters. We offer the same transparency for readers here as well.

Shona: My work in education spans both teaching and research, firstly as a secondary school teacher, in London and Spain, then as an academic in the UK. My research in international education focuses on learning relationships as potent sites for social transformation and I am currently developing methodologies for epistemic justice. My background makes me aware of the disconnect between educational research and practice but I saw, in our book, potential for academic and practitioner voices to connect with each others' knowledge of GCE. I also recognised the ongoing, inspiring, open and challenging conversations with Sarah as invaluable for developing my understanding of the potential of equity through dialogue.

Sarah: Meanwhile, I am an American teacher educator and researcher. I currently teach pre-service and practising teachers at a university in the USA. Much like Shona, I began my teaching career as a secondary English educator, with experiences in the USA, South Korea, and Uganda. My undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees all come from equity-oriented programs in the USA, programs that equipped me to push boundaries of the status quo. Most of my research is qualitative in nature and focuses on elevating the voices and experiences of educators. Shona and I really connected over our shared interest in work at the intersections of academia and practitioner spaces.

Origin Story

Although the book's final structure is described above, here we look back at its evolution to surface the emergent nature of developing publications. We reflect on catalysts for particular choices that led us away from writing norms. By looking at the rationales behind our decisions, we are better able to reflect on the possibilities of the eventual form of our book.

We began the book project, as many editors do, with a vision and a call for contributors. We had decided we wanted a dialogic (Freire, 2012) project that included

academics and practitioners working together towards critical GCE in primary and secondary schools, intentionally challenging entrenched binaries. Our initial call inviting potential authors to submit proposals for chapters, included openness to unconventional styles (such as using poetry or comics to explore GCE). Initially, we were primarily concerned with presenting diverse perspectives alongside each other, creating a selection of viewpoints informed by differing contexts and expertise. We imagined opportunities for direct conversations across contributors in dialogue chapters at the end of thematic sections and asked in our call that all contributors be open to these further sorts of dialogic elements. Once we had a balanced contributor list and a detailed enough vision, we began our proposal process with Routledge. These publisher conversations catalysed our first major shifts.

Routledge was quite interested in a book with both academic and practitioner contributors. A Routledge editor oriented us towards Bhabha's (1994) concept of third space, a resonant metaphor that we saw had potential for work at academic/practitioner intersections. The Routledge Critical Global Citizenship in Education series editor, Carlos Torres, had recently included a book with scripted dialogue (Bosio, 2021), though that text was written in an interviewer-interviewee style. Torres was excited about our application of the Freirean dialogic. Routledge representatives initially asked us to consider a two-volume collection, which would have allowed all our wide-ranging contributors to be involved. But as the contracting process continued, Routledge asked us to scale back our plans to a single volume with a fairly firm upper word and chapter limit. This challenge catalysed our eventual innovations.

Sarah: Readers, we knew we were at a crossroads. We didn't want to cut contributors, which went against our vision for bringing together a wide range of authors. Instead, we got creative, developing the idea of contributor *mash ups*. Shona and I met (on Skype) with all the contributor proposals in front of us and, using knowledge and bios, we matched diverse authors into chapter teams. We wrote specific provocations for each chapter then asked contributors if they would be willing to experiment with something more directly dialogical with someone they didn't know. A few

contributors decided not to continue with the project, but, shockingly, nearly all our initial contributors were willing.

Shona: The unusual approach catalysed not just the new vision for the book but also for our editorial roles.

Sarah: As we began to play with this new vision, we recognised its better fit for our theoretical aims. From the outset, we valued Freire's emphasis on dialogue as a mechanism for understanding, but our original proposal did not fully centralise dialogue. According to Freire (2012), you can't force someone's mind to change, or as he puts it "unveil the world *for* another" (169); one has to discover or re-conceptualize one's ideas in dialogue with another. The fortunate emergence of this collaborative form of writing seemed an exciting way to encourage equitable discussions whilst downplaying our editorial powers.

Shona: Of course, those author/editor power dynamics, something we felt sat uneasily in a project focused on equity, were still there but we became aware of the potential for exploration of the third space in something akin to an ontology of immanence (St. Pierre, 2021); we committed to a bold experiment in unfolding emergent knowledge.

Re-envisioning Collaboration: Dialogues Behind the Scenes

Interested contributors began engaging directly with a specific aspect of GCE with someone in a completely different context (in most cases, someone they had not previously known). These collaborations were neither academic- nor practitioner-led, developing in/towards a third space. The cultures of collaboration in each respective sphere led to norms that were simultaneously helpful and problematic in shaping our contributors' writing.

Despite established collaborative academic publishing traditions, particularly in the social sciences, guides to academic writing promote objectivity, parsimony and formality within a fairly rigid range of acceptable structures for presenting research knowledge (Hartley, 2008). While these conventions were familiar to our academic contributors, we were wary of the effect that this would have on practitioner contributors if they felt unable to name their world (Freire, 2012); in other words, if academic knowledge was perceived as dominant, how could alternative knowledge have equal credence? The deliberate aim of

using dialogue was to unsettle conventions of dominant knowledge that privilege educational researchers' knowledge over practitioners'. We thought that, as editors, we could foster an egalitarian co-author relationship to support dialogic explorations, whilst simultaneously realising we could not escape editorial authority entirely.

Meanwhile, in practitioner realms, we know that educators often collaborate around practical problems, like curricular design, but are encouraged towards consensus instead of critically questioning practices that maintain power hierarchies. We found useful Freire's (2012) description of cooperative dialogue:

> Cooperation, as a characteristic of dialogic action - which occurs only among Subjects (who may, however, have diverse levels of functions and thus of responsibility) - can only be achieved through communication. Dialogue, as essential communication, must underlie any cooperation (…) Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not domesticate, does not 'sloganize.' (…) Let me re-emphasize that posing reality as a problem…means critical analysis of a problematic reality. (p.168)

We felt that forays into cooperative dialogue held potential for equitable connection of knowledges and the sort of radical co-presences (Stein, 2015) that we hoped would stimulate cooperative criticality. However, there was wariness from practitioners and academics alike about the risks involved. As Freire (2012) explained, "[c]oncepts such as unity, organisation, and struggle are immediately labelled as dangerous. In fact, of course, these concepts *are* dangerous - to the oppressors - for their realisation is necessary to actions of liberation" (p.141). Freire helps us think about two key points here. Firstly, in the context of this article, the oppressors, representing those with power to fully express themselves as human while unjustly limiting that power in others, is tied up with the power to write for an academic audience and, therefore something that gave the academic contributors more authority. Secondly, bringing contributors together in dialogue format not only flattened that power hierarchy but also deliberately worked counter to academic individualism and conventions in a publication industry that privileges particular knowledges. This might not be liberation but we were intent on making space for other knowledges to sit alongside those privileged academic narratives about GCE.

We do not wish to overclaim the effect of the book on its contributors and ourselves. We have evidence, from informal conversations and authors' written comments, that many experienced a shift towards expanded perspectives through their dialogues. However, within the wider sector of academic publishing, to which this special issue speaks, we are aware that this is a struggle against entrenched and hierarchical practices.

Shona: We saw dialogues as essential in avoiding the reproduction of dominant editor/author hierarchies, which made centralising collaborative relationships crucial. We framed all chapter contributors, academics and practitioners alike, as experts in the chapter sub-topics. We challenged contributors to not only exchange perspectives, but also to question underlying assumptions in one another's views, cultivating relationships that embraced critical introspection. We did so to encourage "[i]ndividuals who were *submerged* in reality, merely *feeling* their needs, [to] *emerge* from reality and perceive the *causes* of their needs" (Freire, 2012, p. 117). We held that, through dialogue, they could better understand both their own views and expand them to include vastly different contexts and world views.

Sarah: This was no small ask though, since most contributors did not know each other. Contributors were engaged in conversations, not interviews, but nonetheless we saw some of what Maxwell (2013) described as negotiated relationships based on a trusting partnership. Most chapter groups quickly realised that they needed to understand one another's backgrounds and build rapport before launching into critical work. In-person meetings were not an option with contributors geographically distant and in the midst of COVID-19 travel restrictions. Instead, traditional face-to-face interactions were moved to digital platforms. Although less than ideal, most teams started getting to know each other, sharing ideas through video and audio calls before writing began.

Shona: Ideas developed more smoothly in some chapters than others. Criticality was differently experienced across the groups. At some points, collaborative tensions (or lack thereof) prompted authors forwards, and in some moments the tensions impeded

the process. Additional tensions arose as groups worked through differences in meanings and language.

Sarah: Language was an interesting mediating factor. We had numerous contributors who worked in English despite it not being their first language. Even when contributors shared a first language, there were colloquialisms and idiosyncrasies specific to their cultural contexts and professional backgrounds. We even saw this in conversations with each other as editors, where our U.S. and U.K. origins were reflected in our language and interpretations. Contributors, therefore, needed extra time to establish connections and understand one another's words and meanings.

But one thing I thought was so interesting in this process was that disconnects often highlighted different interpretations and ways of seeing. For example, I was in a chapter team with another academic and a practitioner. Together, we looked at the role of explicit curriculum in shaping practice. Almost immediately, the differences in our curricular-oriented language were very clear, reflecting significant differences in the ways we respectively viewed curricular innovations and reforms. This sort of dissonance became the most interesting part of our conversations and was ultimately what we centred much of our writing on.

Shona: I see that dissonance as generative of insight but it had to emerge from places of trust. Groups, composed of people with real emotions, had varying levels of comfort with these collaborations and there was potential for group dynamics to be unsettled if, for example, one person insisted on seeing things their way and moved unthinkingly into the conventional "lead" (dominant) author role. While a traditional lead author's guidance in navigating the writing process and group logistics can be valuable, we wanted to discourage groups from letting one person's voice overshadow their peers' perspectives. Indeed, one practitioner I worked with felt imposter syndrome in his group of academics, and only overcame it with reassurance from me and his co-authors that his perspectives were equally important. Without this level of sensitivity for each other, the chapter would have floundered. For this kind of writing to work therefore, time and space must be made for trust to develop.

Sarah: That trust must exist between contributors and editors as well. We recognized that in conventional academic systems the "relationship of authors and editors may be at the origin of experiences of power and suffering" (Roth, 2002, p.217). We continually reflected on how to keep our editorial powers in check and worked to give teams space to collaborate organically. While we could not completely remove ourselves, we were especially dedicated to letting multiple perspectives arise. To the degree possible, which we discuss more fully below, we tried to give contributors room to discover ways to collaborate and explore ways to capture their interactions in writing.

Shona: Indeed, we began seeing the reflections of these dialogues in their emerging writing as continued claims to the valence of their perspectives. However, representing those behind-the-scenes dialogues on the page took us into new writing territory.

Representing Dialogues in Writing

In this section we attempt to make visible the challenges we encountered as we tried to capture the dialogic practices we just described in writing. You will see that thinking about how to represent dialogues in writing was entangled with various ongoing off-page, spoken dialogues. We raise questions about the mechanics of writing as well as how our view of dialogue broadened and informed the final text. We acknowledge the messiness of writing together, as a group from varied backgrounds, and engage with the potential and challenges we experienced with this sort of writing.

Sarah: We knew, as editors, we had to be clear with our contributors about what we wanted although, we freely admit, we were building the proverbial plane as we were flying with regards to writing style. We found we could be very clear with contributors what our overall goals were, but the meandering path to the final product was much less defined. While dialogue was central in our proposal, we did not have a precise step-by-step plan for how to take spoken dialogues to the page. We knew it was going to be a real challenge, recognizing that spoken and written dialogues accomplish different work, as do more traditional narrative forms. We wanted to capture, in some sort of genuine way, the nuances of communication. Yet we both anticipated and then

experienced the challenge of shifting oral to written words (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Shona: We looked for models of dialogues in academic writing. For example, in academic contexts, particularly the social sciences, examples of collegiate or dialogic writing exist (Hartley, 2008), though are largely written in the third person, as if all contributors were of one mind. Although verbal *and* textual dialogues contribute to the development of what is considered conventional academic writing, we felt the academic convention of expressing consensus had no place in a book that aimed to connect different perspectives.

Sarah: We looked at other examples, like Bosio's (2021) book. Bosio's text had large sections of transcript where he interviewed important thinkers and theorists. This text, in the same Routledge book series as ours, showed some openness to extended sections of printed dialogue in an academic text. Or Handforth and Taylor (2019)'s text, which modelled ways of showing individual versus shared thoughts through stylistic features. They used different fonts to visually demonstrate points of view.

Shona: For us, seeing authors who "interrupt [their] narrative to exchange dialog *(sic.)*" (Chiders et al. 2013, p. 508), showed us a non-conventional way for different perspectives to sit in the same writing space without one dominating over another. I saw in purposeful transgression of academic norms (Childers et al., 2013) that the play script form could accommodate this.

Sarah: While open to forays into unconventional territory, we recognized that, because the book was being published as part of a scholarly series, we had to meet publishers' expectations about consistency, of style and quality of writing for instance, or risk not being published. So we agreed on some basics that we felt would meet these expectations. We eventually settled on American spellings and grammar. We encouraged our contributors to explicitly state their positions at the start of their chapter, to come forward and 'greet' the readers. We asked them to situate their knowledge clearly, showing who was talking by using the first person and names. This was not easy for contributors and nearly all chapter teams experimented around ways to show where their thoughts came together or diverged - when were they speaking as an "I" or when as a "we" on topics of shared interest? The most successful

attempts seemed to use the narrative sections to show alignment and the scripted dialogue sections to denote individual perspectives.

Shona: Logistical challenges posed by cross-time zone communication prompted some teams to employ asynchronous means such as emails and collaborative documents with comment functions. Early verbal dialogues with and between groups were augmented by written dialogues, using Google documents to draft chapters. We began to expand our boundaried conception of what dialogue is and what it could do.

Sarah: Contributors and editors strategically used Google's comment feature to pose questions and respond to each other. These asynchronous marginal dialogues developed as juxtapositional hybrid spaces, between the tentative spoken and 'concrete' written, and as alternatives to dense academic language (Lillis, 2011).

Shona: The use of comments are common in drafts of academic papers, allowing authors' responses to text in progress, but habitually removed prior to submission (Lillis, 2011). Once erased, the final publication conceals evidence of constructive cooperation and hides the authors' persona, creating a distance, valued in traditional writing as a marker of scientific objectivity. But that objectivity, which Haraway (1988) refers to as the god trick, also fails to communicate in ways language is used in life (Lillis, 2011) and is partly responsible for maintaining a distance between research and practice.

Sarah: We had embarked on the book with the aim of dismantling distance between groups of people working in GCE, committed to the potential of Freirean dialogue. A strength of dialogue is deliberately avoiding that antidialogical action (Freire, 2012) that asserts one view over others and, so, oppresses, edging some voices (and knowers) out of valued epistemic (academic) spaces. But representing such dialogue on the page poses stylistic challenges. Spoken dialogue lacks many of the traditional organisational structures present in texts and we struggled to replicate textual signposts and recreate the work done by things like paragraph breaks or headers.

Shona: On top of that, we couldn't replicate the flow of spoken dialogues in natural conversation which often respond to physical cues like body language, gestural and facial movements and tonal shifts in inflection and register. We found ourselves

grappling with questions like "how do we keep readers engaged and following the logic of the conversation?" Perhaps, as a reader of this article you have wondered - where is this going? What is coming next? I felt it even while writing this! We all had to continually renegotiate what writing in dialogue was like when it followed neither academic nor practitioner conventions, especially considering our contributors' varied publishing experiences.

Sarah: It was interesting that this posed different challenges for our academic and practitioner contributors respectively. Many of our academics, who were used to writing in a-personal ways, struggled a lot with first person writing while our practitioner contributors often had less experience in critical practices. Though the dialogic elements of the project fostered first-person style, it was important that we modelled a respectful, critical relationship to show it was safe to question one another's ideas, and everyone's knowledge was valuable. Added to countless comments, video conferences and emails, I even recorded video feedback for teams to watch in their own time.

Shona: I also think that chapter organisation around provocations was helpful in purposefully re-representing authors' familiar topics as subjects for "critical analysis of a problematic reality" (Freire, 2012, p. 168). Like you, I found video conferences useful, especially when authors struggled to be critical, to keep at it, to write in dialogue. We could offer reassuring support as well as examples of how others had done it.

Sarah: That tension, to both reassure contributors and ensure a consistent text, whilst straying from the beaten track made us, and our contributors, simultaneously excited and nervous. As we continued to coach and model thought processes, we saw more and more examples of our contributors questioning one another directly and moving toward more critical discussions.

Shona: But experimentation with text that is neither fully verbal or written dialogue, but deliberately constructed to mimic and read like a conversation, resulted in something neither academic nor un-academic, neither synchronous nor asynchronous. It was a hybrid, recognisable but with uncertain significance (Bhabha, 2011) in each sphere.

That there could be "equality in difference" (Bhabha, 2011, p. 14) rather than oppression of some knowers and perspectives because of difference, was only possible in this third space, where multiple voices could equally assert their legitimacy.

Sarah: It may be uncomfortable to see gaps in our understandings or ways that our perspectives might be clouded by a particular privilege, but these uncomfortable conversations were exactly why we all wanted to engage in this sort of work. We, as editors, have come to understand each other's perspectives well enough to venture beyond the book project and share this writing style with an academic audience. In addition, it has prompted us to critically reflect on the power of editors to elevate a broader range of perspectives.

Editorial Dialogues: The Challenges of Working Against/Amidst Conventions

This section considers the generative tensions that we identified during this project, as well as their potential and limitations, along with editorial choices that, although not without risk, resulted in what we think offer liberatory and equitable spaces open to alternatives to dominant knowledge production practices. Throughout, we critically reflect on the effect of the push and pull we experienced between the conventional and unconventional and how this shaped our experience.

Editors in academic contexts have considerable authority and play both mediating and gatekeeping roles, tending to be white and male, according to Feeney (2015). They work within dominant knowledge systems as custodians (Scott, 2019) that assert "typically" (Hartley, 2008, p. 3) acceptable writing conventions, conferring legitimacy on academic writing with the power to "marginalise, silence or erase alternative ways of knowing" (Scott, 2019, p. 140). Editors have the potential to set the agenda for what matters and can select, change, cut and rearrange authors' text to fit their publication's aims. They work with the opinions of reviewers, recruited sometimes from personal networks (Feeney et al., 2019), whose suggested alterations to articles under review have the power to secure publication (Roth, 2002) that academics depend on for their livelihood (Hartley, 2008). Though privy to the requirements of the editorial boards or academic publishing houses, still dominated by

the USA and the UK (Cummings & Hoebink, 2017), editors' key role is ensuring authors' writing meet these requirements.

Sarah: We continually grappled with how to perform some of the inescapable and important responsibilities of editing while avoiding some of the power traps described above. We also found ourselves navigating how to do these things in the context of industries with clearly defined norms and ingrained hierarchies. We still had conventional editor responsibilities like securing a contract, liaising with publishers and contributors, keeping to a timeframe, and ensuring the text ultimately felt unified. But some of these tasks, in the context of an atypical book, were challenging to manoeuvre.

Shona: For example, when we initially sought a contract, we found that our vision fell outside the publisher's conventional categorizations for texts—practitioner *or* academic. We felt strongly we were doing something both/and, not either/or. A lot of our early discussions with one another explored whether the book would actually connect across those silos, and whether we had too much of a lean towards meeting academic conventions. Even before we made a case for a hybrid audience to the publisher, we had to question the feasibility of something new within acceptable publishing norms.

Sarah: Even once our unconventional project was contracted, we still constantly had to navigate conventional pressures. For instance, no matter how much we hoped this would be a jointly constructed project with our contributors, the reality was that this was still an enactment of our vision—a vision we committed to publishers before most contributor dialogues took place. The vision was pliable and evolving, but we as editors cannot deny we were a heavy guiding force within it. As they talked, we did too. And that had an influence.

Shona: Our editorial dialogues were ongoing, both synchronously through weekly video calls and asynchronously by email and through shared digital documents. They were central to our navigating the tensions between contributor freedom and meeting the consistency demanded by publication conventions.

Sarah: We talked constantly as the project evolved! We have joked many times about how we have come to share the same brain. But really, I think it's more that we can anticipate the types of questions the other will pose and the perspectives we each bring to challenges. How many times did we stop and ask one another, "what do you mean by X?"

Shona: This was part of the process of unpacking terms, re-reconsidering (Freire, 2012) assumptions we had continually taken for granted. Here, as in the book, some of that stayed in oral conversations and some ended up being integrated in the writing.

Sarah: We often wondered how our different intended audiences would receive the book. Would our educator audiences find the sorts of pragmatic pieces they are accustomed to in practitioner-aimed texts? We asked every chapter team to be sure to end their chapters by imagining their chapter's life with its readers. But was that enough? Would our academic audiences take empirically grounded perspectives seriously if they were presented as dialogues instead of the conventional methods-results-discussion format? Would they respect the knowledge of non-academic contributors?

Shona: Do you remember I told you that an esteemed colleague had quietly informed me that a book "for practitioners" wouldn't be as highly regarded as an "academic" book? I worried that what we were doing would be poorly received as well as worrying whether practitioners would engage with the book. This academic-practitioner binary illustrates structural conventions actively separating knowledges, creating an abyssal line (de Sousa Santos, 2018) that establishes hierarchies and favours dominant (western, capitalist) knowledge practices. But it reinforced our resolve to overcome the disconnect between the two.

Sarah: I felt always aware of the simultaneous push towards exploring this third space and the pull back towards the safe knowns of conventional writing.

Shona: We often found ourselves in dialogue between these spaces, in our conversations with each other more than with contributors: going between the (in)applicability of the dialogue format for educators and academics, for different audiences and purposes.

Sarah: It is interesting to see the parallels between the tensions we navigated writing the book and the tensions we found drafting this article. Writing this article was so much more difficult than we imagined. Initially, we thought we could model what we did in the book. But our use of dialogue here feels completely different. In the book, we used dialogue to highlight dissonance in perspectives. The book was a space for that. This paper is a different space again. We do far more talking directly to the reader, which was not something we did as much in the book. Perhaps because here we have a clearer picture of our audience– academics interested in a special issue on writing differently.

Shona: And even while we have been writing this, there have been background voices - internal (ours) and external (SI reviewer and editors) - making demands. Showing our evolving thoughts in dialogue format does not make visible all the shifts in our thinking in response to them. The text here also presents a fairly coherent expression of a solid perspective which differs greatly from our fluctuating verbal conversations.

Sarah: I also think at moments we liked to pretend that conventions didn't exist (in the book and in this article alike). But that conventional backdrop always loomed, especially for those of us who have been trained in conventional academic writing practices. Even after numerous reassurances from publishers (in the book) and from the guest editors (in this special issue) that unconventional approaches were welcome, we still continually found ourselves asking, "What will a reader be expecting?" We felt this all the more in writing an article for a peer-reviewed academic journal, a genre of writing with far more conventional rules than a book project.

Shona: That push and pull was something we had to let sit with us through both projects. And while those tensions have been constant in our conversations about this paper, we have noticed how they supported changes in our ways of connecting.

Sarah: After so many hours of dialogue, we have developed a lot of aligned thinking, even while we both bring our unique perspectives and mirror the book process where dialogues offer spaces to show connections *and* differences. Shona, after as much work and thinking around this as we've done, you and I almost at times speak as one voice (even as we write side by side… in real time… over Skype).

Shona: Breakfast time for you; afternoon tea time for me! The way we are now writing, Sarah, is possible because of those hours of spoken dialogue. I have come to see the dialogue on the page as a fossilised record of those vibrant dialogues that generate knowledges.

Sarah: Absolutely. I think in both the book and this article, dialogue allows a reader to be a proverbial fly on the wall in conversations between people with mutual interests and distinct expertise in topics.

Shona: I suppose now I'm left asking what the value of this is, to academic readers or practitioners. Is it ultimately only beneficial to those present when/where the dialogues take place?

Sarah: I certainly hope not! The authors engaged in the dialogues definitely changed through the process, as was reiterated numerous times by contributors in follow up communications about their book experience. But I think there is great value in centralising the words of individuals in context, to understand the particularities of their unique perspectives and the implications of these. Offering such context enables readers to reflect on transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Is this not after all an underlying premise of qualitative research?

Shona: I agree and might add that understanding others, through dialogue, generates insights into lives beyond our own and that this idea is central to GCE. Maybe what I am coming to understand - with you - is that those silos we initially identified were partly maintained by academic writing conventions; that conventional ways of conveying academic knowledge about educational practice actually sidestep dialogue. And it now feels odd to me that dialogue, so fundamental to humans' being, is largely absent from the forms of writing that are used to convey new knowledge about humans' learning.

Concluding Thoughts

This paper has presented our attempt to overcome the distances that conventional academic writing establishes between writers and readers. Even as we wrote, we revisited and reframed our memories of the GCE book; we were challenged to re-present to you, the reader, key things we had learned from all those dialogues. But there is a risk in deliberately avoiding dense prose and conventions that dominate academic writing: we make ourselves vulnerable to views that what we know matters less because of how we present it. Nevertheless, we stand by our initial assertion that this way of writing – and editing – has huge potential to include knowledges that are less commonly visible in academic publications, and we invite you to find spaces for equitable collaborative writing in your field.

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