

Engaging in arts-based poetic inquiry to generate pedagogical possibilities in preservice teacher education to promote social and ecological justice

Abstract

In this article, we use poetry to give articulation to a collaborative object inquiry into educational spaces through which we move/d. At present, we are teacher-educators at a university in South Africa, working in the fields of social justice and ecojustice in education and how these intersect with teacher development and professional development. Given South Africa's history of discrimination and how this continue to manifest in the present, our challenge is to develop ways for students to engage with difficult and complex past experiences, and to become educators who can collaboratively disrupt, rather than reproduce, oppressive systems and structures in education. We respond to this challenge by engaging in collaborative arts-based self-study methodologies that enable us to draw on our educational experiences to consider how we might strengthen our own educational practices as teacher educators. We specifically employ poetry to engage in a diffractive reading of our experiences and work with object inquiry to foreground where differences emerge and why they matter. These differences are conceptualised as affirmative and productive of possibilities for creative ruptures through which we can generate pedagogical possibilities for preservice teachers to engage in critical self-study of becoming-educators and to work towards socially and ecologically just futures. Thus, by employing collaborative self-study, we hope to change our own practice through engaging in a diffractive reading of becoming-educators. In addition, we aim to generate pedagogical possibilities for preservice teachers to explore their journeys of becoming-educators in a creative and collaborative manner.

Key words

Collaborative self-study, object inquiry, poetic inquiry, diffraction, arts-based research

Introduction

Composition i: Paying attention

I return from scavenging on the beach
a paper bag full of objects

Placing them on white paper under the artificial light

I choose one object

this one that is outcast

The shadow cast by these objects look like a monster

... preparing to devour the outcasts object, the stone



Figure 1: The outcast and the monster

And a story forms in my mind

The stone becomes part of my story

I become part of the stone's story¹

I paid attention to the stone

The stone paid attention to me

¹ Rosiek and Snyder (2020) argue that from a new materialist position stories that emerge in narrative forms of research are agential themselves and not merely representational. For these authors, “narratives become descriptions of particular complex possibilities for future being that exist whether or not they are actualized. Their possibility influences the present – gives the present its form” (Rosiek & Snyder 2018, p.1159).

It asked me to pick it up
Hold it in my hand
And listen to what it has to say²

In this paper, we diffractively read becoming-educators through an engagement with collaborative, arts-based self-study. We view self-study as a collaborative, creative and inventive methodology. Through our exploration, we created an artwork that serves as a response to the educational spaces through which we move/d. In turn, we engaged in a diffractive reading of our artwork to foreground where differences emerge in our reading and why these differences matter. We specifically conceptualise these differences as affirmative and productive of possibilities for creative ruptures through which we can generate methodological possibilities for preservice teachers to engage in critical self-study of becoming-educators and to work towards socially and ecologically just futures. In exploring methodological possibilities for preservice teachers to interrogate their journeys of becoming-educators in creative ways, we also wish to encourage them, together with us, to pay attention to “the risk of being for some worlds rather than others and helping to compose those worlds with others” (Haraway, 2016, p. 178).

As co-researchers, we are bound together on many levels: we have a personal connection as life partners, we have a professional connection as colleagues, and we have a shared interest in self-study as critical friends. At present, we are both teacher-educators at a university in South Africa. The modules we teach mostly deal with issues of identity in teacher development as well as social justice and ecojustice in education. The South African education system remains imbued with racial, gendered, and class divisions left as a legacy of colonialism and apartheid. As such, education students are likely to have had schooling experiences that are influenced by the “bitter emotional legacy” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018, p. 84) left by an oppressive regime. The challenge we face is therefore to develop ways for students to engage with difficult and complex past experiences, and to become educators who can collaboratively disrupt, rather than reproduce, oppressive systems and structures in education.

² Paying attention might help one to receive unforeseen but also strange gifts, such as uncertainty. Receiving such gifts could, in turn, help one to stay with the predicament (cf. Biesta, 2021) or, in the words of Haraway (2016), ‘with the trouble.’ This, we argue, is needed if one is to give recognition to the complexity of a phenomenon one is interested in (cf. Ingold, 2019).

Given this, the objective of our work is twofold. Firstly, we hope to change our own practice through offering a diffractive reading of becoming-educators. Secondly, we aim to generate methodological possibilities for preservice teachers to explore their journeys of becoming-educators creatively and collaboratively. The research question that drives our self-study is: How can we use collaborative arts-based self-study as a pedagogical tool in teacher education for social justice and ecojustice? To answer this question, we first discuss the theoretical perspective that informs our study. After this, we present our study's mode of inquiry by discussing how we take up collaborative self-study within a tradition of arts-based and poetic inquiry. This leads to a description of the process of data generation and the artworks that we created as part of this process. Lastly, we discuss how the creative process we followed in our inquiry may generate methodological possibilities within preservice teacher education to engage in critical self-study. Throughout our writing we weave a poetic exploration presented as five compositions that responds to and grow from the discussions we present and the process of creation we followed. These compositions are conceptualized as nonrepresentational "knowing in the making" (Badley, 2009, p. 108) and address the themes of paying attention, listening, responding, creating, and learning.

Theoretical perspective

Composition ii: Listening

I held the stone in my palm.

And it seemed almost pitiful, all on its own.

Yet, it also seemed strong.

I liked the paradox of strength and weakness of the stone. It was hard and smooth, yet the process of time had worked on it, changed its shape and its surface. I found the stillness of the stone both frustrating and appealing. So unmoving. As if it was satisfied with the way it was and not wanting me to interfere with it. It showed me that I was just a small part of something bigger.

Time had shaped this stone and I had picked it up.

By picking it up I interfered with time. But I also became part of time.

As I listen to the stone, I am met with silence.

Silence takes time.

Listening for silence takes time

Listening to silence takes time³



Figure 2: Listening to a stone

...

I look at the black rectangular plastic shape of the laptop in front of me
It mimics the shape of the stone
Sometimes it feels like the black framed screen keeps me a prisoner
In a prison of words
Steals my time
Fills my room with empty silence
I am connected
I am trapped in connectivity
I long for a pause
For time
For silence
I desperately want to throw my laptop into the sea

³ According to Whyte (2019) the object of all contemplation is silence, for silence allows one to perceive something other than yourself. Whyte (in Popova, 2021, para. 7) continues: “One of the greatest arts of poetry is actually to create silence through attentive speech — speech that says something in such a way that it appears as a third frontier between you and the world, and invites you into a deeper and more generous sense of your own identity and the identity of the world... Poetry is the verbal art-form by which we can actually create silence.”

I want the sea to destroy it...change it ...crumple it up....and give it back to me
Changed and new – like the stone

Listening in silence takes time⁴

Time, we do not have

Silence we cannot find

Silence and time are gifts

These gifts stay unopened in our inboxes

as we chase deadlines in the black plastic frame

Our collaborative arts-based self-study is informed by diffraction. Diffraction is based on a relational ontology that disrupts the Cartesian logic that has informed dominant modes of Western thinking about the world for the last four hundred years and that enables one to divide the world between discrete subjects and objects (Braidotti, 2013). Colebrook (2002) highlights that these dominant modes of thinking are based on an ontology of transcendence that is informed by a certain ‘optics’ that privileges the human subject and positions it at the pinnacle of a hierarchical relationship between the viewer and the viewed, the subject and the object. From this perspective, meaning making and knowledge production is solely the preserve of the human subject, and consequently, the knower (mind) becomes separated “from the known (body) and knowledge (epistemology) from being (ontology)” (Murriss, 2017, p.121). The binaries produced through such meaning-making and knowledge production processes furthermore produces differences that exclude and include and structures what counts as knowledge (Murriss, 2017) and how such knowledge could be *re*-presented.

In contrast to this position, a relational ontology, from which the concept of diffraction emerges, attends to the entanglement of materiality with discursive forces (Strom et al., 2018) and that which emerges from such entanglement. Diffraction describes the spreading and bending of waves when they encounter an obstruction and overlap (Barad, 2007). This implies that diffraction concerns effects of interference. Importantly, however, in such interference the original wave does not cease to exist but remain partly in the new wave that comes into

⁴ See Ulmer (2017).

existence through the interference (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Furthermore, effects of interference are not understood in terms of hierarchical relations or as existing in a linear cause-and-effect relationship but rather as “causes in relation to each other and for each other” (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 4). The transformation undergone in diffraction is thus based on what Barad (2007) refers to as intra-action, rather than *interaction*. Whereas interaction refers to pre-existing and discrete entities engaging with one another in an encounter, for Kruger (2016) the concept of intra-action foregrounds “the ontological inseparability of entities involved in an ongoing becoming with one another, [in other words] entities then are not only constitutive of one another but are created immanently through their interaction” (p. 80). On an ontological level, reality can thus be said to be a relational phenomenon that is continually becoming as the world self-encounters as opposed to being composed of discrete entities-in-themselves (Kruger, 2016). A relational ontology places the knower *within* the world, and not as separate from it. It furthermore positions both the human and (organic and inorganic) more-than-human “as performative mutually intra-active agents” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 527). In contrast to how differences are understood within an ontology of transcendence, a relational ontology is premised on “*one* plane of being, where difference is creative, positive and productive, and ‘not the differentiation of some grounding identity (humanity)’” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 526) that functions to include or exclude. The implication of one plane of being is that ontology and epistemology does not exist as two separate fields but should rather be understood in terms of ontoepistemology. In terms of the artwork and poetic compositions we create in our collaborative self-study, we are informed by a relational ontology, and as such attempt to render visible, in tactile form, intra-action and the way memory and more-than-human educational objects and places co-emerge. Such rendering visible, we argue, create openings to consider the pedagogical significance that intra-action might hold for us as teacher educators, as well as the potential to generate sites for different memories to emerge through collaborative artistic expression of what education might be and could become. We discuss this in more detail in the sections that follow.

Furthermore, taking up diffraction specifically allows one to explore “differences-in-the-(re)making” (Barad, 2014, p. 175) that emerges from the entangled inter-connected activities of different (human and non-human) bodies (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). As such, diffraction functions as a figuration for inquiry that allows one to attend to patterns of interference, the differences that emerge from such interference, and the consequences of these practices of difference-making (Hill, 2017). Importantly, the human and non-human bodies we attend to in

our self-study are understood as material-discursive phenomenon rather than discrete and bounded objects that possess inherent qualities and properties (Barad, 2003) and as such, we understand matter and meaning to be co-constituted and co-emergent. Thus, in keeping with the implications of intra-action we aim to move away from self-study as a representational and Cartesian form of inquiry (cf. Bayat & Mitchell, 2020); that is, the “dogmatic idea of a subject who passively and dutifully recognises and represents the world” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 2). Rather, our approach to collaborative, arts-based self-study and object inquiry is informed by a non-representationalist logic that allows us to explore the entanglement of the material and discursive as a means to attend to the differences that emerge and how such differences come to matter (cf. Strom et al., 2018). In this instance, we are thus not concerned with what the objects we engaged with mean (to us) but rather with the generative possibilities our engagement produces to think and act differently. This concern is based on understanding that working diffractively entails paying attention to how our practices of knowing are entangled with material-discursive phenomena as we enact them in the materiality of the world (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). Diffraction, thus, enables us to foreground where differences emerge during our collaborative engagement with objects as we explore place, memory and subjectivity, and why these differences matter.

Modes of inquiry

Composition iii: Responding

I wanted to see the stone from a different angle

I played with the surface, and how the surface could be ruptured...

how the surface could be penetrated by the stone.

Precisely because it was the exact opposite of the stone

I also started playing with clay

It moved and molded as I shaped it.



Figure 3: Composition in response to a stone

...

When we tell a story, we compose.

When we write a poem, we respond.

A poem contains our feelings and memories of pain and loss and joy⁵.

In our telling we include some things and leave out others.

It allows us to reveal and hide

to obscure and illuminate

Poetry is not factual *representations* of lives

but creates lives and ways of living⁶.

In conducting our collaborative self-study and as informed by diffraction, we use narrative and visual methods of expression to render visible experience and memory. In this regard, we use elements of installation that include found objects and sculptural creations to create a collaborative artwork that we read diffractively to consider the generative possibilities of how collaborative arts-based self-study can be employed as a pedagogical tool in preservice teacher education to pursue social justice and ecojustice. Yet, in doing this we set out to move beyond the realms of our personal subjective memories to foreground collaborative educational

⁵ Pithouse-Morgan (2021) writes that poetry, as self-study, opens “a containing space to express and make sense of my struggles and tensions in an emotionally productive way” (p. 103).

⁶ This understanding is based on the insight that “things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings” (Barad, 2013, p.13)

entanglements and the way relations and connections between the self, human and more-than-human others, objects, place, etc. might be *seen* and *seen differently* as new becomings, and how such becomings allow for *different* thought and practice. By taking up such an understanding, we propose that self-study and arts-based inquiry may enable one to use collaborative creation as a pedagogical tool in teacher education.

We understand self-study as a methodology that can facilitate professional growth that responds to social issues as these touch our lives (Weber, 2014). Through self-study, we explore how lived experiences may influence our practice as we *re-encounter* (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018) ourselves and each other collaboratively. In self-study, collaboration is often used to “help to clarify data collection and/or data analysis within the method used” (Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020, p. 5). The collaborative element of our work is important as we also hope to develop a collaborative method for preservice teachers to participate in a similar process as that which we pursue here. In addition, we situate our collaborative self-study within a tradition of arts-based and poetic inquiry. For Samaras (2010), arts-based methods make empathetic understandings of self and other possible. In the classes we teach on social justice and ecojustice within the context of a preservice teacher programme, we often ask students to write about their personal experiences in education. Yet, in addition to a narrative engagement, a visual-tactile engagement with such experiences challenges current logocentric ways of knowing and potentially generates new possibilities for collaboration with others that allows for different responses to such experiences.

We furthermore use poetry to give articulation to our collaborative object inquiry. In following Miller (2005), poetry offers, we believe, a means to generating “a greater sense of connection to the world” (p.25) that enables one to move from mundane individual lives to becoming attentive to the “ontological inseparability of entities involved in an ongoing becoming with one another” (Kruger, 2016, p.80). Furthermore, our use of poetry gave us a means to voice “the fluidity and multiplicity of meaning” (Leavy, 2015, p. 66) in an evocative and transgressive manner. It is, thus, as a mode of response grounded in “knowing in the making” (Badley, 2009, p. 108) to our collaborative object inquiry into our experiences of education. As a form of collaborative self-study, poetic inquiry makes it possible to enter into conversation about educational experiences through arts-based practice. Biesta (2017) argues that “the educational question of ‘how to come and remain in dialogue with the world’ – is also the question of art” (p. 38). In this statement, Biesta shifts the understanding of art as a passive

object to interpret (how can I make sense of this?) to art as agentic (what is this asking of me?). In doing so, he emphasizes that art (as well as education and inquiry) is something that moves us to be different and act differently. In taking a cue from Biesta, we argue that collaborative arts-based self-study can produce something that makes both ourselves and the preservice teachers we teach be different and act differently in becoming-educators. Our use of becoming-educator in this context is to foreground that it is an open-ended process that cannot be modelled on pre-existing identities or ideas of what a *good* educator should be. Rather, becoming-educator is a ceaseless process that entails experimentation, collaboration and creation. Having discussed the manner in which we employed self-study and arts-based inquiry, in the next section, we present a description of the process of data generation and the artworks that we created as part of this process.

Objects and materials

To start creating our collaborative artwork, we used two objects that we found during a research workshop (*Exploring Academic Identities and Fostering Shared Values Across Diverse Contexts*⁷) we both attended. During this workshop, we participated in a facilitated object inquiry into our academic identities and used our found objects to create an artwork to navigate our affective encounters of becoming-educators within the context of higher education in South Africa. We were asked to walk along the beachfront and find an object that *spoke* to each of us. These objects were then used to creatively engage in reflective and collaborative processes of meaning making and self-discovery. Frans picked up a button which he used to create a flower by adding pins and copper wire, and Marguerite picked up a water-polished stone (Figure 3). After the workshop, we used our found object artworks that we created during the workshop as *intermezzo*. This was done by juxtaposing our artworks with clay creations we made after attending the workshop (Figure 4) and that were informed by Mike Kelley's (1995) artwork *Educational Complex*. Kelley's three-dimensional artwork is a representation of every school the artist attended, as well as his childhood home. However, this work moves beyond representation as the memory of Kelley escapes the personal, subjective response by becoming a visual site of an educational space entirely devoid of humans. In echoing Kelley's artwork, our clay creations enabled us to further our collaborative engagement with our different affective encounters in education that we initially explored during the workshop. By engaging

⁷ This workshop was organised and presented by Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, Daisy Pillay, Inbanathan Naicker, Lungile Masinga (UKZN), Theresa Chisanga (WSU) and Anita Hiralaal (DUT) for an NRF funded project Social Cohesion in Higher Education Project.

recorded conversations about these to inform our five poetic compositions. We believe that poetic inquiry allows us to engage in “knowing in the making” (Badley, 2009, p. 108). Edge and Olan (2021) describe their use of found poems in their inquiry as meaning-making events that enable them to come to an understanding of the stories that frame their pedagogical practices. In a similar manner, we used poems to interpret our experiences, but also to resist representation. Through employing poetry as nonrepresentational, we endeavoured not to tell our individual (psychologized) stories, but rather engage with how these experiences are always already entangled with human and more-than-human others. Through our use of poetic inquiry, we furthermore seek to engage with the challenge posed by Simpson (2019) to grow professionally through in-the-moment professional development. In this instance, we respond in artistic ways to our individual experiences and use these to enter into conversations with one another to express the learnings we find in silent uncertain moments. This process of artistic creation thus enabled us led us to generate five poetic compositions that we can draw on as methodological blueprint to engage preservice teachers in a similar creative and collaborative exercise.

Composition iv: Creating

Creating with a flower and a stone

A flower that cannot bloom

A stone that can sink to the bottom of the ocean

Be washed up by the tide

Change shape

With time

Slowly

Our memories and experiences took shape

forever knotting and folding

until it becomes something with no beginning and no end

Always in the middle

You got a second-hand pair of shoes

that made some of your friends laugh and then like you

playing outside, with a wheelbarrow

when the classroom seemed too small for a little boy
I remember reading
about the history of things frozen in time
Dreaming of the world outside
in a playhouse with a bright red roof
It did not feel like home
spaces where the lawns were green
and the swimming pools threateningly blue
For me the ball sometimes felt too heavy to move
weighing me down
The stairs too high to climb and too many
You say it felt like being knocked into the right shape
Eventually we did find space to have
a warm cup of coffee
Even if the chair was hard and cold
I learned that a child's train track
can take something round and round
until it seems new
You found lost treasures in a rubbish heap
We both had to climb onto the roof to see the world

How do we take care of the narratives we hear?
How do we care for the things that come to us, as a gift?⁸

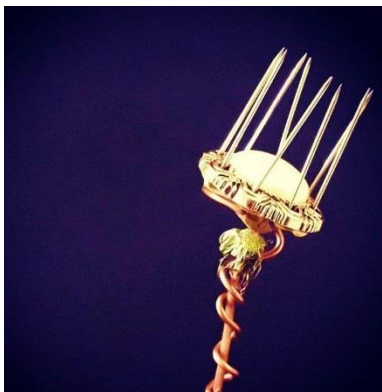


Figure 5: Folding and knotting a flower and a stone

⁸ “Remember that the original meanin’ of datum is ‘somethin’ given.’ Data is a gift, so be thankful for it when it’s given to you and treat it with respect” (Saldaña 2014, p.978).

We flowered into something new
hard on the outside
soft on the inside
the objects took a new shape
as we rolled ourselves into a ball
of colorful clay

What counts as research?
Or data?

We are never prepared
in our research methodology classes for
the emotional, draining and difficult work that research is.
We do the work and count our losses.

Counting our losses...

We counted the active cases
rates of infection
Number of positive students,
Staff deaths
Number of emails
Number of siblings abroad
Months since we had seen loved ones
Money we had lost
We worried about the statistics of our economy
Have we published enough?⁹
Are we viable?

⁹ Cannon and Flint (2021) write about the counting practice and our desire for ‘the good’ academic life that lies behind the next citation, within refrains that encourage productivity. In the words of Cannon and Flint (2021) one should “write more, publish more, be productive, increase your counts” (p. 4). Yet, if we resist such refrains and pursue a slow ontology (Ulmer, 2017) in attending to the world around us, what else might we find (Cannon & Flint, 2021)? Through collaborative arts-based and poetic inquiry we believe that we could “foster a joy of creating, write to disrupt... [and] invite more intimate modes of being in the academia” (Cannon & Flint, 2021, p.6).

How many jobs lost
Layers of our masks
The counting exhausted me

The Covid-19 pandemic became another 'gap' to research....
Fill in this survey about your experiences of working from home?

How productive were you?
How many students do you supervise?
What is your h-index?
Is two really enough?
How many students have you supervised to completion?
How do the 1300 students you teach rate your class?
Have you published anything this month?
How would you measure your performance?

On a scale from 1 to 10
Does a stone and a flower count?

The counting made me feel empty
I longed for being lost in silence.

Loss
All the numbers spoke of loss not gain
Loss of time
Loss of life
Loss of security
Loss
I only had the stone
I had tried to pull it from the claws of the monster

Make it count.

Creating art, creating possibilities

In our collaborative arts-based self-study, we use poetic inquiry to give voice to the multiplicity of our experiences in working toward professional learning and to “heighten self-insight, empathy and social awareness” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019, p. 135). In this section, we discuss the process of creating our artwork and the pedagogical possibilities it enables. In a diffractive methodology as we employed, time is not perceived linearly, and past and present are not sequential. As Barad (2014) puts it, “Diffractions are untimely. Time is ... broken apart in different directions, non-contemporaneous with itself” (p. 169). The collaborative exercise of shaping memory helped us work in a non-linear fashion (cf. Müller & Kruger, 2021; Kruger, 2020). Our shapes responded to each other, and our conversation made it possible to jump between current learning experiences, childhood and future possibilities. Like Bozalek and Zembylas (2017), working diffractively “enable[d] us to see that it is not the (reflexive) self that has constitutive force, but self and others (social and material elements), entangled in multiple ways and across multiple spaces and times” (p. 13). Yet, such entanglements are relations of responsibility (Müller, Le Roux & Kruger, *in press*) that asks of us to take up such responsibility throughout our ongoing intra-actions.

In considering the pedagogical possibilities of our creative process, we hope to replicate and refine our playful interaction and conversation through objects and play dough creations with preservice teachers to offer them an opportunity to explore their experiences and understandings of education with one another. In our exploration, we used clay to give expression to the connections between our different memories and experiences. We started with very different points of departure, a flower and a stone, and the clay became a language that enabled these two objects to enter into dialogue with one another. Once the clay served its purpose, we discarded it, crumpled it into a ball, which could become something else, and created a poem that emerged from the conversation that was made possible through the process of creation of our playdough artwork. For us, this process offered a relief, as often in the past we had been frustrated with writing about our experiences and getting trapped in the textual representation of words. The use of clay freed us from this representational entrapment and helped us to pay attention to the emerging collaborative experience of creation. The materiality of the clay made it possible to visualise our experiences and translate these into a form that others could *read*, feel, and interpret. In this way, we were able to work with an understanding that art might function to show forth the interconnectivity and interdependence of a non-unitary self and multiple human and non-human others, as well create new connections that are

tangible, yet changeable, and that can give birth to something new, if yet unknown. For use then, the use of poetry, as artistic practice and expression, served a double movement that allowed us to connect and show forth the connections and interconnectivity between ourselves and multiple others through time. On the one hand, the movement extended towards the past as it allowed us to engage in reflexive practice by enabling us to interrogate and express “our actions, motives and beliefs” (Hopper & Sanford, 2008, p. 41) as teachers and teacher educators. Thus, our use of poetry connected our often-contradictory past lived experiences as teachers (cf. Hopper & Sanford, 2008) with our present practices and how these relate to and interconnect with multiple human and non-human others. On the other hand, this movement reached out toward the future as we conceptualised and employed poetry as a generative tool that allowed us to explore the possibilities for social justice and ecological justice yet to become actualised. This future-directed movement thus enabled an (often playful) engagement with the virtual and how poetic inquiry could serve as a means to work towards social justice and ecojustice in the present by engaging in reflexive practice and by considering the potentialities for justice yet to become actualised in the future through such practice.

Since we work with social justice and ecojustice education, we find it important to remain mindful that any collaborative exploration should be sensitive to why similar and different education experiences exist given the legacies of unequal access to power and privilege in the South African education system (Müller, Le Roux & Kruger, *in press*). The process of collaborative creation that we followed in creating our education complex may serve to disruptively engage with the status quo present in the South African education landscape. This is the case since it could potentially allow for embracing how differences create opportunities for relocating oneself “in relations with multiple others” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 50). It is through being attentive to the differences that exist, how they are produced and why they matter that we, together with the preservice teachers we engage with, can work toward social justice and ecojustice. A diffractive reading thus offers a means to explore how becoming-educator disrupts and/or reproduces oppressive systems and structures within the context of education. It is through engaging in a collaborative practice, and as informed by diffraction, that preservice teachers could collectively engage with “relations of difference and how they matter” (Barad, 2007, p.71), as well as how such relations of difference can be employed as generative, creative and affirmative force (cf. Kruger & Le Roux, 2020). In doing this, we hope to experiment with how we might direct our becoming towards social justice and ecojustice education, and change our current practice as social justice and ecojustice educators.

Composition v: Learning

I walked on the beach and found a stone

Noticed it

paid attention to it, and

picked it up

I listened to the stone

in silence

and over time

The stone helped me create something new

Play with possibilities

of creation

The stone helped me think about what counts

in research

It took me back to an imagined shore

where I could cast it back into the ocean

But afterwards would not be the same

for I would have lost something

Finding something means that you have something to lose

This is what we have learned about being researchers and teacher educators

We find things, and

when we notice,

pay attention,

listen,

take care of,

create,

honour,

think about what counts

then we become willing to learn that we have much to lose

This is what we write about

This is what counts

Concluding thoughts

In our contribution, we engage with how self-study and object inquiry can be used to collaboratively explore affective encounters in education and how such an exploration could create opportunities for working toward social justice and ecojustice. Our exploration with collaborative self-study and object inquiry serves to illustrate how we might develop a similar pedagogical approach with preservice teachers. Although we know each other well, we found the object inquiry and clay creation helped us to share new and different memories, experiences and encounters with education with each other. We used poetry to give shape to our memories and feelings of joy and loss. In doing this, we agree with Pithouse-Morgan (2021) that "...arts-inspired modes of data representation and reflecting on the responses [to poetic and dialogic encounters with others] when shared..., create different ways of knowing and subsequent implications for practice" (p. 111). Object inquiry served as the catalyst for a poetic response to our experiences in education, and a diffractive reading of these responses made it possible to draw connections between our different experiences. Through our diffractive reading, five compositions emerged: paying attention, listening, responding, creating, and learning. We believe that our contribution contributes to poetic self-study scholarship by illustrating how a diffractive reading might challenge a Cartesian logic by blurring the lines between discrete subjects and objects in inquiry. Our poetic self-study aims to generate openings for conversation with self and others (human and more-than-human), place etc. by creating, through collaboration, an aesthetic text that allows for differences of/in thought and practice to emerge. As we linger in the silences and pauses that shape our experiences and memories of education, we pay attention and listen to the self and human and more-than-human others. In our creative poetic responses, we experiment with how one might move from individual memories to collaborative creations that seek to illuminate the differences and similarities that emerge as in becoming-educators. We believe that an exploration similar to that which we described here could help us, together with the preservice teachers we teach, to understand the past, present and future as interwoven and interdependent, and to act responsively and responsibly in the current moment by being attentive to the differences that exists and how such differences emerge. This exploration could be guided by such questions as: What do you notice around you (objects)? What does it tell you (memories and experiences)? How would you like to respond to what it is telling you (affective response)? What can you create in responding (creation of artwork)? What does the artwork tell you? What did you learn from this experience? We envision that any change brought about by engaging in this process, and as it pertains to our professional identities and our practice, as well as those of preservice

teachers, “open possibilities of entering new spaces of inventive learning that do not seek to represent the *right* answer” (Bozalek & Zembylas 2017, p. 119). Through engaging in collaborative self-study and object inquiry in the manner we discussed here, we are able to “pay attention, individually and collectively, to what is ‘out there’, and what it is asking of us” (Biesta, 2020, p. 31) and in doing so we could ‘meet’ ourselves and others as becoming-educators.

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Declaration of interest statement

We have no conflict of interest to declare.

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