

# The DEFY Collective

Depth Education for Youth

**The Story so Far:  
Exploring Our Capacity  
to Open and Hold Space  
as Educators**

Zine  
Published  
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# ZINE MAP



1. Foundations & principles
2. Introducing elephants-in-the-room
3. Practice and responsibility
4. Noticing the elephants
5. Dancing with the elephants
6. Holding (more) space
7. Feeling futures
8. "It's wonderfully messy: reflections on methodology"



Useless. I feel like I'm just kind of like everyday life it almost feels a bit like covid-esque where you're like kind of something really big is happening and you're like trying to like organize like a small event that like don't spend anything to do with like the Israel Palestine context and you're like it almost it's so it feels very at odds you know if in working in advocacy working in these kinds like we're always juggling different things and in relation to like world issues but what it really feels like feels I think like a lot of like in my circles a lot of people feel very fed up and in terms of the advocacy and activism stuff in relation to Palestine right now and that you know like there's a lot of advocacy things that people have to really show people why it's wrong and like why well that's why it's so important to change it but it just seems so blatantly obvious to this case and it's so blatantly obviously not being recognized by some people and you have the influence on the power and that like what is the point of having influence and power if you can't like you know actually make positive change in the world and like I think there's not just people like us that are questioning that right now it's people who are in those positions who feel like they can't do anything about there's and they are in these powerful positions as well so yeah. I just feel like that's very at odds with the world today and like and more and more I feel that kind of polarised kind of like having to hold multiple brains and whether that's world issues in one brain and then like the day today in the other and or whether that's like just kind of multiple projects because like in community where different things like that you run, you hold multiple projects at the same time because what maybe in a corporate company would be five jobs here is all in your one job and so yeah I think like it just feels a bit like you know if we were having 1. know something a crisis happening in Ireland might have like a day off to just focus on that or something whereas like everything is just going on and this huge crisis feels like happy if to weave and went back to work and if you're a day to focus on something that seems so massive and it comes in ebb and flow but I think it's just very heightened at the moment because of the situation.

Minute: Person 3: "I think I completely feel yeah that sort of what Person 1 and Person 2 have been mad articulating a little bit there as well. I'm sitting currently in my office and I have the sun coming through here so we've got a curtain pulled over there. If I go too far this way then I could get a little bit blinded, so you might notice me hiding in the shadows. But yeah the sort of the running from activity to activity and sort of having 10 things on the go at once and being very conscious of all of the deadlines that are ahead of you it is something that I've really really felt quite a lot today and also they move a definitely see feel that kind of almost lack of distinction or sort of emerging between the things that you're looking at and you're sort of trying to figure out how to bring other people sort of into discussions about in our context is about the kind of the kind of crisis I guess and all sort of related different issues and topics to that but then sort of also seeing it having it as a day-to-day like reality so that the marriage the marriage and the blend between so where does where does the things I do from nine to five and then the things that are sort of all very real you know and sometimes it feels like you're not not working and then also you know also but at the same time sort of you you feel like I'm doing this because I feel like I want to do something that contributes in some small way to the to this issue or but again is that knowledge that in So Many Ways we are very small and related to the scale of the problem as well so just not being able to escape I suppose not that you'd want to but just yeah I don't know it's there's a mesh mash of feelings around that for me too and I think I carry that into my day-to-day life as well as into my work life a lot of the time." Minute: Person 4: "Hi everyone - yeah I guess maybe also linking in with what everyone already shared and so many things that you three said r like feeling so such a heaviness of everything that is unfolding in Gaza and in Palestine and it's yeah really really knowing that like I'm sure so many people here feel that heaviness and we just I mean I just can switch off my phone or you know disengage and by knowing how many people can't, no matter where they are because they have friends and they have families and yeah I feel like I

## FOUNDATIONS & PRINCIPLES

A zine for you.

And here you are, sharing common ground- that of being human, of having heart and breath at a time when the world we live in - the social, scientific and intellectual - is collapsing into a world we live from - the air, soil, plants and animals [1]. That of being human at a time when it's becoming harder and harder to ignore the crises of oppression, of violence and political polarisation (harder to ignore, not because things are getting worse but "getting uncovered", in the words of adrienne maree brown)[2].

At what times are you alert to this cracking, this collapsing? Numb to it? Avoiding of it?

### **DEFY (Depth Education For Youth)-**

is an experiment with and for educators - an experiment that offers rare space for educators to become more intimate with the discomfort that comes with acknowledging crises of oppression and collapse, to dig deeper, to look at shadows, complicity in violence...and feel these things and notice how minds and hearts and bodies respond to them [3].

how - as educators - might we generate more capacity within ourselves to sit with 'difficult knowledge' [4], to 'stay with the trouble' [5] and, in turn, hold space for others- especially young people that we work with- to do similar?

### **DEFY's starting point-**

is right here and now, among peers and within ourselves (Shorr likes to use the term 'foundational discourse') [6]. Let us start here, with what we sense and feel in the learning spaces we hold.



## **DEFY creates and hold spaces for educators, and asks-**

What are we- as educators- making space for in our practice?

What are we choosing to allow in?

What are we holding off? What comes in anyway?

What do we feel is there that is not given space or time?

Where are there cracks and possibilities for other modes of engagement, for more depth?

And, with time given to reflection, is there a sense of how and why we could engage more creatively, more deeply with the cracks, with discomfort and that which is troubling- a line that starts within ourselves and moves out into our practice?

## **Who and how-**

Over 50 educators from Ireland, Germany, Slovenia and Austria, gave their precious time to join us at the DEFY journaling-seminar. Individually, but in each others presence, they journaled their reflections and feelings in response to a number of prompts. 20 more journaled in their own time. 40 educators joined us in more intimate conversation-circles.\*

We hoped that these encounters would not only provide a space for educators to reflect and share insights but would be community strengthening and resourcing also, offering educators an opportunity to sit with feelings of discomfort and in-doing so, explore the realm of capacity somewhat collectively.

The following- in the form of journaling responses, poetry, art and snippets from the conversation circles - is what educators have been sharing in DEFY spaces since September 2023. This Zine is not the sum-total of all that was shared, but instead an effort to convey its essence.

*\*Educators shared experiences of facilitating in the following formal and non-formal settings: primary and post primary schools (19), third level education (17), youth centres/workers (15), activist circles (11), teacher training (27) and community groups (6). Note: not all educators answered this question.*

## Your engagement with the Zine-

DEFY has been exploring feeling by evoking feeling; inquiring into discomfort by inviting it in. Its spaces then are quite tender, as are the reflections you will engage with over the coming pages. As far as you can, we invite you to approach the following pages with care. Be tender with yourself and the pages.

**Is there anything else we can tell you before you dive further in?**

As a project team, we have been wondering whether we are doing things in the right way. Is the balance or perspective within DEFY okay? As educators in relatively privileged situations, enjoying the protections of systems that cause harm in other contexts, what are we missing? [7], 'who is bearing the costs of our learning and its pace?'[8]. To keep these questions with us along the path and drawing on the work of experienced others, we devised a set of guiding principles. These principles informed the DEFY spaces and have guided us in our work together as a team. We offer them to you as Zine reader. You will find them on page five.

We are entirely grateful to fellow educators for stepping into a process that has sometimes been (and will continue to be) irritating, sometimes disruptive and where we are called on to learn and share in ways that sit beyond the rational. Thank you also to the amazing members of DEFY's Youth Advisory Panel and to the kind and generous pilot readers who looked over early drafts of this Zine.

With thanks for reading,

Charlotte Bishop (STAND), Miriam Streit (finep), Sive Bresnihan  
(Comhlámh), Maja Dominič (Zavod Voluntariat)

March 2024

*DEFY is an initiative of*

*Suas/STAND (Ireland), Comhlámh (Ireland), Zavod Voluntariat (Slovenia) and finep  
(Germany)*



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**Collaborative inquiry** - we understand DEFY to be a collaborative inquiry with fellow educators. Material generated in the spaces is considered the 'foundational discourse' [9] alongside a collectively held sense of their limitations and the need to always go further and deeper in terms of understanding.

**Entanglement, complicity** - 'difficult knowledge'[10] is central to this project. It is knowledge that is difficult both for the painful and traumatic material of the actual content but also because it 'makes demands'[11] on us, asking us to consider our own positionalities, our implications in and entanglement with structural violence and injustices. We are ready for when this might disrupt our self-image and sense of who we are.

**Self-focus/ reflexivity** - instead of asking "What can I do?" and "How can I support?", we ask, "Who am I?" and "How am I connected to all of this"?[12] We understand self-focus not as an indulgence, but as a necessary practice for situating oneself in contingent spaces, and for contact with difficult knowledge.

**Process-informed** - we recognise a/our tendency and cultural habit to want to present solutions and/or "prescribe universal responses" [13] and how this allows us to bypass consideration of our own entanglement in systems of harm, leaving our comforts intact.

**Language** - we are mindful of how language has the capacity to suppress as well as expand our ability to explore differently and commit to experimenting with different kinds of expression through DEFY including drawing, image, metaphor, different spoken languages.

**Relationality** - while this project brings our attention inward, we remain attentive to its purpose: to grow capacity to feel, to dig deeper, to relate wider, for and with others [14].

**Comfort / stretch** - we recognise that part of this work is about exploring relationship with (dis)comfort, with dissonance, disillusionment and more, and as it shows up in us - getting more familiar with the worlds inside of ourselves.

**Disclosure and consent** - we do not assume that all are ready to show up to a process that might be irritating and disruptive and so, as we go, we must find ways to convey what is being asked so that each has the chance to consent (or not) and take responsibility [15].









## "elephants are kind of like intrusive thoughts"

Conversation Circle, 2023

No matter how you might try to keep them out, no matter how strong your gate, how secure your lock, they are still large and looming and very, very present.

And you might consider letting them in- giving them a bit more space- but the worry is that they do what any elephant might do in a tight space; trample on everything in their path and cause serious upset.

A little like 'difficult knowledge' perhaps.

This is knowledge that we might find uncomfortable, both for the painful and traumatic material of the actual content but also because it makes demands on us, asking us to analyse our own beliefs and values as well as our relationship and entanglement with injustices and violence [15].

We asked fellow educators about this- about their practice and their relationship with discomfort and 'difficult knowledge'- a term that, in some of our conversations and in the pages of this Zine, has been supported by that metaphor, by that image of the elephants-in-the-room\*

\*for the elephants metaphor we gratefully acknowledge the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective

contrasting to this kind of like everyday life it almost feels a bit like covid-esque where you're like kind of something really big is happening and you're like trying to like organize like a small event that like don't spend anything to do with like the Israel Palestine context and you're like it almost it's so it feels very at odds you know if in working in advocacy working in these Kunis like we're always juggling different things and in relation to like world issues but what it really feels like feels I think like a lot of like in my circles a lot of people feel very fed up and in terms of the advocacy and activism stuff in relation to Palestine right now and that you know like there's a lot of advocacy things that people have to really show people why it's wrong and like why well that's why it's so important to change it but it just seems so blately obvious to this case and it's so blatantly obviously not being recognized by some people and you have the influence on the power and that like what is the point of having influence and power if you can't like you know actually make positive change in the world and like I think there's not just people like us that are questioning that right now it's people who are in those positions who feel like they can't do anything about there's and they are in these powerful positions as well so yeah. I just feel like that's very at odds with the world today and like and more and more I feel that kind of polarised kind of like having to hold multiple brains and whether that's world issues in one brain and then like the day today in the other and or whether that's like just kind of multiple projects because like in community where different things like that you run, you hold multiple projects at the same time because what maybe in a corporate company would be five jobs here is all in your one job and so yeah I think like it just feels a bit like you know if we were having you know something a crisis happening in Ireland might have like a day off to just focus on that or something whereas like everything is just gonna going a

### 3. PRACTICE & RESPONSIBILITY

Minute: Person 3: "I think it's about that sort of what Person 1 and Person 2 have been mad articulating a little bit there as well. I'm sitting currently in my office and I have the sun coming through here so we've got a curtain pulled over there. If I go too far this way then I could get a little bit blinded, so you might notice me hiding in the shadows. But yeah the sort of the running from activity to activity and sort of having 10 things on the go at once and being very conscious of all of the deadlines that are ahead of you it is something that I've really really felt quite a lot today and also they move a definitely see feel that kind of almost lack of distinction or sort of emerging between the things that you're looking at and you're sort of trying to figure out how to bring other people sort of into discussions about in our context is about the kind of the kind of crisis I guess and all sort of related different issues and topics to that but then sort of also seeing it having it as a day-to-day like reality so that the marriage the marriage and the blend between so where does where does the things I do from nine to five and then the things that are sort of all very real you know and sometimes it feels like you're not not working and then also you know also but at the same time sort of you you feel like I'm doing this because I feel like I want to do something that contributes in some small way to the to this issue or but again is that knowledge that in So Many Ways we are very small and related to the scale of the problem as well so just not being able to escape I suppose not that you'd want to but just yeah I don't know it's there's a mesh mash of feelings around that for me too and I think I carry that into my day-to-day life as well as into my work life a lot of the time." Minute: Person 4: "Hi everyone - yeah I guess maybe also linking in with what everyone already shared and so many things that you three said r like feeling so such a heaviness of everything that is unfolding in Gaza and in Palestine and it's yeah really really knowing that like I'm sure so many people here feel that heaviness and we just I mean I just can switch off my phone or you know disengage and by knowing how many people can't, no matter where they are



"Think about your practice" we said.  
Which statement best describes it?"

Involves motivating & giving reasons to hope.  
**40**  
**people**

Supports learners to take action.  
**39**

Hopes to emotionally engage learners.  
**37**

Aims to bring content.  
**29**

Gives space to what's being felt.  
**24**

Explores positioning & complicity.  
**28**

Focus on building connection.  
**24**

Sets out to prompt uncertainty.  
**19**

**"The creation of [class]room safety is certainly a goal toward which educators should strive; at its heart is a respect for students' emotions"**

Leonardo ("Race, Whiteness and Education. New York: Routledge")

**"Your responsibility to learners- is it like this?"**

**"If teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis... it has perhaps not truly taught. my job as a teacher..was that of creating in the class the highest state of crisis that it could withstand, without "driving the students crazy," without compromising the students' bounds."**

Felman ("Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching")

**"Or a little more like this?" we asked.**



# My responsibility is to:

challenge students but  
to prime them so that  
they realise they have  
everything they need  
AND they should not  
feel responsible to do  
anything alone

be accurate and have answers to  
things, to focus on what we know,  
to be 'right' and politically-  
correct, not step on anyone's  
toes or make anyone feel  
threatened but encourage learners  
to question their own positioning  
and have a critical mind.

bring learners into the stretch  
zone..create spaces for new  
learnings both within and  
each other. A brave fragile and  
vulnerable space is where I lean  
towards when situating my  
learners

*"make space for celebration and mourning"*

be vulnerable and open  
as an educator which  
invites participants  
to do the same

I want participants to come away from a  
workshop feeling inspired, motivated,  
connected and determined to take some sort  
of positive action - I certainly would  
love them to have a few aha moments - but  
is that a crisis of sorts?? - I don't  
know.

help learners develop  
their own vision and get  
hands on in moving  
towards that vision

acknowledge and take the emotional  
experience(s) of individuals during  
their learning process to be  
serious...question and support them  
in questioning the narrative(s) they  
are telling themselves about their  
emotional experience(s).

not deceive learners with  
simple, one-dimensional  
answers in the face of  
complex issues

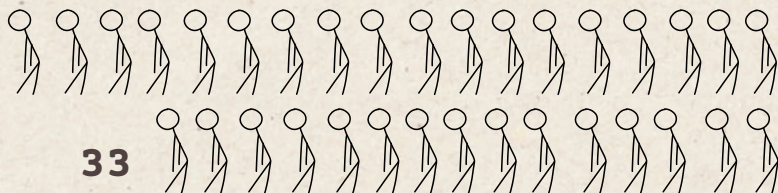
*"crisis is part of the process"*

"These ideas of difficult knowledge and discomfort in the learning space- are these things that resonates with you?", we asked.

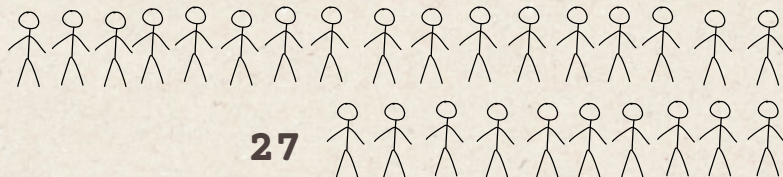
**4 people**



"they are everything for me"



"they resonate a lot"



"they resonate/  
resonate somehow"





don't know 'reall' how to express it adequately but ppl can come up to you afterwards and quietly say 'well what was that campaign you mentioned,' or 'that person, that quote.' of course they're not going to stand up against mister popular in front of everyone else. Who would? I def wouldn't as a young person. I completely agree. And it brings me back to that slide you had re: what allows for the Elephant and I think I wrote complicit silence and like An Was saying ...I've seen it before where a kid will say something and you can tell in their eyes and body language they're testing the waters they're like are they gonna look at me ...they want the attention they want to seem cool they want to test maybe how would it be received if they say what they heard at home or at dinner said by the cool Uncle or whatever you know there's so many other things and they trial it in class and then there's a complicit silence because no one feels equipped and so no talks out and so although they are a minority those are the people who feel empowered and and so I wrote down complicit silence and lack of accountability because we don't like Arron suggests we don't question it we don't push the reasoning which sometimes is not existent and very often actually if you push patiently and rationally there's no rationality and it's just so hard and like delicate of how do you do that without humiliating the person because humiliation is a horrible do you know if you expose their ignorance they're going to have more visceral action and something that might just have been a little bit of bravado turns into real hatred for that topic and it's just such a complex subject but what helps, what could empower me in addressing of elephants i wrote down community network and role models and I really do think as maybe cheesy as it sounds, but sometimes when I just feel like I can't do this I think of people who I've have seen doing this with like such strength and courage and I'm like okay if they can do it maybe I could at least try and think of Greta Thunberg like when Greta speaks I'm like okay she can do it maybe I could give it a try at least. I was very lucky to start working early on with a black Irish educator and activist Sharon Murphy and who I suppose you know a couple of decades ago was very insistent when we started

4.

## NOTICING THE ELEPHANTS

...I think I've been supported through that connection with Sharon, to be to be willing I suppose to be in that kind of space and I think that communicates something to the process as well in the way that, what you've said up here Charlotte, you know despite by even naming some of the things that we might encounter it seems to create an opening for them so I think that's been one thing that's been really supportive ...I had my little elephant there- in the beginning middle of them was power and violence so like yeah I'm cheerful but like i think if we're confronting existential issues than I fully expect to find them there and another thing that has been supportive for me has been to to name somethings from the beginning before the conversation even opens up some to name that part of what we're doing in development or in global citizenship education is to look deeply at the root causes of issues and to try to understand what's causing them by creating a sense of commonality in the beginning around those problems because these are human rights issues whether it's access to housing whether it's access to clean water whatever it is whether it's respect that we all deserve these things and to name from the beginning that sometimes we might think that we're delving into the problem but actually what we're hearing is somebody's opinion about... so that from the beginning to say that, as we explore these we're going to check in on that... is this really the root of the problem or is it somebody's interpretation and where does it come from? and so that has been something that's been kind of helpful and the other thing that's being helpful sorry for taking up so much time but it's a Audre LourdeIf I'm working in the service of my vision then it doesn't really matter if I'm afraid...it becomes less and less important afraid and I think having that sense of Vision ...not what the group should aspire to or share that vision but a vision of those common rights, that vision of there being enough. One of the very big obstacles is them being pitted against each other for resources





"Can you recall moments in the learning space where discomfort has shown up?" we asked. "Moments that have shifted things. That felt challenging, charged, that were unexpected", we said. "What are the topics or triggers, the elephants which lead to this?"





In come the  
elephants...

"I can detect a shift happening  
in the group as the space is  
opened up, not always  
comfortable but always  
engaging"

and this is what they look like...

the bigger the word, the more often it was given as an answer



pause here, linger a while



"Reflection on any topic can be triggering, the journey in can be difficult for people."



privilege

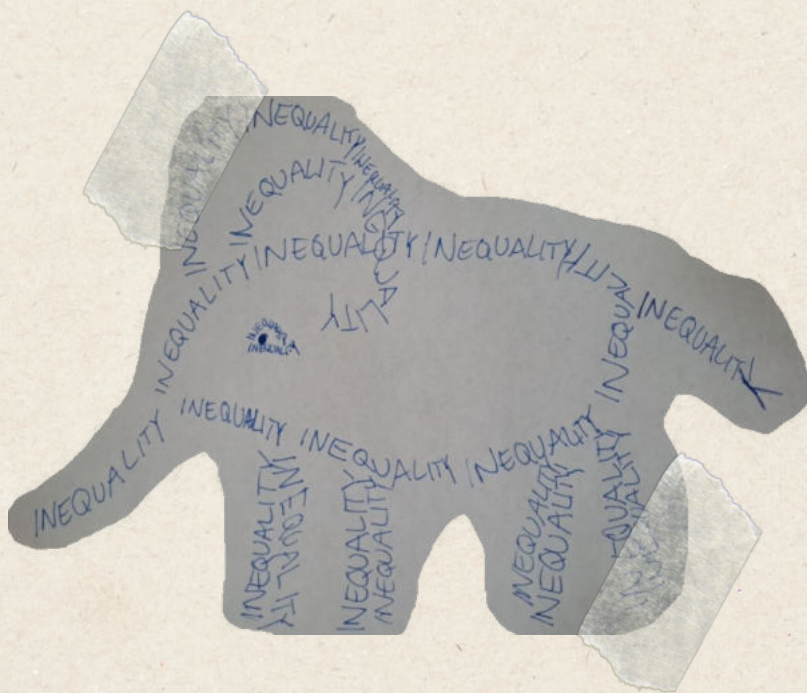
eyes wide open to inequality

"Challenging privilege. Calling out broken systems when people's whole existence is in them"

"[discomfort comes] when learning goes beyond the comfort of a closed space filled only by people with significant privilege... [when there are] insights from people with different lived experiences, people experiencing prejudice, discrimination, people seeking protection, voices of people most affected who are from and/or living in the Global South. It is through this dialogue that the comfort of certainty and a belief that the flawed system can be reformed is challenged and the understanding that something deeper is required. These engagements can open up conversations of complicity, of saviorism, of who is taking action - why and the benefit of whom."

# inequality

"I also have an elephant-  
An elephant of words.  
Inequality, inequality...  
It only says inequality"



"I have a fear that if we really, truly  
looked at the inequality in our world we  
would not stop weeping"



## refugees

"so, my natural, like, comfort place is poetry. This is kind of from a space.. it's a girl who had a conversation with me last week... it just came up and I felt so uncomfortable. So a half written poem, ok?"

How is it that it's okay  
that the others that come over here get free stuff  
and everything is handed to them  
and they're not even from here?

they didn't grow up here  
and they don't know the things that I know  
they can't sing Amhrán na bhFiann  
or understand our culture

they should be thanking us  
for everything that we've given them  
yet they're snapping and snarling  
and taking everything from us

how is it fair if my ma works  
and has to pay for my school stuff  
how is it fair they don't even speak right  
and they get everything that should be mine

answer me that  
we hear about them coming here  
and taking our homes  
and taking our jobs

meanwhile,  
I  
have  
nothing





## power and violence

"sometimes, like, I am absolutely floored at times because it is about power and violence and in particular actually the one that that I feel wrongfooted by is gender-based violence and I still totally struggle with that.

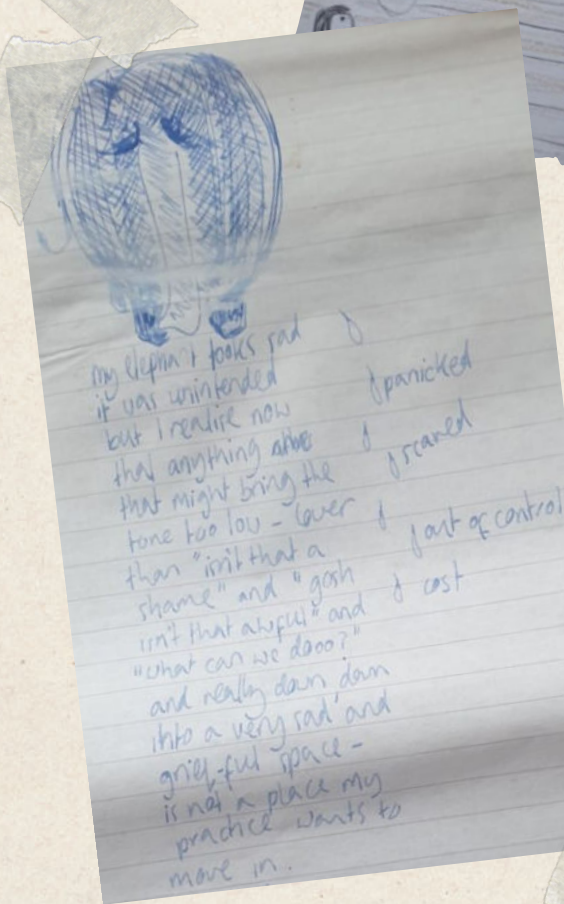
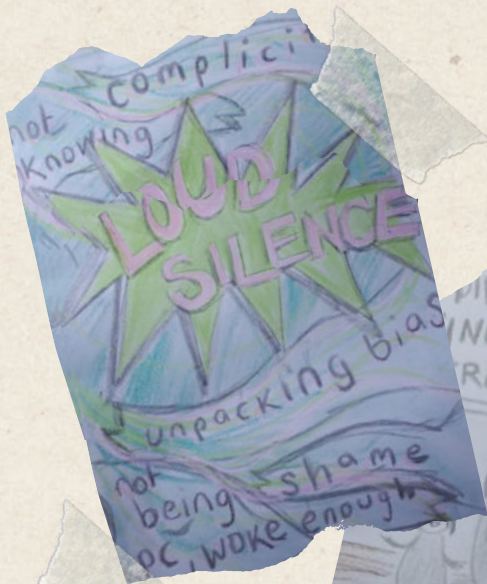
I still feel that I participate in the kind of conspiracy of silence.

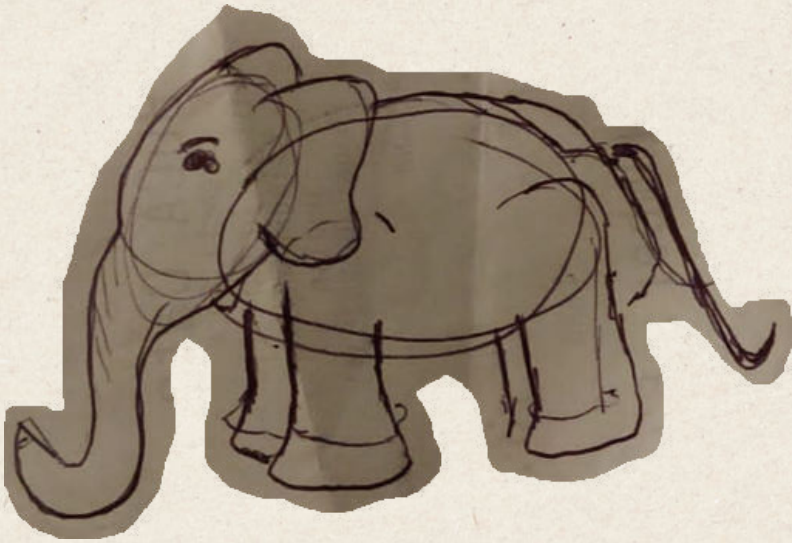
..working with secondary school and third level students where it's just not named that the biggest threat to women is in their own home, in our own homes, and our intimate relationships and saying that feels like I've just taken a massive shit on the floor to be quite honest, you know, but it's just, like...the tension just goes through the roof and so there's that..

there's that edge"



elephant drawings  
 dance in many  
 forms...





the scale, the immensity of the climate crisis

"The elephant that kind of came to my mind, and it's not really being spoken in the work that I do - well we do and we don't - but the scale of some of the things that we're talking about. For example the climate, what's happening with diversity loss and how the actions that we're taking.... they're small. So what's that gonna do in the grand scheme of things?"



## honesty

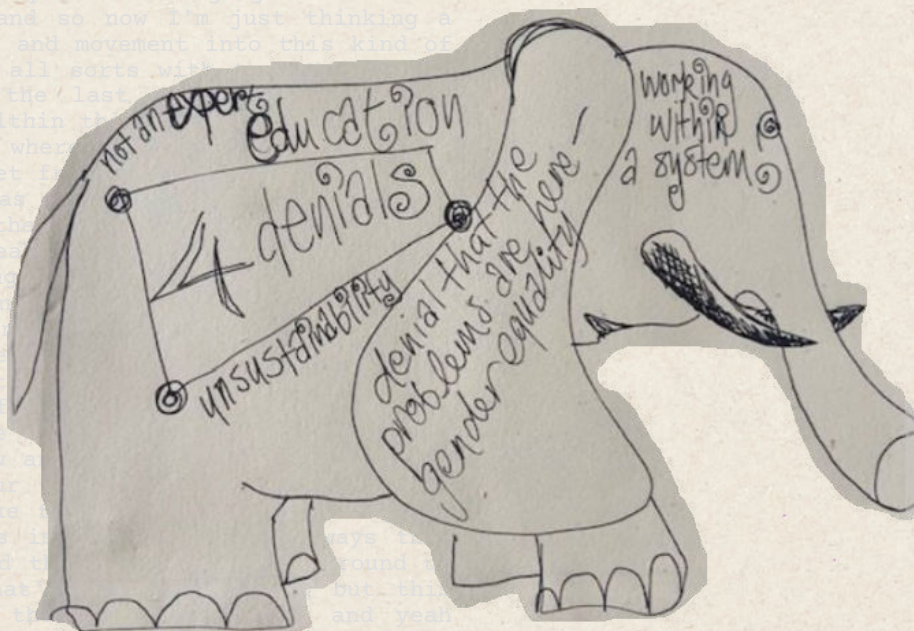


"There is- in the back of my head- the awareness of how small what we are doing is and it can be hard to feel, like, a fine line where I'm being authentic with the people that I'm working with but also not trying to terrify them and make them feel like there's nothing they can do"

"...it's a bit disheartening of coming in and convincing them of something and coming out of it maybe having a bad day and thinking: that's not even going to change anything."

"When I say climate change denial...it's not that kind of crass Trump kind. It's literally the kind that we all engage in that we don't act like this is urgent and I think that gaslighting of young people in schools is one of the things that really upsets me and an edge that I'm quite nervous of..."

"...how much to give away about my thinking of the topic and how much do the people in the room deserve for me to be honest about where I'm coming from? Like not just my positionality but what my thoughts are on it and the ideas on what you are there to do? Are you there to facilitate the group in a kind of neutral way as possible or...?"



"when learners see their future as negative and you can't give any hope or counterargument without feeling like you have to lie"



A colorful drawing of an elephant, rendered in shades of purple, green, yellow, and orange. The elephant is facing right, with its trunk touching a vertical grey bar. Surrounding the elephant are several labels and text elements:

- BLIND TO**: Written above the elephant's head.
- FELLOW ELEPHANTS**: Written to the left of the elephant's head.
- BLIND TO YOUR OWN LIMITATIONS**: Written below the elephant's legs.
- THEY BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL**: Written vertically along the side of the elephant's body.
- FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE FAILURE**: A series of the word "FAILURE" repeated along the top and right edges of the drawing.
- BLIND**: Written to the right of the elephant's head.
- TAI LURE**: Written at the top right, with an arrow pointing towards the elephant.
- BLIND TO ANOTHER WAY OF DOING, BEING, THINKING, BEHAVING**: A long line of text at the bottom of the drawing.

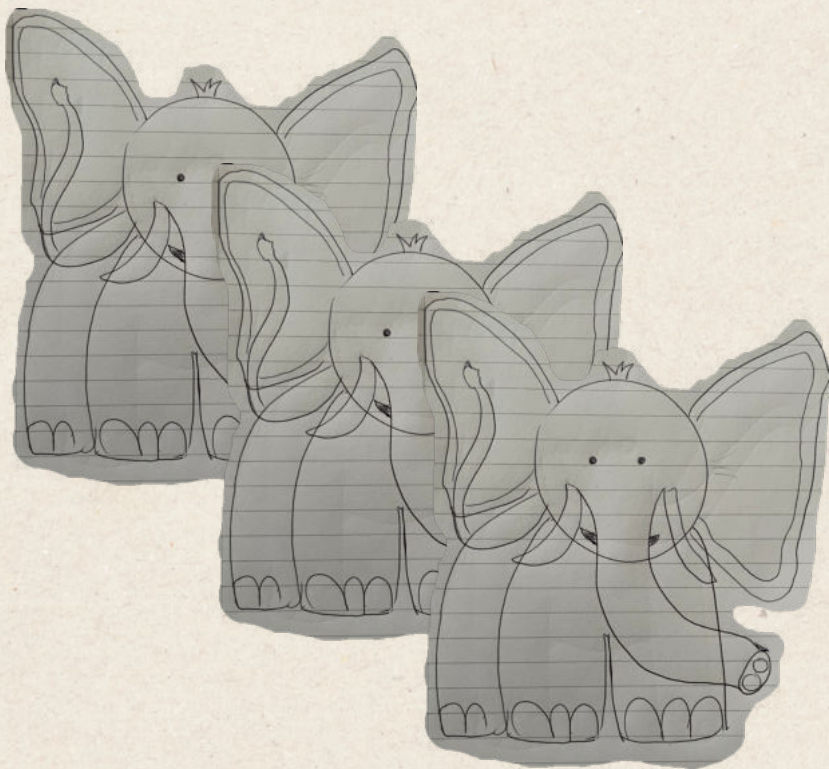
maybe that also has something to do with  
of like to bring that to the fore a bit  
it's - I don't know how much it's a  
influencing but like yeah - I am a woman  
so I'm also kind of aware of that and  
our failure to make there as well Ais: Those  
own emotions kind of was feeling that k  
another way from one into the other and  
inking and behaving" like I do feel  
of empowering people but not to the po  
mark that in so it's sort of yeah ope  
I guess also just the importance of the  
also the challenge of - especially i  
with a certain group - it's very diffi  
as like it's very clear from the sli  
strongest element there among this gro  
sort of ...how deep can you go when you  
think I think it's important (content  
kind lean it as a jumping off point b  
depend on the day and the session and  
with but it's sort of my starting  
depending on the group's response to t  
of go from there but definitely it's

## responsibility

"Am I equipped to have that conversation with them?

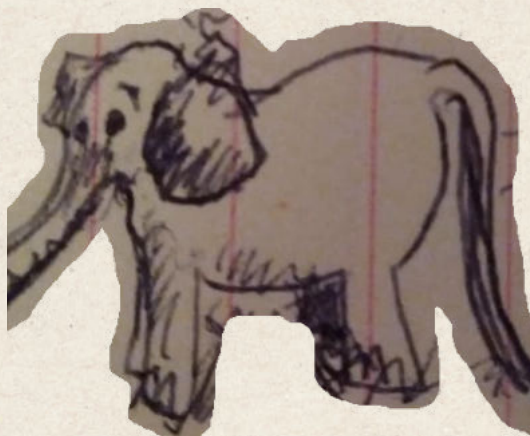
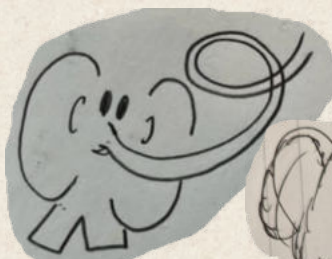
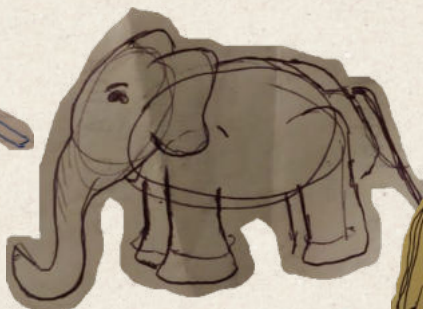
Because, like, you're introducing them to a minefield of, like, horrific stories and so, yeah, I find that difficult sometimes when there's all this stuff going on."

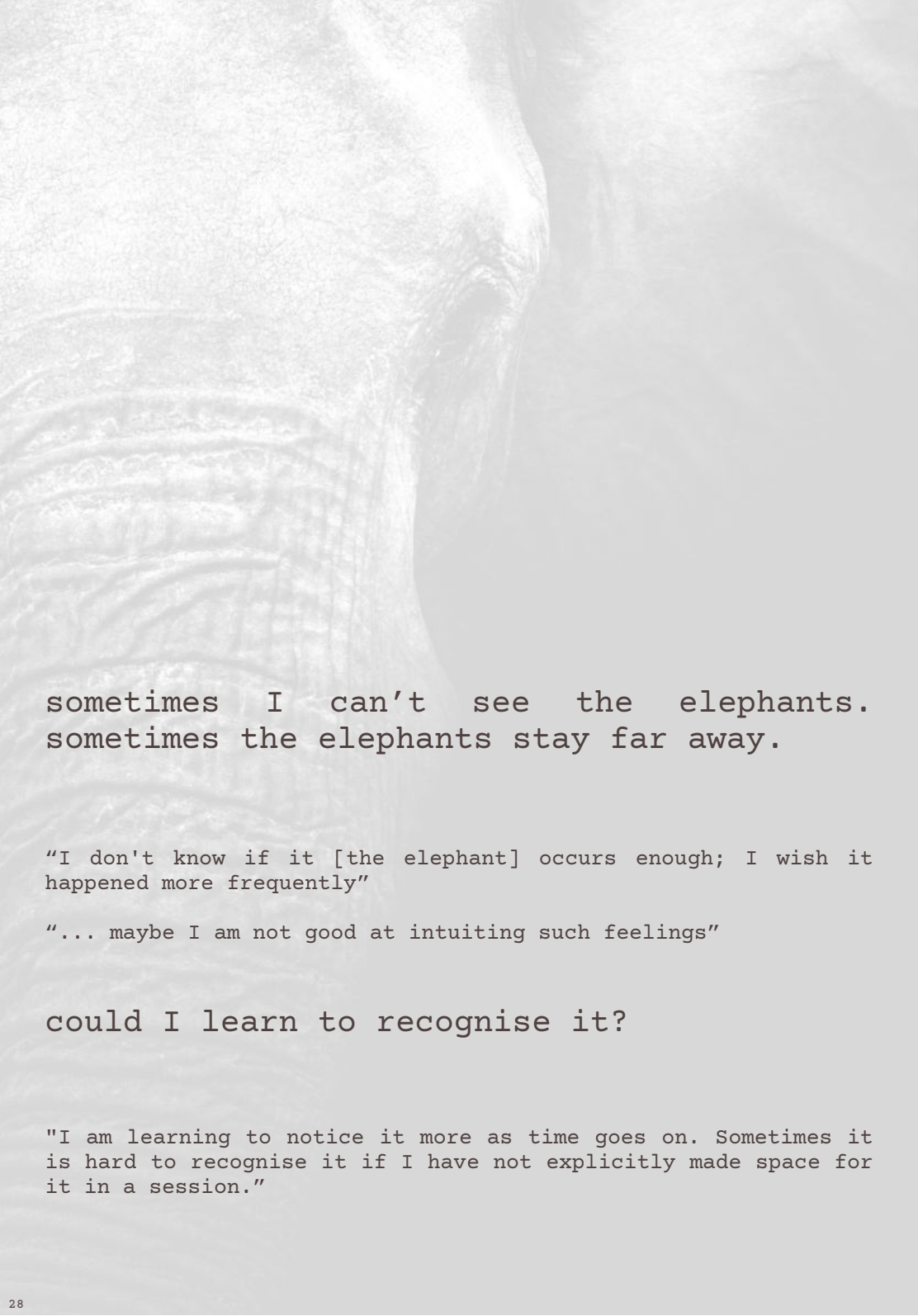
"when you peel back the layers it's quite raw and how you manage that...you know for me, the elephant in the room is if you go there, what are you going to do to support those people? Like am I going to see them again? Is it irresponsible? The responsibility of the facilitator is also there. Is it responsible to open that space up for people when maybe you don't know what their supports are?"





many elephants!





sometimes I can't see the elephants.  
sometimes the elephants stay far away.

"I don't know if it [the elephant] occurs enough; I wish it happened more frequently"

"... maybe I am not good at intuiting such feelings"

could I learn to recognise it?

"I am learning to notice it more as time goes on. Sometimes it is hard to recognise it if I have not explicitly made space for it in a session."



contrasting to this kind of like everyday life it almost feels a bit like covid-esque where you're like kind of something really big is happening and you're like trying to like organize like a small event that like don't spend anything to do with like the Israel Palestine context and you're like it almost it's so it feels very at odds you know if in working in advocacy working in these Kunis like we're always juggling different things and in relation to like world issues but what it really feels like feels I think like a lot of like in my circles a lot of people feel very fed up and in terms of the advocacy and activism stuff in relation to Palestine right now and that you know like there's a lot of advocacy things that people have to really show people why it's wrong and like why well that's why it's so important to change it but it just seems so blately obvious to this case and it's so blatantly obviously not being recognized by some people and you have the influence on the power and that like what is the point of having influence and power if you can't like you know actually make positive change in the world and like I think there's not just people like us that are questioning that right now it's people who are in those positions who feel like they can't do anything about there's and they are in these powerful positions as well so yeah. I just feel like that's very at odds with the world today and like and more and more I feel that kind of polarised kind of like having to hold multiple brains and whether that's world issues in one brain and then like the day today in the other and or whether that's like just kind of multiple projects because like in community where different things like that you run, you hold multiple projects at the same time because what maybe in a corporate company would be five jobs here is all in your one job and so yeah I think like it just feels a bit like you know if we were having you know something a crisis happening in Ireland might have like

## DANCING WITH THE ELEPHANTS

like everything is just gonna going along and like this huge crisis feels like happy if to weave and went if you're a day to focus on something that seems so massive. And that kind of comes in ebb and flow but I think it's just very heightened at the moment because of the situation. minute: Person 3: "I think I completely feel yeah that sort of what Person 1 and Person 2 have been mad articulating a little bit there as well. I'm sitting currently in my office and I have the sun coming through here so we've got a curtain pulled over there. If I go too far this way then I could get a little bit blinded, so you might notice me hiding in the shadows. But yeah the sort of the running from activity to activity and sort of having 10 things on the go at once and being very conscious of all of the deadlines that are ahead of you it is something that I've really really felt quite a lot today and also they move a definitely see feel that kind of almost lack of distinction or sort of emerging between the things that you're looking at and you're sort of trying to figure out how to bring other people sort of into discussions about in our context is about the kind of the kind of crisis I guess and all sort of related different issues and topics to that but then sort of also seeing it having it as a day-to-day like reality so that the marriage and the blend between so where does where does the things I do from nine to five and and then the things that are sort of all very different now and sometimes it feels like you're not not working and then a bit like I know and sometimes the same time sort of you you feel like I'm doing the same thing like I want to do something that contributes in some way but it's like an issue or but again is that knowledge that in So Many Ways it's related to the scale of the problem as well so just not being able to suppose not that you'd want to but just yeah I don't know how to smash of feelings around that for me too and I think it's like a day-to-day life as well as into my work life a lot of it. "Hi everyone, - yeah I guess maybe also linking it to the ready shared and so many things that you three like to have such a heaviness of everything that is unfolding and in and in and it's yeah really really knowing that like I'm sure many people feel that heaviness and we just I mean I just can switch off my phone you know disengage and by knowing how many people can't, no matter where they are



"These elephants can cause discomfort.  
What is your level of comfort for working  
with discomfort in the learning space?" we  
asked.

Low

High



\*68 people in response to a journaling prompt



Sometimes I feel...

[illegible]

\*from 64 peoples journal response

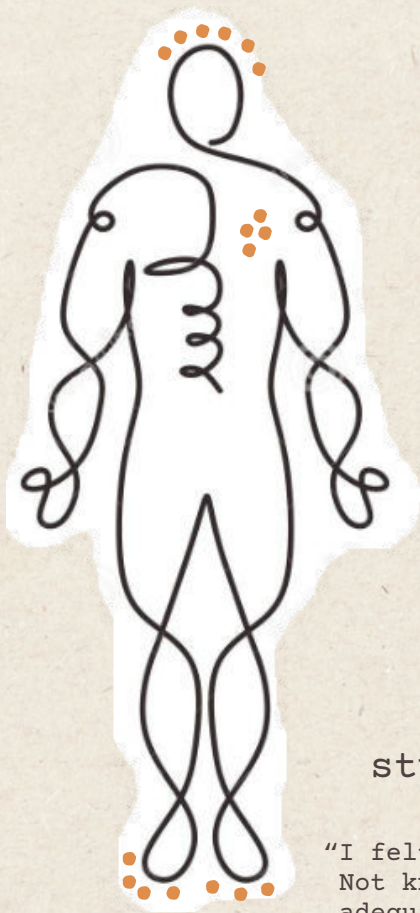
lacking in knowledge

"felt inarticulate and ignorant"

"I felt disappointed and that I should have had much more knowledge to back up the 'discomfort' area...was disgusted with myself! I have never facilitated this activity since."

hopeless

"not knowing how to share my own occasional hopelessness while at the same time looking for ways to explore the difficulties encountered in a productive, constructive way"



stuck, paralysis

"I felt stuck or paralysis. Not knowing how to respond adequately and hold my own integrity while at the same time hearing the other...I did not feel satisfied that I fully voiced what needed to be said. I felt a little disloyal to my own self."



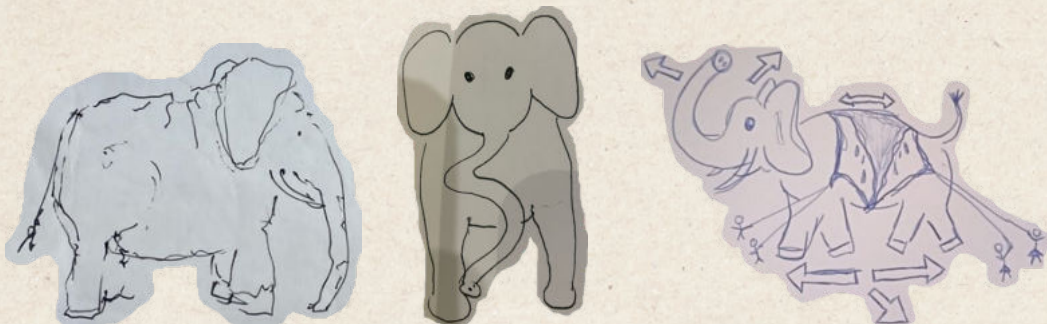
## fear, anger, frustration

"Fear. I have anger and frustration and then I can also find it very difficult, even though I've done an awful lot of work on emotion. What I find very hard sometimes is to name the emotions, because I don't have the name for them...so the struggling then to find the name for a positive emotion that reflects our resilience - the idea of light space and opportunity - I did not know what that emotion was."

## uncomfortable, panicked, avoiding

"I just felt so uncomfortable. I felt so uncomfortable and panicked...I still can't imagine how I would... how I would hold that now. I really don't know, or if I should [hold it] but just...those feelings just stay so strong and I don't want to get used to those feelings, do you know? I actually just want to keep avoiding them."

"I would like to challenge the views of someone else, but in a respectful and inviting way. I tend to move away from it rather than invite it in."



turning away, loud words, depending), fear (frozen, tense, quiet), disgust (turn away, face scrunched, almost-shuddering), sad (hollow feeling, almost-crying)

being pretty privileged

sometimes also happy (relaxed) about

"often anger (feeling hot, lip curled, turning away, loud words, depending)



sometimes this discomfort lingers...long  
after the session has ended

Unresolved, muscle soreness, detached between mind and body. As well as self and others.  
Mostly it motivates me to think about how to deal with it in my next educational activity  
Disappointed. Worried. Upset. Tense. Dismayed. Insecure. Self-critical. Annoyed  
Restlessness, need to take action, to have a plan, to do something, anxiety, guilt  
I tend to feel it very physically. Tightness and butterflies in chest and tummy.  
Anxiousness. second-guessing. Wishing for perfect delivery.  
Fear that I did something wrong, heavy, worried.  
I need to go out into nature and let it sink in  
Yes, it feels awful, like a lump in my throat.  
Hollowness, unsteadiness, and quiet  
Disappointment, confidence bashing  
Unsettled, butterflies, hot/cold  
Buzzing. Exposed. In my head.  
Embarrassed, lonely, tiredness  
Anxious, depressed and sad.  
Self-criticism; despondency.  
critical, disappointed, guilt  
Nervous, tense, embarrassing  
Tender, queasy, drained,  
Racing heart, trembling  
Tired, draining or itchy!  
Anxiety, guilt, shame,  
Maybe i feel weak  
Insecure  
Slow

confused (mist in mind),  
anxious (tight in the chest), inferior (a gap opens  
inside between where I am and where I want to be, inner sinking),  
insecure (wobbly breath), hurt (a collapse in chest), disappointed (tears tickle)

"I want to open the box of difficult knowledge, allow deep, transformational learning to happen; but how will I respond in the moment? And am I afraid of that? And how can I respect the learners and leave them in a better place at the end? And how can all of this happen over 90 minutes?"





Person 3 Here's my elephant. It's a lot of things going in different directions and it's kind of peeling back the layers but that like when you peel back the layers it's quite raw and had you manage that (I'll send you a picture) you know for me, the elephant in the room if you go there, what you're going to do to support those people like, am i going to see them again, is it irresponsible, the responsibility of the facilitator is also there. Is a responsible to open that space up for people Again is a response like the responsibility of the facility like is a responsible to open that space up for people when maybe you don't know what their supports are like maybe like it's helpful for them to open it up but maybe it's like you know they're not ready maybe they are ready and you can be the person People can make their own choices, but people also look to you for guidance if you are opening the space and people are not ready to Maybe people you are ready to step into that space wheel step inside space and then like then what do you here are you then you know like so it's like that kind of yeah for me it's definitely it's like as a facilitator making decisions for the group and where are you facilitating them to? Maybe less serious level but also builds that tension for me is - how much as a facilitator should be involved and how much of myself to give to the space or not? It terms of not just my presence but also how much to give away about my thinking of the topic and how much do the people in the room deserve for me to be honest about where im coming from Fat like one of my thinking on the topic or something and I would do the people in the room deserve me to actually be like honest in like where I'm coming from like not just my positionality but what my thoughts are on it and the ideas on what you are there to do? Are you there to facilitate the group in a kind of neutral way as possible or .. form me it really depends on the context and what the situation is and sometimes that can change during the situation and ... that kind of changability is always keeping me in a kind of torn in different ways and managing that can be quite tiring form me as a facilitator. " Minute:

## 6. HOLDING (MORE) SPACE

Person 4 Everybody is that to come in here if that's okay cuz I think my elephant is probably doing the same thing as person 3 - it's got time multiple trunks, moving very quick and as it tries to do many different things and it tries to work with multiple projects and multiple different contexts and sort of in a very short space of time it's supported something that Person 3 mentioned around sort of the obligations that you have there to you to the people you're working with and not only in the space but then also you know after you've to engage with them you need to sort of there's an ongoing I think duty of caring, I would say maybe Such an important song reflection and you know and what you why should I try to reflect I schedule myself a little reflection time every Friday and that invariably gets blown through with something else as well and it's so important to learn and to continue to grow and I'm really really grateful for spaces like this actually that can create and offer space for something like this actually. You know that so we're living in the world and we're and the world is in the things that we are working on and the groups that were working with and so there's never it's never kind of separable as well you know that kind of also means that you need to be at rest with news and that part is sort of exhaustind and exciting at the same time i find as well. So yeah, my elephant has lots of thoughts about lots of things. Thoughts about lots of things which I can say but yeah I think I hear everything that everybody has said here." Minute: Person 5 I seemd to be like the worst student in this class in terms of following a brief not only did I not draw but the elephant got consumed by Narnia. I like to describe the context of my work as Narnia cause in a lot of ways it's like a makeup-y world, I work in higher education. Formal higher education. Sure I eat the doctor are Narnia The Elephant is Narnia. Narnia is the elephant and they're all elephants and the elephants in my practice are ego, competitions, hurt, equal access opportunities, quite western ideologies and conceptualisations of what it means to exist in this world, a notion of shared values, a notion that I provide a dictate, that I somehow know something about something because I am an academic and I am put on a stage and that dictate. How do I feel about the elephants I have? Fear I have anger and frustration and and then I also fear

The dance could and sometimes does go differently.

"To be able to hold (more) space," we asked,  
"What does that look like?  
What could that look like?"



"these elephants, they are also strong beings, maybe you can win them over somehow and maybe the whole thing also needs time."



courage,  
giving space to the fearful,  
the uncomfortable,  
the 'weak',  
the hopelessness


"we're at this point where it's uncomfortable to ignore and to not talk about the feelings but then it's also uncomfortable to go there as well...There's a different but almost riskier situation of not going there, of not asking the difficult questions. I don't have any grand point that I'm trying to make here - I'm just observing that edge"

"this fear, sadness. Maybe it's also somewhat good- if these things are there- to take them really seriously somehow"

"we have to somehow create spaces in which even supposed weakness is somehow allowed. And that's really hard, because we, or at least I, move a lot in environments where...it's all about showing strength and giving the right answers."

"we also have to acknowledge in some form that these feelings are there or that there is this hopelessness. And I think that this also means somehow taking the people, the target groups, especially young people, with whom we work, as full or serious"

"I think the tensions are key to where growth, learning can happen"



"There is no time to be polite any more  
in the multiple crises we are facing. I can no longer work for  
the sake of work- it needs to enter into the discomfort as that  
is where we are"

"Where is the courage to break out a little? Maybe you don't  
to break rules directly, but at least you have to expand  
and I think that's what my work is often about."



## presence


"I think we're terrified of being present at the moment and I think it requires being present...."



*taken on a Kerry beach*

"[if I was to have more capacity?] In my minds eye, I'm also physically bigger. When I walk into the room, people notice. My movements are impactful, my words weighty and well chosen. I bring this sense of presence to conversations in circles, to classrooms full of bored Transition Years, and to my day-to-day life."

"turn up fully. Bring my most present, bravest self to learning spaces. Keep going with my own healing, personal development and growth. Difficult conversations, yes. I feel like trauma informed approaches to education can be a helpful way to mediate the Safety/Care - Pushing people dynamic"



## therapeutic, trauma-informed

"I have been doing more work with myself in terms of personal development and healing and this helps me feel aligned and centered. Holding space for emotions in a way that interrogates the actors and interests that benefit from our current situation is important to me. I also associate doing this well with trauma informed approaches to education"

"there is already a lot of stress and anxiety on each of us, so recognising the trauma of why we are feeling like we are feeling, and doing restorative work alongside the criticality of the content is one approach I am enjoying and feels like if this is in place we can go deeper and be more courageous as facilitators and participants, all of us co-creating the limits of the space"

## body/somatic informed

"it could be that the physicality, yes the body, should be given a higher priority....to abolish this dichotomy of body and mind."

"Breath work, embodied stretching movement, grounding and gratitude may all be part of this."



and then to hope- a critical hope- and  
maybe a redefining of hope

"it must be about giving space to negative or deficit-oriented  
or even fearful things. But that can't be the only thing.


It has to go somewhere, so something should come out of it,  
which leads us to encourage people not to give up, but to  
carry on somehow....I need conditions where I kind of believe  
that things will change more profoundly."



Uagh Wood.  
Kerry

hold tight to your vision  
(to alleviate fear)

"it's an Audre Lorde [quote] ....If I'm working in the service of my vision then it doesn't really matter if I'm afraid...it becomes less and less important if I'm afraid"




When I dare to be  
powerful, to use  
my strength in the  
service of my  
vision, then it  
becomes less and  
less important  
whether I am  
afraid.





expect to tremble, expect to find them  
- the elephants, the discomfort- there



"I suppose one of the things that supports me is that I expect to tremble  
I don't expect not to. It's an indicator.  
If I'm not trembling I'm not at that edge."

name it from the beginning

"another thing that has been supportive for me has been to name some things from the beginning before the conversation even opens up..whatever it is...to name from the beginning that sometimes we might think that we're delving into the problem but actually what we're hearing is somebody's opinion.. so from the beginning to say that, as we explore these, we're going to check in on that- is this really the root of the problem or is it somebody's interpretation and where does it come from?"

and name 'joy' from the beginning...

"the joy I suppose that is there, framed at the very beginning...there is potential here for a really joyous kind of alternative to what we have"

bring in compassion

"..to have the conversations that are difficult and the skills we need to bring compassion to unexpected places - maybe skills isn't even the right word but you know like realisations or like commitments to ways of being"



## lightness and humour

"A distancing, observing.  
Less judgmental of me and  
others. Accepting, not  
expecting."

"A more forgiving/relaxed  
approach to uncomfortable  
emotions (your own and  
others) - including a touch  
of humour"



admit that there are no simple answers

"if we think there are simple answers, then I think we're lying to the people we're learning with."

"I was struck just now by the need to write something down- the phrase was 'none of us have the answers'. And that, I guess, is our role- to kind of hold a space and, you know, not to instruct on the correct action"



reflection-centered

"there is an insane focus on action. And what I really miss sometimes is reflection.... are we actually only able to act when we have somehow explored and reflected for us what makes us afraid?.... sometimes it really angers me. That somehow it's all about acting, because I think, 'but, where's the thinking'?"

"it became easier to work in uncomfortable spaces over time when you can fall back on questioning the discomfort.... why does it make me so uneasy?"



## know your group have time with your group

"there is only so much we can do as facilitators, and building to that level of discomfort takes time with learners. Otherwise a wall will go up"

"it is very important to bring controversy, challenge, discomfort and the reality of crises into the classroom. However, when done too quickly, I have found this to have a negative impact on students engagement with GCE and their own emotions and reactions."

"I have a responsibility to first build a safe sense of space in the classroom built on mutual trust and bi-directional relationships. It is only from this space that I feel I can safely push students beyond their comfort zones"

"My level of comfort is very dependent on how well I know the group I'm working with, hence how well I can anticipate their individual and collective reactions and group dynamics. Of course, this does never go without trying and sometimes failing but I feel like my assessment of groups gets better each time"





## role models & a community network

"it's just such a complex subject but what helps, what could empower me in addressing of elephants? Community network and role models and I really do think, as maybe cheesy as it sounds, but sometimes when I just feel like I can't do this I think of people who I've have seen doing this with, like, such strength and courage and I'm like, 'okay if they can do it maybe I could at least try'..."

"I am so lucky to facilitate alongside very experienced trainers from whom I have learned a lot and with organisations that rise to the responsibility of minding their trainers and participants".



move beyond  
traditional,  
bounded  
structures

"I imagine such a space, or opportunities to shape our work,  
that are simply detached from the structures in which we are,  
so to speak, always moving."

"I just imagine a space, a little free of constraints.  
Of all kinds, be it the curricula, the time constraints,  
the different expectations that are constantly addressed to you"

right now and others less so as you scan you can also just track yourself. Decolonial futures collective, Collective talk about for denials and the kind of it's a schema it's a grammar as Char says for some of this stuff that's with us but that doesn't get acknowledged and like I said in the elephants you were describing there you were speaking to this denials and so does the word cloud hit on these denials Systemic violence and complicity in harm - the idea that we have or that we enjoy a certain level of comfort or security. So its not I have and others don't have it's I have because others don't have. So there's costs being paid for the security and comfort that I enjoy that im not aware of or I don't have to really look at, so Im able to enjoy So I'm able to enjoy a certain amount of comfort and security and den because it doesn't have to come into the conversation that there's violence that has to happen in order for me to enjoy that the second one is The limits of the planes - And this idea that the planet cannot sustain exponential growth and consumption and it cannot sustain that and their limits but somehow this this also doesn't so easily get into the room it's there's an elephant but it doesn't get it somehow we don't have to talk about it, the limits of the planet. And these denials is because it's difficult, right Entanglement - denial of entanglement is denial that we you know this this this insistence that we are separate from each other this insistence that we are as humans also except from other humans but also separate from nature there's this insistence, rather than being able to consider that we're entangled were part of an ecosystem or there's a bio intelligence also in the non human life that's around us Immensity of the problem - the scale, the denial of the scale and the tendency to then search for Hope and simplistic Solutions that can make us just feel momentarily better or and to turn away then from the difficult work and but it's to say that it's not, these denials are not socially sanctioned in the way that are because we're bad people or we are ignoring stuff that we should be looking at it's because we focus on better future because we consider that if we look to what's actually here would be unbearable but maybe it wouldn't be maybe it would be okay but our feeling is is too much so we have to deflect maybe to small actions making a difference, hope for better future, .. we can breathe again. They're very strong these tomatoes are very strong these elephants are very strong and and yeah some of the work in the journaling tool or the work we did today so it's about maybe just yeah it can we can we say you know, come in a little bit closer so you can come in we won't fall appart, we can kind of name these things, befriend them a bit befriend, see what befriending them would look like in our own context . or maybe not, maybe stop and say well they're there Or maybe not maybe just stop it say okay that they're there we'll just that change if I acknowledge that they're there at least to answer it's a part of the process. Into this these largest systems and take a couple of moments to think about and again you can judge jobs stuff down and what helps us to sit with the trouble what helps us to sit with this with these some more to get a bit closer to them or be braver with them and that might be already something you're trying. Or something you're trying and especially as you name them so quickly you name them so strongly so you have a relationship with them already right so what helps you sit with that trouble, sit with that and be braver with that. What helps us as educators? And even if it's something that helps you sit with it. Because earlier you were talking about what helps you learn and that sometimes that's not what you necessarily bring to learners but that's a little bit of medicine that you you know works for you it's the main it is medicine that might work for others but so what's the medicine that helps you sit with it some more. What's there? Anything there? Minute: Person 1: And I suppose one idea that maybe kind of occurred to me a little bit is this idea of when you kind of encounter something and kind of maybe a meaningful way or maybe you just noticed this thing but then sort of somehow it starts to pop up everywhere and then throughout the world. so as an example I did a series of workshops a couple of weeks ago and we sort of explored the wind farms in the north of Norway as a site of contestation between the Sami, indigenous Sámi peoples and their ability to raise cattle and build their

## FEELING FUTURES



"Tell us more about  
that future where, in your role as  
educator, you have more capacity to hold  
space for emotions, to welcome in the  
elephants and engage with difficult  
knowledge.

How does this feel?"

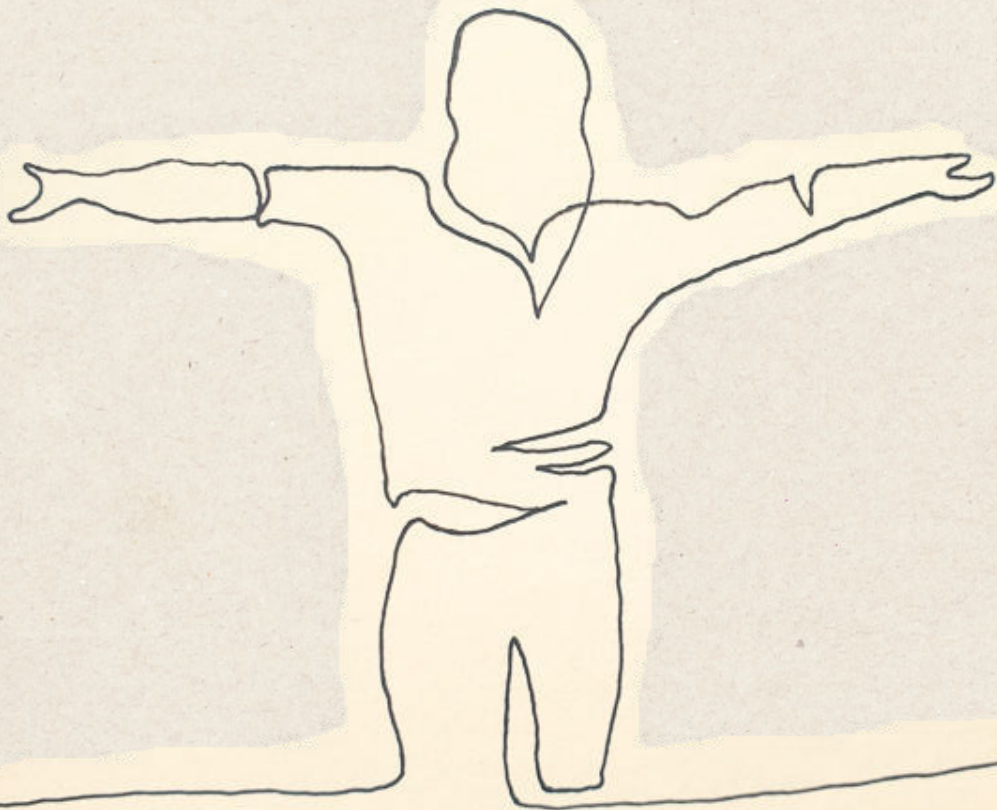
"It looks like open (sometimes brutally honest) communication and  
exploration of the inner map of individuals (and myself)."

It feels like courage, trust, playfulness, acceptance, excitement, curiosity and vulnerability.

"The question about what it would feel like to have more capacity to hold emotions within the educational space?

Even just having this question in front of my brain, in front of my body, my posture changes. It brings worth to my body.

It's not hope I feel, it's something else because I feel like we are more than able to do that and to come to that place even though we might not yet be sure of the shape and form of it"





## it feels

It feels joyous, but also scary..but I need to use what tools I have to make peace with this fear.

like I am making progress with making real learning happen because knowledge, if not felt,  
is not education. freeing, it feels uplifting, it feels calm. It looks like compromise;  
to provide more space for emotions, other areas of my practice must take a step back

(I think). it feels mature. It feels safe, secure, grown-up, collaborative,  
powerful and creative. It feels true to me, soulful and free. knowing  
that it is ok to embrace emotions whatever they may be.

it feels daunting. i feel I can sustain my work  
for longer and deeper.

pretty magical.

I feel more proud of the work I do.

good but I'd like to better at holding this space

i feel my work is more nourishing and meaningful. bright, confident,  
humility, lack of paranoia, confident, relaxing, motivating, exciting, grounded,  
steady, comfortable. secure. free and safe space and it feels relaxed. a connected  
and empowered population. spacious, relieved, connected, tense. how it should be- common  
practice a room of sparkling eyes. comforting and hopeful. i can't imagine it.

low and slow.

wonderful.

energetic.

relaxed.

strong.

I feel

And now, to you- how do you feel?

Take a pause, a breath, a moment.

Movement might feel good- a stretch, a sway, a swinging of arms, a stamping of feet.

And then what? Where to next in this dance with difficult knowledge, with discomfort? How can you find ways to stay with it some more? Can you keep bringing it deeper?

And with whom do want to share this dance? Who do you want to explore difficult knowledge with?

We're staying with it some more. Come with us- this is the work of community.





8.

## IT'S WONDERFULLY MESSY: REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY

by the DEFY project team  
Sive, Miriam, Maja, Charlotte

→ really not an exercise  
taking part in DEFY - Japan - g  
have a read we'd love you to

It's        wonderfully  
messy this ...

D - density (of)  
E - emerging  
F - fundamental  
Y - yearning

What's shaping  
inside of you?



**So, what is this Depth Education idea about for each of you?**

**Miriam:** There is this idea of diving in the ocean rather than climbing the peak. Mastery education, which is familiar to most of us, is about mastering concepts, acquiring more knowledge and skills and climbing further up and up until you reach the peak of the mastery education mountain. When asking what kind of education is needed in the face of collapse, Depth Education is what the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective and Vanessa Andreotti advocate for [1]. Depth Education is compared to diving in an ocean of freezing water and feeling part of the cold water while realizing and feeling and sensing not only the cold vast dark waters but also the toxins in the water and the pollution that is already a reality in our oceans. This education is about finding ways of digging deeper and relating wider and being able to hold difficult conversations, live with uncertainty and face the complexities and complicity of the world we live in.

**Sive:** This idea of feeling the call to dive (and it being cold and possibly dark) rather than climb, resonates with me greatly. It also reminds me of this idea of 'Shadow Lands' that Naomi Klein has recently written about: 'the problem is no longer that we do not know the weighty truths (of injustice, of collapse) but that too many of us do not know how to know them. We all know that our world sits on top of Shadow Lands - the mangled and dense understorey of our supposedly frictionless economy. But what do we do with that knowledge? Where does it go? Where is the outrage and shame and sadness diverted?'. [2] I'm not sure I would have latched onto this question this time last year (before DEFY started) but now it feels quite central - what do we do with the knowledge, for it is with us whether we look at it or not. What would it mean, as educators, to try different ways of engaging with it and to support learners in this too?

**Charlotte:** While Vanessa Andreotti introduced me to the term 'Depth Education', the ideas/concepts behind it are not necessarily new. Nothing new and yet.....gosh, it feels like our current education system is quite resistant to exploring and embracing ways of learning that can truly respond to a world in collapse. Not only is it resistant; it seems to presume the continuity of the existing system...and feeds and keeps building the existing system (the one with comforts-for some- and equality- for some- and care- for some) as if nothing- no collapse-is happening. An education of depth is one that says, "we cannot do this anymore. We cannot keep educating as if nothing is happening". What we are looking for- and I really love this comparison- is a shift "not unlike Galileo's. A radical decentering of ourselves and a radical centering of the world" [3]. I understand the focus to be less on content (and knowledge and skill acquisition and mastery) and instead it is on engaging the cognitive, the emotional and relational dimensions of [un]learning (some call this 'psycho-affective') [4].



**Miriam:** What if Depth Education is understood as education that helps us in uncertain times, to think, feel, reflect and find ways to create the possibility of life without violence and exploitation as a requirement and precondition for existing and living a good life? An education with tools and activities without a clear image of how the world, in which many worlds can fit, looks like in the end. Because there is no end, but life unfolding and continuously changing, embracing the uncertainty of our future.

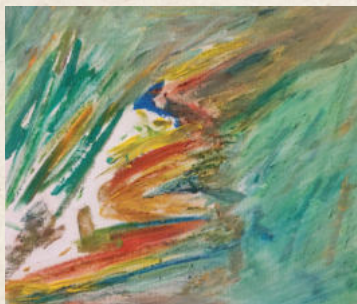
**How have you been reaching people? How do you describe DEFY to them?**

**Miriam:** Finding the language and translation needed to describe what DEFY is about and invite educators in is difficult, as I am inviting to share feelings, to open up, to welcome self-reflective questions and exercises and to face difficult knowledge and denials. And I am still wondering how to invite people and what it is that we offer...

**Maja:** Finding a way to contribute. This is very present for me since I wasn't present when the project was in its earliest stages. I sense a blockage, when it comes to describing DEFY to other people (especially in my native language) and asking them to engage. I do wonder quite often, how come translating the language of feeling, needs, emotion or simply ... describing the embodiment of this project somehow ... comes out awkward or clumsy or 'not really how it feels in English'. At the moment, I am still pondering whether this is an internal (individual) or external (cultural) issue.

There are moments when I see the path,  
I can see a few steps of the staircase,  
then again ...

.. a blur ...



**How did the process feel for us? Have there been any 'elephants in the room'?**

**Charlotte:** Sometimes diving- the unknown looks exciting and I can sometimes see dancing lights under the water- scimplini perhaps (!)- hinting at 'fantastic, almost supernatural things'[5]...if I just dare dive. Sometimes, just about treading the water -this winding, wandering, uncertain way feels sometimes paralysing. There is such discomfort to move into unknown places. Trepidation, tipping, tip-toeing. And frustrating too- I had a different vision of how this project would look. The approach we've taken- the one where we pare it right back and inquire into our own feelings and the feelings of others...that is difficult.

It is not somewhere I like to go/I'm good at going naturally. It asks me to slow down and use another form of 'knowing', one that takes me away from my head and is not so action-focused, so solution-focused. It is a knowledge that prioritises the senses (and the body too perhaps).

**Sive:** Different feelings at different points. I think a little overwhelmed at times - because the scale of this is new to me - it's bigger, wider --- of more consequence and so with that comes this feeling of responsibility (heavier than usual), but also fear of failure, right? Or fear of not getting it right, or fear of mis-representing, or fear of all of this veering too much into a self-indulgence and not being political enough. And linked to this, sometimes struggling to find ways to uphold that principle of self-focus - so how am I feeling because I am participating

in this too. But back to Klein then and her Shadow Lands - and this feeling that there is no time to 'not know'. We have to do... And fast ... and we have to do the 'right' way ... the accountable way, the aware way. And then? Well, I've lost my footing, and I am back in my head.

### Charlotte:

Elephant one: that I am not enough...not equipped enough, not intelligent enough, feeling/emotional enough, learned enough to do this project...especially in the way that we are approaching it. And this feels so uncomfortable because the project feels so (too) important to mess up (the world is collapsing!). How did it feel? Tense, tight-shoulders, sweaty palms...and the 'antidote'? I think I respond by managing and controlling and establishing systems.

Elephant two: so many crises...this is all SO urgent. It feels uncomfortable, almost counterproductive, to- rather than act quickly, decisively- we support a slowing down, we encourage reflection, we place much value on process, on relationships. "Our house is on fire" though, in the words of Greta [Thunberg] [6] -can we just get on with it, I wonder? But I do know there is value in this. At least, I'm learning that there is.

Elephant three: I love hope. I need hope. And there really is room and a necessity- in the heaviest of times- for hope and positivity...so much of it. I want there to be more space for it in our DEFY team... but I sometimes feel naive for wanting that.

### Maja:

(the ping-pong game within my brain)

Wait ... how do I fit in here again? What's my contribution? What do I have to offer to this group of women who seem to have all of their shit together and articulate their thoughts and back them up with works of other people so beautifully...

Wait. Where do I fit in this project again?

I don't have the 'right' background, a degree in higher education, am I even qualified to have an opinion on this matter?

Wait. Slow down. Breathe. Take space. There's enough. You're enough. Wait. Slow down. Breathe. Take space. Co-create.





**In this, who / what has been inspiring you? What has been deflating you?**

**Miriam:** I find it challenging - the project not being about solving anything and not about acting, but about being, relating, caring and sharing differently and that being enough as it is and not needing special actions and big gestures. Because out of the relationality there might evolve collective action, collective imagining and collective transformation, in ways we could not even begin to dream of before...

**Sive:** I think the biggest inspirations for me have been the colleagues in the core group - to see them learning and growing and modeling self-reflexivity in this... Another big inspiration has been the educators who have stepped in to participate. What they did with the space, and in the time that was there was encouraging. At the same time, it leaves me with a bit of pain - we got to see what can emerge out of some time and space ... and if only there was more time and space maybe things might change.

**Charlotte:** The willingness (and bravery perhaps?) of peers to share from what feels like quite vulnerable places.. and the ability too, of so many, to express these words- and I don't mean that in any patronising way, more that I compare it with my own struggle to reach that clarity of feeling and thought and ease of expression when it comes to difficult knowledge and discomfort. I find that all inspiring. Inspired too by the writings and words of educators and thinkers from all over the world, especially those who are, in ways, not saying anything new but are exploring different ways of sharing old-knowledge so that it truly lands. The work of Vanessa Andreotti and the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective offer perfect examples of this. I cannot work out if their writing is poetry or if it is art or if it is academic...but it seems to flow so smoothly from the page into those places that I feel deeply. And I find it funny that I can be both inspired and deflated by their work. I think, maybe, the deflation comes when I sit away from what I am reading and realise that it jars with my action-focused worldview. And I believe that both (and my many other worldviews) can exist at the same time...but not without a quiet but consistent (and somewhat exhausting) battle for top-dog.

**Can you say some more about the role of images, music, photography in the project?**

**Miriam:** Images, music, photography, art can inspire and open us up to the realm of feelings and emotion. They can provide a pathway to spaces and parts of us that we sometimes hide and ignore or don't take the time to explore.

**Sive:** I learned only a few months ago that aesthetic (from the Greek) means to perceive, to feel through the senses - its opposite being anesthetic (numbing, to feel nothing). To explore feeling, one must invite it in right? And bringing feeling into the equation of sense-making/ of knowing, dialing the senses up and the head down, really changes things. It gives permission for and supports another kind of meaning making - and somehow the space from which we speak is less cluttered - and it means people can



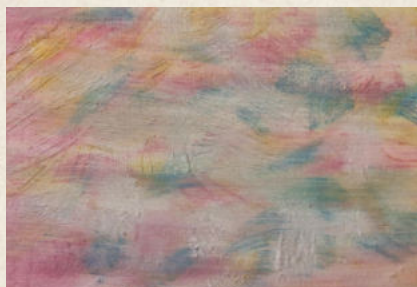
connect more quickly with what we are saying too. "A metaphor is a remarkable formation because it both means what it says and what it doesn't say. Those two things come together, and it creates an imagination which is active. You're not trying to figure things out; you're trying to enter into what's there"[7].

**Charlotte:** I've a favourite image at the moment- the crack in the wall. We've used it often in presentations and events linked to DEFY. For me, 'it' has hit, something has landed when I suddenly feel a cracking...and an opening. And it is most often something aesthetic- someone singing the unsingable, or a certain patterning of words, or a choice of colour- that brings that feeling. Last night, I listened- for the 99th time- to the stunning interview between Krista Tippett and John O'Donoghue- an Irish poet, a philosopher and a beautiful and wise thinker who died in 2008. He words the power and importance of the aesthetic in a way I never could- "if you look at the educational system and you look at most of the public fora in our culture, there is very little time or attention given to what you could almost call learning the art of inwardness; or a pedagogy of interiority. That's why I find the aesthetic things, like poetry, fiction, good film, theater, drama, dance, and music, actually awaken that inside you and remind you that there is a huge interiority within you [8]."

**How has the project resonated with you and your wider lives? Have you noticed anything changing/ shifting as a result of your engagement in / with DEFY?**

**Sive:** For me it has felt quite 'strong' - the experience - because as I was writing earlier, there is a different scale with this project and this brings discomfort - not new discomfort but maybe heightened discomfort- the scale of this is bigger and so the discomfort becomes bigger too - this thing of wanting it all to be perfect, and playing role of guide / facilitator all the time instead of allowing myself to enter in, to also be guided and taught.

**Maja:**



Somehow becoming part of this project is reminding me of the importance of my own well-being and overall health.

In the mix of everything that is currently in progress, taking time for rest, regenerating and rejuvenation is not selfish, but extremely necessary and crucial.

'hard to be soft, tough to be tender'

**Can you say some more about the e-zine?**

**Charlotte:** I'm stuck on this question...because I think I don't really know the answer, or at least a satisfactory answer. Only that "it feels right". It feels right to place the words, the stories, beside the colour, imagery, art and expression shared by the greater DEFY collective. More engaging? Yes. But, more importantly, it follows the rhythm, the grammar that has been consistent throughout; the aesthetic is another way 'in' to deeper knowing. The aesthetic tells a story itself. And it feels right too when I consider who I want to be drawn to the project; well, everyone, of course (! 😊 )- educators, youth workers, lecturers, young people, those 'au fait' with engaging with traditional research/academic pieces, those not so au fait- How do we share this knowledge and wisdom in a way that



does not intimidate, is not elitist and that is- actually- just a little irresistible!? 'Irresistible'- I write that tongue in cheek but also with a little bit of sincerity; I love zines because they are not finely crafted, they are not honed- they are messy and amateur and off-center. They are 'inherently anti-professional and pro-mistake'[10] and very, very real. 'YOU and YOU and YOU can engage with me', they shout, and 'YOU and YOU and YOU can do this too.'

### **Looking forward, what hopes do you have for the project?**

**Sive:** This theme of community/ of 'collective'/ of trying to stitch people (back) together feels like a really strong one on this moment ... and if DEFY could somehow build on that (and the appetite that is there for that) it could make an important contribution - collective is key and I feel like the journey so far points towards that-

### *In Those Years*

*In those years, people will say, we lost track  
of the meaning of we, of you  
we found ourselves  
reduced to I  
and the whole thing became  
silly, ironic, terrible:  
we were trying to live a personal life  
and yes, that was the only life  
we could bear witness to  
But the great dark birds of history screamed and plunged  
into our personal weather  
They were headed somewhere else but their beaks and pinions drove  
along the shore, through the rags of fog  
where we stood, saying I [11].*

*Adrienne Rich*

**Charlotte:** I can't imagine too far ahead, I can't imagine the 'end piece' of this project and so struggle to attach any pride to that. What would make me proud? If we were able to continue this project in the same vein that we have been doing up to now- that would make me proud. That vein... ? Freedom to be creative, to explore and to suggest what-ifs and madcap ideas and to know that my DEFY colleagues will bounce with that and 'and' it and add to it and bring their own wonderful wanderings. A lighter attachment to 'final pieces' and an embrace of process and care; care for quality and care for each other (all those involved in DEFY).

*Thank you from DEFY*



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The majority of drawings and photos- elephants and otherwise- by fellow educators and DEFY friends.

A special thanks to Miriam for her photos on page 48, to Maja for her drawings on page 47, 58, 59, 60, 61 and 62.

'Unsplash' provided the photos on the cover page (Marcos Paulo), page 14 (Wilhelm Gunkel), 15 (Geranimo), 40 (Ivana Cajina), and 45 (Sam Sommer).

Photo on page 43 by Eoghan Dalton

The pencil drawings on page 32, 42, 49 and 50 are Shutterstock images

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