

The DEFY Collective

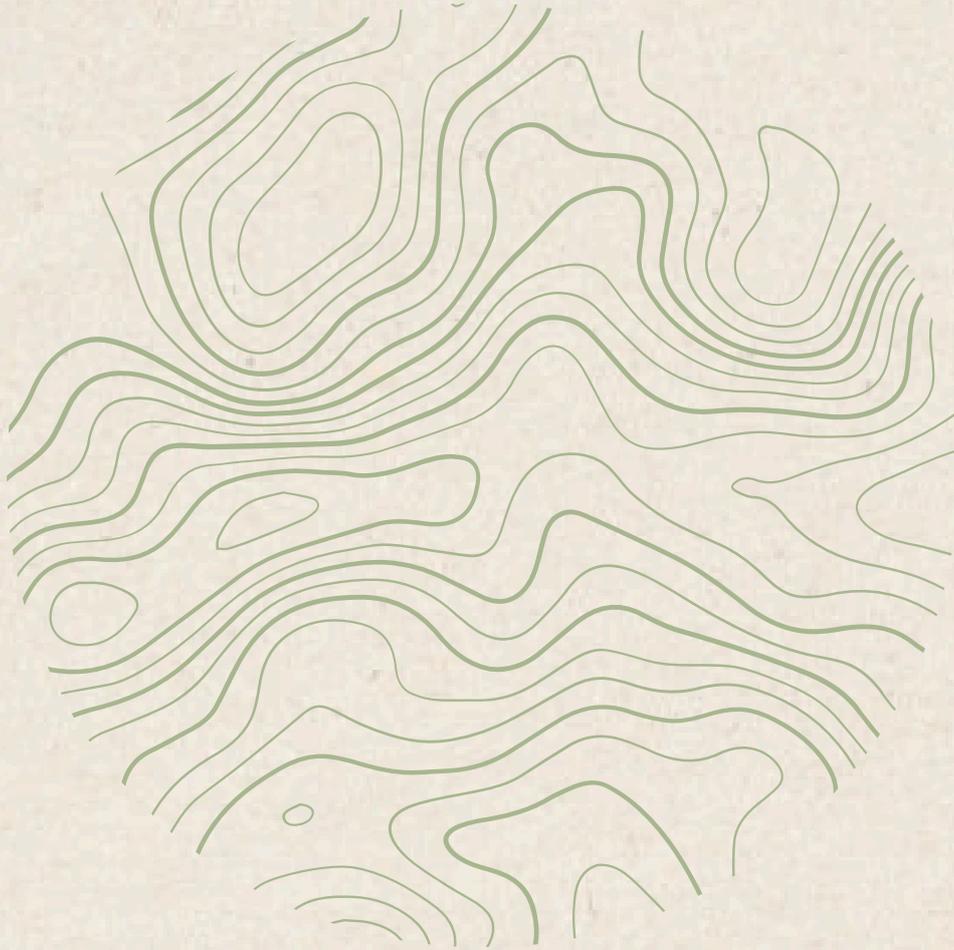
Depth Education for Youth

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

Zine I
Published
March 2024



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

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

1.

FOUNDATIONS & PRINCIPLES

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 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

A zine for you.

You're an educator perhaps, a facilitator, a youth worker, or on your way to becoming...

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 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 the educators shared with us. 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: primary and post primary schools (19), third level education (17), youth centres/workers (15), activist circles (11), teacher training (27) and community groups (6).*

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 you go, 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 privileged positions, relatively safe and comfortable within otherwise harmful systems, what are we missing? [7], 'who is bearing the costs of our learning and its pace?' [8]. To keep these questions with us and drawing on the work of experienced others, we devised a set of guiding principles to guide us in our work as a team. We offer them to you now as Zine reader. You will find them on page eight.

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, Miriam Streit, Sive Bresnihan, Maja Dominič

*DEFY is an initiative of
Suas/STAND, Comhlámh, Zavod Voluntariat and finep.*

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 its 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 necessary 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].

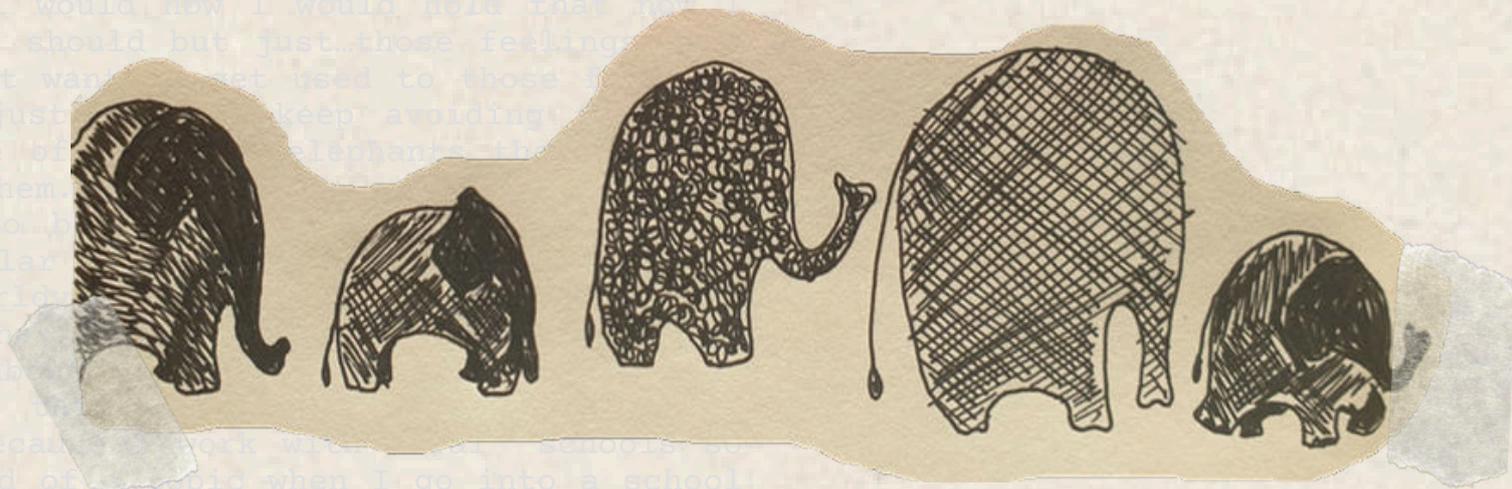
Comfort / stretch - we recognise that part of this work is about exploring relationship with (dis)comfort, with dissonance, disillusionment and more, and as it shows up in us - getting more familiar with the worlds inside of ourselves.

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 will find ways to convey what is being asked so that each has the chance to consent (or not) and take responsibility [15].

questions that Mi is going to share just on the slide now I will just spend about five minutes or so and the questions are as your drawing or painting what do you feel are the elephants and the topics or feelings possibly in the room for you at any thoughts on why these are your elephants what is it that makes it makes those your elephants and and finally incorporates into that is hygiene feel about these elephants and how does how does it go with the elephants the human engagement how does that go how does that feel so yeah let's let's give ourselves five minutes to to paint through to draw or to write as well some people might prefer words to write your elephants and we'll come back together in about five minutes At all so just to avoid that but if anyone feels comfortable to me be share their elephant or part of their elephants and maybe the picture they might just want to talk about it this is ready to share oh why amazing well I think I could take a photo of it and then I'll share it.so my natural like comfort place is poetry and and all of this so this is kind of from a space it's a girl who had a conversation with me last week that wasn't about what this is but it just came up and I felt so uncomfortable so a half written poem okay How is that its 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 and they don't know the things that I know they can't sing amhran na bhrian. 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.I have an Elephant as well but it's just not as good but I just wrote into it I suppose I started with each question. despair there's no hope there's anger there's bias

2.
**INTRODUCING
ELEPHANTS-IN-THE-ROOM**

people are bringing in their culture and background and that's affecting it and then the second one I suppose then it is by pointing at my experience that makes me aware of these things and and third point was sadness and I'm sad the children feel so strongly about such topics and they have to hear such negative things when they're just so young I have to say that was really visceral...yeah thank you very much and my elephant there's a picture too but they're all saying something the first one is saying and I come from privilege and perpetuate the system and that is how I feel when I'm working in very diverse ?? background I just come in and I was driven off to that workshop and I'm white and I'm young and I have my own place and it's like who am I again saying oh we should leave the place for more people to speak and I work for an organization that's all white and it just feels really ??? sometimes ersation with the other is about that so that's maybe the difference in the conversation circle and and yeah we'll run till till 4 maybe before but before before we do not before we do but as a way to start I'd love to know and then another elephant, and elephants are kind of like intrusive thoughts. I'm not as convinced and hopeful as I'd like and maybe goes back to what Miriam saying of kind of going into class for children they don't xxx for climate and do think, do change the world but at the end of the dayt it's big systems you won't be able to change what big multinational are doingso it's a bit disheartentening 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.The last elephant says I might be wrong and say the wrong thing because I think there's always this questioning of -especially in difficult conversations- I told once by my best friend saying like it's very nice because I can tell that you're trying very hard to say the appropriate things but sometimes it's tiring for me because I see how much you're trying and so I think ...you have to learn but maybe I'm not willing enough to make a mistake to get that feedback and I'm just trying so hard it's actually making it more complicated than everyone. so I do think to learn how to navigate those spaces you have to make the mistake once but also have the right setting to invite feedback. yeah a weird kind of balance to have.I couldshare quickly. I think the last one you mentioned there the I might say something wrong is something that I've reflected on recently or more



“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 its 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 [16].

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 along and like this huge crisis feels like happy if to weave and went hitch time and if you're a day to focus on something that seems so massive and if comes in ebb and flow but I think it's just very heightened at the moment because of the situation."

3. PRACTICE & RESPONSIBILITY

Minute: Person 3: "I think it's very interesting 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 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

action. Supports learners to take

39

Learners. Hopes to emotionally engage

37

content. Aims to bring

29

felt. Gives space to what's being

24

competitively. Explores positioning

28

Focus on building
24
connection.

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

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

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.

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

"make space for celebration and mourning"

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

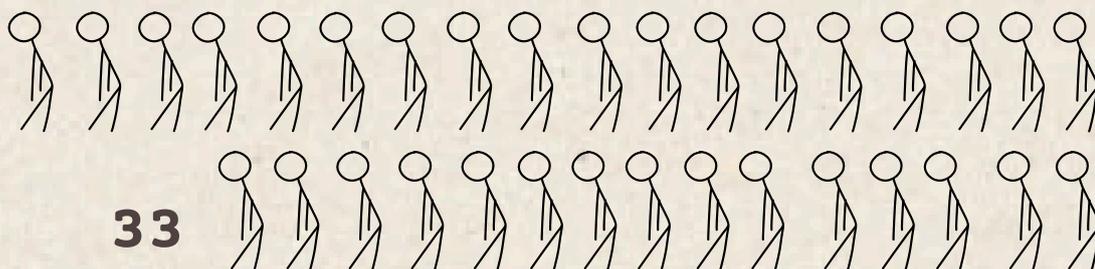
"crisis is part of the process"

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

4 people

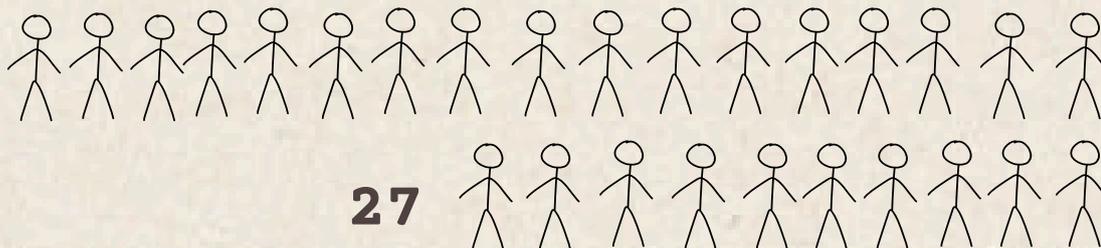


"they are everything for me"



33

"they resonate a lot"



27

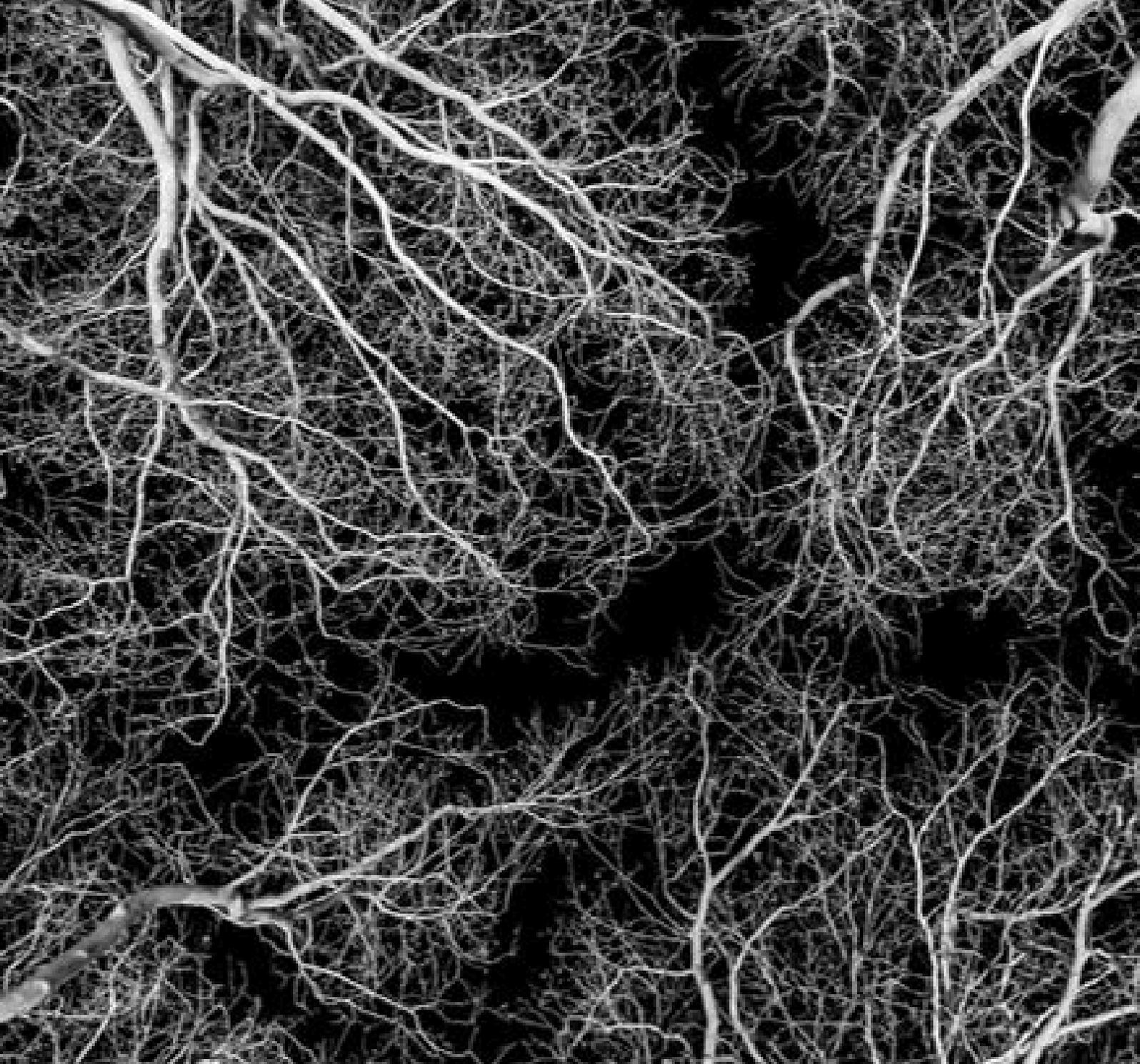
"they resonate/ resonate somehow"



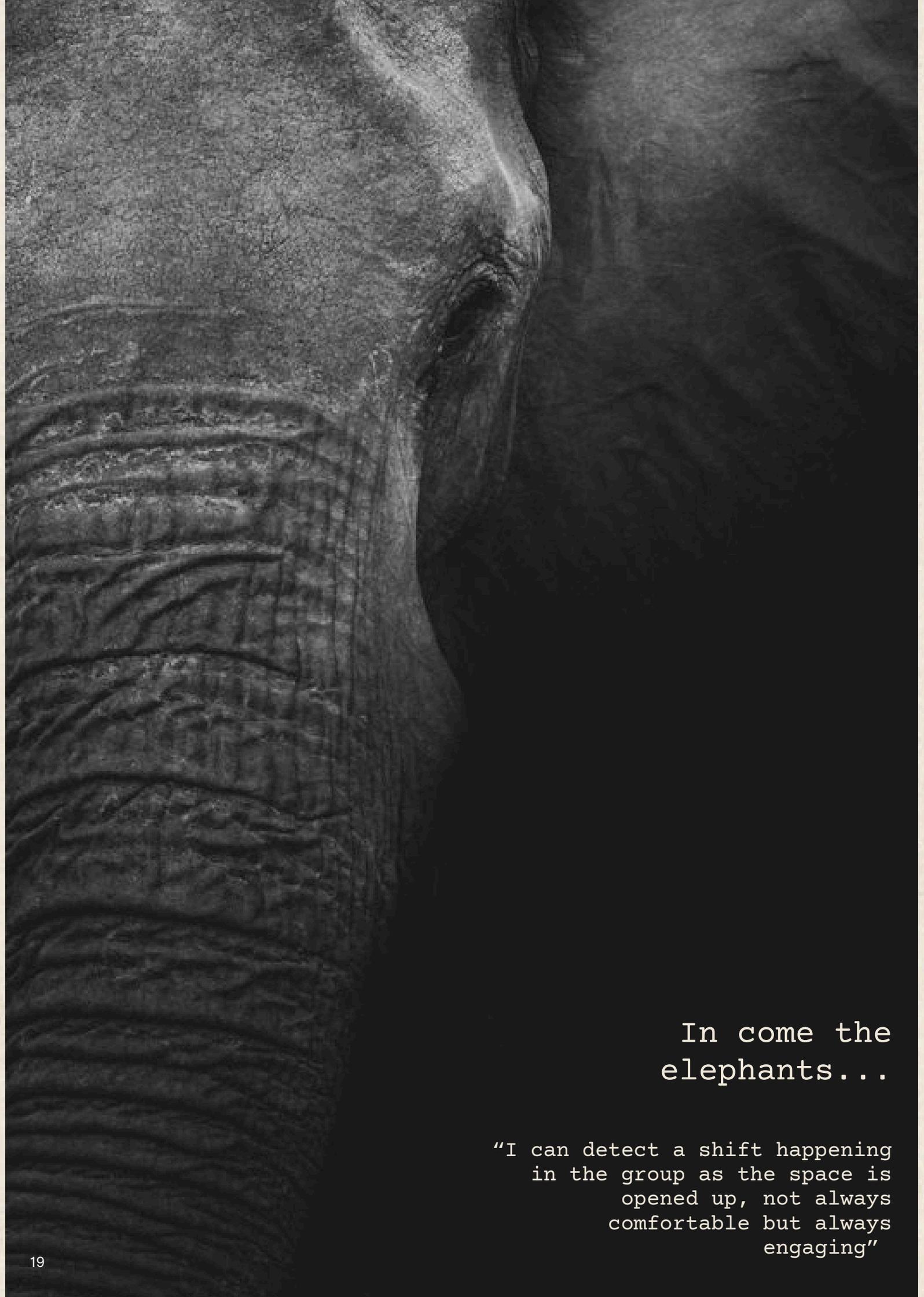
you don't know real how to express it adequately but ppl can come up to you afterwards and quietly say 'well what was that campaign you mentioned,' or 'that person, that quote.' of course they're not going to stand up against mister popular in front of everyone else. Who would? I def wouldn't as a young 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 so 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 working on the issues of racism or other forms of repression that we that we took it to an edge that was always a phrase she used- so I suppose that that supports me is that I expect to treble I don't expect not to, it's an indicator. if I'm not trembling I'm not at that edge...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 their hair pitted against each other for resources

4.

NOTICING THE ELEPHANTS



“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

inequality

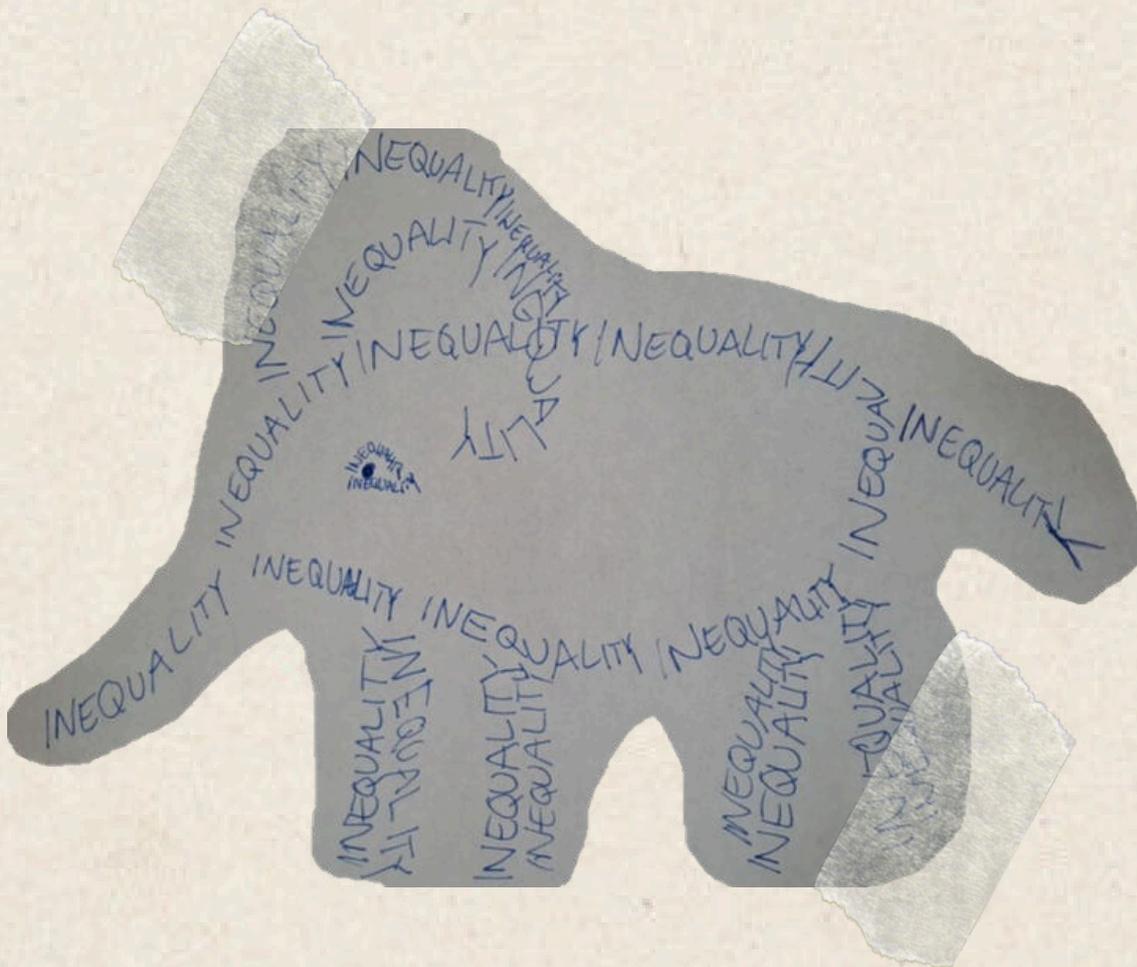
imagine
a new world

“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

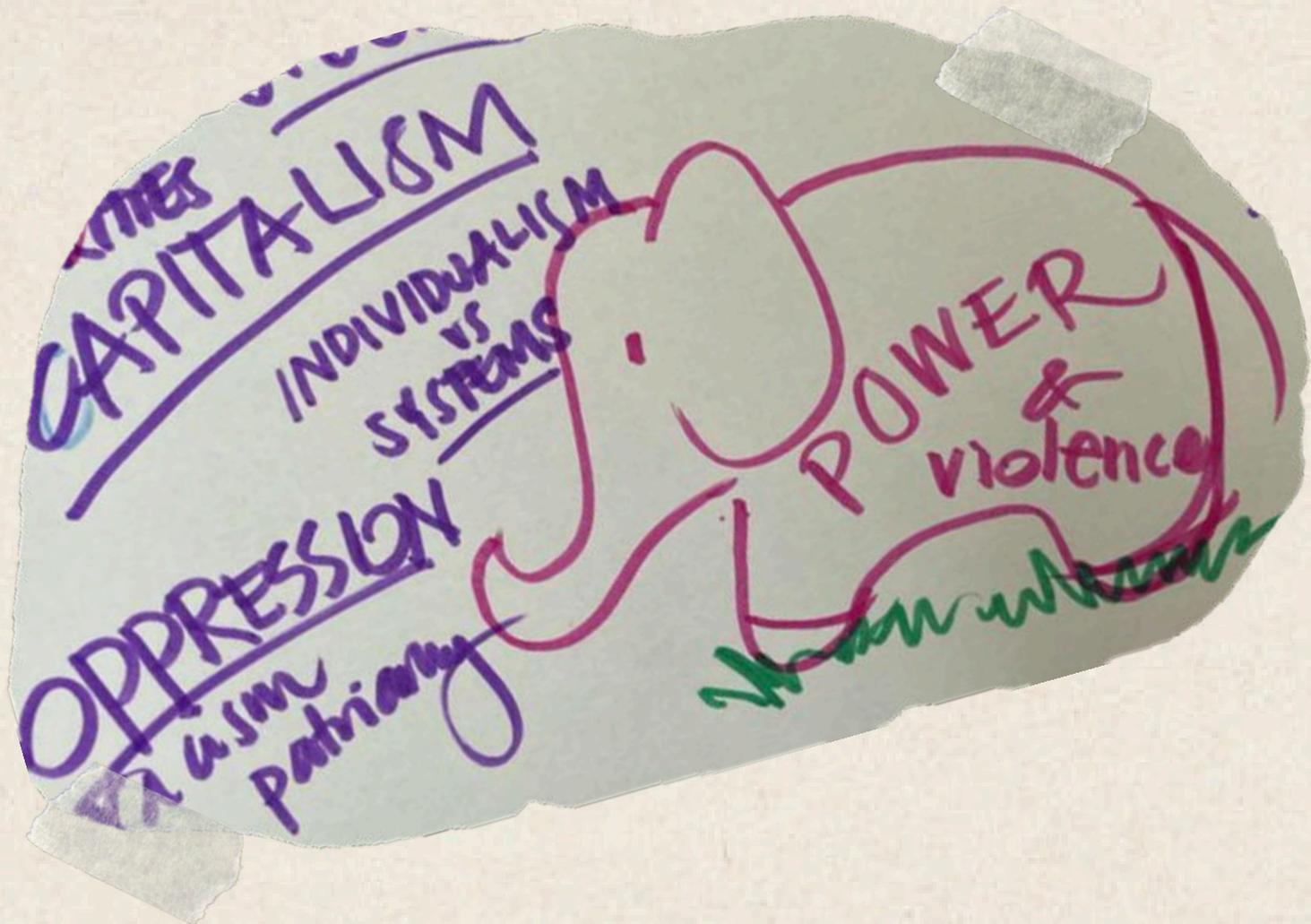
how is it fair if my ma works
and has to pay
for my school stuff
how is it fair
they don't even speak right
and they get everything
that should be mine

answer me that

we hear about them
coming here
and taking our homes
and taking our jobs

meanwhile,
I
have
nothing





power and violence

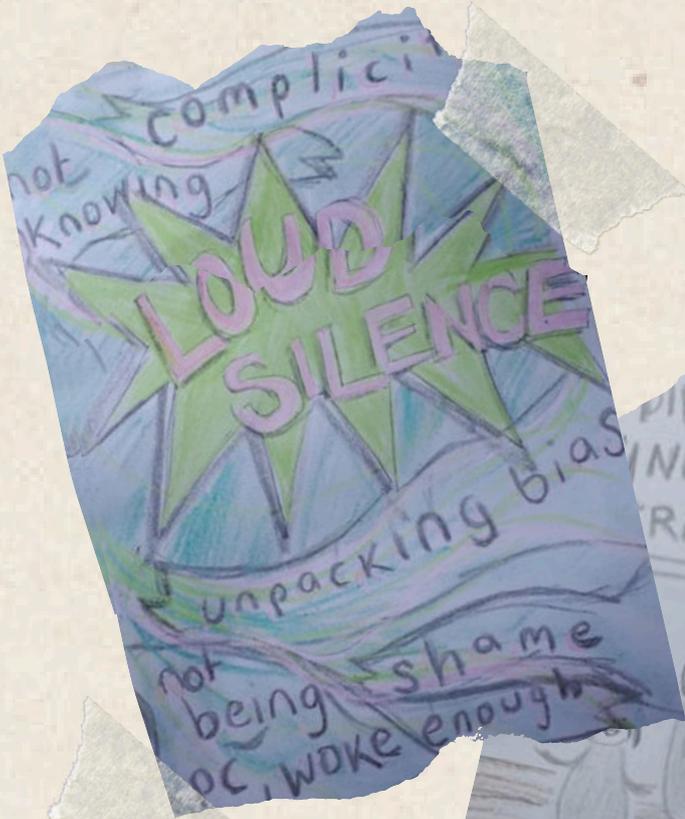
"sometimes, like, I am absolutely floored at times because it is about power and violence and in particular actually the one that that I feel wrongfooted by is gender-based violence and I still totally struggle with that.

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..

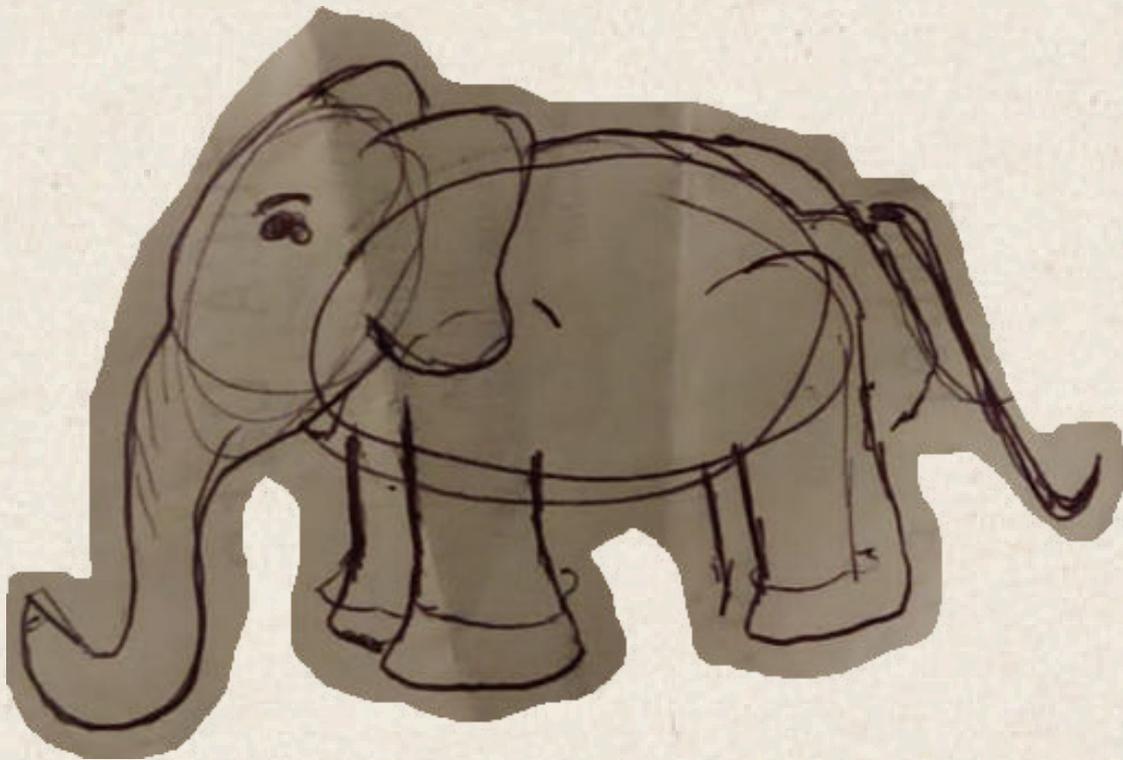
there's that edge"

elephant drawings
came in many
forms...



my elephant looks sad
it was unintended
but I realise now
that anything other
than "oh that's
shame" and "gosh
what can we do?"
and really damn
into a very sad and
griefful space -
is not a place my
practice wants to
move in.

panicked
scared
part of control
cost



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

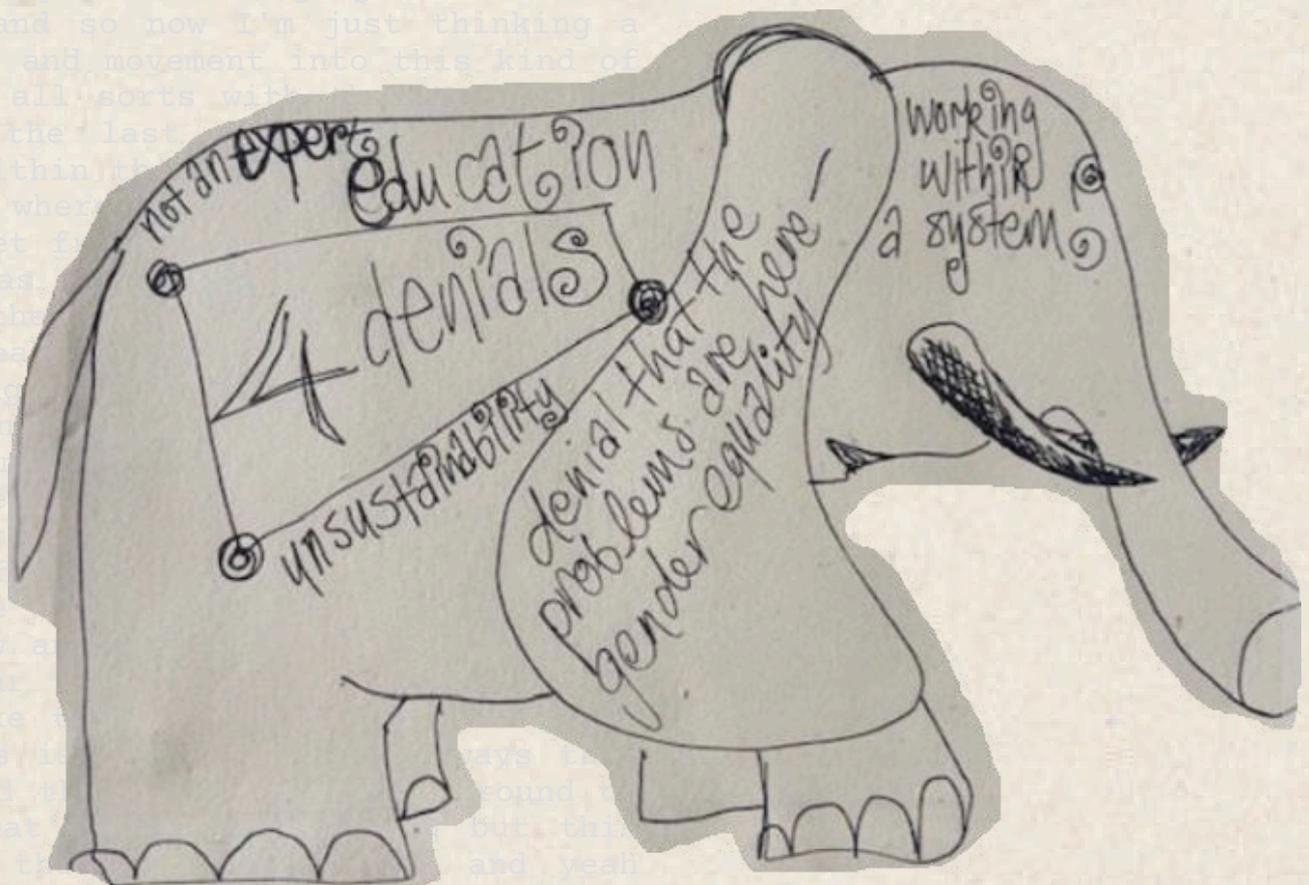


"There is- in the back of my head- the awareness of how small what we are doing is and it can be hard to feel, like, a fine line where I'm being authentic with the people that I'm working with but also not trying to terrify them and make them feel like there's nothing they can do"

"...it's a bit disheartening 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"

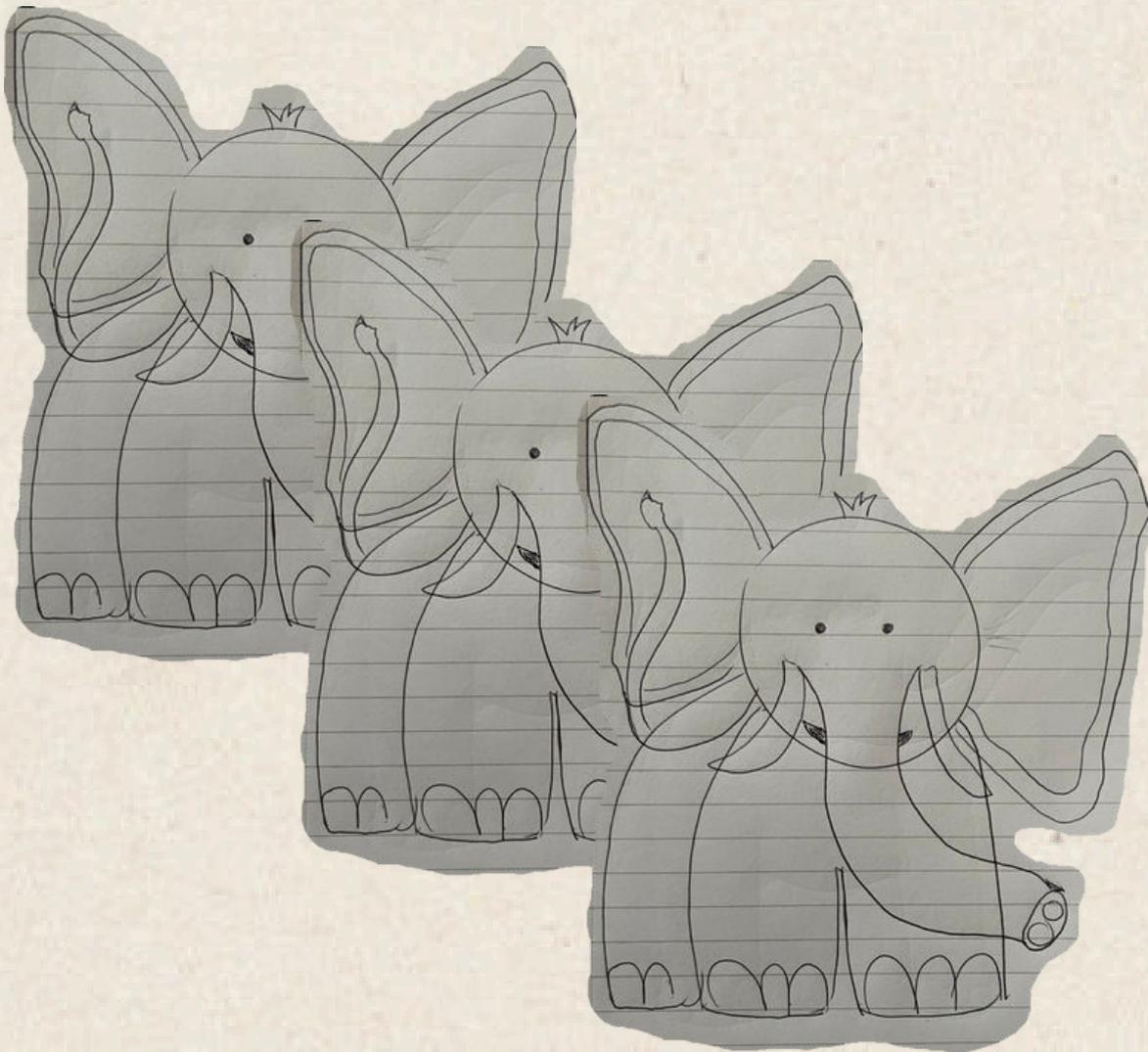


"blind to our failure
 blind to our own emotions
 blind to another way
 of doing, being, thinking and behaving"

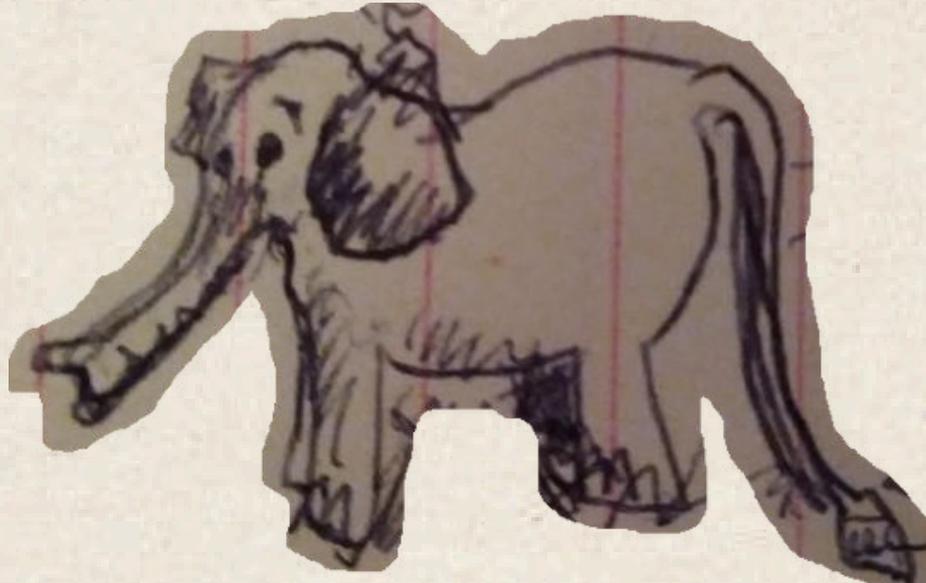
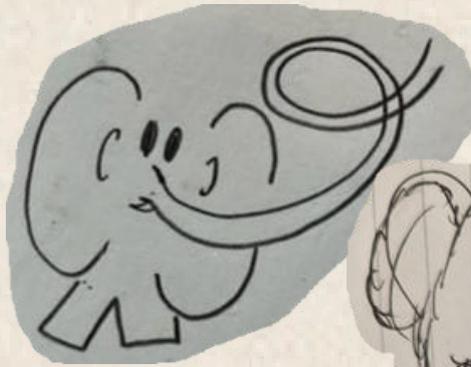
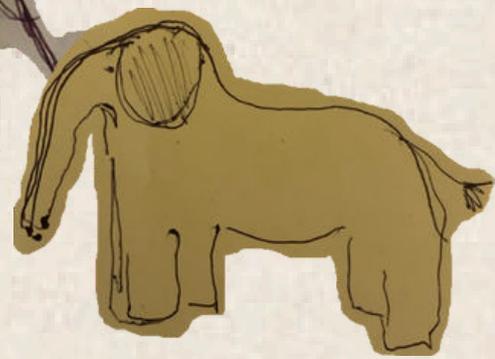
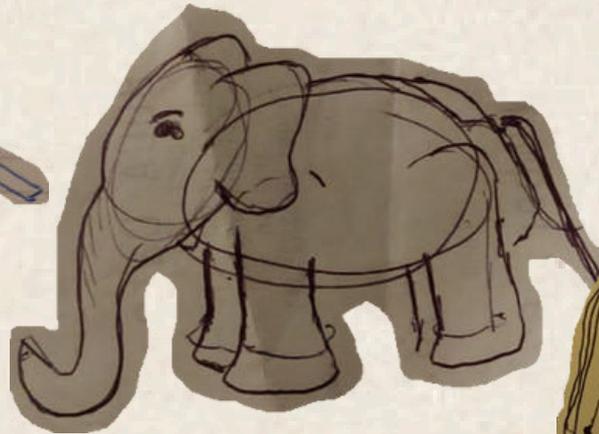
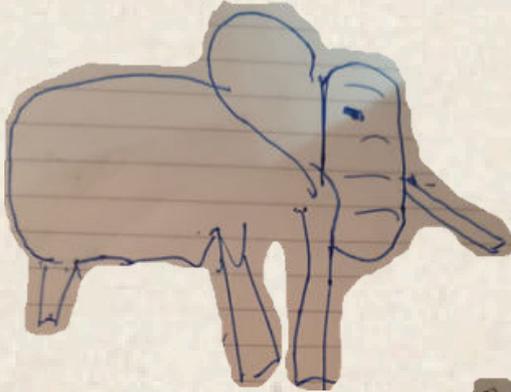
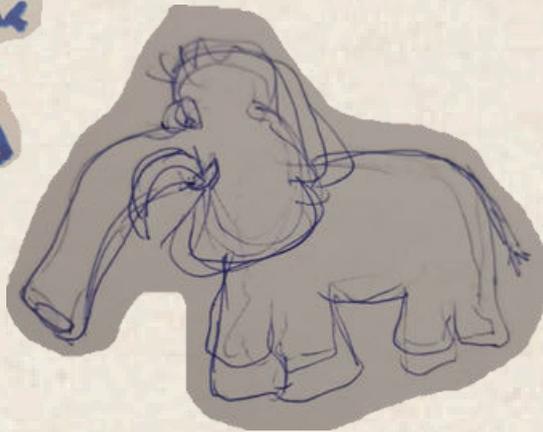
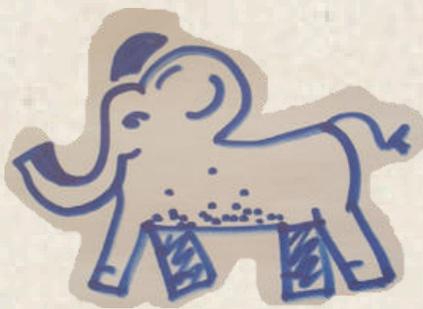
responsibility

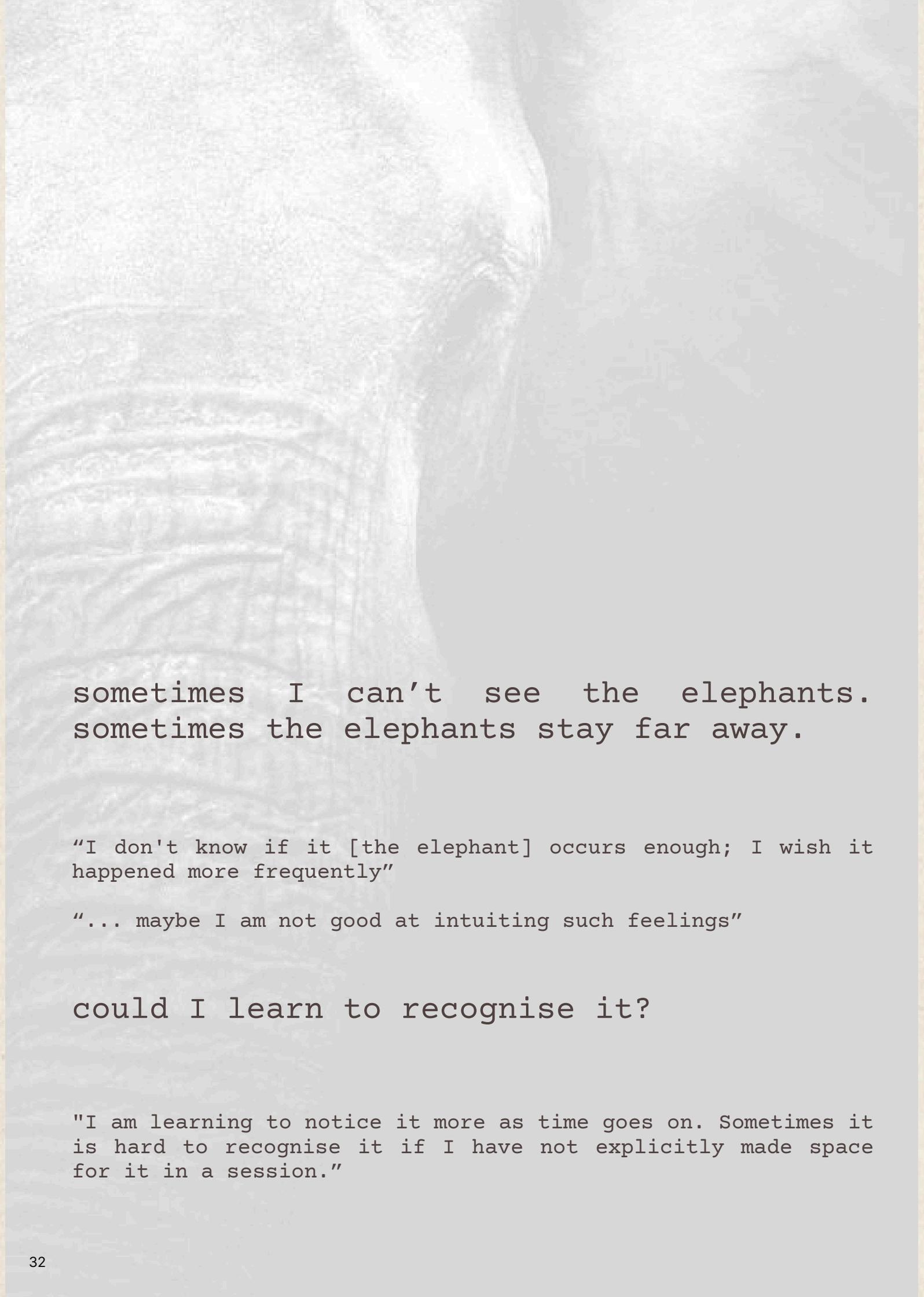
"Am I equipped to have that conversation with them? Because, like, you're introducing them to a minefield of, like, horrific stories and so, yeah, I find that difficult sometimes when there's all this stuff going on."

"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"

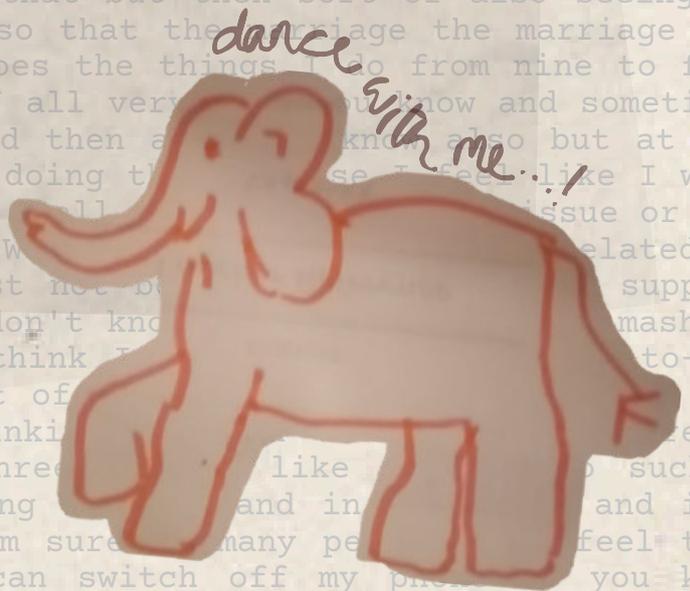
"... maybe I am not good at intuiting such feelings"

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."

5.

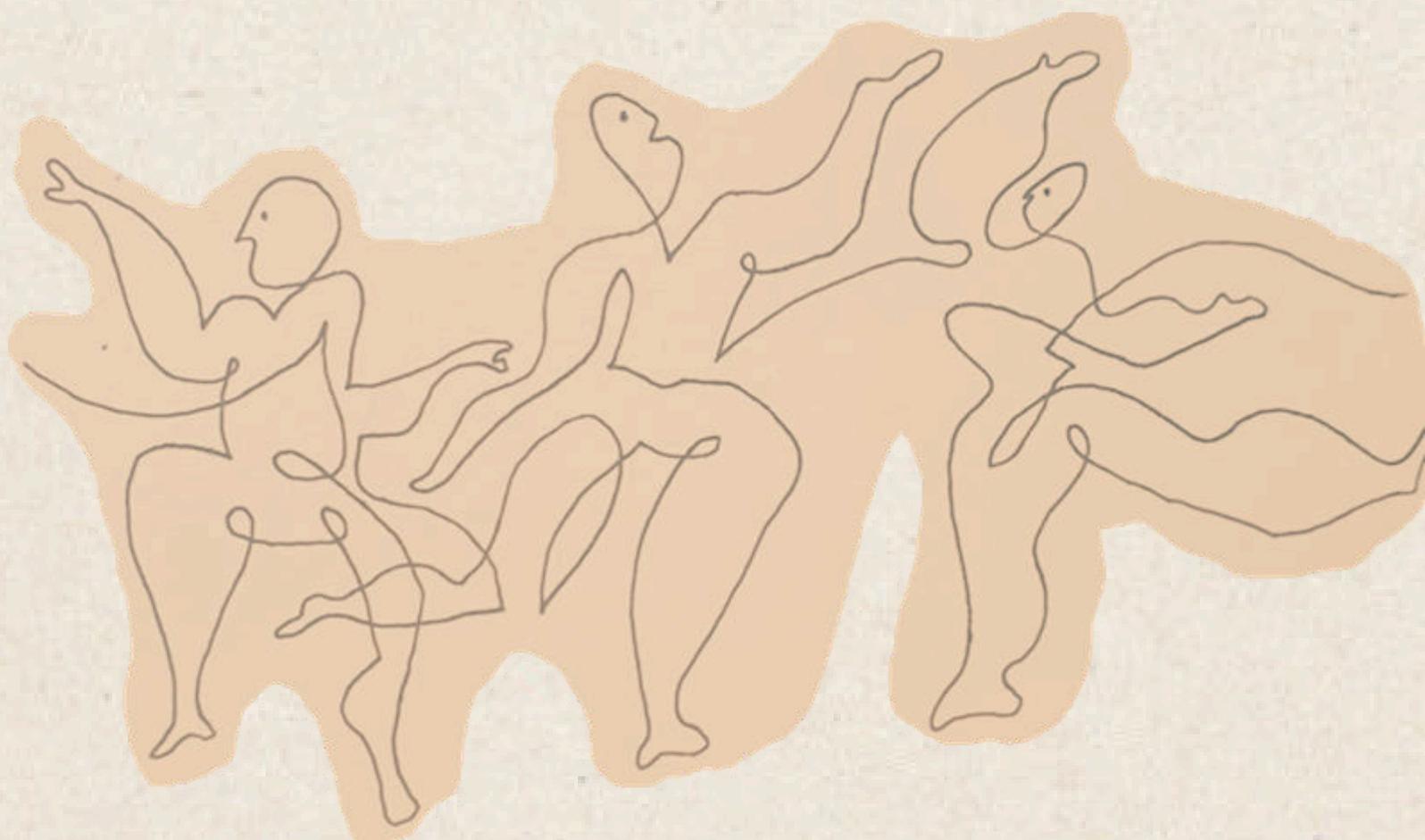
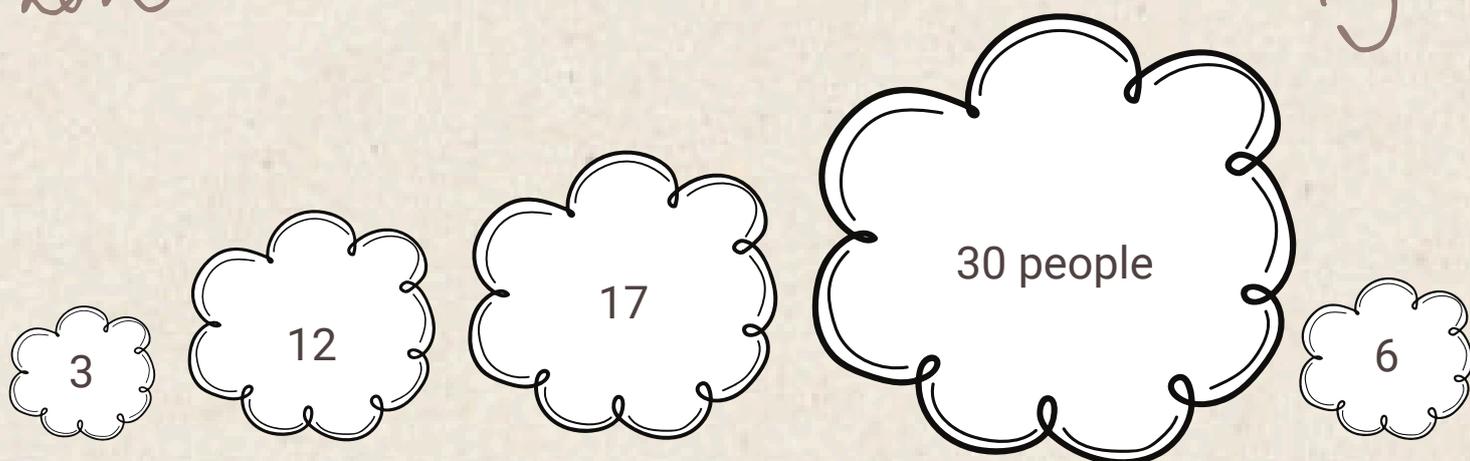
DANCING WITH THE ELEPHANTS



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

Low

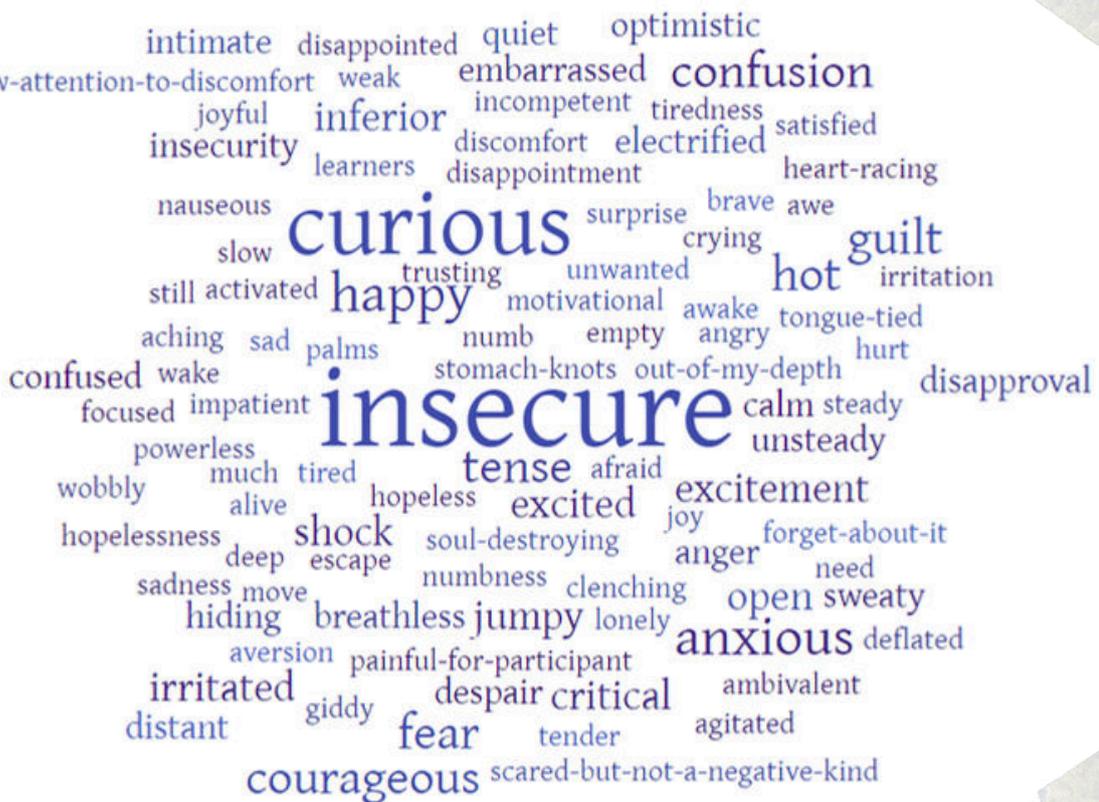
High



"Tell us more about that dance.
How does it feel to be in these moments—
when things are shifting, when elephants
bring discomfort?"

Sometimes I feel...

take your time here...



"Some days I can handle anything
other days I want to cry
(and I have cried after sessions)"

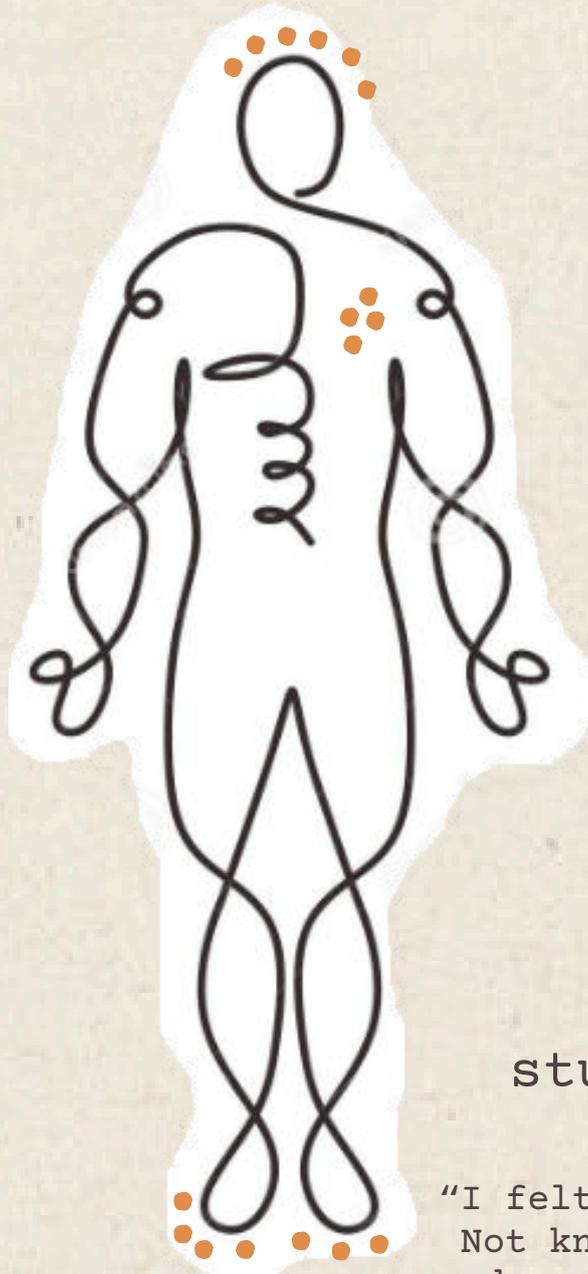
lacking in knowledge

"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."

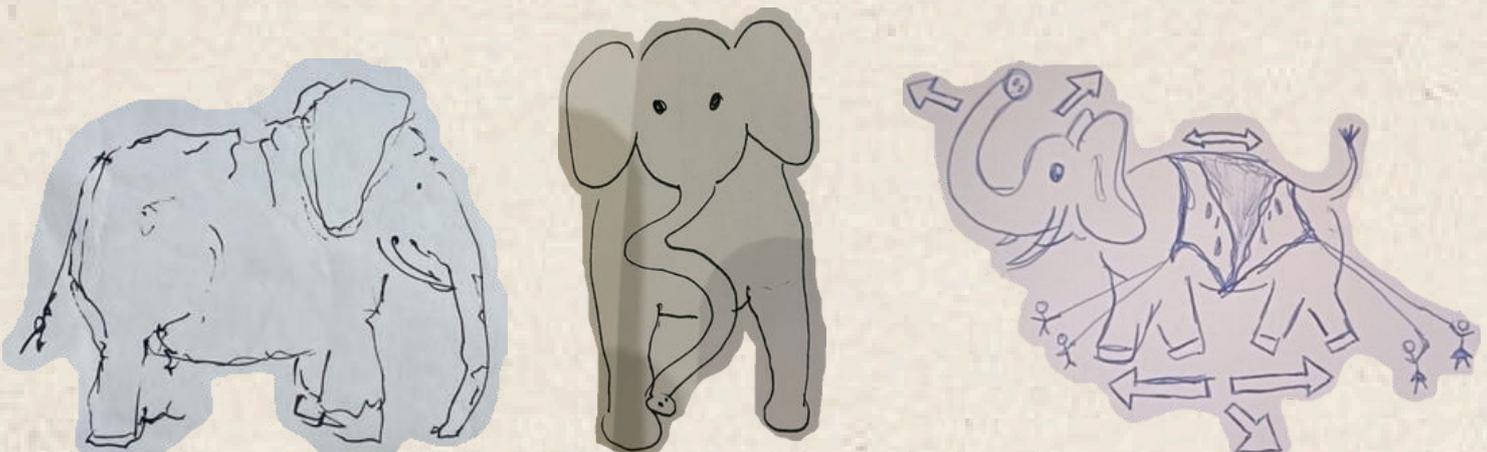
fear, anger, frustration

"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."

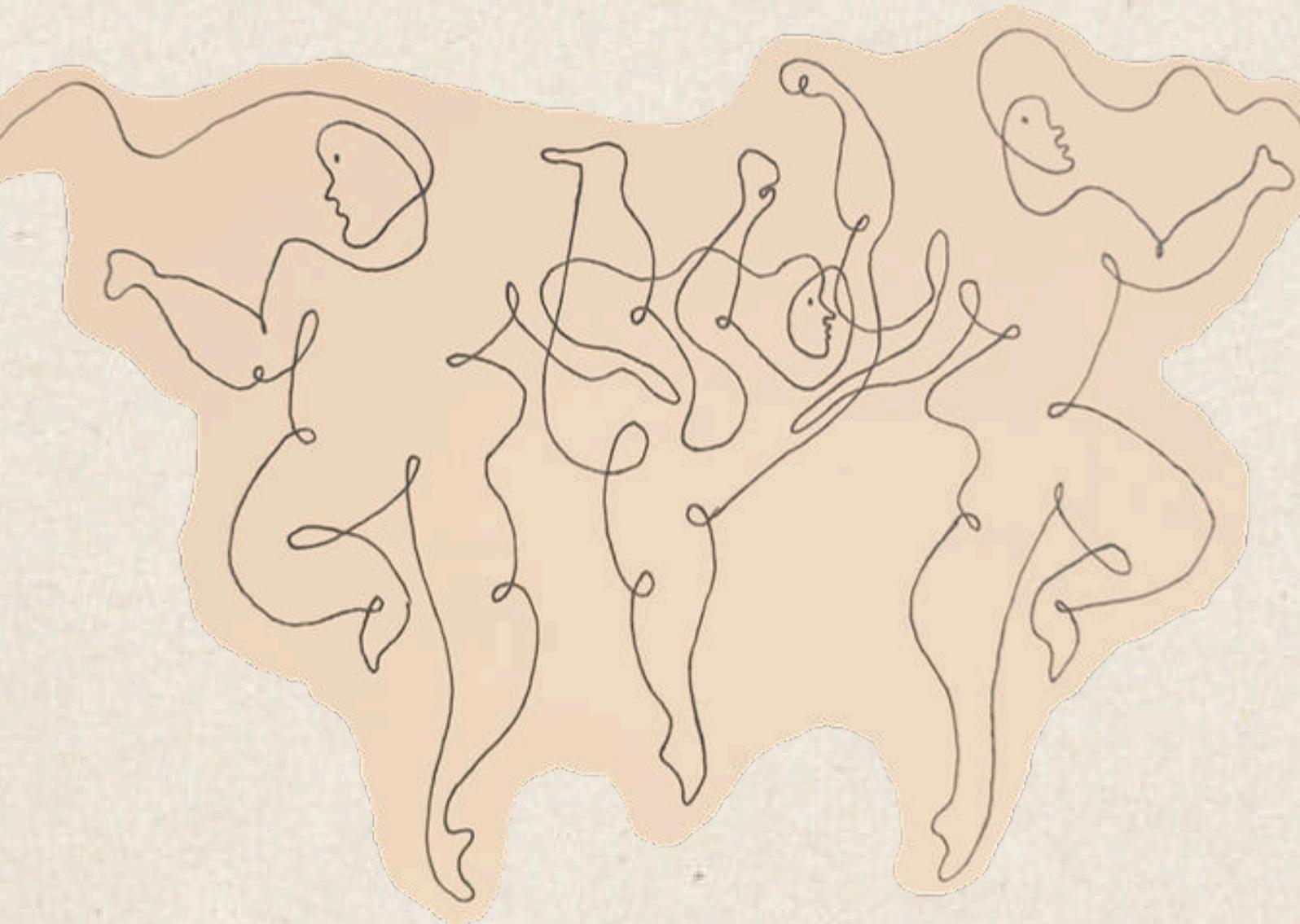


turning away, loud words, depending), fear (frozen, tense, quiet), disgust (turn away, face scrunched, almost-shuddering), sad (hollow feeling, almost-crying)
lip curled, "often anger (feeling hot, lip curled, being pretty privileged sometimes also happy (relaxed) about
almost-shuddering), sad (hollow feeling, almost-crying)

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

restlessness, need to take action, to have a plan, to do something,
anxiety, guilt, disappointed. worried. upset. tense. dismayed.
insecure. self-critical. annoyed. i tend to feel it very
physically. tightness and butterflies in chest and
tummy . mostly it motivates me to think about how
to deal with it in my next activity. unresolved,
muscle soreness, detached between mind
and body. 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,
Racing, heart, trembling. tired, draining or itchy.
embarrassing . Tender, queasy. 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

"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 an elephant. It's an a lot about 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 where 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 holding that space 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 madeup-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 that 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"

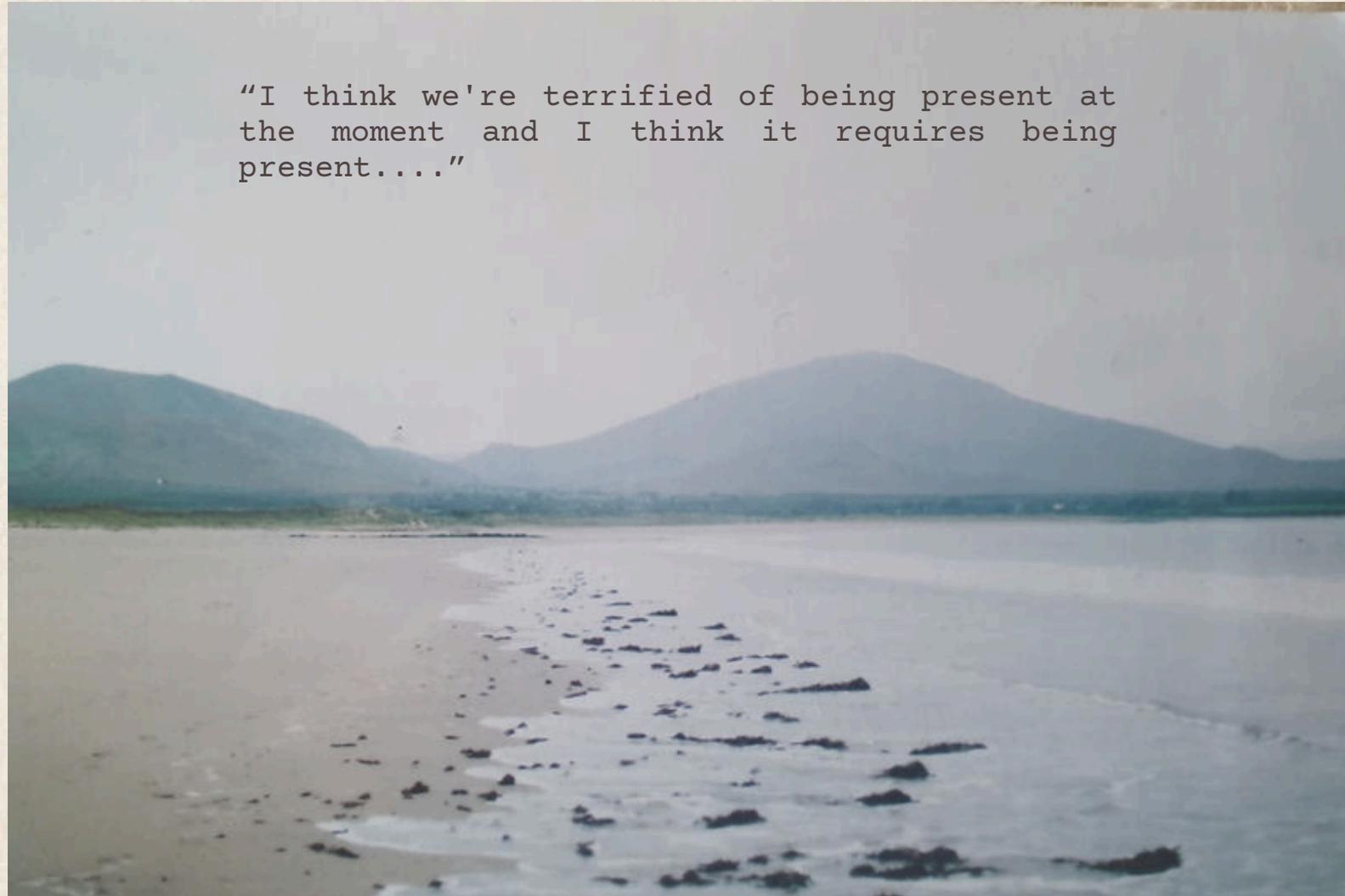


"There is no time to be polite any more
in the multiple crises we are facing. I can no longer work for
the sake of work- it needs to enter into the discomfort as that
is where we are"

"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...."

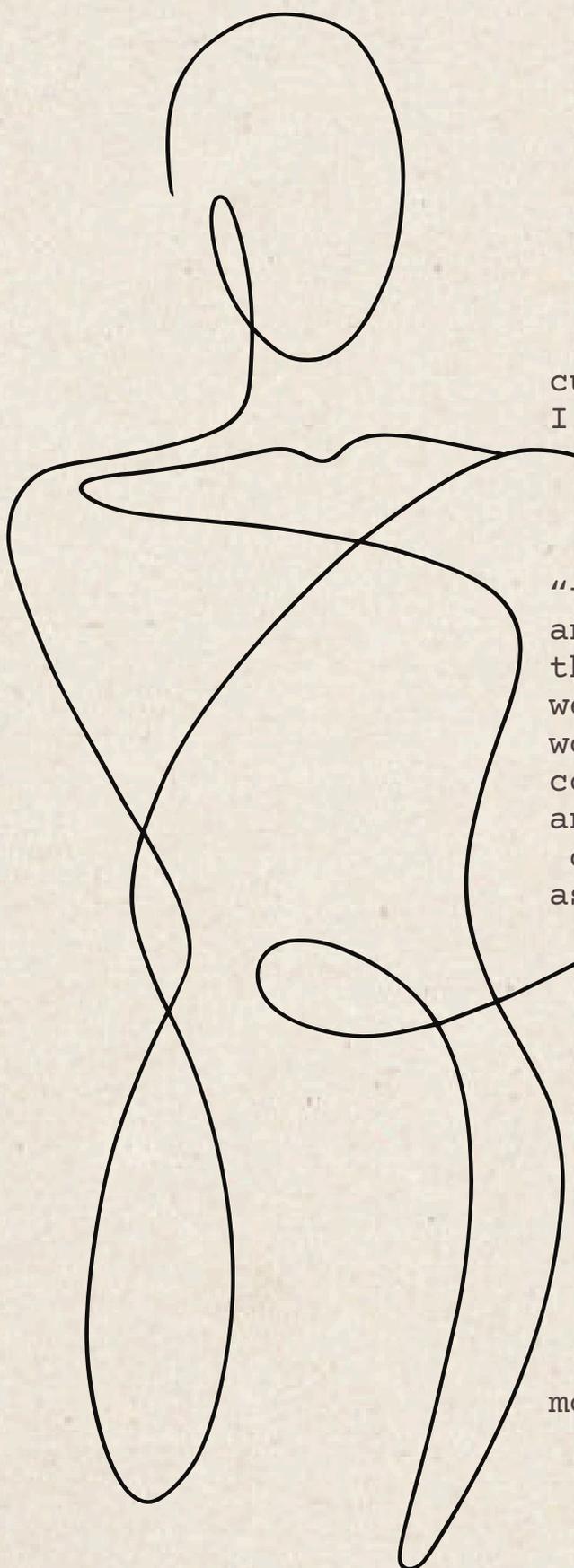


taken on a Kerry beach

"[if I was to have more capacity?] In my mind's 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

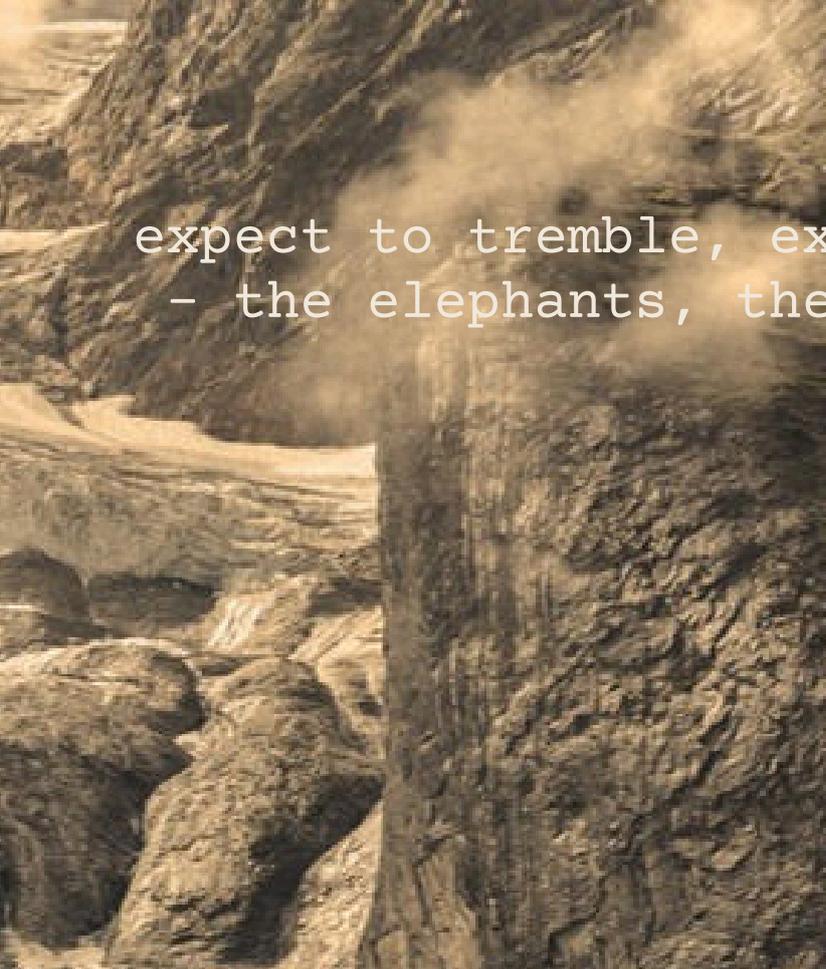
hold tight to your vision
(to alleviate fear)

"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."

Audre Lorde



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"

strong right now and others less so 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 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 deny 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.

7.

FEELING FUTURES

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 they 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 apart, 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 Sami peoples and their ability to raise cattle and build their

"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?"

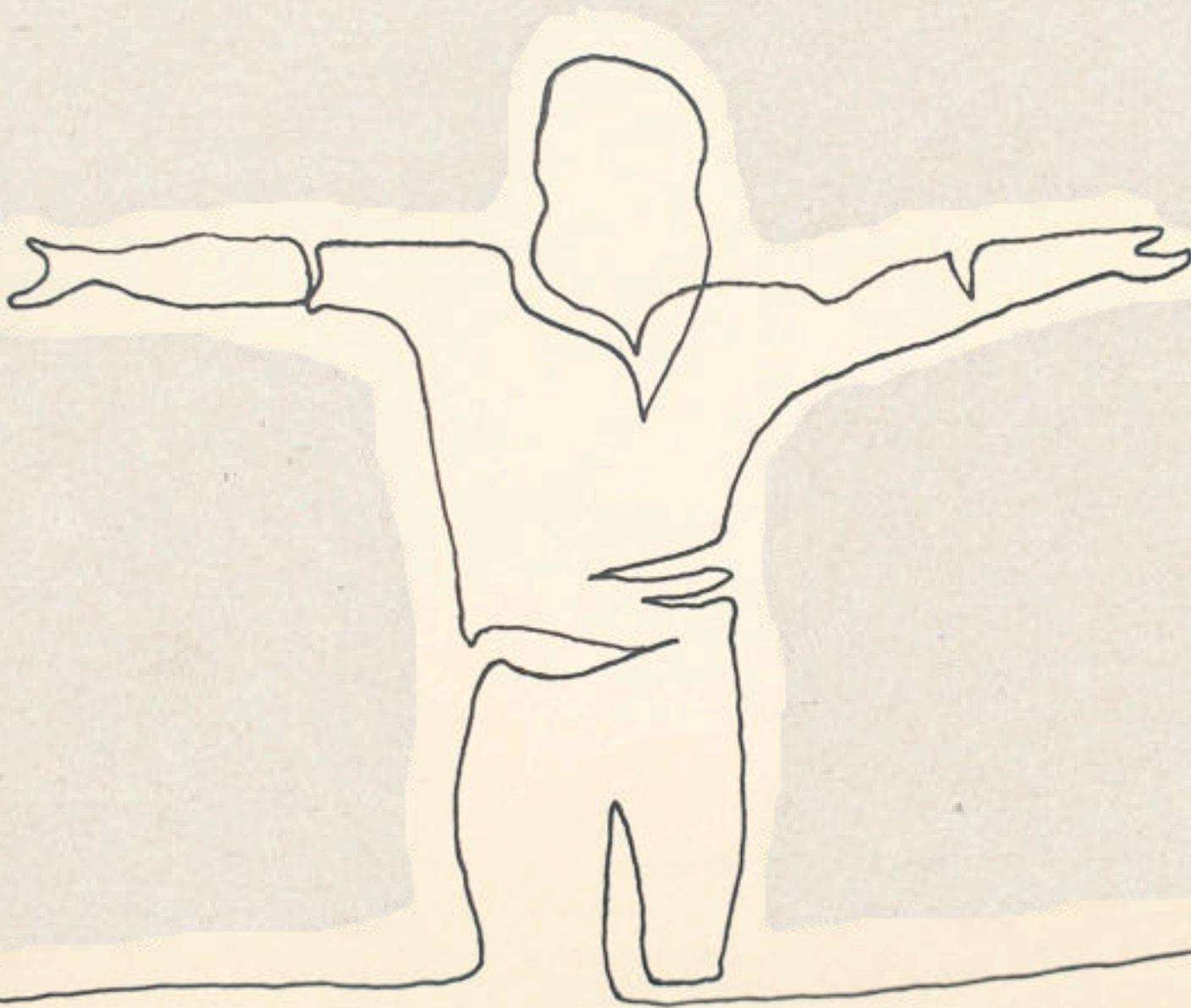
"It looks like open (sometimes brutally honest) communication and exploration of the inner map of individuals (and myself)."

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. daunting. it feels safe, secure,
grown-up, collaborative, powerful,
creative. it feels true to me,
soulful and free. knowing that
it is ok to embrace
emotions whatever
they may be.
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 be better at holding this space. i
feel my work is more nourishing, 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? With whom do you want to share this dance? Who will you explore difficult knowledge with?

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



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The majority of drawings and photos by DEFY- both core team and fellow educators. 'Unsplash' provided the photos on the cover page (Marcos Paulo), page 18 (Wilhelm Gunkel), 19 (Geranimo), 44 (Ivana Cajina), and 49 (Sam Sommer). Photo on page 47 by Eoghan Dalton, artwork on page 51 by Maja Dominič. The pencil drawings on page 16, 36, 46, 53, 54 are Shutterstock images

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