Equity Unbound as Critical Intercultural Praxis

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This article traces the emergence of Equity Unbound, originally founded as "equity-focused, open, connected, intercultural learning curriculum" (Equity Unbound, n.d.) and designed with a critical curriculum approach. We outline how our design and praxis centers on social justice and how our activities and purpose have continued to evolve to respond, with care, to the needs of our networks. We then offer a critical autoethnographic account from an educator who started on the margins of Equity Unbound and later became a key co-facilitator.

Introduction

This article traces the emergence of Equity Unbound, originally founded as "equity-focused, open, connected, intercultural learning curriculum" (Equity Unbound, n.d.), and designed with a critical curriculum approach. We outline how our design and praxis centers social justice and how our activities and purpose have continued to evolve to respond, with care, to the needs of our networks. We then offer a critical autoethnographic account from an educator who started on the margins of Equity Unbound and later became a key co-facilitator.

"Equity Unbound" was conceptualized and initiated in 2018 out of the aspirations of three educators: Mia Zamora (Kean University, New Jersey, USA), Catherine Cronin (then at the National University of Ireland, Galway) and Maha Bali (American University Cairo [AUC], Egypt). The authors collaboratively imagined an equity-focused, open, connected, intercultural learning curriculum for teaching digital literacies to educators and co-learners in diverse educational contexts, with an emphasis on higher ed. We had been critically engaging and leveraging the open web in our professional development and teaching, and noticed most intercultural learning experiences did not take advantage of the open web and potential for participatory and connected learning. We also noticed equity was rarely tackled in such learning experiences and attempts at promoting intercultural learning *without* centering social justice have been problematic, often reproducing power differences and injustices.

In response to these observations and after clearly identifying a need to center social justice when pursuing intercultural learning on the open web, we created Equity Unbound driven by a belief that "the only way to make borders

meaningless is to keep insisting on crossing them" (Mounzer, 2016). As a diverse group of educators from different countries and higher education systems, two initial key questions drove our collaboration and the design of Equity Unbound:

1. How can we minimize the ways that our institutions and pedagogies serve to exacerbate existing inequalities?
2. How can we work together to create and sustain equitable and just learning environments for all?

Equity Unbound recognizes the important role intercultural education plays in supporting justice, as noted by Palaiologou and Gorski (2017), when it is "implemented in ways that respond directly to the most pressing contemporary forms of exploitation – when they respond to the newest forms of exclusion, disenfranchisement, and marginalisation" (p. 353).

The work of open, participatory, equitable learning and teaching is personal and requires continual reflection on our own practice, including excavating assumptions not serving the needs of all students and the greater public good. In Equity Unbound, we adopted a critical approach to openness – seeking to move our collective learning and teaching towards equity and towards epistemic justice. Our goal was to avoid centering our curriculum on particular content and aim at centering it around particular values, recommending content and activities, and creating a space where our students and other interested learners/educators could engage and contribute. By centering these goals, the curriculum would be emergent. Cronin (2019) states:

> The work of critical open educators . . . is individual, collective, and multi-layered: decentering Global North epistemologies; furthering personal and institutional understanding of intersectional inequality; challenging traditional power relations, within and beyond classrooms and institutions; connecting with/via formal and informal learning spaces (digital and physical); recognizing that resistance to openness is a personal, and possibly radical, choice; and ongoing self-reflection (p. 19).

We know equity cannot be envisioned as a one-size-fits-all destination. The "unbound" in the project title itself alludes to limitations and constraints when aspiring to an equitable world, and also to limitations of achieving all we aspire to within the confines and hierarchies of formal institutions.

Values-Based Design: Equity Unbound as Critical Curriculum

A critical approach to curriculum must necessarily resist the traditional higher education approaches of designing curricula with particular measurable learning outcomes in mind or having preset readings included on the syllabus. Both of these approaches raise questions over the hidden values behind any choices of outcomes and content, which cultures are represented and privileged, and who has the power and authority to decide which outcomes and content are valuable (Cornbleth, 1990; Grundy, 1987). They also beg the question of how to design courses with uniform outcomes regardless of differences in students' contexts and starting points, and how to include content relevant to students' cultures before meeting and knowing them. How would a teacher be able to remain sensitive to the interests and needs of students? One of the answers is to conceive of learning experiences as "curriculum as process". This entails the teacher and students enacting the curriculum while interacting together (Stenhouse, 1975).

Our design went beyond "curriculum as process" and became a critical curriculum, or "curriculum as praxis", one which centers liberation and questions social injustice and hegemonic worldviews (Grundy, 1987). Our critical curriculum also centered context, recognizing pedagogical processes, not just content, promote values exacerbating or redressing injustice (Cornbleth, 1990). Although Equity Unbound had some set topics and suggested content as a starting point, topics were intentionally chosen to promote social justice and include diverse viewpoints of authors/speakers of color from around the globe. What was more important were the processes and dialogue occurring within our classrooms around these topics, and creating open, connected learning experiences our students and other educators around the world could participate in. Critical digital pedagogy, after all, focuses on the potential of open practices to create dialogue, to deconstruct the teacher-student binary, to bring disparate learning spaces together, and to function as a form of resistance to inequitable power relations within and outside of educational institutions (Stommel, 2014).

In our work, we wished to avoid what McMillan Cottom (2015) called "expand[ing] access without furthering justice", and instead adopted Fraser's (2005) three dimensions of social justice: economic, cultural, and political. The Equity Unbound curriculum addressed each of these dimensions:

Economic

All of the content housed on Equity Unbound is freely available and the curriculum itself is openly available on a public website; therefore, anyone in the world with an internet connection can access the basic content. Where possible, multimedia content requiring high bandwidth, including live recorded sessions, was available as a recording for those who could not participate live.

Cultural

We intentionally chose content produced by international and minority authors/speakers. For example, among our first prominent readings/videos, you will find Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author, speaking about identity and the danger of a single story; Binna Kandola, an Asian-British psychologist, speaking about unconscious bias; and Lina Mounzer, a Lebanese author, writing about the lived experiences of Syrian female refugees and the violence of translation in *War in Translation*. When conducting live studio visits, we intentionally ensured the majority of invited speakers were women, people of color, and/or from the Global South.

Political

The facilitators of the first round of Equity Unbound are three women from diverse backgrounds. We designed with bell hooks' belief that "radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged" (hooks, 1994). In practice, this means that "everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes" (hooks, 1994). It also means extending an "always open" invitation to share and adapt materials while growing the network with new participants (i.e., educators and learners engaged in formal, informal and nonformal education). The margins were the mainstream in Equity Unbound. Most contributors were those not typically foregrounded in curricula (i.e., women, people of color, and/or from the Global South). However, we recognize participants had to have a degree of digital literacy and familiarity with the facilitators in order to take that step to engage, unless they were our own students whom we explicitly encouraged to contribute.

Values-Based Practice/Praxis

Our practice had an additional political action: the ordering of the initial content. We intentionally started with issues of identity, empathy, bias and equity, before moving on to discuss social injustice in algorithms, fake news, digital colonialism, online privacy, safety, security and wellbeing, and how these differ across contexts. In doing so, we sought to lay a foundation for the explicit values of our curriculum. We intentionally created asynchronous, text-based activities (e.g. blogging, Twitter activities and slow chats, Hypothes.is annotation) to lower barriers for participation. Mindful of diverse time differences for global participants, linguistic diversity of participants, and even accessibility issues like consistent wi-fi access, we attempted to vary our activities and offerings, and to build these concerns into our intentional planning. We created a Twitter account (@UnboundEq) and also a hashtag (#UnboundEq) so all activities were visibly open across networks. We also intentionally used a mix of video, audio, and text-based content in order to make material accessible to a wider range of audiences, some of whom may not have English as their first language. In addition, we developed network activities and learning materials with an eye for revision and remix, intentionally and explicitly keeping open to thoughtful network-generated critique and new insights.

An early Equity Unbound activity is a Twitter Scavenger Hunt, designed to initiate community, sharing, and networked learning by inviting participants to share images using the #UnboundEq hashtag on Twitter. The first instance of this activity in 2018 revealed an unintentional "blind spot": one participant critiqued the exercise as having a component that was inaccessible to people with visual disabilities. This resulted in an important learning experience for everyone, as the network collectively explored how to use Twitter's alt-text option when including images. In addition, Equity Unbound

participants crowdsourced an open letter to Twitter to make the alt-text option the default rather than an option. This is an example of emergence and how participants can drive the agenda of a course.

Online Studio Visits form another important strand of Equity Unbound practice. Studio Visits are essentially open video conversations (i.e., Google hangouts or Zoom sessions) planned within the Equity Unbound curriculum which include #UnboundEq facilitators, invited scholars, and students from across the globe. These sessions aim to model intercultural and transnational collegiality. While these conversational sessions are designed around learning themes such as "Empathy & Bias" or "Equity in Education", Studio Visits never contain a script or planned interview questions. Rather, these conversations are intuitive and unfold as dynamic dialogue in order to embody and model active thinking partnerships. We grapple with challenging questions and of-the-moment concerns. Together, the authors and participants have recalled critical or formative memories in our lives, explored our own blind spots or (mis)understandings, and connected personal experiences with our shared purpose of redressing injustice. In other words, as active co-learners we practice and promote self-reflection, trust, and care through both lived experience and a lens of criticality. To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences (hooks, 1994, p. 130). A less visible but equally valuable community existed in an ongoing private Twitter Direct Message group consisting initially of the three founding facilitators but eventually growing to include several other educators from Canada, Italy, Japan, and the United States.

Every topic area in Equity Unbound has a "contribute" section inviting anyone, student or educator, to contribute to course content or activities, and some of these suggestions were incorporated immediately, others the following semester. One early Studio Visit guest and active participant, Parisa Mehran (the author of the narrative section of this paper), suggested many videos later becoming part of the curriculum, and she became a co-facilitator of future iterations of Equity Unbound.

Another example was an AUC student who suggested we move beyond talking about bias and empathy and delve into the more systemic issue of othering. That semester, the student suggested possible videos and readings, and since then, a new article was added to the list for the topic of bias. The article is one that students annotate or blog about across the globe. In addition, Maha Bali designed a specific assignment called "contribute" and students added material or activities they thought could be used to fulfill the overall goals of the course. As a result, a student suggested "NASA girl" as an example of fake news perpetuated by an Egyptian AUC student, and this reference became a content staple in future semesters.

Beyond the first level of engagement with course content, the use of Hypothes.is annotation has meant that both learners and educators can engage with each other's reflections on the content, such that this interaction and social construction of knowledge has been crucial. Moreover, in a section where participants could play games to promote empathy, AUC students developed their own games about causes they felt passionate about and received feedback on early drafts from anyone in the open community. The final versions of those games were then used in future iterations as sample games for other students to try before developing their own.

Equity Unbound as Emergent Critical Space and the Activation of Care

As facilitators of Equity Unbound, we have considered the overall value (and limitations) of "care" in the continuing development of this intercultural learning network. We draw on Fisher and Tronto's (1990) conception of care, where the ultimate goal of caring dispositions, activities, and practices is to bring about well-being; to have an impact on our world that enables us "to live . . . as well as possible" (p. 40). Partway through Equity Unbound's first run, we realized the curriculum was not only serving the facilitators' students, but also helping other educators. Educators learned to not just use the curriculum, but to form community around social justice issues in digital spaces. Noddings (2012) suggests in unequal relationships such as parent, nurse, or teacher "carers in this position need the support of a caring community to sustain them" (p. 54). We continue to ask ourselves: can "care" be an explicit tool for social transformation when it is rooted in actual practices and mechanisms aimed towards a lasting social reorganization? ("Pedagogy of care", 2019).

Emergence in Practice

This critical question of care took on new urgency in Spring 2020. Because of the emergent nature of Equity Unbound, when the Covid-19 crisis hit, we were able to also pivot our focus to urgent issues by crowdsourcing a global conversation on "Continuity and Care During Coronavirus". The conversations included a Google document and several open Studio Visits (Equity Unbound, 2020). Some of our resulting discussions were recorded and some were not in order to promote comfort among participants when sharing information about themselves on sensitive topics such as privacy and surveillance. These recording decisions were usually made in collaboration with the studio visit speaker and with consent from students. Sometimes students requested the session be recorded in case their internet was unstable, but that the recording only be shared among participants and not on YouTube.

An ongoing Twitter direct message "Continuity with Care" conversation became a lifeline for 27 educators throughout the crisis. This group's direct message was never intended to be an ongoing community space. It was created for the purpose of quickly inviting people to a studio visit. However, it emerged as a critical space for mutual support. As we all have struggled to cope, the politics of care has taken center stage. Equity Unbound has helped many people collaboratively think about the urgency of care in education and the strategies at multiple levels care requires. We continuously ask: in what ways are our scholarly practices also activist practices? in what ways are we opening up the academy? And, how can we take concrete steps to listen, learn, and collaborate with those who have previously been unheard/unauthorized? Equity Unbound has mobilized our critical curricular design knowledge and our equity-oriented praxis to respond to the moment via our existing and growing networks. We trust in collective intelligence and valuing different types of knowledge, while avoiding distinctions between experts and non-experts as we continue to listen to one another's ideas.

Moreover, when the murder of George Floyd sparked a resurgence of #BlackLivesMatter --with related calls to redress injustices in academia via the #ShutDownAcademia and #ShutDownSTEM movements-- Equity Unbound hosted a panel conversation entitled "Inclusive Citation, Inclusive Academy?" (Bali et al., 2020) held in June 2020. Invited scholars of color spoke about systemic injustice in academia and ways to enact anti-racist and decolonial academic practices. Participants and panelists agreed to move forward with an online workshop to focus on concrete action plans for proposal to individuals, institutions, and policy makers. These events eventually led to the establishment of the "Socially Just Academia" project later in the year. This project is the embodiment of a space for praxis by: taking action based on collective reflection and consciousness-raising around systemic oppression. In other words, "Inclusive Citation, Inclusive Academy?" (Bali et al., 2020) activities and the resulting corrective action workshops are an extension of our activation of care.

Intentionally Equitable Hospitality and Online Community Building

The latest Equity Unbound project has emerged as a response to the continuation of online or at least hybrid teaching in many countries across the world for the latter half of 2020 and early 2021. We realized many educators unfamiliar with online education were struggling to build community online. In response, Equity Unbound collaborated with the global network for higher education, OneHE, to create a website that curates resources for online community building. The website offers demos and materials educators replicate or adapt in their own settings. This work builds on our previous experience with Intentionally Equitable Hospitality (IEH) derived from our work with Virtually Connecting (Bali et al., 2019b). IEH is an approach for ensuring hybrid video conversations pay close attention to power dynamics in order to ensure spaces are welcoming and hospitable to the most marginalized of participants, not just in terms of intention and design, but in terms of the embodied and enacted experience.

Educators from around the globe have contributed activities for conducting online introductions, warm-up activities, ideas for setting the tone in classes, structures for ongoing engagement, and more. Since equity is at the center of our practice, we also offered adaptations for each activity (e.g., for synchronous and asynchronous options) video-based and text-based options, and some considerations for safety when doing activities. The list of demos and resources continues to grow and is open to contributions and critiques (See https://onehe.org/equity-unbound for more information). Again, the majority of our contributors were women and from a variety of countries including Egypt,

Lebanon, Kenya, US, UK, Canada, and Australia. We launched the project in August 2020 just before the Northern hemisphere new semester, with lead curators Maha Bali, Mia Zamora, and Autumm Caines. Since the launch, the Online Community Building resources landing page has had 25,000 unique pageviews, the individual resource/activity pages have had a collective total of just under 33,000 unique pageviews, and traffic has come from 163 countries in total. Many educators and faculty developers tweeted with gratitude for these resources (Blum, 2021; Cohn, 2020).

Along with our activation of care as a strategy, it is equally important to recognize Equity Unbound is, at the core, aspirational. We continually seek to move toward our shared value of equity, knowing that this work is *always in process*. For example, when we do Studio Visits including students and educators from around the world, we noticed if we do not explicitly suggest the importance of IEH, educators may not be considerate of making space for all students to speak equitably in breakout room activities. Likewise, if we do not remind others to prioritize the voices of the most marginal, our processes may fail to embody the equity and care intended.

Our praxis is about continually and collectively finding new ways to dismantle boundaries of power, but we also know this work is risky, and for some, more than others, is born of small brave moves from the margins. In the third section of this paper, Parisa Mehran (initially an invited Studio Visit guest speaker and later a co-facilitator for Equity Unbound) uses an autoethnographic account to make visible this truth. Autoethnography is an approach that seeks to describe and analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011). In keeping with the foundational values of Equity Unbound, this methodological approach challenges canonical ways of producing knowledge and representing others. By employing the tenets of autoethnographic narrative, we foreground our process and see it as product. By choosing this methodology to close, we acknowledge this research as a political, socially-just, and socially-conscious act.

The Praxis of Equity Unbound: An Autoethnographic Narrative by Parisa Mehran

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) defines praxis as "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 120). One such structure which is in need of urgent transformation is white supremacy in English Language Teaching (ELT). I am an Iranian English instructor based in Japan, and my existence in academia is constantly being questioned because being white or how close you are to being white is among the core qualifications in my 'profession'. My lived experiences as a marginalized professional in ELT, alongside my efforts to radically transfer ELT's inequitable structures (Mehran, 2020a), have led to my isolation. For a long time it felt like I was drowning in the sea of whiteness - ironically in the land of People of Color. While this isolation first sounded like social exclusion and marginalization, I gradually came to realize this is actually mindful isolation (i.e., disconnecting myself from spaces which are not meant for the 'outsiders'), and I found myself in spaces, in Dr. Thema's (2020) words, "where I am seen and heard, where I am safe and celebrated, and where I can breathe". One such space is Equity Unbound.

So far, I have experienced five visa rejections. You can read about my UK visa rejections at the blogpost: "Denied Yet Present at EUROCALL 2017: A Memoir" (Mehran, 2017), and my recent Canadian visa rejections at this blogpost: "And this is me a lonely woman" (Mehran, 2020a). Equity Unbound's tagline, "Making borders meaningless" strikes a chord with me.

I know Equity Unbound through Maha Bali, and our Sisterhood which is a political term, different from friendship, meaning we are in solidarity with each other. Our sisterhood was shaped when Maha, together with her team, connected me to EUROCALL 2017 via Virtually Connecting (See www.virtuallyconnecting.org) and made visa rejections meaningless. When Maha introduced Equity Unbound on Twitter, I knew that praxis would be at the heart of this initiative, and I decided to get involved. Being connected with equity-minded educators, who see me beyond the stereotypes and do not 'include' me nor 'empower' me, but work with me toward liberation and equity, not for all, but for those who are "farthest from justice" (Okuno, 2019), is all I needed to feel associated with a community. Equity Unbound has put me in the cycle of theory, action, and critical self-reflection in which I try to actualize my equity-oriented teaching philosophy in my classrooms, especially by answering this question: how does my identity shape the way I teach?

Joining Equity Unbound, in reflecting on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's powerful TED talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, started a conversation about empathy, bias, authenticity, and power in my classes. I shared my stories of othering with my students. I asked them: what is your single story of my country? I asked them: what is my single story of your country?

"How are stories related to authenticity? And to power?" Together with my students, I started reflecting on this question raised by Equity Unbound about Adichie's TED Talk. Adopting an autoethnography approach, which is the writing (graphy) of one's personal story (auto) in relation to cultural, political, and social analyses (ethno), I answered these questions in addition to these emerging questions: Am I authentic in my own classrooms? And, am I powerful in my own classrooms?

My Journey to My Authentic and Powerful Self

Authenticity is the "subjective experience of alignment between one's internal experiences and external expressions" (Roberts et al., 2009, p. 151). Marginalized and socially devalued groups often struggle to create authentic identities as they "are generally characterized within society as possessing unfavorable characteristics, and that are often stigmatized by negative stereotypes and low relative status in social hierarchies" (Roberts & Creary, 2012, p. 73). I am an Iranian woman who used to wear *roosari* (a type of Iranian head-covering), and now I wear a hat after experiencing racial microaggressions and going through an identity crisis after being called a terrorist, a life-changing event that has profoundly changed my being. This incident made me acutely aware of the inequities imposed by the intersection of nationality, race, gender, physical appearance, skin color, and religion. A story that I keep sharing in spaces where I am not silenced and I can be my true self, which to me means wearing my gol o bolbol roosari (please refer to Equity Unbound "Studio Visit #1: Empathy & Bias") (Zamora, 2018). And, there are few such spaces out there for me. I still prefer to wear a hat in my classes especially during the first session to protect myself from the shock of the existence of an English teacher who is not a "native speaker", which is a code for white male from a so-called English-speaking country with the 'right' passport. However, I create teaching moments for myself where I share my stories and during those moments, my *roosari* finds her way into my classes. Equity Unbound activities have helped me construct such moments.

On reflection, I realized I have had this question in my mind for a long time: "Is my Iranianness a barrier for me?" Until recently, I had no clear answer for this question rooted in my internalized racism, and a powerful tweet (DrawnToIntellect, 2020) made me confident that the barrier is white supremacy. The systems of power are the barriers, and the power of storytelling can dismantle oppressive power systems.

Through another Equity Unbound activity, "Linguistic Landscapes" (Zamora, 2019) recommended by Italian-British co-facilitator and fellow language teacher, Francesca Helm, my students and I could co-create spaces in my classrooms to teach about critical multilingualism. While my mother tongue is considered as a deficit in ELT in which 'native' speakerism is prevalent, I, as a marginalized professional, have some limited power to transgress one of the dominant hegemonies in my 'profession' within my classroom.

While reflecting on writing this piece, I realized that my journey to my authentic and powerful self is bounded and comprises continuous revolutionary effort to be fully achieved. The notion of bounded authenticity is a protective one which provides me with sociopsychological safety to construct my authenticity within oppressive systems and identify strategies and initiatives for transformation. Also, the concept of bounded power gives me opportunities to act and go beyond the binary of powerless and powerful. Transgressing within my limits and taking action despite being bounded is what Equity Unbound let me experience as a marginalized pedagogue, as those who teach at the margin also have a praxis that is relegated to the margin, and:

> I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center — but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds (hooks, 1990, p. 149-150).

Finally, my involvement in Equity Unbound has led to an emic understanding of my authentic identity construction within its limits especially by inculcating a sense of community in me despite living at the margin and being constantly perceived as an 'outsider' — a *kharejee*. I would like to conclude my section with the following poem, which I shared as a tweet with the Equity Unbound hashtag, by Sholeh Wolpé (2008) an Iranian American poet, writer, and literary translator with those who do not belong anywhere and live at the threshold of belonging:

The Outsider

I know what it's like to be an outsider, a *kharejee.*

I know how English sounds

when every word is only music.

I know how it feels not

to be an American, an English, a French.

Call them

    —Amrikayee, Ingleesee, Faransavi,

see them

    see me as alien, immigrant, *Iranee.*

But I've been here so long.

they may call me American,

    with an American husband

    and American children . . .

But mark this—I do not belong anywhere.

I have an accent in every language I speak.

From *Rooftops of Tehran* (p. 82).

Conclusion

As powerfully evoked in autoethnographic narrative, a critical element of the Equity Unbound approach has been the importance of making ourselves vulnerable as educators. In the process of enacting these learning experiences, we realized this overall curricular endeavor became a supportive community enhancing our own wellbeing as educators and enabling us to be better teachers and better human beings. As hooks (1994) emphasizes:

> To educate as the practice of freedom . . . comes easiest to those of us who also believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (p. 13).

Thich Nhat Hanh (cited in hooks, 1994) suggests that holistic education (also called "engaged pedagogy" by hooks) goes beyond most notions of critical pedagogy and involves an element of wellbeing where teachers "must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (hooks, 1994, Kindle location 286). We noticed as the #UnboundEeq curriculum grew and evolved,

we all looked to Equity Unbound as a kind of "lifeline" of support and strength as we moved forward with our work within our own local, institutional, or societal contexts. We received feedback attesting to the importance of this support from participants in Equity Unbound events, such as studio visits (Walji, 2018), as well as from participants in the wider network, whom we do not know, but who engaged with #UnboundEq via Twitter (Blum, 2021; Cohn, 2020; Leek, 2020).

It is rare anyone talks about professors and scholars in university settings as healers (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1994), and "even more rare to hear anyone suggest that teachers have any responsibility to be self-actualized individuals" (hooks, 1994, p. 15). As we have practiced self-actualized engagement, we have realized the significance of making ourselves vulnerable as a *caring* act of learning empowerment, and we have also discovered the design of social justice work is both situational and embodied in context. Herein lies the paradox of our vulnerable yet hopeful work. Perhaps the "unbound" in our network's founding title alludes to limitations and constraints when aspiring to an equitable world. Simultaneously, "unbound" points to the limitless possibilities residing in our public scholarship as open self-reflexive practice. Along the way, our iterative and emergent learning design for social justice has loosened problematic binds that come from institutional structures, from institutional timelines, from institutional or academic standards of "what is allowed", and even from "what counts as knowledge".

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