



"I honestly don't understand how this system can exist."

**Promoting Social Justice & Equity
by disrupting the master narrative**

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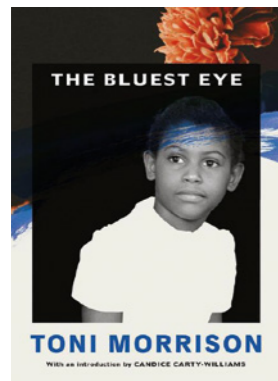
To my parents, Leidy and Paul

PART 1 • PART 1 • PART 1

Master narrative

"Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs – all the world had agreed that the blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. 'Here,' they said, 'this is beautiful, and if you are on this day "worthy" you may have it.' I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all world said was lovable." (Morrison, 2022/1970, p. 18)¹

These are the words and thoughts of eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's debut novel *The bluest Eye* (first published in 1970, followed by many reprints and recently reprinted in the Vintage Classics series [2022]). The story about this black girl from Lorain, Ohio, is set in the early 1940s in a society whose appreciation for its blond, blue-eyed children comes at the expense of all children who cannot live up to this standard. In a very clear way, the quote states that this



privileged position of blond, blue-eyed children is not a natural phenomenon, nor the result of individual qualities. On the contrary: it stems from a worldwide 'agreement' of which nobody can probably pinpoint exactly where, when and between whom it came about: "all the

world had agreed that the blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured". White privilege is portrayed here as an active act of appreciation ("Here, this is beautiful"); as something "that all the world said was lovable". The downside of this appreciation of whiteness is that Pecola is constantly regarded as 'ugly' because of her dark skin. In an effort to beautify herself, she wishes for blue eyes.

Being lied to

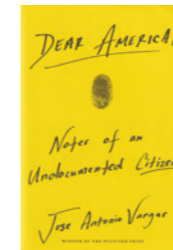
You may be thinking: those are the 1940s. Today the world knows better. But I'm sorry, the world still doesn't know any better. And that is why I will start this inaugural speech with an anthology of texts by authors who often experience(d) first-hand how much our world is a world of privilege and disadvantage. *The bluest Eye* will return regularly in the first part of this anthology.

Take for instance writer and journalist Jose Antonio Vargas's book *Dear America: Notes of an undocumented Citizen*, which was published in 2018. Vargas was born in the Philippines. By the age of twelve, his mother sent him to the United States to live with her parents. While applying for his driver's permit, he found out his papers were fake. More than two decades later, he still lives undocumented in the country he calls his home, like an estimated 11 million human beings.

When Jose Antonio Vargas read Toni Morrison's novel *The bluest Eye* in 8th grade, the book had an enormous impact on him. "Imagine a Filipino kid trying to understand why this young Black girl wanted blue eyes," he said in an interview. "That book exploded like a bomb in my head." (Pineda, 2021)

In one of the notes or chapters of his book he writes that the 'why' of the story intrigued him:

"Why was Pecola wishing for blue eyes when she had black ones? Who told her to want blue eyes? Why did she believe him? (...) Pecola was a year younger than I was when I came to the U.S. Our lives couldn't have been any more different, save for one central detail: we were both lied to." (Vargas, 2018, p. 75)



The lie Pecola was confronted with was that blue eyes were better than her dark eyes, and that she wasn't good enough. The lie Jose Antonio Vargas was confronted with was the lie of so-called illegality.

"'Illegal' was what the news media called us, from the television and radio news programs I consumed to the newspapers I read at the school library to the magazines I would lose myself in at the public libraries. The word, I discovered, was more than an identification – it carries meaning, signifying what I could not do. Being 'illegal' meant not being able to drive, like most of my classmates. Being 'illegal' translated to limitations of what my life was and what it could be." (Vargas, 2018, p. 76)

Master narrative

In a 1990 interview, Jose Antonio Vargas hears Toni Morrison explain that what ultimately determined Pecola Breedlove's life, is the master narrative:

society's dominant notion of what is ugliness, what is worthlessness, what is contempt.

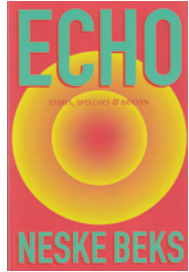
"Morrison: The master narrative is whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else. (...) So, when the little girls see that the most prized gift that they can get at Christmastime is this little white doll, that's the master narrative speaking. 'This is beautiful, this is lovely, and you're not it.'" (Vargas, 2018, p. 77)

Jose Antonio Vargas realizes that the master narrative that marginalized Pecola because of her race and color now dismisses him as illegal, as non-existent, as invisible (Ellison, 1982/1952). In this way, the master narrative can marginalize and oppress groups of people on the basis of, for example, physical disability or illness, socio-economic position, cultural capital, religion, nationality, sexuality, gender, and age as well. It is important to note that people usually do not experience disadvantage (and also advantage) on the basis of one of these mutually exclusive factors, but on the basis of an intersection of factors such as these (Truth, 2020/1851; Lorde, 2007/1984; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1994; Wekker, 2016; Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2020). For example, the disadvantaged position of Pecola Breedlove in *The bluest Eye* is not created on the basis of her race alone, but on the basis of an interplay of at least race, color, class, gender and sexuality.

Selfloathing

The artist and author Neske Beks - a Belgian woman born in 1972 to a Gambian-Senegalese father and

6 ¹ If the cited edition is of a considerably later date than the original work, I include in the reference both the year of the cited edition (in this case: 2022) and the year in which the original work was first published (in this case: 1970). For this referencing style I was inspired by Robin Boilorn (2017).



a Flemish Afro-American mother who grew up in a white socialist foster family - also characterizes *The bluest Eye* as a "serious analysis of what the master narrative and the white gaze can do." (Beks, 2021, p. 73 – translation ML)

While *The bluest Eye* made Jose Antonio Vargas aware that society was forcing the lie of alleged illegality on him, the novel confronted Neske Beks with the power that the master narrative also has over people of color. The novel made her realize that the people who are portrayed as inferior by the master narrative, are in the grip of the master narrative as well. As a teenager, the mirror held up to her by the book was too painful to continue reading: the internalized racism and self-loathing expressed in the book were too confrontational. It wasn't until she was well into her thirties that she picked up the book again.

"Morrison points out exactly what many Black people still prefer to avoid: that the dominance of the white gaze teaches us to hate ourselves, because whiteness, white imagery, white power and the perpetual influence of the dominant white narrative are so strong." (Beks, 2021, p. 74 – translation ML)

We will also encounter this self-loathing and sense of inferiority as a result of the master narrative in texts by other authors later in this anthology.

Colonialism

But before continuing the anthology, our exploration of the master narrative also requires some thoughts on colonialism and the resulting Eurocentrism. Colonialism has taken many different forms throughout history and has had various effects around the world. However, colonialism is always and everywhere about Western domination of 'other' peoples and their land, economic gain (there is a strong relationship between colonialism and capitalism), and unequal power relations between the colonizers and the colonized.

"Colonialism is perpetuated in part by justifying to those in the colonising nation the idea that it is right and proper to rule over other peoples, and by getting colonised people to accept their lower ranking in the colonial order of things – a process we call 'colonising the mind'." (McLeod, 2010, p. 20)

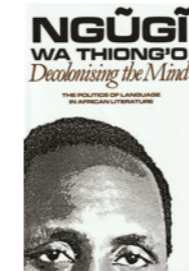
Colonialism means that the colonizer turns the colonized into objects, thereby othering the colonized as subservient, primitive and inferior (Said, 2003/1978).

It is a misconception to think that with the process of decolonization, in which colonized areas became independent of their colonizer, this colonial thinking and discourse would have disappeared from our system. Colonial thinking and the political, ideological, and psychological effects of colonialism survive the historic moment of colonialism. It maintains alive in the books we read, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, and so on (Motha, 2014). To this day, our thoughts and actions are, consciously or not,

often dominated by a Eurocentric view of the world, its inhabitants and history. Such a Eurocentric perspective assumes the superiority of European narratives and cultural values over those of non-European societies (Pokhrel, 2011; Couttenier, Standaert, & Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2018). This white, Western, Eurocentric gaze, for example, becomes apparent in the master narrative dictated history lesson, which teaches that Columbus discovered America in 1492. This history lesson makes Maverick Carter, the seventeen-year-old protagonist of Angie Thomas's Young Adult novel *Concrete Rose*, sigh:

"I fell asleep in US history. It was boring anyway. I'm tired of hearing 'bout all these fucked-up white people who did fucked-up stuff, yet people wanna call them heroes. Philips [the history teacher] talked 'bout how Columbus discovered America, and all I could think was how the hell can you 'discover' a place where people already lived?" (Thomas, 2021, p. 87)

Decolonizing the mind



In his book *Decolonising the Mind*, the Kenyan writer and academic Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (born in 1938) has poignantly portrayed how colonization was indeed a colonization of the mind, thus having a devastating impact on his and his community's life, language, culture, and self-esteem. To do some justice to his portrait, I quote him extensively here:

"I was born into a large peasant family: father, four wives and about twenty-eight children. I also belonged, as we all did in those days, to a wider extended family and to the community as a whole. We spoke Gĩkũyũ as we worked in the field. We spoke Gĩkũyũ in and outside the home. I can vividly recall those evenings of storytelling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved. (...)

The home and the field were then our pre-primary school but what is important, for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teach-ins, and the language of our immediate and wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one.

And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. (...) English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

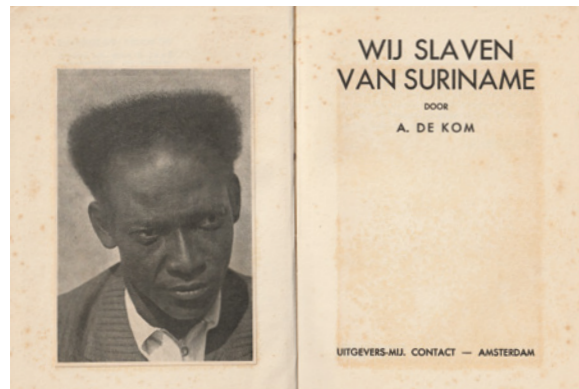
Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gĩkũyũ in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three of five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID OR I AM A DONKEY. (...)

Literary education was now determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance. (...) Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.

(...)

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationships to the world. (...) The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized." (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1994, p. 10.11.12.16)

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o sharply underlines here the intersection of language with power. Colonizing the mind manifests itself in imposing the colonizer's language, literature and culture on the colonized. And for the colonized children at the colonial school, this involves being exposed exclusively to a world and culture that is external to themselves. To say in Toni Morrison's words: the colonized child is exposed to the master narrative.



We slaves of Suriname

A comparable indictment from a completely different part of the colonized world can be found in the work of the Surinamese anti-colonial writer, activist and nationalist Anton de Kom. He too writes about the imposition of the language and in this case the history of the colonizer on the colonized, the dominant position of the master narrative, and the feeling of inferiority that arose among the colonized as a result. Listen, for instance, to what he writes in the chapter 'The History of our Nation' of his book *We Slaves of Suriname*, which was published in 1934:

"When we small 'Negro'² boys, children or grandchildren of slaves, were taught 'the History of our Nation' in school, it goes without saying that what we learned was the history of the white military men. The class was taught by the Brothers of Tilburg, who told us about the heroic deeds of Piet Hein and De Ruiter, about Tromp and Evertsen and Banckert. We black children in the rearmost desks (the front desks were reserved for the sons and daughters of Europeans) tortured our heads by trying to cram them full of the dates of the noble houses of Holland, Bavaria, and Burgundy. We, who were caned whenever we dared to speak our own 'Surinamese language' within the school walls, were expected to go into raptures about the rebelliousness of Claudius Civilis and the brave Abjuration of William the Silent. We, who searched our history books in vain for the names of the rebels Boni, Baron, Joli Coeur, did our utmost so that, when the exam came, we could quickly and accurately rattle off the names and dates of the Dutch governors under whose administrations our

fathers had been imported as slaves. And the system worked.

No better way to foster a sense of inferiority in a race than through this form of historical education, in which the sons of a different people are the only ones mentioned or praised. It took a long time before I could free myself entirely from the obsessive belief that a 'Negro' is always and unreservedly inferior to any white. I remember that one of my friends had a little sister who did not want to walk outdoors with her own brother, because his skin color was one shade darker than hers.

I remember how proud we were as little boys when white schoolmates condescended to beat us at marbles – the same European boys who felt too high and mighty to ever allow us into their homes. And we thought it was fair! That's how deeply that schoolbook history had stamped us with inferiority.

No people can reach full maturity as long as it remains burdened with an inherited sense of inferiority. That is why this book endeavors to rouse the self-respect of the Surinamese people and also to demonstrate the falsehood of the claim that the Dutch had peaceful intentions in the days of slavery." (Kom de, 2022/1934, pp. 84-85)

Colonialism today

And although this was written in 1934, experiences like these are not just from days gone by. For instance, in her 2021 book, Neske Beks realizes that the colonial past continues to determine our present, although the dark pages of that past would rather be kept silent. Although in a different way

from Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Anton de Kom, her education was also steeped in a white, Eurocentric perspective on the world:

"By paying close attention in history class, I know more about white European history than about the Black African part of my identity. As a young Black school-age woman, it was a thorn in my side: it was about neither heroes nor despots mirroring my heritage. In fact, people with my skin color are often represented as victims of poverty, perpetrators of violence and very occasionally – phew – as sports heroes and pop idols." (Beks, 2021, pp. 85-86 - translation ML)



To use another example, the British writer and academic Bernardine Evaristo, born in 1959 to an English mother and Nigerian father, vividly describes a gruesome school memory from her older brother in which he was confronted with Western feelings of superiority underlying the Eurocentric gaze:

"He still recalls the time when his class had to read out loud in turn from the popular racist children's book *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899), about Sambo and his father, Black Jumbo, and mother, Black Mumbo. Sambo had long been a racial slur in America and Britain and mumbo-jumbo was a pejorative term for black languages, which were considered nonsensical. When my seven-year-old brother, the only child of colour in the class, was forced to read from this racist text, everyone in the

room erupted with laughter. He's never forgotten it." (Evaristo, 2021, p. 13)

The Empire writes back

While the authors quoted above, from their own context, place in the world and moment in history, make sharply visible the strength and power of the master narrative with its white, colonial and Eurocentric perspective, it must at the same time be said that these writers themselves make a powerful counter-voice by writing their texts, testimonies and indictments. This powerful counter-voice to the dominance of the master narrative also resonates in postcolonial literature and literary criticism.

The term 'postcolonial' can be used to mark the historical period after colonialism. However, with many postcolonial theorists we consider the notion 'postcolonialism' "an historically grounded and transformative approach, position, standpoint or way of thinking" (McLeod, 2010, p. 39) that questions and challenges the power of European colonial rule around the world including its impact on both the (former) colonized and colonizers.

A specific form of this kind of postcolonial literacy and literatures are concerned with what the British novelist and essayist of Indian descent Salman Rushdie phrased as 'writing back': post-colonial voices responding by writing back to the literary canon of the colonial center. With a humoristic reference to the science fiction movie trilogy 'Star Wars', he titled his 1982 article about this in *The Times* "The Empire writes back with a vengeance." (Rushdie, 1982) He both urges and calls attention to the decolonization of language and literature. Because it is often mainly the title of his

article that is quoted, and because the original article is not easy to find and therefore difficult to read in its entirety, I quote generously from this newspaper article as well:

"The language, like much else in the newly independent societies, needs to be decolonized, to be remade in other images, if those of us who use it from positions outside Anglo-Saxon culture are to be more than artistic Uncle Toms. And it's this endeavour that gives the new literatures of Africa, the Caribbean and India much of their present vitality and excitement.

The phenomenon has occurred before. Earlier escapees from colonialism, in America and Ireland, made similar assaults upon the classical frontiers of the language; the value of those assaults scarcely needs proving in James Joyce's centenary year. In America, it actually happened twice over: first among the whites and then the blacks, who have now given us – in Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison and others – writers with the courage and the talent to infuse English with new rhythms, new histories, new angles on the world.

Now it is happening again, and on a more global scale than ever before. English (...) now grows from many roots; and those whom it once colonized are carving out large territories within the language for themselves. The Empire is striking back." (Rushdie, 1982)

The assault upon the classical frontiers of language and literature that Salman Rushdie is talking about here is an assault upon the master narrative. Artists

and writers from formerly colonized areas refuse to be oppressed and lectured any longer by the dominant narrative of society with its white, colonial, Eurocentric perspective. They hit and write back.

Some authors take this writing back, and thereby limiting the power of the master narrative, very literally. They have "rewritten particular works from the English 'canon' with a view to restructuring European 'realities' in post-colonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based." (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 32) One of them was Jean Rhys.

Wide Sargasso Sea

Jean Rhys (1890 – 1979) was born in Dominica, West Indies, to a Creole mother of Scottish and Irish descent, and to a Welsh father. In fact, with her most famous book *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Rhys, 1966), which was first published in 1966, she wrote back to the English canon. With her novel, she provokes



dialogue with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), creating a powerful counternarrative to this literary classic from 1847. In short, Charlotte Brontë's novel tells the story of the governess Jane Eyre, who wins the love of her enigmatic employer Edward Rochester. When Rochester finally proposes to Jane Eyre and she agrees despite other people's objections about the class- and age differences, the marriage is unexpectedly prevented: Rochester appears to have been married before, namely to Bertha Manson. This woman, of half-Caribbean descent, turns out to be insane and live a life locked up in the attic of Rochester's huge mansion. Whereas the reader of Charlotte Brontë's novel only gets to know this first wife of Rochester as the producer of animalistic noises and insane laughter, Jean Rhys presents the possibility of another side to *Jane Eyre* by giving voice to this silenced Creole woman, named Antoinette Cosway (Azam, 2017; Cappello, 2009; Carr, 1996; McLeod, 2010; Şenel, 2014; Spivak, 2003; Su, 2015). As the American writer and journalist Marcelle Bernstein recalls in a 1969 interview with Jean Rhys:

"She had the extraordinary idea of writing a biography for Bertha, the mad wife of Rochester in 'Jane Eyre', who was left by Charlotte Brontë as a remote catalyst whom we glimpse tantalisingly before she disappears to a victim's death. 'She seemed such a poor ghost, I thought, I'd like to write her a life.'" (Bernstein, 1969, p. 50)

And that is what happens in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: the silenced, dangerous mad woman in *Jane Eyre* is written to life by Jean Rhys. Her book can be seen

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as a critical prequel to *Jane Eyre* that tells Antoinette Cosway's story largely from her own point of view, from her childhood to her marriage to the unnamed Rochester who calls her Bertha, declares her insane, and finally takes her to England where he isolates her from the rest of the world. This concise summary certainly doesn't do the book justice: I only hope to make clear that the novel is literary about *writing back*; about what the Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic Chinua Achebe calls "'the process of 're-storying' peoples who had been knocked silent" (Achebe, 2001, p. 79). And therefore, *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be seen as a contribution to restoring "the balance of stories among the world's peoples." (Achebe, 2001, p. 79) Although some critics like Spivak (2003) and Şenel (2014) are partly critical of the extent to which Rhys has managed to escape the colonial perspective, McLeod (2010) emphasizes that *Wide Sargasso Sea* contains various invitations and pointers for the reader to critically examine the society of then and now. In this way, this counternarrative to *Jane Eyre* can be considered a disruption of the master narrative (Boerma & Leijgraaf, in preparation).

PART 2 • PART 2 • PART 2

Counter- narratives

“My mama say education will give me a voice. I want more than just a voice, Ms Tia. I want a louding voice (...).” (Daré, 2020, p. 224)



Social Justice oriented (teacher) education

Where the counternarratives in the above anthology have their homebase in the world of literature (in the broad sense of the word), counternarratives also play an important role in (teacher) education and educational research that aims to focus on Social Justice. Since our Social Justice & Equity Research Group (in Dutch: Lectoraat Kansengelijkheid) approaches (teacher) education and educational research from a Social Justice perspective, I would like to start this second part of this inaugural speech with a brief explanation of what we mean by a Social Justice approach to (teacher) education. After all, it is an approach that is not yet widely known in the Netherlands, and moreover, the approach is not clearly defined in the international literature (Hosseini et al., 2021). Next, I introduce counternarratives as an important strategy within Social Justice-oriented (teacher) education, and I present a counternarrative developed within our Social Justice & Equality Research Group. Small warning in advance: the tone and nature of this second and later third part of this speech are different from the more literary first part. To begin with, Social Justice oriented (teacher) education acknowledges that within society and therefore within (teacher) education, unequal power relations exist. These unequal power relations involve that some groups of people in society, and

thus also in education, often unconsciously form the dominant group, while other groups are forced into a marginalized existence because of race, color, physical disability or illness, socio-economic position, cultural capital, religion, nationality, sexuality, gender, and/or age.

Speaking of opportunities, inequality and equity, it is important to emphasize, as with Pecola Breedlove from *The bluest Eye*, that the latter groups do not have fewer opportunities and lead marginalized lives because of lacking individual qualities, or because they fail because of their family background, but because society disadvantages and fails them (Hosseini et al., 2021).

Based on this acknowledgement of unequal power relations, Social Justice oriented (teacher) education and educational research want to critically question and actively disrupt and fight the structural inequalities and marginalization that arise from these existing unequal power relations. In doing so, we are not aiming for charity – whereby we “‘help’ those who ‘just happen to be less fortunate’”, but for the more critical justice – whereby we fight “a vertical fight against a system of oppression”. (Picower, 2021, p. 97)

Critical approaches to (teacher) education

This interpretation of Social Justice-oriented (teacher) education and educational research is in line with critical approaches to multicultural and Social Justice-oriented teacher education as presented in 1990 by Joyce Elaine King and Gloria Ladson-Billings. Both Joyce Elaine King and Gloria Ladson-Billings are leading teacher educators and educational researchers from the United States for

whom resistance against inequity – and not just valuing diversity – is an important social purpose of (teacher) education. They stand for education for social change and consider it as their task to challenge future teachers to question and criticize society’s ‘mainstream’ values, beliefs and structures that have led and lead to all kinds of oppression and injustice. As teacher educators, they want to prevent future teachers from being unaware of what Toni Morrison called the master narrative, and thereby unconsciously reproduce or even reinforce societal inequities with their educational practices.

“Above all, we want them [the student teachers – ML] to make a conscious choice about the kind of teachers they want to be. This means they must be aware of the ideological viewpoints they may have internalized.” (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990, p. 22)

Conservative, liberal, critical

In their research into ways in which the student teachers they worked with explained racial inequality, Joyce Elaine King and Gloria Ladson-Billings found three categories of explanations that connect to three prevailing perspectives on equity and (teacher) education, namely conservative, liberal and critical (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990). Although in their paper they do not schematically present these three existing perspectives separately from each other, but rather present them in conjunction with each other (making it all but a secret that they themselves pursue the critical perspective), I describe them separately here. Doing so, I do not intend to subsequently label or categorize opinions, let alone people, but I hope to support our thinking

and acting with regard to Social Justice and (teacher) education.

Starting with **conservative**, assimilative perspectives that justify the status quo. Historical determinism is a key feature of these approaches: injustices from the past are believed to have passed down intergenerationally. Within this perspective, (student) teachers do not perceive that there is anything they can do to change the way children from marginalized groups are educated, for example. In fact, in order to achieve greater equity, not the educational system or teachers need to change, but these children and their culture need to change or be changed. They have to adapt to the dominant group (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990).

This line of thought stems from an uncritical acceptance of the idea of human hierarchy and cultural ranking; an idea that conservative approaches have in common with **liberal** approaches. Liberal perspectives teach that anyone can ‘move up’ if given the sufficient opportunity through education. It should however be noted that this idea of ‘moving up’ ignores questions like: “If some people move up, does that mean there will be a new bottom? If so: who will be there?” (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990, p. 22) Within liberal perspectives, people have blind faith in education as a route to ‘equality’. With the right opportunities, everyone can make it in society (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990). With regard to teacher education, the American educator and researcher Paul Gorski – who presents three similar perspectives in a more schematic way – describes liberal perspectives that aim at developing teachers’ sensitivity to diversity, for example through an examination of their own

prejudices. Other liberal approaches aim to equip the future teacher with multicultural knowledge and skills to meet the diverse learning needs of students (Gorski, 2009).

Unlike conservative or liberal perspectives, **critical** perspectives put the aspect of power at the heart of their thinking and acting with regard to (in)equality and (teacher) education. Within critical perspectives, the structures in society that lead to oppression are criticized, and not the victims of these oppressive structures. Critical perspectives to (teacher) education presuppose that teachers and teacher educators also have a responsibility to contribute to Social Justice. This contribution to a more just society requires criticizing and challenging society's normative ideologies. In this way, space can be created for emancipatory (teacher) education that can help teachers bring about more fundamental social change (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990). In this context, Paul Gorski speaks of engaging future teachers in a critical examination of the systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequality, and injustice on education. Besides that, he identified critical approaches in which education is regarded as a form of resistance against and disruption of the dominant narrative in society (Gorski, 2009).

The critical perspective of Social Justice-oriented (teacher) education

As mentioned before: the Social Justice perspective from which our Social Justice & Equity Research Group approaches (teacher) education and research is in line with these critical approaches to (teacher) education. We thus fundamentally

question conservative approaches because of the intended assimilation and preservation of the master narrative. We also ask fundamental questions about liberal approaches and the 'celebration of differences' that this entails: after all, there is not much to celebrate for the groups in society that suffer from the master narrative. We acknowledge that Social Justice-oriented teacher educators' concerns relate less to the **presence** of liberal approaches than to the **absence** of critical approaches (Gorski & Dalton, 2020). For instance, we do not oppose teacher education that focuses on raising awareness of the personal prejudices of future teachers (as happens in liberal approaches), but we do oppose the neglect of structural inequality that favors some and disadvantages others. To put it in the spirit of this speech: the absence of any critical framing in liberal approaches means that the master narrative is not criticized, let alone disrupted.

Counternarratives in teacher education

An important 'weapon' within our battle against the master narrative is formed by counternarratives. By making the master narrative critically visible, the authors presented in the anthology of the first part of this speech have in fact already created counternarratives. In addition, within international literature working with or creating counternarratives is regarded as an important strategy for Social Justice oriented teacher educators (Hosseini et al., 2021; in preparation). In Critical Race Theory in particular, counternarratives play an important role: stories of people whose experiences are not often heard (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016) and that interrupt the



dominance of the frequently heard voices (Milner, 2007). Counternarratives give shape to the 'louding voice' (Daré, 2020) that is systematically oppressed, suppressed and made invisible (Ellison, 1982/1952) by the master narrative.

One of the many examples from the international literature in which counternarratives have been used as a strategy within Social Justice-oriented teacher education comes from South Africa (Gachago et al., 2014). There, student teachers were invited to develop reflective portfolios in the form of digital storytelling during the last semester of their teacher education program. The assignment for the digital stories was to reflect on a critical incident from their educational practice that related to diversity and difference. Of the resulting 62 digital stories, the researchers selected five that explicitly addressed issues of power and privilege.

"The student teachers appeared to address different aspects of power and power relations in their stories, which reflected personal experiences with various forms of racism, abuse of power and sexism, among others. In doing so, they severely criticized dominant narratives that justify the status quo. In addition, this project provided a safe space for telling stories that had not been told before, due to insecurities or fear of possible consequences. Besides a platform where student teachers dared to make their voices heard, counterstorytelling also created a community among marginalized students. For student

teachers from dominant groups, the stories offered a new window into the world, different from how it was previously known and familiar to them." (Hosseini et al., 2021, p. 21 – translation ML)

Where these teacher educators made room for future teachers to create counternarratives, we use existing counternarratives within our own teacher education program to make the master narrative visible as well as to disrupt it. For example, in the voluntary course 'Privilege and Racism', we invite the participating teacher candidates in their final year to discuss various provocative (non)fiction works by both American authors such as Peggy McIntosh (2007, in Leijgraaf, 2017), Jennifer Eberhardt (2019), James Baldwin (1998/1963; Peck, 2017) and Beverly Daniel Tatum (2017/1997) and Dutch authors including Anousha Nzume (2017), Rodaan Al Galidi (2019) and Deborah Cameron (2020). (Leijgraaf & Reeves, forthcoming) The importance of counternarratives like these for student teachers from marginalized groups is clearly expressed in the words of one of the participants who describes herself as a woman of color:



"I liked reading the examples, because sometimes I feel like it's not visible enough. I have also experienced quite a bit myself, and now I feel like: 'oh yes, it is substantiated and it is visible and it really happened. It just really exists. So for me, let's say... it strengthens me that I can now substantiate it: that it is there and that it exists. And that I will no longer be seen as that angry brown girl [laughs], but that I do have a right and a reason. It originates from somewhere and I can now substantiate that and I like that for myself."
 Monique: "Because 'it' that is there and that you can now substantiate, that is racism...?"
 "Yes, and privilege."

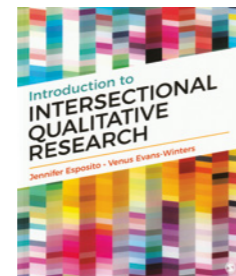
Counternarratives in our educational research

Not only in our teacher education program, but also within the educational research of our Social Justice & Equity Research Group we see a powerful role for counternarratives that criticize and disrupt the master narrative. For example, the first research project that was set up with the start of the research group focuses explicitly on the development of counternarratives. In this research project, my colleague Nina Hosseini and I are seeking collaboration with former student teachers of University of Applied Sciences IPABO who are now teachers and who are confronted with one or more forms of structural inequality in their personal and professional lives. This structural inequality may be related to factors such as physical disability or illness; race; color; socio-economic position; cultural capital; gender; religion; nationality; and/or sexuality. Since these factors rarely appear in isolation from each other, we will be alert to

possible intersections experienced by the participating teachers between different factors that lead or have led to disadvantage or advantage for them. The former student teachers will not participate in this research as respondents, but as participants: in addition to asking them *whether* they want to participate, we also ask them *how* they want to participate. Of course, Nina and I, as initiators, are aware of the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between us and the other participants in the study (Smyth & Santoro, 2015). We will reflect on this regularly. At the same time, we would like to emphasize that all forms of knowledge that all participants bring to the table are of value in the research (Leijgraaf, 2019).

Narrative inquiry from an intersectional perspective

Because the focus of this research is on developing stories that visualize lived experiences of teachers from marginalized groups, we consider narrative inquiry an appropriate methodology for our research. However, in designing our narrative inquiry we do use a critical and intersectional approach. As indicated by Robin Boylorn (2017), narrative inquiry taken up from an intersectional perspective, intentionally focusses on people's strategies of coping and forms of resistance. In our research and



research methodology, we assume that stories can bring about political change and mobilization. Where the master narrative dominates in much research, narrative inquiry from a critical and intersectional perspective can contribute to

disrupting oppressive structures and thereby become part of a wider struggle for a more just society (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022).

Although the research project has only just started at the time of writing this inaugural speech, we would like to share one of the counternarratives as a first preliminary finding: the story of a participating teacher and former student teacher of University of Applied Sciences IPABO who has given herself the fictitious name Carmen van Bruggen.

Punishment after punishment

Meet Carmen van Bruggen. A thirty year old woman who approaches me warmly and cheerfully. She looks fit and healthy, but unfortunately: looks can be deceiving. As a child, Carmen became seriously ill at age 11, and her body never recovered. You could call her a person with a chronic disease, but that's not how she self-identifies:

"I never really talk about being ill, but more about a disability or condition. I'm Carmen and yes, something's wrong. I am not my body. My body has a problem. (...) My body has to deal with something, and so do I."

And apart from the fact that Carmen has to deal with her body's disability or condition, she also has to deal with people and structures that make an independent life impossible for her, and force her into a marginalized existence. Her motivation to make her painful story public with enormous drive and passion, in fact underlines the previously mentioned potential of stories to bring about political change and mobilization (Esposito &

Evans-Winters, 2022). Although, in her own words, it is too late for her ("it can't get any more damaging than this"), Carmen wants to fight for the children who are now "in an educational setting that does not do them justice":

"The limited access to education, the process that led to my classification as incapacitated for work, and the limited access to the labor market, (...) have meant that I have almost no chance of success in this life. This really could have been different. My body may not be able to do much anymore, but my head is still filled with knowledge and my heart will forever be in education, and I will not let that go to waste. I will fight for today's children!"

'NOW, I'M STANDING STILL'

Carmen's story is a mixture of wanting to build herself a future and her recurring worries about the future. As she approached the end of her high school days, her worries began. After high school comes secondary vocational education including internships: how could that happen? The moment of graduation is still a painful memory for Carmen:

"My friends and fellow students were asked on a stage what they were going to do after the holidays. They all went on to secondary vocational education; the next step in their lives. And then the microphone came to me. I still can't put this into words without tears. When I was asked the question, my answer was, 'I'm going to take a rest.' It was a very awkward moment. They wished me good luck. All I could think was: What now? What

should I do with my life? Why is nobody helping me? Why isn't a solution being sought so that I can follow vocational education as well?"

When we talk about this moment of graduation again at another time, Carmen puts it this way:

"Of course I had already seen all kinds of children who had answered that question, who were very proud of what they were going to do. Then I thought: yes, that question will come to me soon. It came to me. That was very uncomfortable. I was thinking: why are you asking me this question, because you know I have nowhere to go? What do you want me to say? (...) And I thought: I am now answering this question and I am stuck with it, but you're going back home later and you've forgotten about it."

Monique: "That was how you felt? That it was really only your problem and nobody else's?"

"Yes. That's what it really felt like. So it was for me; yes... The rest went on and I stood still. It was really like 'now I'm standing still'."

THE FINAL BLOW

However, the final blow comes a few years later, when Carmen turns eighteen and the system determines that, because she could not provide for an income herself and did not study, she had to go to the social benefit administration Employee Insurance Agency (EIA) to be assessed. And the EIA classified her as fully and permanently incapacitated for work.

"That felt like the final blow. 'You're no use to us anymore, here's your money, you're on your own from now on.' (...) I was distraught. There was so much I wanted to do. But it was made impossible for me."

To her, she was without any chance of success; caught in a situation she couldn't get out of. The fear she'd felt since high school, exacerbated: "How am I going to be okay, how am I ever going to make money, will I ever be able to leave home? How on earth can I start taking care of myself, how?" With the help of numbers and calculations written down in a notebook, Carmen accurately calculates how hopeless and impossible her financial situation has been since she was considered as fully disabled; and how this financial situation makes it impossible for her to realize an independent life including her own place to live. While she herself also sees alternatives that are attractive even for the state treasury:

"Let people work and supplement their income, pay them a supplement for the days they can't work. Look, it would be fairest if the supplement is based on the wages I earn. But okay, you can also take an intermediate step, and base the supplement on the minimum wage. (...) That results in a nicer amount of money, so that you can live a little and that it pays off that you went to college. Right now, going to college doesn't pay off at all. You want to get the best out of all people, right? Plus: it would save the state a lot of money, because right now they have to pay all those people. (...)

It makes me angry. Not just for myself, but for everyone involved. It doesn't feel fair that you are sick, but well, you will never get an answer to that question. Why me? You shouldn't ask yourself that either. But that's bad enough as it is. On top of that, you get this for free, as a bonus. So it's punishment after punishment. It's almost as if you've chosen for a life like this, like 'oh yes, let's get sick as a child, how nice, because then you get this in return'. That's how it feels to me. I honestly don't understand how this system can exist."

SYSTEMS AND PEOPLE

Despite the opposition she experiences from the system, Carmen does not give up but starts a doctor's assistant education at a private, small-scale institution where Carmen and her possibilities were fully thought along. But this private education has its price:

"Fortunately, I have very sweet parents who could help me out. But what if that's not the case? Surely that shouldn't be the reason for not making it happen! I was very aware of that and it has stayed with me to this day."

However, the work as a doctor's assistant, which she started during her education ("My very first job! I was so proud!"), turned out to be physically too demanding. She did complete her education, which gave her "a basic qualification on the labor market that was said to never happen. I proved the contrary, but what now?" She started a new education, to become an elementary school teacher, at University of Applied Sciences IPABO. And just like in

other parts of society, including educational institutions – although the private education to become a doctor's assistant was an exception – she was confronted with people and structures that made life difficult for her and put her at a disadvantage. She wrestles with the question of whether it is the people or the structures that disadvantage her. The system entails that education is organized in such a way that it is impossible for her to attend any study program. And at the same time: the system is made and supported by people:

"[The system makes] it impossible, is constructed in such a way that it is impossible for people like me to attend a study program. Perhaps also the people, because there have also been people (...) who were also in that system, but who gave me a chance. Then it worked. So is it the system or is it the people who work in that system? That is the question."

For example, Carmen experienced at IPABO that the system sometimes disadvantaged her very badly:

"During my second internship, in kindergarten, my health was not good. I had to stop my studies because I couldn't continue with my internship. Instead of entering the second semester the following year, I had to follow the first academic year again from the beginning, and had to pay for it as well. This happened again in the second year. I couldn't fight this because rules are rules."

PEOPLE AND SYSTEMS

She was also confronted with the fact that various people who had a specific role in the education system and who could therefore have supported her education by thinking along with her options, unfortunately often became a hindering factor in her development.

“For example, it was very important to me that the internships were not too far away. You have to make quite a journey. Well, public transport was already not an option. When I get on a bus, no one gets up for me. Well, those are all things you run into. Then I was told: “Well, you can also take you bike, that’s good for you”. Then I felt so small again.”

Carmen also ran into the rule that she had to do an internship at many different schools. While it makes a huge difference for Carmen if she can do her internship at a school where the teachers already know her: “If people know you, they can still take you into account without being bothered by you. They know about it. I can also indicate if things are not going well, without causing irritations.” Her request to do her final internship at a school she already knew was initially turned down because of the college’s rule that you must have completed an internship at a certain number of schools before graduating. In the end, another official within the IPABO arranged that she could do her last internship at the school she knew, but this required a doctor’s statement.

“So the doctor had to write a letter, explaining that it is so important for me to have an internship in the area. That all that is necessary... So you have to arrange a lot again. Well, then I think: that doctor is not waiting for all that. He did write the letter, but why does it have to be so difficult? Why?”
 Monique: “Do you also feel mistrusted?”
 “Yes, because you have to prove yourself again.”

Even from individual teachers, who she had to inform all individually about her situation, Carmen could not automatically count on help or support that was adapted to her situation and possibilities:

“During my studies I had several bad periods. The combination of study and internship became too much for me and I was not always able to meet the deadlines. It then strongly depended on the teacher how this was dealt with. (...) I also had to do extra assignments, as a punishment, several times because of my absence, because yes, I apparently chose to be sick.”

UNPROTECTED

After graduating from IPABO, Carmen makes several attempts to contribute to education in one way or another. She is bursting with knowledge and ideas, but doors close faster for her than they open. It is more about “looking at the things I cannot do” than at her ideas, commitment and possibilities. It happens to Carmen that, without having started a conversation with her, it is decided for and about her that there are no opportunities for her within educational organizations. Carmen feels vulnerable:

she wants to participate, but because she has no employment contract she is unprotected and people think they can do with her whatever they want, as if she is ‘nothing’:

“You just get written off without being heard... and they can do this because I never signed anything. People who want to join in, who want to participate in society, are not protected by the law. You can treat those people like that.”

Experience has taught Carmen that people can “make it really hard for you, or they can really make it lighter”. People who don’t choose to make life easier for others and thereby unconsciously maintain the system, are a mystery to her. Maybe, she considers, it has to do with the fact that they themselves don’t have to deal with it and thus have no idea what it is like to live with a body that has to deal with disability. She compares it to politicians who make decisions about, for example, the level of benefits:

“Even people who decided about the level of benefits, they don’t have to deal with it themselves.”
 Monique: “The policy does not affect themselves?”
 “That is of course the case with most things, especially because... Look, most people in a Wajong [i.e. the Dutch disability insurance for young people - ML] situation are not highly educated, are they? People in politics are all highly educated, so they will never have to deal with this.”

Ableism as master narrative

Carmen’s narrative aptly illustrates that we as a society also have a master narrative concerning disability, in which people with disabilities are often unconsciously regarded as ‘not normal’. After all, her story focuses not so much on the individual physical disability with which she has to live, but more on society’s reaction to it, which in fact results in a socially imposed disability (Derave, 2012). It is important to realize that the “manner and extent to which difference of an individual’s body, mind, or affect shapes his or her experience in society is dependent upon the culture and norms of the historical, political, economic, and geographic context.” (Baglieri & Bacon, 2020, p. 1) The way in which (dis)ability is understood is culturally determined. The master narrative concerning disability emerges in valuing and privileging people who are labeled as ‘able’ at the expense of those presumed to be ‘disabled’. This appreciation gives rise to a social practice referred to as ‘ableism’: a system of oppression in which the marginalization of disabled people is normalized.

“In other words, the expectation that disabled people will be stigmatized, underemployed and unemployed; will live in poverty; and will fail to achieve in schools is attributed to assumptions about individuals and the fitness of their minds and bodies.” (Baglieri & Bacon, 2020, p. 8)

The fact that not only the fitness of mind and body, but also society’s response to it determines someone’s opportunities and possibilities in life, is completely ignored in this system. Carmen’s

narrative, however, tells the story of an unjust society that disadvantages disabled people like herself: her counternarrative thus contributes to not only making visible but also disrupting the master narrative.

Power and power relations

Another aspect of Carmen's counternarrative that I would like to mention briefly relates to power and power relations. In addition to the power of individual people with certain positions within educational institutions and of institutions like the Employee Insurance Agency, Carmen also talks about the power of politicians and policymakers. At the end of her counternarrative, she characterizes these people as the ones who make decisions about people who live in situations that are completely unfamiliar to the policymakers and politicians themselves; situations they will never have to deal with. Her words remind me of the broadcast of a Dutch TV program in which the French writer Édouard Louis indicates that for the working class, politics is a matter of life or death (Louis, 2021). In the interview with Maaïke Schoon, he tells about the northern French town where he grew up: a small, old industrial town. In the 1980s there was a factory where most of the men, including some women, worked. In the 1990s, the factory was moved to Southeast Asia "to exploit the people there." (Louis, 2021) It left the people of Édouard Louis's town jobless, penniless and hopeless. Édouard Louis was the first of his family to escape this reality, and he soon discovered that the books he began to read and the films he saw had nothing to do with the working class people of his town and that their reali-

ty and the poverty in which they lived was not addressed. His mother was always saying: nobody cares about us. So he started writing, in order to fight that invisibility.

During the interview he zooms in sharply on the question of who is in power in society and who is not; who are privileged and who are disadvantaged; how asymmetrical and unjust the power relations are. For instance, the working class people, the poor people, are always suspected to be sustained by society; that they are the ones who benefit from society. While, argues Édouard Louis, it is precisely the dominant class that has all the benefits:

"They grow up, and they have the culture, the parents give them books, they go to the cinema, they go to the movies, they know about the best universities: they are prepared. Society is giving them everything to succeed, and in succeeding I mean having an easier life, having a better life. It's the dominant class who gets the benefits not the poor people who are starving, who are trying to survive, who are harassed by the state to prove that they deserve to live and have a life. (...) The privileges are obviously on the dominant side of society.

(...)

When you are privileged, when you have money, when you have diplomas, you are kind of protected from politics. Politics is not really changing your life. But when I was a kid in this working-class milieu, if a president, if a government was cutting welfare, was cutting access to medicine and everything, you couldn't go to the doctor, you couldn't buy food. (...) For the working class

politics is a matter of life and death. If you are poor (...) politics is something you can't escape. And that is something the dominant class has trouble understanding. They don't see it." (Louis, 2021)

Just as, according to Carmen, the highly educated politicians will never come into contact with the misery that their policies cause to young people who become incapacitated for work, Édouard Louis criticizes those same politicians who, with their measures, make life impossible for people in poverty and with less powerful cultural capital.

PART 3 • PART 3 • PART 3

Social Justice & Equity Research Group



“Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
(Baldwin, 2017, p. 103)

Disrupting the master narrative

Hopefully it is not a surprise that the Social Justice & Equity Research Group has the ambition to actively contribute to the disruption of the master narrative. Based on the acknowledgement that unequal power relations and structural inequality exist within society and within (teacher) education, we aim to:

- a:** contribute to promoting critical consciousness (Freire, 2005/1968; Jemal, 2017; Leijgraaf & Reeves, forthcoming) of structural inequality among (future) teachers and teacher educators;
- b:** contribute to broadening the (future) teachers' and teacher educators' possibilities for action to fight forms of structural inequality.

We mainly cooperate with North Holland (future) teachers and teacher educators from University of

Applied Sciences IPABO, and with fellow researchers from Radiant, the University of Amsterdam, the University of Humanistic Studies, Newcastle University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

In order to be able to work concretely on what we aim to achieve within our research group, we have distinguished the following overlapping and inter-related themes:

1. Fostering critical awareness of structural inequality among teacher educators and (future) elementary school teachers.
2. Taking a critical stance on curriculum content within elementary education and teacher education, and acting accordingly.
3. Promoting critical literacy among (future) teachers and students in elementary education.
4. Valuing and involving the students' and student teachers' world in (teacher) education.
5. Taking a critical stance on silencing and micro-aggression.

These themes are briefly explained here.

Theme 1: Fostering critical awareness

James Baldwin's words at the opening of this third part succinctly express the importance of critical awareness of inequality and injustice as the first step towards greater equity and Social Justice. Injustice cannot be fought if it is not seen and recognized as injustice. The power of the master narrative often makes it difficult to recognize and acknowledge structural inequalities that lie within it. In a sometimes confrontational way, the authors in the anthology of the first part of this inaugural speech send out a wake-up call: they make us

realize how the master narrative disadvantages some groups and privileges other groups in society.

Theme 2: Critical stance on curriculum content

The previously quoted passages from the work of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Anton de Kom and Neske Beks illustrate the importance of a critical stance of (future) teachers and educators on curriculum content (scripted or not). After all, history education has been used as a way to colonize, oppress and rob people of their dignity (Kom de, 2022/1934). And Neske Beks did not recognize the African part of her identity in the Eurocentric history education she received (Beks, 2021).

If (teacher) education is to be oriented to Social Justice, the (future) teacher or educator must understand that curriculum contents are socially constructed and therefore also reflect the power, the social context, values and perspectives of the knowledge constructors (Banks, 1993; Susam, 2015; Leijgraaf & Telkamp, 2022). Based on that understanding, the teacher or educator will also add other, less dominant perspectives to the existing school knowledge. Social Justice-oriented (teacher) education cannot exist without a curriculum that attempts to restore the imbalance in power relations that also resonates in the content of our (teacher) education, thereby doing justice to marginalized (groups of) people as well (Picower, 2021; Kitts, 2020).

Theme 3: Critical Literacy

Just as power is a determinant of curriculum content, so it is of novels and other literary works. The Nigerian American writer Chimamanda Ngozi

Adichie (2009) tells vividly and convincingly about the danger of the single story. Apart from the fact that stories have the power to open up new worlds for the reader, Adichie also points out the danger of the single story that threatens both at the (inter) personal level in, for example, stereotyping or missing representation of marginalized groups in literature, and at a more structural level in the power that determines which stories are told and published, how they are told and published, and who tells them (Boerma & Leijgraaf, in preparation).

The writing back of which Salman Rushdie (1982) spoke and the attack on the master narrative contained therein by postcolonial writers such as Jean Rhys (1966) testify to and oppose the power of the single story.

An approach to children's literature that explicitly considers this relationship between power, language and stories has become known as critical literacy; an approach that wants to encourage (young) people "to read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources." (Janks, 2013, p. 227)

Theme 4: The students' and student teachers' world

For the colonized child Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, colonial school meant that he was exposed exclusively to a world and culture alien to him and miles away from his own home, family, community and culture. The world he lived in turned out to be of no importance at all when it came to his education. In fact, the world of his home, family and community was considered inferior to the superior English and

Anglophone world of his education.

While times may have changed, the knowledge and experiences students gain at home and within their communities (referred to in the literature as funds of knowledge [Moll et al., 1992]) are often hardly appreciated in education. And with that we, as (future) teachers and educators, may unconsciously send out the signal that this knowledge and these experiences from outside the school would not be of value, which encourages a deficit perspective. A powerful example of this comes from the portfolio of one of the future teachers of University of Applied Sciences IPABO, the Dutch-Syrian Amani Baker:

“‘However you look at it, we all have to adapt to each other. I was able to learn that myself at a young age and I’m glad I was so young when I first learned about the different perspectives you sometimes have to deal with. The Syrian and Dutch aspects sometimes clashed and that’s okay too. Still, I would have preferred to learn about this in a different way. The simple ‘Yes, this is the Netherlands and that’s how we do things in the Netherlands’ led to shortsightedness and made me feel rejected. When I made a ‘Syrian’ book during the free craft room in kindergarten that read from right to left, I got a comment from the teacher. Even after my explanation of why I was doing it this way, the teacher picked up another piece of paper and let me start over. In a somewhat annoying way I learned to leave my Syrian interests at home.”

Without detracting from Amani’s painful experience of being rejected for what is an essential part of her

identity, we can also formulate this fourth theme positively. By valuing and involving the funds of knowledge that students and their parents or future teachers bring into the classroom, you as a teacher (educator) reject prejudices and stereotypes and you show that you are on the assumption that your students and future teachers are competent and have knowledge and skills, developed in their own communities (Hogg & Volman, 2020).

Theme 5: Silencing and micro-aggression

The case presented by Amani Baker also contains elements of what is referred to in the literature as silencing and micro-aggression. Silencing involves leaving unnamed and not addressing issues that influence the life of the student or future teacher (Dabach, 2015). This also includes ignoring the home language and home culture of students or future teachers. And although I understand very well how important it is that children living in the Netherlands have to achieve great fluency in Dutch so that they can find their way in Dutch society, I would like to emphasize here that ignoring the mother tongue of students and future teachers can give the impression that the student’s or future teacher’s mother tongue would be of less importance than the Dutch language. This is especially the case when the mother tongue is a non-Western language, which is relegated by the master narrative to a lesser language that has to bow before Dutch language in deference (cf. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1994).

Micro-aggression concerns the conscious and unconscious negative treatment of (groups of) students and future teachers (Levinson, 2012). This may involve negative treatment among students

and future teachers (excluding peers because of an aspect of their identity and/or the cultural group they belong to), by teachers and teacher educators, or by the school or university itself.

Social Justice-oriented (teacher) education is therefore characterized by a critical stance on silencing and micro-aggression, so that students like Amani feel at home in (teacher) education and experience there is room for (in Amani’s case) the Syrian part of her language and identity as well.

Not just an Amsterdam Research Group

You may think: inequality is a typical urban problem that students and (future) teachers in small rural communities have nothing to do with. But that’s not the case. Firstly, unequal structures in society won’t be stopped by city boundaries. Also outside cities like Amsterdam, (groups of) people are being marginalized because of for instance class, ethnicity, gender, disability, race, religion, education level, age, or the extent to which society values their personal qualities.

Moreover, inequality is a collective problem for society as a whole, and not just for the people who suffer from it. For example, James Baldwin underlines that racism is a nationwide problem, not just a problem for the communities that suffer it. Precisely people from dominant groups will have to become aware of the oppressive structures they once created and perpetuate:

“‘What white people have to do is try and find out in their own hearts why it was necessary to have a ‘nigger’ in the first place, because I’m not a ‘nigger’, I’m a man. But if you think I’m a ‘nigger’, it

means you need him. (...) If I’m not the ‘nigger’ here and you invented him, you the white people invented him, then you’ve got to find out why. And the future of the country depends on that, whether or not it is able to ask that question.” (Baldwin, 2017, pp. 108-109)

In more cautious terms, Salman Rushdie also suggests in the previously quoted article for *The Times* that the former colonizer must become aware of the oppressive structures he once created and face a process of decolonization himself:

“‘It’s possible to argue that Britain needs decolonizing, too; that too many of the old imperial attitudes – jingoism, xenophobia, a sense of automatic moral superiority in all things – still lie, just below the surface, in British culture and even in ‘English’ English.” (Rushdie, 1982)

If structures of oppression are to be disrupted, it is especially important that people who personally are hardly affected by inequality because of their privileges, financial situation, high education or other factors, become aware of the power differences and the resulting inequalities that exist in society. For example, the former president of the International Reading Association Nancy Larrick already noted in 1965 that the predominance of white children in children’s books is not only damaging to the self-image of children of color (that comes first, I would like to emphasize!), but also has an impact on white children and their self-image (although it is striking that she only speaks of boys here):

“Although his light skin makes him one of the world's minorities, the white child learns from his books that he is the kingfish.” (Larrick, 1965, p. 63)

Despite the danger that, by focusing on awareness of the dominant group, we will again focus on precisely this powerful group (Hosseini et al., in preparation), we would like to emphasize that Social Justice-oriented (teacher) education is, in our view, an approach to (teacher) education to which all education can commit, regardless of context. We would in any case like to challenge all schools and institutions for teacher education to do so (cf. King & Ladson-Billings, 1990), starting in the province of North Holland.

Positionality

Whereas in the second part of this speech we presented a critical perspective on (teacher) education that is oriented towards Social Justice, we want to extend this line to educational research oriented towards Social Justice. We have seen that a critical perspective on (teacher) education raises issues such as power and ideology. For Social Justice-oriented educational research, this involves the acknowledgement that human experiences and observations, like all human activities, are never objective and value-free, but formed and shaped by ideological orientations, positions of power and inequalities tied to ideological and historical contexts (Leijgraaf, 2019). For educational research aimed at Social Justice, it is therefore important as a researcher to consider what is called your positionality in international literature. After all, the position I take as a researcher with regard to

the people I conduct research with influences the way in which I see, interpret and want to change the world around me (Leijgraaf, 2021). Therefore, a little bit about myself as the researcher / 'lector' standing before you today.

RANDOMNESS

As a child I was already amazed at the great differences between poverty and wealth in the world, and at the coincidence that I was not born in poverty, war or other oppressive circumstances, but in a reasonably prosperous family in Utrecht at the end of the 1960s. This amazement made me write an essay for friends and family for my fiftieth birthday entitled: 'Tank & I, or the Randomness of Birth' (Leijgraaf, 2017). As a teenager, I became involved in Amnesty International by writing letters that demanded the release of political prisoners. My first interest in critical literacy also arose during high school, although I didn't know it was called that at the time. I wrote my special project for my Dutch language exams about anti-authoritarian children's literature. At my former elementary school I even did some research, and how disappointed I was to find out that those students in their final year of elementary school preferred to read books about horses than the work of Guus Kuijer, Karel Eykman or Hans Dorrestijn.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

During my theology study I was affected by liberation theologians, and I immersed myself intensively in biblical liberation stories such as Exodus and texts in which justice was central. At the same time, I increasingly got the feeling that I was born in the

wrong time, and that Social Justice was an issue from the 1960s and 1970s in the Netherlands. My surprise and joy was therefore great when, as researcher on Diversity & Critical Citizenship of IPABO, I became acquainted with the Education for Social Justice, Equity and Diversity research group of the ATEE in 2008. In the many years that I have been associated with this research group, I have learned a lot from colleagues such as Geri Smyth, Gyuri Mészáros and Hanneke Jones. In April 2014, Jenelle Reeves, a professor at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, reached out to me, which led to an intense friendship and collaboration. Just like to the colleagues I had met through ATEE, it was obvious to Jenelle to address issues such as power and ideology in her teacher education and educational research; much more obvious than I was used to in the Netherlands.

When I was given the opportunity in 2019 to write a proposal for a PhD trajectory together with Monique Volman of the University of Amsterdam, I took the plunge (for me it really felt that way at the time): this PhD project would focus on Social Justice (teacher) education! I was really happy that Nina Hosseini actually started this PhD program in 2020. Against this background, you can imagine how much it means to me that today we officially celebrate the start of a research group that approaches (teacher) education and equity from a Social Justice perspective.

DOMINANT GROUP

Besides these personal notes, my positionality is also determined by the fact that I belong to the dominant group in society. I am a white, highly

educated woman who, as of today, occupies a specific position within a Dutch University of Applied Sciences. On the one hand, I consider it my shared responsibility to stimulate critical consciousness among myself, colleagues and (future) teachers of existing inequalities, especially of the inequalities that I do not experience personally. And to jointly fight inequalities in society and in (teacher) education on the basis of that critical consciousness. On the other hand, I am very aware of the pitfalls I can step into, perhaps the biggest of which is that by accepting this position I occupy a position that could also have been taken by someone from a marginalized group (Cheryy, 2021; Lodik, 2021). I have no solution for this dilemma.

I do know that, to put it in the words of writer and activist Audre Lorde, silence is not an option for me. Her call to transform silence into language and action, without hiding “behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own” (Lorde, 2007/1984, p. 43) is of an unmistakable urgency. Therefore, I would like to close this section quoting her words:

“The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.” (Lorde, 2007/1984, p. 44)

Proudly presented: counternarratives

Both the anthology of the first part and Carmen's story in the second part of this inaugural speech can be regarded as counternarratives that reveal

the painful and humiliating effects of the master narrative for people from marginalized groups: the internalized self-loathing in *The bluest Eye* (2022/1970) that was so confrontational for Neske Beks (2021) that she couldn't finish the book for a long time; the feeling of inferiority that Anton de Kom (2022/1934) and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1994) wrote about; the humiliation that Bernadine Evaristo's brother (2021) had to endure at school when he had to read an excerpt from *Sambo* aloud; the opposition Carmen experiences from people and systems that makes it impossible for her to build an independent life to this day.

I would like to end this inaugural speech with some examples of counternarratives that actually tell their stories proudly and without any sort of reference to the master narrative. Such as the picture book *I Am Brown* written by Ashok Banker and illustrated by Sandhya Prabhat. Full of enthusiasm, the picture book tells and shows from the first sentence 'I am brown' what being brown entails: love, friendship, happiness, being a researcher, or an actor, or an electrician, having a mustache, or not, having green eyes, black eyes, brown eyes, long hair, no hair, having many hobbies, various preferences for food, clothing – just to name a few. And the book ends with the words, "I'm brown! I am amazing. I'm just like you." (Banker & Prabhat (ill.), 2020) Not a trace of feelings of inferiority imposed and internalized by the master narrative. On the contrary: this is a picture book full of pride and possibilities.

Another example is the original Dutch picture book *Idje wil niet naar de kapper* (*Idje doesn't want a haircut*) by Michael Middelkoop, illustrated by Lisa



van Winsen and published by ROSE stories (2019). In this book, the little boy Idje has a big head of hair that he can hide things in, and create all kinds of shapes with. He feels like a superhero with his hair because "anything is possible." (Middelkoop & Winden van (ill.), 2019) What is interesting about this picture book is the total absence of what Toni Morrison called the 'white gaze'. For Toni Morrison, the white gaze is the gaze of the white oppressor that writers such as Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Richard Wright were confronted with and opposed to. And this reacting to and acting against the 'white gaze' is exactly what Toni Morrison refuses to do:

"I thought: I can't do that. What is the world like if he [the white oppressor – ML] is not there? The freedom, the open world that appears is stunning. And I know that most African- American women writers did the same thing. (...) There was this free space opened up by refusing to respond every minute to the gaze. Somebody else's gaze." (Morrison, 2013)

What is interesting about the picture book *Idje doesn't want a haircut* is the total absence of the 'white gaze': neither the pictures nor the text try to explain things to a presumed white audience that do not need any explanation to people of color (Boerma & Leijgraaf, in preparation).

Finally, I would like to conclude with the lyrics of a song by Nina Simone, one of my favorite musicians whom I admire immensely for her dark voice, great

piano playing and above all for the combination of the completely different yet converging musical lines of her voice and piano playing. It was only later that I became aware of the role she played in the Civil Rights Movement. Her 'Young, Gifted and Black' was named the 'National Anthem of Black America'. In her autobiography she writes about this:

"[T]he news that really made me glow was that (...) 'Young, Gifted and Black' was going to be declared the 'National Anthem of Black America'. I wasn't in the movement for personal glory, but this dedication made me very proud because I showed I was succeeding as a protest singer, that I was writing songs people remembered and were inspired by." (Simone, 2003/1991, pp. 108-109)

The lyrics and the song as a whole express hope and pride, without making room for the master narrative and its devastating effect on marginalized groups of people. What is centralized is being young, gifted and black:³



"Young, gifted and black
Oh what a lovely precious dream
To be young, gifted and black
Open your heart to what I mean

In the whole world you know
There's a million boys and girls
Who are young, gifted and black
And that's a fact

'You are young, gifted and black'
We must begin to tell our young
There's a world waiting for you
Yours is the quest that's just begun

When you feelin' really low
Yeah, there's a great truth that you should know
When you're young, gifted and black
Your soul's intact

How to be young, gifted and black?
Oh, how I long to know the truth
There are times when I look back
And I am haunted by my youth

Oh, but my joy of today
Is that we can all be proud to say
'To be young, gifted and black
Is where it's at'

Is where it's at
Is where it's at"
(Simone, 1970)

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"It takes a village to raise a child," a famous African proverb teaches. When my parents unexpectedly became seriously ill at the beginning of this year, my family experienced how much this can also apply to the last years of a person's life. This also applies to a research group: no one can do this alone. And so I would like to say some words of thanks.

With the application for and the establishment of the Social Justice & Equity Research Group, University of Applied Sciences IPABO has indicated that it wishes to make an active contribution to combating inequality in (teacher) education and in society. I would like to thank the Executive Board for this, as well as for the confidence they have placed in me. Also many thanks to the Foundation for the promotion of the interests of Roman Catholic Academic schools in the working area of University of Applied Sciences IPABO that recognizes itself so much in the ambition of University of Applied Sciences IPABO that it has decided to finance the Research Group. Many thanks for this and for the trust placed in the Research Group.

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Anyone who knows you even a little is familiar with your passion for literature and books. Thanks to you I have come to know many authors whose books have become very important to me as well, such as James Baldwin and Toni Morrison. You were also the one who managed to find the first edition of *We Slaves of Suriname* for me (Kom de, 1934). You were the first reader of my speech. Unfortunately, I was unable to include all the ideas that the text evoked in you (such as the threefold feeling of inferiority that Carry van Bruggen experienced: being a woman, Jewish and autodidact; and Paul Célán who spoke of healing the German language raped by the Nazis). During the time of your Hemingway project I was reading *For whom the Bell tolls* along with you, and in it I came across a passage in which the love between people is described in a special way. I quote the passage for you:

..... "What you have with Maria, whether it lasts just through to-day and a part of to-morrow, or whether it lasts for a long life is the most important thing that can happen to a human being. There will always be people who say it does not exist because they cannot have it. But I tell you it is true and that you have it and that you are lucky even if you die to-morrow." (Hemingway, 1946, p. 288)

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