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1. DISRUPTING THE MASTER NARRATIVE: A METHODOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Abstract
As researchers, we are often hardly aware of the influence that generally accepted perceptions and beliefs about proper research have on our research practices. Criteria like generalisability and objectivity are rarely questioned, and can be considered part of the methodological master narrative we all live with. This methodological master narrative is very powerful: it excludes both groups of people and forms of knowledge by defining what may pass for scientific research and what may not; what is true and real knowledge and what is not; what the role of the researcher and the so-called participants may be. In this way, dominant methodologies privilege certain ideas, experiences and groups of people while silencing other(s).
Therefore, this paper explores 'methodological counternarratives' that seek to do justice to marginalized voices in teacher education. In this exploration, we are informed and inspired by a form of research that explicitly addresses power and power relations: critical autoethnography (CAE). Critical autoethnographers acknowledge the inevitable privileges they experience alongside marginalization, and take responsibility for their subjective gaze through reflexivity. This form of research is expressly aimed at disrupting the dominant narrative and promoting social justice.
After an outline of what can be understood by CAE, this paper describes some concrete examples from our own research practices as a social justice-oriented education research group in which forms of CAE have supported us in the choices we made during the research process. These examples address issues like insider knowledge, stories and storytelling, positionality and commitment, and personal experiences.

Key words / phrases: *Social Justice; Methodology; Critical autoethnography*

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Disrupting the master narrative: a methodological exploration of educational research for social justice
Monique Leijgraaf

Introduction
"It's lovely, but how are you going to make science out of this?!" The people to whom my colleague Nina Hosseini and I had presented our social justice-focused teacher education and qualitative research looked at us with confusion. They were impressed by the stories we had been telling them, but how do you turn stories into academic papers?

In another project in which I am actively involved and also participate as a researcher, I encountered a similar confusion. With concern, one of the partners in the project asked me about my active participation in the project: wasn't that at odds with my role as a researcher? As a researcher, wasn't I supposed to keep my distance?
In the process of supervising the research activities of our undergraduate students, I noticed that my fellow teacher educators and researchers had various opinions about the narrative voice students can best choose when writing a research article, with some colleagues explicitly advising against using the first person ('I').
These three small examples all reflect certain ideas and assumptions of what constitutes a good research project: good research strives for making generalisable statements instead of telling individual and personal stories; the researcher takes as objective a stance as possible within the situation being researched; and speaks in publications not from a subjective 'I' but from a more objective and distanced third person.
The criteria of generalisability and objectivity expressed in the three examples, could be complemented by other generally accepted criteria for good research, such as reliability, reproducibility and validity (Bochner, 2000; Leijgraaf, 2019). Moreover, as researchers, we are also often faced with established ideas about the form in which our research has to be represented in academic papers: a good academic paper consists of an introduction, literature review, method section, findings and discussion (Tony Adams, personal communication, July 2023).
All these criteria are part of what I would like to call here the methodological master narrative: academia's and society's generally accepted perceptions and beliefs of proper research methods and practices. In this paper, I want to explore ways in which this methodological master narrative can be disrupted in order to do more justice to marginalised voices in teacher education and educational research. More specifically, I want to explore how a disruption of the methodological master narrative in educational research can be inspired and informed by a form of research that explicitly addresses power and power relations: critical autoethnography. This form of research is expressly aimed at disrupting the dominant narrative and promoting social justice (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021). Before turning to critical autoethnography, I will first say something about the term master narrative, counternarratives and my own positionality within social justice-focused educational research.

Master narrative

The term 'master narrative' that I am using here, is derived from the work and thought of Toni Morrison (1931-2019). In an earlier publication (Leijgraaf, 2022), I introduced this term with a reference to Toni Morrison's debut novel *The bluest eye* (first published in 1970). This story is about a black girl named Pecola Breedlove, who discovers that all the world had agreed "that the blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl treasured" (Morrison, 2022, p. 18). Pecola is surrounded by a society that appreciates and privileges blond, blue-eyed children over children who cannot live up to this standard. 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.

In an interview with Bill Moyers in 1990, Toni Morrison links Pecola's desire for blue eyes with the master narrative:

> "MORRISON: She [Pecola Breedlove – ML] surrendered completely to the so-called master narrative.
> MOYERS: To?
> MORRISON: The master narrative, I mean, the whole notion of what is ugliness, what is worthlessness, what is contempt. She got it from her family, she got it from school, she got it from the movies, she got it everywhere.
> MOYERS: The master narrative. What is — that's life?
> MORRISON: No, it's white male life. The master narrative is whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else. The master fiction. History. It has a certain point of view. So, when these 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'" (Morrison, 1990; 2020, pp. 35-36).

Toni Morrison's choice of words indicates that power plays an important role in the master narrative. She defines the master narrative as an ideological script imposed on society by people who have the power to do so. Now, the impression might arise that this imposition happens very consciously and visibly, but that does not have to be the case. The tricky thing about the master narrative is that the people who live with the master narrative (whether they suffer or benefit from it) are barely aware of the existence of the master narrative and hardly realise the impact the master narrative has on their thinking, feeling and (re)acting. The master narrative is nowhere explicitly written down, but exists in people's minds and beliefs and has deep roots in the past.

By defining what is considered 'normal' within a society, the master narrative simultaneously marginalises anyone who diverges from this unspoken norm. The master narrative marginalises and oppresses groups of people on the basis of, for example, sexuality, gender, race, skin colour, disability or illness, socio-economic position, citizenship status, cultural capital, religion, nationality and age. It is important to note that people usually do not experience (dis)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; Lorde, 2007; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1994; Wekker, 2016; Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2020). For instance, Pecola Breedlove experiences disadvantage not only because of her race, but on the basis of an interplay of at least race, colour, class, gender and sexuality.

At the same time, it should be noted that the master narrative tells 'monovocal' stories about the groups it marginalises: it essentialises and wipes out the complexities and richness of those groups and engenders stereotyping (Montecinos, 1995 in: Solórzano & Yosso, 2016). While it privileges Whites, men, abled people, documented citizens, the upper class, heterosexuals and/or cisgenders by labelling these factors as natural or the norm, it distorts and silences experiences of marginalised groups. The discourse of the master narrative pretends to be neutral and objective, but is full of negative stereotypes about, for example, people of colour, working-class people and/or people living in poverty (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016).

Counternarratives
An important 'weapon' within the battle against the master narrative is formed by counternarratives. Within international literature, working with or creating counternarratives is regarded as an important strategy for social justice-oriented teacher education (Hosseini et al., 2021a; 2021b; in preparation). Counternarratives give shape to the voices that are systematically oppressed, suppressed and made invisible (Ellison, 1982) by the master narrative. In Critical Race Theory in particular, counternarratives play an important role (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023): stories of people whose experiences are not often heard and that interrupt the dominance of the frequently heard. For instance, Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso define the counternarrative or the counter-story as a method of telling the stories of racially marginalised people whose experiences are not often told and heard, and consider telling counternarratives as a form of resistance:

> "The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. Yet, counter-stories need not be created only as a direct response to majoritarian stories. As Ikemoto (1997) reminds us, 'By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse' (p. 136). Indeed, within the histories and lives of people of color, there are numerous unheard counter-stories. Storytelling and counter-storytelling these experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016, p. 32).

Our exploration of the concept of counternarratives can be informed from postcolonial and decolonising perspectives as well (Young, 2020). For instance, Salman Rushdie coined the often quoted term 'writing back' to refer to postcolonial voices responding by writing back to the literary canon of the colonial centre. He urges the decolonisation of language and literature, so that the master narrative no longer dominates the discourse (Rushdie, 1982 – see also Leijgraaf, 2022).
Unfortunately, we should also note here that counternarratives do not automatically have the power to destroy the master narrative. For example, Toni Morisson notes in *Playing in the dark*, her personal inquiry into the significance of African-Americans in American literature, that slave narratives (in which unlike the master narrative was not spoken *for* or *of* Africans and their descendants but *by* them) did not instantly deprive the master narrative of its power:

> "Whatever popularity the slave narratives had – and they influenced abolitionists and converted antiabolitionists – the slave's own narrative, while freeing the narrator in many ways, did not destroy the master narrative. The master narrative could make any number of adjustments to keep itself intact" (Morrison, 1992, pp. 50-51).

Despite this, counternarratives do have the power to at least disrupt the master narrative. And therefore they need to be told and listened to; they need a stage.

Methodological master narrative
Research methodologies can also be dominated, unconsciously or not, by a master narrative. The three examples at the beginning of this paper illustrate, I believe, the extent to which certain generally accepted beliefs and assumptions about good research unconsciously influence our thinking about research. The quest for generalizable statements (or perhaps

even theories) and for objectivity that speak from the examples reveal how positivist views permeate our conceptions of not only the natural but also social sciences. Besides positivist traces, numerous colonial pitfalls and dangers lurk on our qualitative research today.

Jennifer Esposito and Venus Evans-Winters (2022) associate the first and traditional period of qualitative research (1900-1950) with positivist paradigms linked to colonialism:

> "The purpose of research was to justify and learn how to colonize better and more efficiently. Indeed, all research was a colonial project that relied on a deficit notion of the *Other* or the *Savage* (Bishop, 1998; Smith et al., 2002). Research became the groundwork for reporting and representing this Other and was intimately linked to the colonial project that sought to dominate and control. As Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) argued, 'as agents of colonial power, Western scientists discovered, extracted, appropriated, commodified, and distributed knowledge about the indigenous other' (p. 5). In no uncertain terms, anthropology was an agent of Western domination. Falling under the positivist science paradigm, the white European colonizer anthropologist claimed to offer the scientific world valid, reliable, and objective firsthand accounts of his experiences in the field" (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022, pp. 8-9).

Jennifer Esposito and Venus Evans-Winters note that residual effects of these positivist colonial views are still very much present in qualitative research. In the same vein, I would like to argue that positivism and coloniality (Dzodan, 2019) are part of what may be called the methodological master narrative. To me (as to others), it is painful that, like society's master narrative, this methodological master narrative also reproduces unequal structures and exclusion: it excludes both groups of people and forms of knowledge by defining what may pass for scientific research and what may not; what is true and real knowledge and what is not (Collins, 2000); what may be the role of the researcher and the so-called participants. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, creating methodological counternarratives is of great importance.

Positionality and commitment

Before turning to the exploration of critical autoethnography as an inspiration to disrupt the methodological master narrative in educational research, a few words about my own positionality and commitment (Morsi, 2022) regarding the master narrative, privilege and disadvantage. First of all, I acknowledge the privileges I have as a white, highly educated, documented, abled citizen in the Netherlands. At the same time: I experience certain disadvantages as well being a woman, being a first generation college student and coming from a somewhat crazy 'in-between' position when it comes to class and socio-economic status.

Having said this, I feel personally and professionally strongly committed to the struggle for a more socially just society and (teacher) education. In my work as a researcher and teacher educator, I hope to contribute to disrupting the master narrative and halting the often unconscious and unintentional continuation of unequal structures. Especially because of my privileged position, I want to take responsibility and contribute to ensuring that promoting social justice is not made the responsibility of those who have been forced into marginalised positions by our society and education system (Leijgraaf, 2022).

Critical Auto-Ethno-Graphy

As indicated earlier, in this paper I want to explore how forms of critical autoethnography (hereafter referred to as CAE) can contribute to breaking the methodological master narrative in educational research for social justice and creating methodological counternarratives. To this end, in this section I will first outline what can be understood by CAE.
Following Tony Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis (Adams et al., 2022; Tony Adams, personal communication, June 2023) I will start by unravelling the three characteristics or activities that are all conditional for a study to be called autoethnographic: the 'auto-,' the '-ethno-,' and the '-graphy'. Likewise, I will address the adjective 'critical' (Figure one).

Defining critical autoethnography	
'auto-'	• foregrounds the researcher's own lived experiences • demonstrates an insider perspective • unlocks access to otherwise unknown experiences and sense making • not objectivity but positionality • tries to avoid the danger of othering people
'-ethno-'	• refers to society, culture, community (including theoretical insights and existing research) • connects personal experiences (the 'auto-') with cultural experiences and social happenings • values fieldwork (like ethnographers)
'-graphy'	• art and craft of representation as a core component of research • no 'objective,' detached, and all-knowing papers but engaging and evocative representations • has storytelling at its heart, possibly using composite characters • 'writing as inquiry'
critical	• explicitly concerned with power and power relations • putting critical social theory into action through storytelling • aims at promoting social justice

Figure 1: defining critical autoethnography

The 'auto-' of critical autoethnography
The *'auto-'* relates to the researcher's own lived experiences:

> "We share intimate and vulnerable experiences that sometimes bring forth shame or sorrow; experiences and situations that shaped us and these events; and moments that

> motivated joy, confusion, conflict, grief, passion, and possibly trauma. We tell about these events and feelings to show how we and others with whom we interact might make sense of a life, disrupt unnecessary silences about uncomfortable issues, and reveal stories that haven't been told before (or told well). We hope these stories challenge institutional and insidious ideas and practices, as well as offer lessons about making do, getting by, and living our best lives" (Adams et al., 2022, p. 3).

While not all autoethnographic projects should aim to break the dominant narrative (far from it!), certain personal experiences can be identified that may lead to powerful counternarratives. For example, experiences of people who are not or 'mono-vocally' and stereotypically represented in existing research. Especially when the researcher can demonstrate an insider perspective on a marginalised situation, that researcher can unlock access to experiences and sense making that would otherwise remain unknown (loosely based on personal communication with Tony Adams, July 2023).

By foregrounding the researcher's personal experiences and reflections, autoethnographic studies break with the positivist's and colonial strive for objectivity: "There is no 'neutral' or 'objective' stance from which to view human social phenomena" (Poulos, 2013, p. 39). By making the researcher's experience central and crucial to the research, autoethnography chooses a radically different path on which the researcher's positionality is not only accepted but also embraced and required (Adams et al., 2022). This embracing of our positionality, however, can reveal that we sometimes cannot escape the oppressive aspects that our positionality entails. Whether we like it or not: we sometimes do conform to oppressive processes as a researcher. György Mészáros argues for openness and transparencies in case of inevitable conformation with oppressive structures:

> "Conforming is not totally avoidable, and we cannot get rid of our socioeconomic conditions and situatedness. What we can do is to make this conforming visible. With our reflective writing, we can unmask and denounce the exploitative and oppressive processes we conform to, and at least in this way we may contribute to the struggle against them" (Mészáros, 2015, p. 718).

This autoethnographic path also (thankfully) complicates the pitfall of doing research *for* 'others' and thereby othering people: in autoethnographic research, the researchers are always part of what is being researched, and there is always something at stake for the researchers themselves. Especially from a social justice perspective, this is a very important premise. Doing research *for* 'others' entails that the researcher would be the outsider analysing the lives of 'others' (cf. Toni Morrison's remark that the master narrative speaks *for* or *of* marginalized people) in order to tell those 'others' from a so called objective outsider position what would be better for them. But emancipation or liberation is not something that someone (being an academic or not) can realize for 'others': emancipation or liberation can only be realized by people themselves, with each other. Therefore, social justice-oriented educational researchers can never function as 'objective outsiders' who mine and analyse 'other' people's experiences in order to show them their path to emancipation. Instead, together with the research participants, the researchers (try to) find, create and walk together the path to emancipation and liberation. By making their own experiences a core element of their research and embracing at least a partial insider

perspective (like autoethnographers do), educational researchers for social justice include themselves in the practices being explored and challenged.

The '-ethno-' of critical autoethnography
It is a misunderstanding to think that the mere use of personal experiences automatically makes a project an autoethnographic project. Autoethnographers tell their personal stories to describe and also critique cultural life, expectations, beliefs, practices, values and identities. That is the '-ethno-' part of autoethnography (Adams et al., 2022). The '-ethno-' refers to culture, society, community groups, cultural life, and patterns of behaviour. This is the part that pushes the researchers outside of and beyond themselves (Adams & Herrmann, 2023). To put it differently, the '-ethno-' is the component where the culture (including theoretical insights and existing research) and the personal (the 'auto-') connect:

> "At its core, autoethnography embraces how personal experience is infused with cultural norms and expectations, and autoethnographers engage in rigorous self-refection – often referred to as 'reflexivity' – in order to identify and interrogate the intersections between self and social life. (…) [A]utoethnography brings together the personal and the cultural. If a project does not engage ethnographic techniques, ask questions of culture, and/or provide an understanding of social life, then the project may not fit the definition of autoethnography" (Adams et al., 2022, p. 3).

Like ethnographers, autoethnographers value fieldwork: taking fieldnotes in natural settings, conducting formal or informal interviews, including unsolicited and informal conversations with others and other everyday experiences, doing archival research, engaging extant theories and research as well as popular cultural artifacts (like movies, novels, news reports, social media), et cetera (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018).
It is a false assumption people sometimes have that autoethnographic researchers would be solely focused on themselves. Whereas Ronald Pelias (2014) refutes the accusation of navel-gazing by pointing out that his navel (the 'auto-') quickly leads him to other people, the '-ethno-' component of CAE (society, culture, community) makes the accusation of navel-gazing untenable. Good autoethnography includes the voices of others (Tony Adams, personal communication, July 2023). As a strong example of this, I would like to mention *Sweetwater* (Boylorn, 2017), in which Robin Boylorn gives an autoethnographic account of black women from the community in the rural South where she grew up as a child, and in which she connects her own experiences with many of the stories that she learned from her female family members and other women of the community. As a powerful example of an autoethnographic project where the included voices of others consist of scholarly works and researched data, I would like to refer to Shelly Carter's first person account of a woman living in an abusive relationship (2002). By dividing the text into two columns (one for academic discourse [the '-ethno-'] and one for the journal she kept during her abusive relationship [the 'auto-']), Sheila Carter literally juxtaposes experiences of abuse against information derived from research literature. Doing so, she questions the so called objectivity in scholarship and brings her own voice to what academic research has written about women in abusive situations.

The '-graphy' of critical autoethnography

Similar to ethnography, autoethnography includes the art and craft of representation as a core component of its research:

> "In addition to the auto and the ethno, autoethnographers take the craft of representation— the 'graphy'— seriously. Good life writing *and* good ethnography,
>
> both of which comprise the core of autoethnography, offer compelling and insightful accounts of personal/cultural experience; as authors of successful texts/performances/digital works, we rarely present ourselves as 'objective,' detached, and all- knowing, and we work hard to make engaging and evocative projects" (Adams et al., 2022, p. 3).

In her paper on writing as inquiry, Laurel Richardson confesses that for 30 years, she has abandoned countless qualitative studies only half-read, half-scanned because she found the texts boring and passive voiced (Richardson, 2000). In her search for possible causes for the boredom of many qualitative studies, she actually stumbles upon a kind of master narrative that dominates our thinking about research and writing, and which has its roots in the 19th century. The master narrative namely that, as a researcher, you do not write because you want to find something out or learn something that you did not know before you wrote it; but that you start writing only when you know exactly what you want to write and when your points are carefully organised and outlined. Problematic with this model, in Richardson's view, is that it ignores the role of writing as a dynamic, creative process and that it requires writers/researchers to silence their voice and to consider themselves as contaminants.

Against this dominant idea, Richardson posits the idea of writing as inquiry and writing as methodology, an idea taken a step further by Julia Colyar who suggests including a subsection on the writing process when we describe our methods (Colyar, 2009).

Creating and telling compelling tales can take many forms within CAE, both textual and non-textual. In the before mentioned book *Sweetwater*, Robyn Boylorn chose to work with composite characters, which allowed her "to tell stories without attributing them to individual women" (Boylorn, 2017, pp. 188-189). She also included poetry into her work. Apart from textual representations, autoethnographic projects are also presented in forms such as performance, music, dance, video and film, and photography.

The adjective 'critical' in critical autoethnography

The adjective 'critical' indicates that CAE is explicitly concerned with power (relations) and values marginalised identities, experiences and knowledges:

> "[W]here some autoethnographies might provide rich and detailed descriptions of cultures through the lens of personal experience, critical autoethnographies work to bring attention to the ways cultures are created and compromised through institutional, political, social, and interpersonal relations of power. That is, they focus on how experiences within cultures are enlarged and/ or constrained by relations of power. Critical autoethnographers view their work as a means of pointing out the *politics* of their positioning, explicitly acknowledging the inevitable

> privileges and marginalizations they experience and the 'responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain,' including the practices of research itself (Madison, 2012, p. 5)" (Holman Jones, 2018, p. 5).

Critical autoethnographers recognise the privileges they experience alongside marginalisation and take responsibility for their subjective gaze through reflexivity and their critical stance towards their intersectional positionings (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021).

Stacy Holman Jones (2018) identifies three interwoven goals of critical autoethnography. Firstly, the 'diagnostic' goal to examine systems that privilege some people and marginalise others. Secondly, to mobilize and develop explanatory frameworks that critical theory provides us – like Black feminist thought, queer theory, materialist and new materialist critiques – by putting that theory into action through storytelling. Thirdly, to build new knowledge about the social world in order to stimulate new practices. These three goals demonstrate how forms of CAE are explicitly aimed at identifying and disrupting the master narrative in order to promote social justice.

A book like *Critical Autoethnography – intersecting cultural identities in everyday life*, edited by Robyn Boylorn and Mark Orbe (2021), can be seen as an illustration of the many forms CAE can take as well as the variety of issues it focuses on. The book approaches CAE "from multiple perspectives and genres, sometimes incorporating traditional scholarship with experimental writing techniques, and other times demonstrating a familiarity with research without explicitly citing it (Ellis & Adams, 2014)" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021, p. 10). In the various chapters, the contributing authors address experiences of gender, language, race, ability, citizenship status, sexuality and/or spirituality situated within larger systems of power, privilege and oppression.

It should be noted, however, that the above interpretations of the adjective 'critical' are not considered critical enough from critical-Marxist perspectives. György Mészáros for instance, labels them as 'soft' interpretations of *critical* autoethnography, because they lack "a systemic, dialectical, materialist analysis" (Mészáros, 2017, p. 90). Therefore, as a critical-Marxist educational researcher who advocates CAE, he interprets and analyses his personal experiences in a dialectical, historical materialist way and in doing so demonstrates that CAE "can be epistemologically positioned in Marxist critical theorizing" (just as "Marxist research is rewarded by studying subjectivity" in a CAE way) (Mészáros, 2015, p. 720).

Exploring methodological counternarrative(s)

In this final section, I would like to share some considerations and reflections stemming from our own research practices where we have been informed and inspired by forms of CAE. I want to do this by describing concrete examples from our research practices in which forms of CAE have supported us in the choices we have (had) to make during the research process. I will describe the first five examples in this section; for the remaining examples, I refer to Figure 2.

Examples of how our social justice-oriented educational research experiences support and inspiration from critical autoethnography	
# 1	Critical autoethnography helps us better unravel our research aim
# 2	Critical autoethnography supports us in demonstrating insider knowledge and limitations within existing research
# 3	Critical autoethnography inspires and supports us to value stories and storytelling
# 4	Critical autoethnography enables us to take seriously our own funds of knowledge and identity
# 5	Critical autoethnography backs both our break with the strive for objectivity and our desire to embrace and give clarity about our positionality and commitment as researchers
# 6	Critical autoethnography helps us to take the danger of mining seriously and supports us in our efforts to avoid using other people's experiences for our own benefit
# 7	Critical autoethnography supports our commitment to including other people's voices in a socially just and ethical way, and avoiding othering the people that participate in our research
# 8	Critical autoethnography has a rich and vivid tradition of asking and discussing ethical questions that challenge and stimulate our own ethical reflections (for instance, Carolyne Ellis's reflections on relational ethics [2007])
# 9	Critical autoethnography enables us to include unexpected moments, conversations and experiences we could never prepare for with a formal research protocol
# 10	Critical autoethnography is known for its creative, evocative and accessible forms of representation, which inspired us, for example, to present our research in the form of a performance at a Dutch-Flemish conference for teacher educators (Leijgraaf et al., 2023)

Figure 2: Our social justice-oriented educational research and critical autoethnography

#1: Critical autoethnography helps us better unravel our research aim

As a social justice-oriented education research group, we want to fight structures of inequality in (teacher) education because of the impact they have on people, especially on people from marginalized groups. Therefore, much of our research involves exploring ways in which individuals (including ourselves) respond to and cope with structures of inequality

in society and in the educational system in which they find themselves. What coping strategies do people employ when dealing with unequal power relations in (teacher) education arising from factors such as religion, gender, race, language, class and/or socioeconomic status? How do people face, handle or fight the master narrative?
From the perspective of CAE, our research aim can be seen as a critical connection between the '-ethno-' (namely the structures of inequality in [teacher] education and the master narrative we want to disrupt) and the 'auto-' (namely the experiences of both ourselves and students, [student] teachers, teacher educators, parents and others involved in [teacher] education). This perspective helps us to better and more consciously unravel our research aim. For instance, one of my colleagues and co-researchers named Zena Bani was pretty determined on her research topic: Islamophobia in teacher education. Being a Muslim and a teacher educator, primary school teacher and former student teacher herself, she is unfortunately familiar with many situations within (teacher) education that have to be characterized as Islamophobic. So she knew early on that she wanted to contribute to creating a stage for such experiences of (student) teachers and to fight the Western master narrative that in the end equals Muslims with terrorists. As a research group, we were seeking ways to do that research-wise. CAE helped us to understand this project's research aim as a critical connection between the '-ethno-' (namely the Dutch or Western master narrative about Islam that we want to fight) and the 'auto-' (namely Zena's and other [student] teachers' experiences with Islamophobia in [teacher] education). This insight gave Zena more freedom to design her research project. It made her decide to start by writing down her own personal experiences as a Muslim in the Netherlands and in the Dutch education system; to invite other (student) teachers to tell their own stories and experiences on this topic (the 'auto-'); and to bring these stories in critical connection with theories, existing research and popular cultural artifacts that reflect the topic of Islamophobia (the '-ethno').

#2: Critical autoethnography supports us in demonstrating insider knowledge and limitations within existing research

The opportunity CAE offers to contribute to (a) 'demonstrating insider knowledge' and (b) 'demonstrating limitations within existing research or representation' is another aspect that makes CAE so valuable and inspiring to our research group. We all have various experiences of privilege and disadvantage based on, for example, race, skin colour, disability or illness, socio-economic position, cultural capital, religion, language, nationality, sexuality, gender and/or age. As indicated earlier, Zena (regrettably) has a lot of insider knowledge of her research topic: Islamophobia. Existing research, at best, only investigates Muslims facing experiences of Islamophobia, making this marginalized group the object of study (speaking *for* or *of* them [Morrison, 1992] and making them the Other [Said, 2003]), whereas Zena envisages stories of Islamophobia being told *by* (student) teachers (including herself) who experience it. CAE offers her help and inspiration in this endeavour.
The same can be said for another member of our research group, named Lisanne Plutschouw, whose work as a researcher and teacher educator focuses on multilingualism. Being the partner of an Iraqi Arabic-speaking man with whom she raises their children

multilingually, Lisanne can offer unique, firsthand insights into negative stereotypes about Arabic languages which dominate Dutch culture and society. Arabic, like most other non-Western and Eastern European languages, is considered a subtractive second language in the Netherlands: the language has a lower status in Dutch society than Western second languages such as English and French. Arabic is thought of as a language that can be of hardly any value to children, and education professionals gave Lisanne (thereby excluding her Iraqi Arabic-speaking partner and father of the children) the unsolicited advice not to raise the children bilingually. These experiences, too, are not adequately represented in existing research. By valuing the demonstration of insider knowledge, CAE gives Lisanne the opportunity and freedom to include her own unique experiences in her research project and in doing so, to fill in gaps in existing research.

#3: Critical autoethnography inspires and supports us to value stories and storytelling
Whereas the methodological master narrative generally values generalizable statements and theories over individual and personal stories, CAE inspires and supports us to value stories and storytelling as a core component of our research. It could be argued that CAE rephrases the question of how to turn stories into academic papers to the question of how to make stories the heart of your research project.
This appreciation of stories also encourages us to seek inspiration from scholars and storytellers outside the field of CAE who disrupt the master narrative, like Aminata Cairo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Being a scholar and storyteller, Aminata Cairo makes a case for a storytelling approach to change:

> "Storytelling is not always appreciated or taken seriously. We tell stories to children for entertainment. However, as a part of my heritage, storytelling is also a means to learn your place in the family and affirm your existence in the world as a whole. (…)
> Those with traditions of storytelling believe that stories touch us and affect us on a deep level. (…) Stories can stir something deep within us and plant a seed for change that will sprout when the time is right" (Cairo, 2021, pp. 21-22).

To Aminata Cairo, stories are essential in our pursuit to social justice: stories can stir something in us; they can make us aware of injustices and they can spur us to action and change.
This power of stories and storytelling is also at the heart of the TED-talk by the Nigerian American writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The danger of the single story*:

> "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity" (Adichie, 2009).

Restoring the broken dignity of gifted children and their parents in Amsterdam Nieuw-West – a neighbourhood populated mainly by people from marginalised groups whose families have a history of migration from non-Western countries – could be seen as the drive of our co-researcher and teacher Fatima El Khattabi. Long before our research group existed, she started collecting stories told by gifted children and their parents in this neighbourhood. She herself had also experienced that society assumes that gifted children only live in affluent neighbourhoods and not in deprived neighbourhoods. She noticed that as a result of this

prejudice, gifted children in Amsterdam Nieuw-West were easily labelled with for instance ADHD, and even put on medication, while the real problem was not properly acknowledged: these children are not adequately challenged. Because of her aspiration to disrupt this master narrative about gifted children in neighbourhoods like Amsterdam Nieuw-West, she was very happy to learn that stories and research do not have to exclude each other. She feels supported and inspired by CAE and the opportunities it offers to not just take personal experiences and stories seriously, but also to make them the centre of her research.

#4: Critical autoethnography enables us to take seriously our own funds of knowledge and identity

The methodological master narrative teaches researchers to make rational choices and decisions during the research process, increasing the feasibility for other researchers to replicate the study (including the choices and decisions made during the research process). During a reflective conversation we had as a research group in the context of Nina Hosseini's PhD research, we realized the extent to which this dominant methodological narrative subconsciously controlled our thinking. We were discussing how our existing knowledge (books we had read, documentaries we had seen), issues that mattered to us (such as Nina's housing activism) and people we knew (like Zena's friend Esther Kamara who became a crucial co-researcher) had significantly influenced the research process. Initially, we tended to negatively label this as 'coincidences' that weakened the study. But CAE made us realise that we could also interpret this as the 'auto-' being at work in our choices and decisions as researchers: we were able to design certain research activities because of the books we had read, documentaries we had seen, activist life we lived and friendships we valued. Thanks to CAE, we positively relabelled our choices and decisions during the research process as mobilizing our own funds of knowledge and identity (Moll et al., 1992; Hogg & Volman, 2020).

#5: Critical autoethnography backs both our break with the strive for objectivity and our desire to embrace and give clarity about our positionality and commitment as researchers

> "Twenty-three years ago, I emigrated to the Netherlands as a Canadian. Never was the difference between my country of birth and my new home greater than when, in 1999, I saw a museum announce their new exhibition with a large banner bearing the word 'Eskimos'. Many years earlier, in Canada, I had learned that the term 'Eskimo' was outdated and perhaps even racist. How could it still be in use here in the Netherlands? I was equally perplexed when I came across the term 'Indians' in a textbook [at the primary school where I worked – ML] (…). Had we not long since moved away from such erroneous terms?"

These are the opening words of the bachelor thesis by one of the now graduated student teachers from our research group: Ben McKay. In his thesis, Ben explicitly embraces his positionality as a Canadian immigrant. That positionality helps him unmask the term 'Indians' in the Dutch textbook as Western and colonial and supports his strive to include indigenous voices in both his research and Dutch teaching practices. Although Ben's undergraduate thesis does not pretend to be a CAE project, it is fair to say that the break with

objectivity and embrace of positionality advocated by CAE has given him the freedom to make his own Canadian-Dutch experiences part of his research project.
Hopefully, these examples illustrate the extent to which CAE helps us to critically examine our and other people's experiences with privilege and disadvantage, which hopefully leads to a disruption of the master narrative and powerful counternarratives.

With many thanks to my co-researchers. They consented to be called by their own names in this paper.

Editor's note: *The formatting of the text reflects its content, therefore, it has deliberately been left different from other articles in this volume.*

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