

Conversations Over a Brew

Season 4 Episode 1

Danielle Lewis-Egonu and Sarah Bailey

Transcript

Recorded online on Friday 14th July 2023

N - Nat

D - Danielle

S - Sarah

1:00:23

[INTRO MUSIC]

N - Conversations over a Brew is a series of intimate recorded conversations exploring the stories and ideas of the people we make art with. This podcast is about the power of listening and conversation and how making art can bring us together and create change. In this episode of Conversations Over a Brew, we are joined by Danielle Lewis-Egonu and Sarah Bailey. Danielle is a thought leader with over two decades of experience in education. She is known for her commitment to creating supportive and inclusive school environments where all students are valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. Danielle believes in the value of education as a tool for empowering individuals and promoting social justice. At the time of recording, Danielle was deputy CEO of the Golden Thread Alliance and has since become the CEO of the Cygnus Academies Trust. Sarah is an artist, educator and consultant. Her practice sits at the point where learning, community, childhood and art meets. She is a long term collaborator with Heart of Glass. In 2021, Sarah began working with a group of ten teachers on a project that would become known as Textbook. The first stage of the project produced a pamphlet that playfully and poetically took the traditional idea of an educational text to question the values we want to place at the centre of education. It places a red pen in the hands of learners to write back. Textbook is a long term project that seeks to imagine the future of schools by giving us the space to dream of alternative approaches to learning together. Danielle and Sarah met through the Textbook project. In July 2023, Sarah was invited by Danielle to lead a series of workshops exploring Textbook for early career teachers working in the Golden Thread Alliance schools. The following conversation reflects upon their experience of working together and their passion and hope for schools.

[THE SOUND OF A KETTLE BOILING FADES IN, THE CLICK OF THE SWITCH INDICATING IT IS BOILED, WATER BEING POURED AND THE CLINK OF A TEASPOON STIRRING TEA IN A CUP]

N - Sarah and Danielle, thank you for joining us. We're here today to hear a bit more about what you've been doing this week at the Golden Thread Alliance.

S - So I'm Sara Bailey, all of my work sits in between art and education these days. I kind of wandered around but found myself there. And today I'm here in the context of having worked with Heart of Glass on Textbook. And the last week, we have been at the Golden Thread Alliance talking to early career teachers and this morning, senior leaders of education about some of the like fundamental principles of education and what we're doing, when we're doing this education thing.

D - Hi I'm Danielle Lewis-Egonu, I'm the deputy CEO at the Golden Thread Alliance, and I've been working with Heart of Glass as part of Textbook. So I was involved in the project and also The Talk as well; a resource that Heart of Glass produced.

N - Great. And Sarah for context, could you explain a little bit more about Textbook and perhaps talk about how this project began pre-pandemic and then really kind of came into its own during the pandemic and is now kind of evolved into something else or continued that conversation.

S - So Textbook was quite a simple initiation. So it kind of came out of the end of 2020, I think it was. So we've been, we'd kind of had the lockdown life and we thought we were starting to come out of it. It was a really practical thing about thinking about the forward

direction of Heart of Glass and its work with children and young people and schools. And there've been a few projects and different organisations, it's not a kind of new thing that helps us think about, what children, how children might reshape the world, how children might want work at school to be. And we kind of went "Ah we, we need to have this conversation with some teachers in a way that's more than transactional." So we started the project there. That's where the kind of idea came from. At that point, we thought that the work...we thought that we were coming out of lockdown and then it transpired we didn't. So the project changed shape a few times in response to that. So our hope was that we would be in the space together and do some stuff around reimagining learning spaces and working through environment to get some of those broader principles about education. But actually in the end, we did a lot of chat. We did some drawing as warm up activities and those kind of things to kind of help us reimagine things in a slightly different way, but there was a lot of discussion. Eventually we met in the following summer, which was amazing.

D - Fantastic. I mean, just to jump in, it's been one of the most impactful projects and creative activities I've been involved with in my whole career. It's something I've absolutely fallen in love with and I think the way it's developed organically, what it's become, how it is continuing to grow in so many different ways is something I definitely didn't expect. It was a profound experience of being part of this project from the beginning. Exactly as Sarah said, we were all presuming we were going to come out of this terrible time and then it just kept coming in waves and waves. But it was lovely having these opportunities to keep getting into the 'Why?' I think we're going to talk a lot more about the why as we have this conversation and to speak to other practitioners. Which is again, the whole essence of this creative act was around unifying us and remembering that we're all in this together. But it became for all of us, all of the teachers involved, and I shouldn't really speak for them, but I know that this is what they would express as well, is that it was a really unique point in time, which we thought was going to be a point in time. But actually it's, it's become a lot more than that and it's, and that gives it more and more importance as all of these touch points happen. So, yeah, really, really inspiring project, ongoing project. Maybe that's the wrong word for it, but that's something that's influenced, definitely me and my practice and will continue to influence me and my practice going forward.

S - Yeah, same. Danielle, I feel the same. And I think when we met in Manchester.

D - It's just like old friends.

S - It was both like meeting old friends, but it was also like "Oh gosh, this is, this is a lot, there are a lot of feelings in this room." It was kind of, it was a lot, right? But we had a really nice time. We had some dinner and went to a gallery and that was great. But it felt really important that we meet in real life. So it's good that we're doing it again too and have also worked with Engage together on their programme about Reimagining Schools. Which is a programme that was about rethinking about gallery education. Their remit is broader than that, but a broad discussion about how a gallery and the visual arts works with educational spaces. It was super interesting and everyone in there was so grateful that you were there to talk to. Like, they were like "Ooo we've got a teacher like, ta-da!"

D - And from behind the curtain I came out. I think we talk a lot particularly in these sessions around the high stakes accountability models that we find ourselves in, in education. Of course, we find ourselves in these. But you speak to practitioners and that creativity and collaboration is something that we constantly want, not just in our sector, but

beyond that as well. But we are very cliquey because we're attacked a lot in our profession, so we do close our walls. So when people reach out to us, we're a bit wary. But then once you're in, you're in. And it was great to have that discussion with Engage and to talk about the fact that yes, we definitely want these aspects and all this, this richness in our environments. But we have been a bit battered and bruised within education and we are now only starting to realise the strength of our voice again around saying "Yes," if Ofsted come in or whoever might want to come in through our doors, "this is why we're doing this, this is the impact it's having" and being brave in saying that. Because it's being acknowledged that that's okay. But it hasn't been that way for a very long time. And we can reflect on our own childhoods where there was very, very limited constraints. We were talking about being rolled down a hill in a barrel today. Like, you wouldn't be able to do that. [Laughing] That's all health and safety. But yeah, we've gone, the pendulum has swung really far into high stakes ridgedness, but that's not where we want to be in education. And I think that's the misconception. A lot of things are imposed on us, but people rarely ask us the question, and that's what this is giving us the forum to do.

S - Yeah, and that's interesting because we talked about this this morning as well. Schools are interesting because they make culture and they're also a product of it. So there's a kind of like, there's a kind of loop there. And so there's two things happening. There's awareness of our fundamental values in education and what we want and how we might want to explore, you know, the simple thing of an adult and some children and what happens, what learning is generated, what imagining happens in those spaces. So there's that kind of level. And then there's also like the rest of the world and its expectations and what, what we focus on and what's in charge and how we keep ourself conscious in those spaces. We also had a completely tangential conversation this morning about an abolitionist, who's a really interesting woman who talked about kind of planting seeds for the world that we would like to have rather than and always, always pouring our energy into deficit models of what it is that we don't want. And that can be quite hard to do that, and we sort of have to help each other do it, I think.

N - Would you say that something like Textbook and the Engage Conference has created... It seems like these kind of conversations and these thoughts have been going on for a while. But had there been opportunity from your perspective, Danielle, prior to something like Textbook, to really ask these questions and meet up with your peers and really, I guess, have conversations about what's going on? And whilst Sarah, we talked about Textbook, but I guess for our listeners to clarify some of the questions that were going on within the Textbook conversation. Perhaps you could talk a little bit more about that.

D - So in short answer, no. We are time poor. We are held by very rigid constraints. And it seems like the most simplest thing to put practitioners in a space where they can have a talk without any expectation of an outcome, would happen because of the nature of education. You think about discourse, you think about what education is meant to be, particularly when we are studying ourselves we sit in lecture theatres or we're in seminars and you're meant to have a debate about critical analysis. It's not a natural state for us in our sector because we are, once you're in your setting, you're very much in your setting. And that collaboration is something now that's being put back onto the agenda because it's being seen as such a powerful tool nationally and locally. But no, there isn't opportunities for practitioners to speak in a forum just for the sake of debating or having a discussion without an outcome that needs to be then action planned and put into timeframes. And so when you create those spaces and people then can let their guard down, because they're

not used to that, they see, "Oh, this is so beneficial. I've never experienced this before in a forum where actually we should be doing it on a much more regular basis." We, we, we still are in that kind of cycle of "he said, she said" and "I'm not competing with that person or I'm going to compete with that person." And that's not the nature of, or the essence of what we should be doing. But that's again, like Sarah's saying about the culture around what's around us, it does inform our practice, it informs what we do on a day to day basis because we have to meet certain goals. And that doesn't always leave space unless you're deliberate about it.

S - Yeah. And I'll come onto that before I go back to the questions before about the questions that were in Textbook. But, it's interesting when you listen, when we listen to Danielle speak like that, because there's so many public services we could apply that absence of reflection and the absence of space to become aware together. Which is extremely dehumanising, by the way. So if we are able to find that time to think about the reason why we might be doing something, the answers that we might generate together will be different. But also, and I'm not the only person thinking about this. Again, it's something we talked about a lot. Just staying in the questions a bit longer before we rush to "We've got to do this and this is going to get us here and we're good. We've got this problem. I've got a quick, quick fire go, go." You know, that's like that urgency of fixing and and, and producing energy that maybe, maybe what we need is a bit longer in the question. Because like we were joking before that we were going to start this podcast by saying "We don't know what we're doing." Like, let's be honest about that. Like, I have some, we have some useful ideas I think and we want to talk about them and share them. So, so in that and also, you know, education's a very, again, not on its own, but really political, people use the word football, I'm not sure I'm quite comfortable with that, but it's very political artefact. Exists in that way. And so if we can kind of leave the machinery of it and zoom out into philosophy and value, then we've got space to have a different conversation. It doesn't mean that we can switch off all the conditions straight away, but it does enable us to recenter ourselves. So the questions at the beginning were things like what is a school? What makes a school work? How do those people work together? What's the role of a child? What's the connection? How do we understand school in community and of community? And they're not the only questions. There are other questions. But they seem to be the ones that would initiate interesting discussion.

D - And they did.

S - And they did. Yeah.

N - Perhaps following on from that, Sarah, you could, if you don't mind, tell us a bit more about the workshops you were leading yesterday with the early career teachers.

S - I'll be honest, preparing a workshop for some early careers teachers at the end of summer was a little bit terrifying because they're super tired and haven't got much space and, but Danielle programmed it there and I think was completely right to do it because we kind of landed in a really helpful way together. So we conducted the... I'll just tell you how it was orchestrated, maybe, that's probably a good starting point. So we started by doing some drawing together, which was mostly...although Textbook obviously is very text based, actually when we're meeting new ideas together, sometimes it's a, you know, sometimes it helps us to remove the languages that we're working in because sometimes the languages are full of the things that we're trying to resist or trying to get away from. So we did a bit of drawing. We introduced ourselves and we talked. We thought actually the first, the first

more directed thought was about our favourite place in our school, whether we were in formal education or home education or whatever that was.

D - And I found that was really interesting.

S - Yeah. It's so evocative isn't it? Can you...?

D - Yeah. Because none of the early years, early careers teaches, ECTs that's the acronym ECTs drew anything within a classroom. They didn't talk about maths, they didn't talk about writing. It was being outside, it was playground, it was connection, it was the assembly came up quite a few times and singing together and just their experiences of joy within schools. And it was across the schools range, sorry. It was primary school and secondary school experiences that they reflected on as well, which was really nice. I made an assumption they might automatically go to primary, but they didn't. It was nice to see where their minds went when we gave them that question.

S - Yeah, so that was kind of our arrival. We arrived through that activity together and we connected with people we didn't know very well. So that was also part of opening the space and we were actually really clear in the session that we wouldn't, we would decide at the end what we were going to share from it. So we kind of closed the space and then opened it again, and then we read Textbook and we did it in a really particular way, which other, other people have experimented with. And this actually came, the reason we did it like this is because when we met with some teachers in St Helens a while back, the way that we did it, the way that we read was really interesting and it sort of happened by accident. So we kind of did it. So you wouldn't, you weren't there for that bit, Danielle, but we kind of took that starting point and built on it. So people came up and read to each other. So it was a kind of guided reading and then marked the text wherever they finish, and then the next person kind of picked it up. So it became a group activity. And then as the book was, as the pamphlet unrolled, we kind of added, added the drawing back in from the beginning, and then just to conjure what images were striking to us, where our imaginations were leading us in response to the text. And then we moved on to an old school overhead projector, because I think they are lovely. Although they are, we do have to use them carefully for all sorts of reasons, safety and environmental. So we used them to generate images that people were willing to share with the rest of the group. And then we used those images as a reflection, and then we generated another series of questions that express what those teachers want to inquire about through their practice. Would you say that's right? So we kind of pull those out and reflected on them. And then towards the end of the workshop, which we kind of won't detail, we then talked about as practitioners what they, what they need to do in order to be able to live those inquiries in a way that sustains them and that they can keep going with because it's not necessarily an easy undertaking. And I won't detail those but I would say the most obvious one was about collective, the need for collectivism to do that. Yeah?

D - Yeah. I think it's easy to forget that we were all children. So we had just, we exist as adults, we spend the majority of our life as adults, but then we're all, I'm sure, an age in our heads where we kind of got stuck as we move on, but we forget that we were children. So the style of the workshop, or the format of the workshop I found, was really intuitive to the fact of them being read to, so that was them in their teacher mode, but also listening to Textbook and then, and hearing their little whispers saying, "Oh, I love being read to." and "I love being, and I remember when," because again, it's, it's that playfulness, but also that letting down of their guard of yes we can slip, slip in and out of all different labels. We're

not just one thing we, we transcend and we move around who we are at any given time, sometimes we're a daughter, sometimes we're a teacher, and that comes back to the being human aspect. And I think because of that style and that structure, it continuously helped people let their resistance or guard...not that anyone was resistant, but there's an apprehension, isn't there, about sharing thoughts and feelings sometimes. So them being able to slip in and out of different labels that have gone on us, or roles and go back to, "Oh, I really enjoy this" or "This is something I want to do with other people," was another element of the discussion that I didn't anticipate. And that actually was a real richness because they were having lots of shared new experiences. Some of them had known each other, some of them hadn't in great detail, but they were creating new experiences with each other and connecting through childhood, connecting through now, connecting through what they wanted to do with their careers. So it expanded on so many different levels. And then wanting to draw and to doodle and, and that's okay. And so when they, when the children are doing it are they going to so quickly next time say "Oh no stop doodling." They'll think, "actually doodling is helping them focus. It's okay," and it will inform them going forward. So that longevity of those little whispers that they will take away with them was very apparent. You could see it, you could hear it. They're going to take some of these things into their own personal life, but also into their practice and beyond.

S - The energy when they left was really exciting. It felt really exciting to watch them be up and out, that felt great.

D - Rejuvenated.

N - And will this be recorded and collated in some way to, for these teachers to perhaps reflect back on next year? Or will there be moments created where they can just maybe take stock of the energy they came away with today or yesterday and maybe when they're a bit frazzled at Christmas and it might have gone out the window or something like that?

S - So, yes, things will be shared as a result of this. Some of it we know already, some of it we haven't quite decided yet, but we checked that everyone was happy for us to do that and they are. So we have some principles that are just for them, that the team here are going to collate for them and send to them in a lovely way, which I'm not going to detail because I'm not revealing the secret, but something very nice for them to keep. Which we won't retain because that's for them. And then there's a whole other section of stuff which is quite interesting. The questions and the images that they produced are super interesting for ongoing work. I don't know that I'm, I think you guys want to share them within yourselves and they'll probably attach themselves to this podcast and be useful to illustrate what we're doing. Beyond that, I don't know, I don't know if we know that, and that's okay.

D - It just brought me to a part in Textbook. I was trying to find it. I think it's 20 years or 25 years, she says. But there's an incident or a situation that she observes of a child making this amazing thing out of these random objects and that ability to be creative, stayed with her for 20 years. Sometimes it's not necessarily about recording things in a tactile way. I think for some of those practitioners it will be a point that they will come back to, to reset themselves, to remind themselves. It became quite an emotional, connective environment to be in as well. So I think some of it will just be part of what they will be doing going on into the future because it will be a point for them. That's been a significant one as well, another way of recording it but just for them.

S - Yeah, that's interesting because as we're having that conversation, my eyes have just strayed over to some of the acetates that we've produced, and the one it's fallen on is "What are our universal languages?" And Danielle is an early years professional, which means that she's like top of my list in educators. But we were thinking about, I'm just thinking about what you were saying about how we, what we take from things and that kind of, like, embodied knowledge as much as a physical thing. I think that's really interesting. Just the experience has its own mark, leaves its own mark. So and we were thinking about that in relation to children and also, you know, finding different ways of being with things, how we then understand somebody else's experience, how we give it value, how we allow the value of it to exist, even if it's not the way that we might communicate or the way that we might make memory or the way that we might add value. But allowing that, those different ways in for people seemed important. Anyway, sorry I got slightly distracted, but I felt like it was resonant to the conversation we're having.

N - No, it is yeah, relevant and it resonates. And it circles back to something I'm really interested in exploring in this conversation and also links in with The Talk Learning Resource, Danielle. And that question within the Textbook questions

D - I have to start with the deficit before I discuss the connection, because as a global species, as a country with a massive disconnect. And we can all feel that and we can all articulate it or express that in very different ways. But there is a big disconnect, that there is something societal at the moment where there are high levels of anxiety, mental health, whichever way it's presenting behaviour, people overeating, people under eating, there's there's this whole disconnection with who we are as spiritual beings living in this form. What our connection is with the planet. What our connection is with each other. And we've lost that. We've become very singular and we, because of that disconnect, have become very sick and very ill as a planet, as individuals, as the whole ecosystem. And so therefore we're seeking connection. But we can't articulate that always because we don't have that language, that universal language anymore of something missing, but we can't put our finger on what it is. And so we need these thought leaders, we need these creatives, we need these people in our community to teach us this language again. So when I think about community, I think about the fact that that's just who we are meant to be. That is what's our, what is intrinsic to us all, we are meant to be in groups, we are meant to be together, it is how we survive. We are a community. And we put labels on things because we need to make sense of our world. But a school is no different to an artistic organisation, to a religious organisation, to we are all, have our little pockets of that, but it all comes together as a big puzzle and we cannot exist without each other. But we've made that assumption that we can and that's why we feel so disconnected. So when I think about working and collaborating with others, it makes absolute sense. That there is no reason not to do that because that's the natural state that we're meant to be in, we're meant to have art completely immersed in the school community because the school community is the art community. Our parents, our teachers, our, every existence of what we do in education is linked to something else. We talk about philosophy, we talk about discourse, we've sadly lost that. So we're re-learning what community is. And once people step over that line, because there's fear because we haven't known that for a very long time, once people combat that fear and take that initial step, they realise such huge benefits of it because once you're in there, the world opens to you. So I think the battle is getting people over the line because they're scared and a lot of resistance comes from fear. Fear of the high stakes accountability, fear of the machine, fear of you know "I've got to tick this box or someone's going to get rid of me here or I'm going to get sacked there. I have to do this." And so we've slipped into this culture of fear and isolation and individualism. But it's

completely foreign to us, and that's why we keep getting people battling to come back to community. So the more and more we shout about community and remind people to jump over that line and the more and more people that will do that, they are the advocates, they're the people singing the praises, because once you're in there, you just completely are immersed and feel that warmth. And because the natural place it's where we are meant to be. And that's where that battle is, because we are fighting against everything that's on the news, you know "You've got to vote in this way," "we're all enemies." The argument with this person when there isn't really an argument is just a discussion, it's just a conversation.

S - Yeah. I'm so preoccupied with this question most of the time that I'm finding it a little bit intimidating to know where to start. Everything, everything Danielle just said. If you live in a system long enough that tells you that your value is an achievement or a role, or a...the pressure on you individually will turn you away from community because you, because you've got to survive that pressure. So, you know. It feels like finding ways of connecting that allow us to be in community, in all of ourselves, even when we, especially when we disagree, feels like the work. It feels like, so, so we were talking about one of the questions that arose yesterday, which was kind of difficult was "Why can't you do it?" Which is absolutely about that individualism and the idea of, rather than how can we flourish? How can we be together? How do we resolve? How do we work through to be, to be at the kind of the binary option of win or lose, like that's the ultimate thing. Like. How does anyone thrive in those conditions? Like that's not...is that the truth of many people at all? That's not, that's not really, that's not right, is it? So, you can kind of think about that if we think about community from, community might have different centres, right? So in this context, we're talking about education as part of a community. But if we flip it around and look at it from a family or from a parent or from a child, or how do we reform? How do we get better at difficult conversations, kindly how do we allow difference? How do we? They're the, they're the questions I think we're both really...

D - Compassion.

S - Compassion, yeah, we're both really...and assumption that someone's doing their best, man. Like there's a really simple thing of like "I don't know what happened to you on the way here this morning. I don't know what you bring. I don't know how you've arrived in this moment, so..."

D - You talking about that brings me back to one the other ones about breaking the cycle.

S - Oh, yeah. That's really important Danielle.

D - What people bring. And I know that in lots of conversations I have with people around those challenging conversations, it's sometimes taking your own emotion out of it. It's not an attack on you. We just don't know what people bring. And that could be parents, it could be children, it could be your colleague. What people are bringing. So sometimes, well, not sometimes all the time if you approach it with compassion what have you got to lose? Maybe someone might shout at you, okay, we can get over that. But, you know, compassion is where you start. And it's very difficult for someone to come into that with their energy and not eventually fold into that compassion, because actually you're coming from a place of trying to understand. You may not understand it, you may not be looking for the resolution, but you're coming into that from the approach of compassion. And a lot of times leaders don't feel like that, that's, that's what's expected that they can do that. You

can come in. You've got to be firm. You've got to be this way. But actually, who said that? Who said you have to be this way? Has that worked for those people? Have they had long and happy lives in their community? Or have they done that to get to a certain means to an end? Has that been fulfilling? Have they had the result they anticipated from that? But you have to be secure in yourself to a certain extent to be that way, and you have to be brave and you shouldn't have to be brave to be compassionate. But in the world which can be quite hostile, you do have to be brave to be a compassionate leader.

S - Which goes around to who's with you, like what's around you. You know, it's also making me think about the conversation we had yesterday about different types of energy and to know when to be in flow and when to contain and the rhythm of that within a group like..."How do I contain what's happening here, How do we allow it to flow? What's the responsibility of that?" And it's nuanced and it's easy to get wrong as well. Like so, so..

D - It's also easy to say "You know what I got that wrong" like we were talking about with a child. Sometimes you say "You know what? I did the whole lesson wrong."

S - "Yeah, sorry about that."

D - "Let's go back to the beginning." And the children are so forgiving and the same if you say it to adults "I got that wrong, you know, can we try that again?" People can be forgiving.

S - Yeah, And sometimes it's not even about getting it wrong, but it's like, one of your colleagues this morning who I really appreciated, talked about awareness and the power of awareness when you're working in a context where you can't change the things that you would like to change within your sphere of influence, but you can change some things. But the awareness of what you can't change is important because it allows you to act more consciously and more like present, be more present real with who's there.

[A BRIEF RELAXING AND SOOTHING MUSICAL INTERLUDE PLAYS, SIGNIFYING A BREAK.]

S - What are you hearing from us?

N - I'm hearing that it's as simple as and as complicated as creating the conditions where compassion can take hold. And the current system doesn't allow for compassion or it doesn't teach people that compassion can take place.

S - I would say what it does is it doesn't centre it. So, it doesn't, it doesn't know that it has to be central. It kind of and it's, you know, it often feels like it's about worry like...So the thing about avoiding being divided, how can we avoid being divided by our circumstances is really interesting because there's different ways of reading that. And sometimes that energy can go into a very adrenalized "I'm not going to be defined by my circumstances. I'm going to do this." This kind of like dogged social mobility. "I'm going to do it, I'm going to prove myself." And it's like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, right, okay. No, no, maybe not." Maybe there are other ways of doing that. That aren't so, like...

D - On a mission.

S - Yeah, that's a lot for a person. So. So yeah, it's about how we're centering compassion rather than centering what we've got... Your colleague before he left, spoke really generously about what he's charged with within his work and acknowledging what he doesn't focus on because he's got responsibilities to meet. He's a great guy. He's really centred on children, he's really interested in that, like, it's in his body. But, and he's acknowledging, "Oh, I've got to, go to..." You know, the world has told him he's got to prioritise certain things, right?

D - Oh yeah, he's amazing. Yeah.

S - So. So we have to know that that's happening and it doesn't mean... I'm not an anarchist, right? So I'm not, I'm not going, like "Argh, Grrr." I'm not doing that, but what I'm saying is let's know, so that we can work with sensitivity and awareness and consciousness about what's, what's in the space with us. I guess.

D - We're realistic. We're realistic. It's about balance. I always, one of the things I say is about the balance around not going too far in one way, completely academic, not going too far one way, completely pastoral. You want to be somewhere in the middle where...and that is the battle. The battle is getting people over that initial line about coming into community and within an educational environment, not letting it swing too far in one way because it completely changes the feel of a school. You do feel...I don't know how to articulate it, but you do when you walk into a school building, you can sense, "Okay, we're too far in academics or gone too far in pastoral and these children aren't getting what they need to give them those opportunities to move maybe out of their circumstances, or to move into these wonderful spaces that are available to them. But it is that struggle that is for many in the sector who are, we have so many fantastic practitioners and leaders, that is the gruelling aspect of the role because the amount of energy is to maintain that, when you've got people knocking at your door and all of these other things outside of your organisation pressure on you to be a certain way sometimes. So again, it's about coming back to leaders who have the most influence in their schools, in their maps, in their organisations and empowering them and supporting them. Talking about that practitioner, of course, there is all these constraints and restrictions that we have to be aware of those and acknowledge that because that doesn't go away and they have huge implications if we don't do certain things, but it's also supporting them so where they do have those windows of opportunity to take them and run with them completely because they have that backing, that support, those organisations, those people that they can like with and say "Actually I have this bit of pocket that I actually do want to prioritise for here." And that has such a wide reaching impact because it does. It doesn't have to be, people sometimes think too big. We were talking about the deficit model, people think they have to destroy in order to create. Sometimes you can just plant a new seed and start from there and never underestimating the power of that one seed.

S - And also understanding that we especially, we talked a little bit about when, where the arts and education sectors cross over and when they do. And also understanding that we don't have the same role. So, in my, I am fortunate in that I have the space to ask questions and to be in a broader framework of like "What do I want to explore here? What do I want to uncover? How do I want to challenge and question?" I don't, I'm not a teacher, so I don't, you know. It's okay that we're asking different questions. There's a Venn diagram of things where we can cross over and have a kind of interesting, flourishing, fruitful collaboration. And it doesn't matter if we don't agree on everything or that we've got a different intention or purpose. That's, that's kind of okay. There's enough, there's enough

crossover for us to do that. I think that's important. And I suppose as somebody who's worked in our, in the English context, we often refer to it as cultural education for a long time. It's interesting when we're working in other people's languages and sectors, how much that language influences us at the set of, at the level of purpose and belief and what we think we're here to do. Because for me, if we're in the process of making art of any kind, there's a kind of natural set of questioning and exploration and mirroring and subversion and all of that's in there. So when we're working in schools, we don't lose our...We don't need to...we need to work sensitively, but we don't need to lose all of that juiciness. Like we don't need to. And other people are talking about this. I can't claim this space as my own, but you know, we don't have to reduce everything to a set of outcomes because we think that if we don't, schools won't want to work with us. Like I under...I have worked on programs where I have made that mistake. I own it, right? And maybe it's not a mistake. Maybe at the time it was the right thing to do. And it doesn't feel quite right now. It feels like...allow each thing to be in its integrity and find a place where it crosses over and it's valuable and generative. That sort of feels like a way to do it that I can get onboard with at the moment, although I kind of give myself permission to change my mind about that.

S - It's funny, we were talking...I have a school I work with at the moment, I've been working with them for a little while and they're gorgeous. And we were talking about something where in a room full of people you attend, you tend to attend to where the need is expressing itself. So, or where it's loud, or where there's a strong energy that you need to respond to. And sometimes you can get it if you've got a big group and you kind of get through the session. This happens with adults too actually, this is not the result of children. The moments where I'm the most disappointed in myself and where I feel the most challenged is when I look at someone, a child or a person and go "I'm not giving you any time because I've been completely swallowed up by everything else that's happened in the room." So, yes, if I, if we had the resource to have small groups and, you know, there's always, there are always those moments.

D - But I think it's again, I'm going to keep going back to universal language. Like I was thinking about it yesterday actually, it's so widely embedded. I think it's just having that discussion with schools, with practitioners that we all know that time is the, that commodity that we take for granted that we don't have enough of, we don't know how to use, we don't really understand. And every relationship with every school is different. I can speak more for primary than for secondary, I know secondary well. It's very different in the sector secondaries in primaries. Special schools I would liken probably a bit more to primary in kind of how we approach, but that's not a negative for secondary schools. But we are very much about relationships, we're touchy feely, we want to build a relationship, but there's also an awareness and I think that, that needs to be that not every practitioner understands creativity or art or how, or the process. And some opportunities for that learning, again, it comes down to time and awareness, opportunities for that learning for those practitioners. It's again getting them over that line. If it's something they're afraid of, it's unknown, they're not completely sure of, they're going to be a bit more wary or a bit more apprehensive, and that's not coming from a negative space, they're coming from a space of fearfulness and so that's where the compassion comes back in. I underestimated how beneficial being early years trained was. I was meant to go into secondary school English and ended up in a PGCE early years and I was like, "What is this?" And within a few moments I was like, "I am obsessed and I adore this." But it has given me in my practice and experience such a richness and a foundation of understanding of psychology, development, pedagogy around creativity. That child is the curriculum, that you do not feed ahead of them, you wait for them and you give them time, and it doesn't matter if it takes

the whole year. That is what they need. But that is very rare for leaders. I came to understand that meeting other leaders that had that basis of their training. And again, they're all terrified. The ones that haven't been early years, kind of that, that experience, and "I think it's that place I'm not really sure of, but I know that I need to learn more about." That and inclusion tend to be the two spheres where people are a bit more wary of because if you haven't been in those spheres and worked in that, it can seem like a foreign language. And I again was fortunate that I was in inclusion for many years as well in my career. I was the Inclusion Lead, the Deputy for Inclusion, so that was my role. So having those two elements in my toolkit gave me a rich understanding, and I didn't have that fear of saying, No, no, we need to go at the pace, let that process happen and I know it's, I have faith that it will get here. But some of the support in getting those people over that line into community, into these creative spaces is teaching the practitioners don't...It's, there is an assumption, an assumption about our training, lots of assumption about our training. And it's, it takes a very unique practitioner who goes out and starts doing their own research and their own investigation.

S - That, there's, there's two things in what Danielle's just...because I also have a fondness for early years practice I think it's really interesting, and the two things in it that I think we can learn from in terms of how we connect and how we allow...because we don't we don't find creativity, right? We have it. So we have to allow it. We have to find and make spaces where we can allow it. And so I'm thinking about environments and how we create environments for people. And early years does that in a really child-centred way when it's done well. And if we, if we take out the word child and put in human, how do we have human environments that centre the human that allow, that allow us to develop those capacities and experiences. And the other one is about, which I think is interesting, is about presence. So, my training originally was largely performing arts and when I like it, I don't always like it, when I like it is when it has a really high quality of presence. When it's really something happening in a moment with people in a space. That's really, in fact the teachers reading yesterday had that quality of presence. That's partly what was beautiful about it. So, for me, those are the qualities that, in that way of thinking about what it means to be creative. Environment and presence, there'll be others, but those factors. And also, you know, if we want to imagine, so the connection between education and liberation and freedom and the idea of that is a known one and one that lots of people have talked about over the years. But there's something about imagination in that, in addition to that that seems important because if your language has been occupied by something that you don't want, it's very hard for you to imagine alternatives. So if we can find spaces of creating imagination, maybe that allows us to work out what seeds we want to plant, right? Like, what are the seeds we want to plant here? That seems important. That stuff.

N - Thank you. And I was just thinking about that and some of the things you said, Danielle, some teachers not quite, because of their training, not quite understanding the role of arts and creativity. And then, so I just want to circle back to, because you mentioned The Talk Learning Resource and I know that's something that you've worked with Heart of Glass on. And just for our listeners, The Talk Learning Resource was a resource Heart of Glass developed or produced with the artist Marjorie H. Morgan and it's about teaching racial literacy within schools. And it's a cross curricular resource. And yes, and Danielle, you've been part of that process of piloting it. So perhaps yeah, going back to finding space and making space for these kinds of conversations and to create space for imagination and where new languages can flourish. Is some of that kind of connecting with you within The Talk Learning Resource and this week?

D - I think I recognise my privilege and my position so I can create these spaces. So, but I also remember that I'm a practitioner, I'm a teacher, I will always be a teacher and I find it really difficult to introduce myself as anything else but a teacher, even though that's fundamentally what I am. So I also remember that my colleagues are adults, yes, but we still need to structure that learning for them. And again, people forget that for adults, we forget that it's not a given that everybody has that competence or that competence or that ability or that, that the aptitude at that precise moment in time to deliver something. So you have to give people the space to learn. And we forget that for adults. So with The Talk, of course, is a fantastic resource, but it does tackle some challenging issues and it's a conversation around celebration of, of people from different backgrounds with some of our school communities, because it's very, very different in Kent. Different communities, different pockets, different kind of pressures, different kind of, sometimes not community cohesion. So some teachers and practitioners wouldn't have had experience of maybe addressing any complicated questions that might have come up in those discussions. Even though it's a celebration, there's more that we want to pull out and draw out from the resource as well. So prior to launching the resource, we had meetings together, we talked together, not meetings, but as in a collaborative discussion, how confident are people talking about? So if there's an issue that comes up, can we talk about language? Can we talk about what our concerns are, our fears are? How do we approach this? It's a safe space. Those same things that we do for children, we also need to do for our practitioners to say, it's okay, that maybe having broader discussions from this, because at the times as well we had Child Q that big, serious case review and I was really, of course, you know all of our community were really shocked about that, but also wanted to think about "Okay, what are we doing in our practice? How are we advocating for children from particular backgrounds?" And so on. So there was lots of discussion beforehand and again discussion without necessarily answers. Just let's have a forum that you feel safe in, and then introducing the resource so that the children could then engage with the resource, with the videos, go through the factsheets, have celebrations. Have children saying, "Oh, that's me," you know going into the schools like "We did some learning today." Then they're incorporating that and how it can be not just a one off but embedded practice. And going back to creativity in that way is that yes, don't make the assumption. Creativity isn't something taught. I completely agree. We are born with creativity, but it is taught out of us very quickly depending on the environments and the settings and the families that we are born into. We are naturally, we pick up things as children before we try and eat them, we try and put them on, you know, doodle, we mess, we do, that's what we do. And then we come into a system, in England I can't speak for the rest of the world, that teaches that out of us. It's wrong to doodle, it's wrong to create, it's wrong to mould things. Only in this place can you do it. Only here can do it. And remember, our teachers have gone through that system who've been raised here. So it's really interesting. And the sessions yesterday and today, we have practitioners from other parts of the world and the different questions that they brought into these discussions because they have a very different experience of education, hasn't been taught out of them, but they came to work in the English system they're like "Oh, okay, it's like this here." So when it comes to the language, don't ever presume that everybody's confident with the language and treat them how you, with compassion as you would with your children, with the classes. And when it comes to creativity, don't forget that our systems instructors have taught that out of us. So you come with compassion for the practitioners and the children who've been told, "No, don't do it that way." When actually "You just want me to draw however I want to? I don't have to do this?" So it's, it's that awareness, we keep coming back to that word don't we.

S - Yeah an awareness there of like what the dominant culture is and what we put into a space that that's not of the dominant culture. Really important. So even down to when we are kind of attending to a child's vocabulary and making judgement, value judgements about how many words they should have by a certain age, it's like, is that right? Is that right? Is that where they're from? Like so in cultures where yes and no might not be verbalised there might be, an act- a physical action. We need to have aware-. And you know, the book-, I mean, your-. There's a bookcase outside this room everybody, which is arresting. I can't get past the bookcase. I keep getting stuck at the bookcase. But the books that we choose to read. The time of day that we choose to come to school. What we understand is a parent role. What we understand is a teacher. All of those things are cultural. So we, we have to know what, a colleague of mine described it as like the invisible coat that we're wearing and also the invisible coats around us and in the building, in the fabric of the building, like the invisible buildings around us that we're kind of working within. We have to be as aware of those things as possible and surface them in a way that's right.

D - Yeah, I think when, when approaching schools and educators, it's about building those relationships and kind of gauging where are they at within that journey around language and understanding of creativity and then pitching from there.

S - Yeah, totally. Right. Because you do, because it always exists in context.

D - Yeah.

S - And if we don't, if we don't get that right, that we've ended the conversation before it started.

D - Yeah. It's too scary.

S - Too scary. Yeah.

N - So thank you. We've been chatting for like an hour now. So to round up, thank you very much. What are your closing comments on...? Where you're at, where you're feeling after these two days spent with senior leadership team and the early, early career, ECTs, early career teachers? And, with the Golden Thread Alliance like where you at? What's your kind of your energies, your thoughts?

S - Danielle's just pointed at me.

D - It's a big question I need to sit with that.

S - It's a big question. So I can't, I can't give you the answer. I can give you an answer because I am someone, we are people that require reflection, so we're going to need longer. But off the top of my head, I would say I'm completely preoccupied with ideas of community at the moment. That to me seems to be the most important thing. So it was really great for me when people were talking about assembly yesterday because I'm really interested in ideas of assembly, I think that's really fascinating. So, for me it's how I continue to try and situate this work in, in the idea of community or in an authentic way, in a way that continues to try to build connection, that builds connection in the slow mushroom way rather than via broadcast. That seems really important. Yeah, that's I think I was probably there before, but it's probably just reinforced where I was. You?

D - I think for me it's reinforced again just the ability to, it's not a reset, but it's to pull people together for a moment, just the importance of the moment. So within that we developed a community yesterday, whether that community continues, it will continue in different ways. It's organic, it will change, it will evolve. And it's not for me to know how that will develop. That was the seed. I think it's the, it's the seed. It's creating moments to plant a seed and then allowing it to go off and not necessarily knowing what the outcome will be, but getting a feeling of actually some of those, it will grow but I just don't know how. So I think it's remembering to keep doing that because sometimes again, I get caught up in the machine, but it's important to take the moment to plant the seed.

[OUTRO MUSIC PLAYS AS NAT SAYS THEIR FINAL THANK YOU]

N - Thanks for listening to this episode. Check out the show notes for more information about this project. We will be back again soon with another Conversation over a Brew.

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