I Come From: Using Collaborative Auto/Biographical Poetry to Foster Transdisciplinarity and Build Inclusion

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Abstract
Transdisciplinarity refers to ways of working that bring together people from different backgrounds—academic and nonacademic—to address real-world challenges. This article explores how team members on the IncludeAge project, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, enabled transdisciplinary ways of working to build inclusion in the project, by designing and facilitating a collaborative auto/biography poetry activity for transdisciplinary team members. The article demonstrates the potential for using collaborative creative writing to foster transdisciplinarity and build inclusion within the context of a research project with multiple team members from different backgrounds. The article aims to contribute to methodological discussions on transdisciplinary ways of working in research, particularly with seldom-heard populations, and how creative methods such as auto/biography and collaborative poetry writing may contribute to these.

Keywords
transdisciplinary, inclusion, collaborative writing, auto/biography

Introduction

Transdisciplinarity refers to ways of working that bring together people from different backgrounds, academic and nonacademic, to address real-world challenges (Worosz, 2022). As such, transdisciplinary ways of working require deliberate attention to how team members are being included in processes of research, knowledge inquiry, dissemination, and engagement (Grigorovich et al., 2019). This is especially so for projects that are specifically focused on understanding and enhancing the health, wellbeing, and inclusion of people marginalized by social systems and cultural attitudes (Sixsmith et al., 2021).

This article explores how team members on the IncludeAge project (2022–2026), funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, enabled transdisciplinary ways of working to build inclusion in the project, by designing and facilitating a collaborative auto/biography poetry activity for transdisciplinary team members, which included academics, co-researchers (experts by experience), and third-sector co-applicants. As a project, IncludeAge (www.includeage.co.uk) adopts several auto/biographical qualitative methods to develop understanding and to enhance awareness of experiences of inclusion and exclusion among diverse mid-older (40+) adults in Britain—specifically: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and / or trans (LGBT+) people and people with intellectual

and developmental disabilities (IDD). The team encompasses academics and other experts who may be drawn from these communities themselves and/or whose expertise and commitments are centered on being inclusive toward seldom-heard individuals. Throughout the project, we have sought to ensure that all team members feel part of the work of the project, and that the diversity of team members' backgrounds is considered an asset to knowledge generation.

One of the ways in which we have supported team members to work effectively is to undertake concept workshops, where team members discuss concepts relevant to the project from different angles, such as "inclusion," "participation," "appreciative inquiry,[1]" and "human rights," to produce shared understandings of complex concepts. This article explores how we used a collaborative poetry writing activity, drawing on Dean Atta's (2019/2020) poem, "I come from", to explore team members' diverse backgrounds, motivations, and perspectives regarding inclusion through

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transdisciplinary working. Team members who participated in the workshop encompassed multiple characteristics, including a range of sexualities, gender expressions, ethnic backgrounds, regional affiliations, faiths, professional experiences, and status levels, from more senior to more early career within the organizations our co-applicants work in, such as charities with an LGBT+ or learning disability focus, which map onto the project's main focus. Some team members knew each other prior to IncludeAge, while others came onboard once the project started. Some were employed directly through the project, while others acted as consultants or gave their contribution "in kind." The concept workshop was particularly welcomed by sectoral co-applicants and co-researchers, who tended to value more creative ways to consider what can sometimes seem rather abstract concepts, such as inclusion.

After a brief discussion on the relationship between transdisciplinarity and inclusion in IncludeAge, we then discuss the significance of auto/biography and poetry for building inclusion in research processes. We subsequently outline how we designed and conducted this specific writing activity, before reflecting on the poem individually and considering the limitations and future directions of this activity.

In this article, we fully acknowledge our own intellectual and personal standpoints and how these contributed to the formation of the poem and reflections printed here. As authors, we straddle multiple disciplines: sociology, gerontology, literary studies, urban studies, health sciences, and sexuality studies, as well as different stages of academic career, from postdoctoral level to professor. The article aims to contribute to methodological discussions on transdisciplinary ways of working in research, particularly with seldom-heard populations, and how creative methods such as auto/biography and collaborative poetry writing may contribute to these through encouraging team members to be open with themselves.

Transdisciplinarity and Inclusion in Research

Transdisciplinary working has been seen as a way to address complex and almost intransigent societal challenges or "wicked problems" (Lönngren & Van Poeck, 2021). One such challenge concerns finding solutions to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with people positioned at the margins of society. Discriminatory laws and socio-cultural norms continue to marginalize and exclude disadvantaged and minoritized people from education, health care, housing, employment, and occupation, as well as leisure, entertainment, and community places and spaces (Hebl et al., 2020; Wanka et al., 2019). Transdisciplinary research has been identified as a possible way to generate knowledge

and recommendations to tackle such "wicked problems" (Lönngren & Van Poeck, 2021).

Over the years, different forms of knowledge sharing have developed in research contexts, such as multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity. While ambiguity exists concerning these approaches (including how they are used) and their similarities, some differences can be discerned (Vienni-Baptista et al., 2022). Generally, multidisciplinarity refers to bringing different disciplinary knowledges together in one project or endeavor; there is no requirement to integrate knowledge across disciplines, nor is there a drive to step outside of disciplinary boundaries. In addition, teams tend to work in parallel, with clear task and role definitions, and can do so with minimal communication processes (Körner, 2010). This means that each discipline can work in relative academic isolation from the other toward understanding of the same topic. Conversely, both interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinary teamwork are based on collaboration and open communication. However, while overlapping in complexity, interdisciplinary studies can be theory-driven and reside entirely within the academic sphere, whereas transdisciplinary studies are driven by real-world problems and require the integration of experiential (drawn from lived experience), disciplinary, and applied, sectoral, and practice knowledges united toward a single, shared goal. Further key differences in definition between inter and transdisciplinarity relate to the requirement in transdisciplinarity for a reflexive attitude and close attention to team dynamics. Reflexivity and team dynamics may well occur in interdisciplinary work but are not requirements of the approach (Boger et al., 2017).

Transdisciplinarity involves proactively developing and negotiating a shared vision, aims, and objectives across a diverse range of stakeholders, such as academics, people with lived experience, policymakers and third sector, social and health care practitioners, all with different knowledge bases, expertise, and skills (Wada et al., 2020, 2021). Beyond basic knowledge sharing, which often happens in interdisciplinary work, transdisciplinarity requires the integration of multiple knowledge bases to develop new concepts, models, ways of thinking, and methods (Boger et al., 2017). Such integration supports the innovation process, where new ways of thinking and doing research are built into the research cycle, enabling potential solutions to "wicked problems" that arise through co-creation (Battersby et al., 2017). Embedding innovation requires training and reflexivity (i.e., critical reflection) as integral components of a transdisciplinary approach. Building innovation into the research process in this way facilitates learning about the diverse perspectives of team members, and second, it enables critical reflection on how these varied perspectives can be integrated and applied to address real-world problems.

Transdisciplinarity underpins teamwork on the Include-Age project. IncludeAge works with a diverse range of mid-older people who have experienced historical and current exclusions across the life course, based on either their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, or their IDD, or both. We recognize that positionality in both categories can place people at increased risk of discrimination and stigma. For example, ageism, sexism, and ableism in the context of sexual orientation are not necessarily experienced in isolation but can be experienced as intersecting forms of discrimination, including the impacts of hate, violence, and exclusion in everyday lives, relationships, places, and spaces.

The central aim of IncludeAge is to understand everyday lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion of mid-older LGBT+ people and people with IDD in the places and spaces of their in-person and online communities, to develop potential solutions to enhance inclusion. To do this, the IncludeAge team, comprising members from a range of disciplinary perspectives (sociology, history, psychology, literary studies, health sciences, and communications) and professional backgrounds (third-sector, health and social care, academia, the arts) engaged in a workshop discussion, sharing and integrating their different perspectives on, and assumptions about, the concept of inclusion. The auto/biographical method is situated at the heart of this discussion—and is similarly central to our broader qualitative methods in the project—and helped to develop a sense of inclusion in the project among team members from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Engaging the Auto/Biographical in Research

In many academic settings, "knowledge" is often conceptualized as something objective and detached from individual experiences and emotions. This view tends to overlook the ways in which knowledge is inherently situated, personal, embodied, and socially constructed, shaped by the diverse perspectives, values, and emotions of those who generate it (Brennan & Letherby, 2017; Smith & Watson, 2024). By contrast, auto/biographical approaches in research help enable an in-depth exploration of the interplay between individual experiences, knowledge, and societal influences, while avoiding a simplistic division between "subjective experience" and "objective social structure" (Becker et al., 2023, as cited in Okyerefo, 2023, p. 230). Knowledge generated through auto/biographical representation amounts to critical material for examining the social world and its narrators (Okyerefo, 2023). Auto/biographies, therefore, are not created in isolation but are rooted in complex and interconnected social contexts, rendering them valuable as both methodologies for creating knowledge, and as sources

testifying to such knowledge (Okyerefo, 2023; Stanley, 1993).

In this article, we deliberately use auto-slash-biography and not autobiography to signal that we are not only writing about ourselves ("auto") but also re-writing the biographies of others, including those of the poem co-creators ("biography"). Auto/biography—and auto/ethnography—emphasizes the researcher's dual role in the narrative, engaging with both our own experiences and the experiences of others, blurring the distinction between autobiography and biography (see Makita, 2024; Parsons & Chappell, 2020). In this sense, auto/biographical approaches contribute to the democratization of knowledge co-creation by amplifying marginalized voices and challenging traditional power structures (Foster, 2015; Janesick, 2007; Johnson & Parry, 2022). As a creative process, auto/biography allows individuals to navigate the intersections of their constructed identities, uncovering the unique challenges they face within society (Brewer, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Stanley, 1993).

As such, auto/biographical approaches are useful tools for understanding and promoting inclusion with and for marginalized communities, offering a depth of insight not available through traditional research methods (Moree, 2018). Through collaborative, transdisciplinary, and participatory research methods, marginalized individuals can reclaim agency over their narratives, challenging dominant discourses and shaping the trajectory of inclusion initiatives (Ahmed, 2012). By promoting a sense of ownership and validation of their lived experiences, auto/biographical methodologies can help empower marginalized communities to advocate for their rights and demand systemic reforms (hooks, 1994). However, it is important to recognize that while some marginalized voices may find validation through sharing their stories, others may be ignored, and encounter voyeuristic scrutiny or misinterpretation, particularly if this relates to the telling of sexual stories (Plummer, 1995; Smith & Watson, 2024). Therefore, we must navigate the complexities of eliciting narratives from marginalized individuals or communities with sensitivity (Atkinson, 1997).

The use of auto/biographical poetry in qualitative research has also emerged specifically as a powerful method for both researchers and participants to include personal experiences that may not fit within traditional data frameworks and processes of knowledge generation. Scholars such as Graglia (2008) and Richardson (1994) have demonstrated the efficacy of this approach, whether through standalone poetic compositions or through integration of prose within research papers. This blending of poetic expression with scholarly analysis allows transdisciplinary teams to convey the nuances of lived experiences in a manner that resonates with readers on both emotional and intellectual levels, and which may promote solidarity and collective

action within marginalized or underserved communities (Leavy, 2015; Liamputtong, 2006/2007; Liamputtong & Rice, 2022).

In practical terms, while the use of poetry as a research methodology has predominantly relied on free verse, others, such as Rich Furman (2006, p. 565), have advocated the use of poetic forms, which encourages practitioners to "make specific choices and explore the essence of the experience" being written about in the poem (Parks et al., 2022). Researchers have begun to experiment with diverse poetic forms and techniques to represent and engage with participants and research data. Gannon (2001) has pioneered collective poetry work, employing the collaborative efforts of multiple voices to construct meaning from shared experiences. In addition to these innovative approaches, some scholars have embraced structured poetic forms like tanka or haiku to represent research findings (Furman, 2006). Similarly, Prendergast (2009) notes the integration of poetry as a key component of qualitative research, akin to researchers' fieldnotes, memos, vignettes, or reflective auto/biographical writings, highlighting its potential to deepen engagement with research materials throughout the entire research process.

What We Did

Although not a poem with formal properties in the same way a sonnet or a haiku are poems with formal properties, Dean Atta's (2019/2020) poem, "I come from," is guided by a clear structure designed to elicit auto/biographical reflections. Atta wrote, "I come from" with the intention of using the poem in schools "to model a workshop [. . .] where I get my students to write about where they come from" (Dhaliwal & Atta, 2019, p. 281). Explaining his choice of form, Atta recalls that "rather than say I'm British I say, 'I come from a British passport'" (p. 281). The words "I come from" structure the poem by beginning each sentence with these three words, and then typically balances two juxtaposing images or ideas within a single sentence, such as, in our poem, the line "I come from loneliness and lifelong yearning." The cumulative effect is to evoke a patchwork quilt of objects, people, experiences, or ideas that the composite speaker believes have shaped their sense of self over their life, influencing who they are today. As a poetic form, "I come from" is suited to exploring modes of subjectivity connected to place, people, community, and inclusion. From our perspective, the poem is ideal for collaborative writing exercises where people from different backgrounds aim to foster mutual understanding and inclusivity, each adding their own contribution (Jones & Vytniorgu, 2022).

Since the 1990s, collaborative creative writing has increased in popularity as a pedagogic device but has often been practiced in disciplines such as English studies and composition, where, as Wendy Bishop (1995, p. 55) has observed, the "single authored text is foundational." Collaborative writing challenges this single-author model but can also be practiced in different ways. For example, where some practitioners believe they are implementing co-composing, in fact, they may be limited to side-by-side composing, where authors support "each other in generating individual texts," whereas "co-composing means the process of two or more authors negotiating the construction of a single text"—a difference that echoes the distinction we make above between multidisciplinarity (side-by-side composing) and transdisciplinarity (co-composing) (Jaeger, 2021, p. 180). When "I come from" is typically used as a pedagogic tool—and when I (Richard) have used it myself in undergraduate teaching or in research workshop settings—it has actually involved a two-step process, beginning with side-by-side composing and progressing to co-composing. Broadly speaking, this is the approach we took when creating our "I come from" poem in the context of transdisciplinarity and inclusion.

On December 12, 2023, eleven team members from the IncludeAge project met online for a 2-hour workshop on the concept of inclusion. I led the first exercise, which focused on "I come from," and, as a team, we framed this as an ice-breaker exercise to help facilitate mutual understanding between team members from diverse backgrounds in a way that prompted spontaneous discussion about inclusion, while also providing us with an "output" we could reflect on later. After showing attendees a YouTube video of Atta performing his own "I come from" poem, attendees were asked to use the "I come from" structure to contribute between two and three of their own "I come from sentences" as post-it-notes onto a blank page on webwhiteboard.com. Using this online platform enabled attendees to contribute anonymously, and for everyone to see other people's contributions as they were posted. As attendees were composing side-by-side, I began to collate responses posted on the Web Whiteboard in a Word document as they came in, to begin the process of co-composing and making sense of the poem as a whole. Some attendees contributed only one "I come from" sentence, while others contributed several. Once the workshop was finished, I invited other people into the team who couldn't attend the online session to contribute their own sentences, which I later integrated into the emerging collaborative poem.

Attendees were moved by other people's contributions and could appreciate the way the poem as a whole represented different dimensions of life experience that we all brought to our understanding of inclusion. As one contributor said, the poem "really struck a chord with people" and was "very expressive of ourselves as a group." While the poem is certainly "multi-voiced" and redolent of Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia, which signposts the existence of multiple discourses within a single text or "language," our poem also has a unified quality to it, which was

architected by other people's affirmative responses and co-composing activity (Jaeger, 2021). The poem has since been published on our project website (including an audio-recorded version also on our YouTube channel) and has impacted the wider team by signaling an inclusive attitude toward transdisciplinary and creative ways of thinking together about inclusion. At a recent steering group meeting, for instance, we were able to incorporate a creative discussion around human rights in the project, with the collaborative poem exercise acting as a precedent for such conversations. Moreover, when people outside the project have encountered the poem they have demonstrated an emotional impact and a realization about what can be done within a research project, as well as recognizing the importance of relationships across a project team and how these in themselves are a form of lived inclusion.

The poem we publish here is a more condensed version of the original one produced in the workshop. The flexibility of the "I come from" format means that authors are not beholden to the original order in which lines were contributed during the original writing process. Taking into account the in-workshop discussions and postworkshop contributions, I—as workshop facilitator—took the poem away and re-ordered lines to further emphasize shared aspects of experience and identity through the lens of inclusion, allowing each stanza to embody mutuality and difference in how experiences are lived individually. This re-organization process was also undertaken to protect authors' privacy, especially for those who contributed several sentences, and to prevent others from identifying people based on their contributions. While it could be argued that this re-organization tipped the balance of agency among the team and resulted in the facilitator's imprint being greater than that of other attendees, this is not how the re-organization was experienced. First, as a method, collaborative auto/biographical poetry is flexible enough to welcome revisions which, in the re-ordering of the poem, actually amplify and crystallize the diversity of issues, identities, and backgrounds present, and can minimize the possibility of accidents of erasure caused by logistical unpredictability or technological quirks, especially considering our whiteboard platform. Second, power imbalances were addressed by following the emergent and spontaneous nature of the activity, and being open to the desires of different team members to contribute, no matter where they come from, rather than being planned or ordered from above in a hierarchical way.

The Poem

I come from Jamaican Island

I come from being abandoned in rainforests

I come from home when home was alien.

I come from Shinto shrines

I come from the rolling green hills of The Mid-lands

I come from the stifling middleclass where North and South raged

I come from the low life expectancy north western lands

I come from a rural working class background

I come from Carpathian intuitions that challenge Western gay ideals

I come from smoggieland, where people and poverty

walk hand in hand

I come from coal.

I come from shitty school and didactic learning

Education pitted against Lowry

I come from a childhood lived in fear but a mother trying her best

I come from mam and became mum

I come from trying to fit in at school to being an online influencer

I come from the school of DIY Punk Rock

I come from low educational achievements (but later to academic success).

I come from being bottom, not top

I come from beautiful queer love in a time of AIDS

I come from many dogs and cats and kindness and shame

I come from loneliness and lifelong yearning

I come from the people of the Sun and the corn

I come from appreciation

I come from a life of empowering others

Guiding them through life's transitions and uncertainties

I come from the buzzing world of hi-tech industries,

where innovation meets determination, and ideas take flight.

I come from ambivalence, I come from warmth

I come from withdrawal, I come from success

I come from sadness but also happiness

I come from busy and chaotic

I come from peace and tranquillity

I come from struggle, survival

and the shitshow that

that passes for caring.

I come from standing stones and cairns and ancient rituals

I come from a mind that races, vibrant and untamed,

ADHD, my unique lens, colouring the world in vivid hues.

Neurodiverse, I navigate the waves of thought,

Finding brilliance in the chaos, clarity in the storm.

Walkouts and shutdowns

Bravo, Bravo, Bravo!

I am a tapestry of experiences, woven with dedication and passion.

Reflections on the Poem

Our reflections indicate the kinds of conversation that helped us move between side-by-side composing and co-composing. Although these reflections are offered by only three of the poem's original authors, and from a team member who did not attend the original workshop, we feel that the commentary embodies the multivoiced and heteroglossic atmosphere of the poem itself, allowing each of us to identify with lines that were not our own. In addition to co-composing the poem itself, processes of reading and re-reading a poem, as well as responding to other people's readings, are integral to evoking a co-composed poem from the words on the page, paying attention to language, imagery, voice, and tone (among other features) (Rosenblatt, 2005; Vytniorgu, 2019). As such, what follows are "readings" of the poem as opposed to "analyses," in that they are reflexive about the personal, transactional experience of "making meaning" with texts and the processes that formed these (Rosenblatt, 2005). These reflections help address the aim of the paper by signaling transdisciplinary ways of writing and reading together, to better understand and develop inclusion for seldom-heard populations, especially utilizing auto/biographical approaches.

Meiko

This exercise is a reminder of the power of poetry to express emotions and ideas, in a much freer way than traditional academic writing allows us to. There is a rawness and authenticity to poetry in general, and to our "I come from" poem, in particular, that resonates with me. As I reflect on the collaborative process of co-creating the poem, I am reminded of the transformative power of poetry to transcend language and cultural boundaries and promote dialogue and connection. Stuart Hall (1990) emphasizes that identity is not a fixed, essentialist category but a dynamic process of constant (re)negotiation and representation. This sentiment aligns with the themes of identity and belonging that permeate the poem, as each line serves as a reflection of the multifaceted and changing nature of individual and collective identity.

Upon revisiting the poem, I'm taken by the vibrant imagery that now brings to mind familiar British landscapes and cultural references. There is an emphasis in the poem on "British" geography, cultural heritage, or identity, through evocative imagery: "rolling green hills of the Mid-lands," "low life expectancy northwestern lands," and "smoggieland, where people and poverty walk hand in hand." The prevalence of British imagery is unsurprising given the makeup of the workshop attendees, many of whom hail from the United Kingdom. As such, references to landscapes like the "Mid-lands" and cultural motifs such as the struggles between the North and the South may resonate deeply with the lived experiences of those involved. They also remind me of my own ongoing journey between belonging and alienation, prompting moments of (dis)connection amid cultural diversity and boundaries.

During the workshop, I recall gravitating toward those non-British references that resonated more closely with my own cultural heritage, such as Jamaican landscapes and Shinto rituals. Yet the evoked images, somewhat foreign to me in their cultural specificity, speak of universal themes such as family and childhood, social class struggles, sexuality, and mental health. Through these underlying themes, the poem invites readers from diverse backgrounds to find common ground in the shared experiences of the human condition. They also serve as a reminder of our interconnectedness, transcending cultural differences to explore the universal truths that bind us all together. For instance, the themes of "beautiful queer love," identity, acceptance, and inclusion resonate with individuals from all cultural backgrounds who have experienced a journey of self-discovery and navigated societal norms around love and sexuality.

The last line, "I am a tapestry of experiences, woven with dedication and passion," beautifully encapsulates the essence of the poetry workshop's exploration of identity and inclusion. Like a tapestry, our collective identity is depicted as a complex interweaving of diverse experiences, each thread contributing to the richness and depth of the whole. The use of the metaphor emphasizes the intricate and interconnected nature of human existence, highlighting the ways in which our experiences shape who we are and how we navigate the world. The mention of dedication and passion suggests an active role in the construction of one's identity—an acknowledgment of the agency and intentionality behind the dynamic formation of self. This line also speaks to the resilience that comes from embracing the full range of life's experiences, both triumphs and tribulations, and weaving them together into a meaningful narrative.

Judith

Initially, the creation of the poem was to be an "ice-breaker" to support our research team to feel comfortable to discuss the concept of inclusion in a workshop organized for team

members of the IncludeAge research project. As Principal Investigator of the project, I felt the value of the workshop would lie firmly in helping the team to understand each other's ideas about inclusion. The ice-breaker activities were, for me, a warm-up for the session and important to get us all talking together online (through Microsoft Teams).

I was wrong. To me, the ice-breaker provided a great opportunity for a brief but powerful reflection on my own sense of self and how that plays out in the inclusions and exclusions that have marked my life. In short, they helped me place my own experience in the experiential *and* academic context of inclusion.

Perhaps it's not so surprising that when I read the poem for the first time, I felt the power of self in my expression of "being" but also "emotion," past and also present, relationality and environment. Subsequently, as I have re-read the poem several times, I see much of myself in the people, the things, the places, and spaces that have shaped the lives of my colleagues. I also see more of that sense of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion that the poem springs from.

In the poem, I keenly feel the sense of coming from a family home which is, within the current context of my life, quite alien ("I come from home when home was alien"); interestingly, framing one of the mainstays of my past security and belonging (my working-class family home) as exclusionary to my present lived middle-class reality. As a young scholar, one of my first publications was on the meaning of home (Sixsmith, 1986) as an environment of immense physical, social, and psychological significance. Just as our academic understandings of home have progressed (Kerkezi, 2022), my own transition from family home to homelessness, and then to my current "chosen" home has progressed through a process of psychological alienation without me having noticed it. Therein lies the power of a poem!

Talking of transitions, my journey from being a Northern child with a "mam" to being a parent "mum" ("I come from mam and became mum") co-constructs self with other, in a language steeped in social class, clearly positioning the self in the hierarchies of society. This notion of hierarchy resonates with my past ". . .where people and poverty walk hand in hand," but not in an exclusively negative way. Coming from a world of disadvantage and exclusion, I increasingly recognize the value of the glue that held us "poor people" together with strong bonding ties of similarity and inclusion. In this, I see shades of inclusive social capital (Putnam, 2001) and its dark side of exclusion when people don't quite fit in (Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2017).

The poem also spoke to my inner voice ("I come from a mind that races, vibrant and untamed"). Being diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in my 60s has helped me explain "me" to "myself" and engendered a love of my racing mind and ability to hyper-focus (sometimes!). Coming to terms with the relational difficulties I had as a child through this lens of understanding has

happily settled me into my world of inclusions and exclusions where I can now say: "I am a tapestry of experiences, woven with dedication and passion."

Mei

As a team member who was on maternity leave, I was initially concerned about missing the workshop on inclusion and particularly the ice-breaker session aimed at enhancing our transdisciplinary collaboration through creative writing. However, reading the poem that emerged from that session has been a profoundly inspiring and imaginative experience. It has allowed me to feel a deep sense of connection with my team through these words.

For me, the IncludeAge version of "I come from" is a vivid tapestry of our diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Each line is a testament to the unique life journey each of us has traveled. It beautifully captures an approach I have frequently used throughout my research journey, called Appreciative Inquiry, which focuses on identifying and leveraging the strengths, successes, and potentials within a community or team. This essence of transdisciplinary working, inspired by Appreciative Inquiry, is powerfully reminded here in this creative process by focusing on the positive aspects of our individual and collective stories.

"I come from Jamaican Island / I come from being abandoned in rainforests / I come from home when home was alien." These lines resonate deeply with the principle of recognizing and valuing our origins, no matter how challenging they may have been. Drawing on Appreciative Inquiry, I am reminded of how this approach encourages us to appreciate the best of what is. These lines highlight that our struggles and triumphs are equally important in shaping who we are today. They underscore the importance of understanding and celebrating the diverse paths that have led us to this point.

The poem also reflects the principle of envisioning the future by building on the best of the past. "I come from a life of empowering others / Guiding them through life's transitions and uncertainties." This line speaks to our shared commitment to supporting one another and fostering an environment where everyone can thrive. For example, using transdisciplinary working and drawing on Appreciative Inquiry teaches us to dream and envision the best possible future by leveraging our strengths and successes. This line is a powerful reminder that our work is not just about achieving goals but about lifting each other up and navigating life's complexities together. It highlights our collective potential to create a positive impact by building on our strengths.

The creative and imaginative nature of the poem itself is a testament to the power of artistic expression in team building. Through our collective engagement, we emphasize the importance of collaborative inquiry and co-creation. By

sharing our stories in such a creative format, we have found a way to connect on a deeper level, transcending traditional team-building activities. For example, the verse "I come from a mind that races, vibrant and untamed, / ADHD, my unique lens, colouring the world in vivid hues" acknowledges neurodiversity and celebrates different ways of thinking and perceiving the world. This is incredibly affirming and aligns with the principle of valuing the whole system and appreciating diversity. It highlights our collective strength and the richness that diversity brings to our team.

In hindsight, even though I was not able to contribute to the session itself, reading this poem has helped to make me feel more connected to the team; namely because this creative process embodies the principle of inclusion, emphasizing that multiple voices matter, even for those of us who may not always be able to be immediately present. Engaging with the poem has allowed me to appreciate the richness of our collective experiences and to approach our transdisciplinary work with renewed enthusiasm and creativity, as this was the first truly creative activity to build teamwork for the IncludeAge project. It illustrates the transformative potential of positive storytelling and a shared vision, showing me that, even from a distance, I am part of this journey.

For me, the poem is not only a reflection of where we come from but also a guide toward where we can go together. It aligns with the principles of Appreciative Inquiry by focusing on our strengths and shared aspirations, reminding us that our work is about co-creating an inclusive, innovative, and impactful future.

Richard

I come to this reflection from a different perspective of having arranged and organized the poem we're reflecting on. I know all too well how it could have been different—how the poem we're evoking and responding to might have prompted different patterns of meaning-making (Rosenblatt, 2005). But still, this uncertainty and flexibility is energizing; it prevents us from being too sure about what the poem means, about what it "does."

When I read the poem, I see some things that speak to my experience and some things that touch me but which I recognize are different, even "alien," as the first stanza concludes. I've seen the "rolling green hills," lived with a "mother trying her best," experienced "low educational achievement," and guided others "through life's transitions and uncertainties." I can resonate with other people's battle with the "shitshow that /passes for caring," but I look with envy at those who can find "clarity in the storm." There are "ancient rituals" that beguile, but which also repel me, especially in universities, where hierarchies can stifle transdisciplinary ways of working and where "creative" and people-focused aspects of research projects are feminized or stereotyped as the domain of the less powerful within a research team—"from being bottom, not top," as the poem states (Flynn & Bourelle, 2018).

I am struck by the movement of the poem, from external to internal landscapes, and how some stanzas "run over," not through their syntax (enjambment), but through images and meaning. Coming from "low educational achievement" echoes "being bottom, not top," and "ideas take flight," quite literally, in the stanza that follows this metaphor. These ideas—withdrawal "happiness," "ambivalence"—can seem "busy and chaotic," and "struggle" and "survival" come to the fore in how these ideas are experienced. Having taken flight, these ideas then land in the penultimate stanza and materialize as "standing stones and cairns"—ancient experiences people from diverse backgrounds can claim as their own.

Although it's been a few years since I wrote my PhD and first book on the literary and educational theory of Louise Rosenblatt (2005), I'm still mindful of her emphasis on the poem as an experience that is evoked differently from reading after reading (Vytniorgu, 2019). Even though we co-created this poem and the poem now stands in one particular configuration, successive readings of the poem enable new configurations and new combinations of ideas and responses. This strikes me as particularly inclusive and democratic—writing and reading as a social act (Pradl, 1996). For example, I now notice the way the poem seems to suggest that simply "coming from" somewhere or something doesn't automatically mean belonging to that place, identity, or experience. Clearly, team members acknowledge—and include—elements of their life experience that have helped form who they are today, but which they may exclude as not representing who they are *now*: elements such as "low life expectancy," "poverty," "shame," "fear," "low educational achievements."

The final line of the poem is especially resonant, not just in terms of our team's diversity, but also in relation to constructing "I come from." Rather than a one-off event, the poem is a living "tapestry of experiences, woven with dedication and passion." When I re-read the poem later on in our project, I might find it speaks newly to my evolving understandings of inclusion and transdisciplinarity, revealing fresh but "vivid hues."

Limitations and Future Directions

Of course, Dean Atta's "I come from" poem is just one way of structuring a collaborative and auto/biographical writing exercise designed to foster transdisciplinarity and build inclusion in a research team. But for us, the poem's affordances when used in a workshop setting lie in its ability to bring people together auto/biographically while also exploring themes central to the overall IncludeAge research project, around belonging, inclusion, community, and how past experiences map onto present preoccupations and future challenges, aspirations, or anxieties.

For some readers, the limitations of this paper may lie in the arguably arbitrary way the poem was organized; the fact that we didn't choose a more well-known poetic form (such as tanka poetry); the fact that only four people offered readings (and one of those was not even present in the workshop); or that it may be hard to replicate the workshop very closely. But throughout this paper, we have argued for the strengths in approaching knowledge co-creation by utilizing the specific experiences of our team, the technology and time available to us, and the expertise of those able to contribute to reflecting on the poem itself and the process of co-creating it, or even being outside this co-creation process, but being invited to the reading and reflection stage. Indeed, we recognize that insights from team members who experienced the poem as readers, rather than creators, offer unique and meaningful feedback. Mei's reflection allows us to understand how the poem might resonate with someone who was not directly involved in the creative process. In terms of transdisciplinarity, Mei's reflection enabled a heightened sense of connectedness among the rest of the team and among those who attended the workshop, suggesting possibilities for different levels of impact and modes of inclusion within a transdisciplinary team.

The "I come from" format is remarkably versatile and adaptable across various disciplinary contexts and institutional settings. It serves as an innovative and creative approach to fostering team-based research, enabling team members to connect on a deeper level through shared and personal narratives. This format invites diverse perspectives, making it a powerful tool for building cohesion and mutual understanding in collaborative, cross-disciplinary environments. Our article has demonstrated not only the importance of moving from side-by-side composing to co-composing, but also the value of recording and reflecting on the reading and re-reading of the poem, and how the collation of different readings helps foster transdisciplinarity and builds a sense of inclusion. Further research drawing on our experiences here might also consider more fully the role of different technology, and how an in-person or hybrid workshop space might afford different experiences of inclusion and/or different disclosures of belonging and exclusion from those who attend the workshop.

Concluding Remarks

We recognize that transdisciplinarity requires time, patience, and investment in people who may not initially see eye to eye or who may not share similar ways of working or approaching research. Some team members may be academics—of varying levels of seniority—and familiar with university structures and processes, but others may be outside such structures and processes, and may need additional support to help feel included. But the anonymity of "I come from," and the fact that everyone contributes something structurally similar, means that whatever background a team member has, each contribution is set on a level-playing field. The overall effect is striking, and is best seen as a process, an "event in time," that could have ended up quite differently. The writing of this article itself—and the compilation of different readings or evocations of the poem—has also been a reflective auto/biographical exercise that has allowed us to connect personal experiences with academic insights, highlighting the complexity of identity, belonging, and inclusion. Indeed, at its heart, engaging in a creative and collaborative process like this is really an invitation to team members to get stuck in, engage in key themes in the project from a creative angle, and build trust that will benefit collaborative tasks long after the final full stop is placed at the end of the poem.

We hope that this paper encourages others to explore different ways of fostering inclusion in transdisciplinary projects. As a method of transdisciplinary relationship building, the poem allows team members to experience research as a lived reality. It is hard to step away from research like ours, and the "I come from poem" signals a way of living with the relationships within a project, and enables a legacy that is perhaps more vivid than traditional research outputs. In terms of best practice, we recognize that if we can interrogate power relationships in the creation of a poem like this, we can turn with renewed energy to mutually rely on each other for knowledges and skills that are integral to the success of a transdisciplinary project. Who is listening to new ideas in the project, and who feels able to enact them? Increasing the capacity for team members to proactively integrate each other's skills, knowledges, and experiences—including where we have come from—is crucial, and a methodological process like the "I come from poem" can help build such capacity. Although team members will move on from this project, the ways of working and thinking and being reflexive that emerge from being more open with ourselves will stay with us.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Approval

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Note

1. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a change management approach that focuses on identifying and leveraging the strengths, successes, and potentials within an organization or community. Unlike traditional problem-solving methods that concentrate on identifying and fixing problems, AI emphasizes the positive aspects of a team to inspire and drive transformation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

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