

“This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in:

Stuart, K., Bunting, M., Boyd, P., Cammack, P., Frostholm, P. H., Gravesen, D. T., . . . Walker, S. (2019). Developing an equalities literacy for practitioners working with children, young people and families through action research. *Educational Action Research*, 21.

on, 27 March 2019 available online:

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2019.1593870>.”

Developing An Equality Literacy for Practitioners Working with Children, Young People and Families through Action Research

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Sponsor: Erasmus+ funded research project.

Abstract

The Marginalisation and Co-created Education (MaCE) project was developed between the University of Southern Norway, VIA University in Denmark and the University of Cumbria in the UK and funded by Erasmus+. The project aims to co-create proposals to achieve an equitable and socially just education system through participative action research with 'Early School Leavers'. This paper establishes a conceptual framework called 'Equalities Literacy' that evolved from the first action research cycle of the project. The framework is informed by the practice experience and theoretical knowledge of the international and interdisciplinary research team. It is applied to one youth narrative in this paper in order to illustrate its efficacy in revealing socio-cultural in/equalities. The 'Equalities Literacy' framework is proposed to challenge and inform practice and further research. Further, the 'Indirect Approach' is introduced and located within action research as a participatory methodology that other researchers may wish to adopt.

This paper also constitutes a response to Giannakaki, McMillan and Karamichas (2018) paper. This put forward an erudite analysis of inequality in education, but proposed a 'placebo' participatory action research approach as a solution to these endemic difficulties. The proposal here constitutes an open and transparent participatory action research approach with allied conceptual framework to enable everyone working with and in the education system to transform their practice and educate young people about inequality.

Keywords

Equality, education, action research, early school leaver.

Introduction

The Research Context

The Marginalisation and Co-created Education (MaCE) project was developed between the University of Southeast Norway, VIA University in Denmark and the University of Cumbria in the UK and funded by Erasmus+. The project aims to understand school students' experience of marginalisation in education in order for the European team of academic and student researchers to co-create solutions for education and other sectors that support young people. The lens of 'Early School Leavers' (ESL) is used as a criteria by which the team could understand who had experienced success or failure at school. The term ESL was chosen as it is more

neutral than terms such as 'dropout' which is pejoratively negative to young people. The term ESL includes many other terms such as: drop out, push out, pull out, opt out, excluded, facilitated out, tuned out, not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Clandinin, Steeves, Caine, 2013 pp.15-42).

The MaCE project spans three years from September 2017 to August 2020 each comprising an action research cycle. The first action research cycle comprised three Transnational Partnership Meetings and additional collaborative work between the ten international and interdisciplinary researchers in order to develop the research methodology and underpinning conceptual framework for the project. The ensuing cycles over the next two academic years will involve data collection, analysis and dissemination in a process of co-inquiry with the academic research team and university students working with young people of school age.

This paper proposes the 'Equalities Literacy' framework as a conceptual framework to underpin a socio-cultural understanding of young people and the ESL phenomenon. Further, we propose it can support; practitioner reflective practice, practice with young people, youth development and research. This paper takes the form of second person action research as ideas and action evolved through the collaborative work of the research team (Reason and McKardle, 2004). One illustrative youth narrative collected through an Indirect Approach (Bunting and Moshuus, 2017a; Moshuus & Eide, 2016) is used to illustrate the Equalities Literacy framework's ability to map socio-cultural in/equality.

Early School Leavers in Norway, Denmark and the UK.

A wide range of metrics may be used to compare the performance of the education systems across the three countries such as attainment, attendance, and truancy. This project is focussed on young people in secondary education who are early school leavers (ESL) as this phenomenon is indicative of something seriously amiss in the student-school experience. Whilst the term ESL is used as a collective noun throughout we do not imply any homogeneity within this group. Some of the differences between the education systems in the three countries are presented below to start to build a comparative contextual picture.

In Norway compulsory schooling starts at age six with primary school and continues to lower secondary school (starting at age 13) and ends at age 15/16. Upper secondary school is not compulsory in Norway, but young people are entitled to schooling from age 16 to 21. However, they must compete for a place in the study programme of their choice, based on their academic achievements from lower secondary school. The total number of available study programmes is 15: three in a general programme leading to higher education and 12 in the vocational study programme. The latter is known as the '2+2 model', comprising two years in school and two years of apprenticeship (Bunting and Moshuus, 2017b). Students can also go from the apprenticeship system to complete a general academic course, extending their schooling to a third year and enabling them to access higher education upon completion (Markussen, Frøseth, & Sandberg, 2011). According to national statistics, 27% of young people in upper secondary school are early school

leavers. 24% of the ESL's are from the general programmes and 41% are from the vocational strand (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016).

Compulsory schooling in Denmark starts at age six when children enter grade 0 in the Danish Folkeskole. The compulsory education comes to an end when children reach the age of 15-16 years and leave primary school after 9th grade (The Danish Ministry of Education, 2017). Upper secondary education is then available for students, followed by Higher Education. 20.9% of students have not completed any upper secondary education seven years after they leave the Folkeskole (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd, 2017) and the European Union (2016) cites a 7.8% ESL rate in Danish education. Between a 9% and 50% ESL from vocational education has been reported (European Union, 2015; and Eriksson and Vetvik, 2012) along with a 16% ESL rate from higher education (Styrelsen for Forskning og Uddannelse, 2018).

In the United Kingdom children are in compulsory education from 5 to 18 years of age. Primary school spans from 5 to 11 years of age, followed by secondary education from 11-18. The last two years of this may be vocational rather than academic in nature. Further or higher education is then available to students on a non-compulsory basis. Data is not collected on the number of students missing from school in primary school in the UK and the term ESL is rarely used or measured. Instead data is collected on young people described as 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' or NEET aged 15 – 18 year olds. National data shows 11.2% of this age group are NEET (The House of Commons, 2018). The European Union (2016) statistics indicate the UK has a 13% ESL rate. Students also leave Higher Education at a rate of 6.2% (Universities UK, 2018).

A summary of the drop out from school is shown in table one below, although the differences in age of various stages of schooling make it difficult to compare like for like.

Table 1 situated here.

Despite the variations there are young people missing school in all three countries. Given the causality between attendance and attainment (OECD, 2014) this may have a significant impact on the future prospects of these young people. This is an unacceptable inequality that the research project proposes to expose and address.

The Marginalising Potential of Education

The current education systems in each of the three county's involved has been developed from international educational theory and national policy. These educational systems claim to address inequality through policies such as ability streaming, standardised testing, and targeted support. These approaches have been shown to be deeply flawed and problematic (Giannakaki, McMillan and Karamichas, 2018). As such, young people's experiences of school are fundamentally unequal.

Young people who are not in school are variously described as ‘drop outs’, ‘early school leavers’ and ‘NEET’. This terminology all defines young people as the locus of the issue. This terminology is “flawed and intolerable” (Fine, 2017) in three respects. Firstly, it defines a young person by something that they have not done (i.e. not been in school), secondly, it defines young people by deficits alone (Stuart, 2018), and finally it places the entire blame of the phenomenon at the young person’s feet (Orr, 2014). Such discourses sidestep the actions taken by schools to ‘disenfranchise’, ‘facilitate out’ or ‘push out’ young people from classrooms (Clandinin, Steeves and Caine, 2013). Identification of such negative discourses reveals the extent to which young people may be marginalised and oppressed (Fine, 2017). This process may exclude and isolate some of the most vulnerable young people doubly compounding the issues they face from a lack of education.

This demonising discourse is not contained within education, but is appropriated and reproduced in the media influencing society to view young people negatively. Indeed the dislike and fear of young people is so endemic it has even been given a name: ephiphobia. This is indicative of a continuing moral panic about young people (Cohen, 2011).

This asset-balanced participatory youth research is needed to understand the complex and nuanced inter and intra socio-cultural process of young people deciding to leave school early. It has potential to inform education, youth development, practitioner development and future research, and ultimately aims to contribute to social justice.

Equality, Equity and Social Justice

Not all groups of young people are equally likely leave school early, and UK data is used to illustrate this point. Whilst not specific to ESL youth, the UK data shows worrying demographics of young people who are NEET:

- 37% Looked After (in the UK Care System)
- 18% with statement of Special Educational Needs
- 16% English as a Second Language
- 12% entitled to Free School Meals
- 8% living in one of the 25% most deprived areas in the UK
- 6% mixed ethnicity (Department for Education, 2018).

This indicates that young people with additional needs are particularly prone to NEET status. From the same data set are three key statistics suggesting young people with a negative experience of school (evidenced by an exclusion or being educated in a Pupil Referral Unit) are also highly represented in the NEET demographic. This suggests a downward spiral of educational disadvantage is occurring:

- 27% from Pupil Referral Units (schools for young people with behavioural issues)
- 26% permanently excluded from school between age 11 and 14
- 22% permanently excluded from school between age 14 and 18 (Department for Education, 2018).

The UK data suggests that education leads to inequitable outcomes. This is a significant issue of social injustice that prevails relatively unchallenged (Reay, 2017, Giroux, 1983 and 2011; Hooks 1994; Ilich, 1971) in the existent neoliberal meritocracy. Each phase of this research project will attempt to critically disrupt the hegemonic status quo in the three participating countries through the development of the 'Equalities Literacy', on-going data collection and co-created solutions.

Why an Equalities Literacy?

Originally literacy was originally understood as the use of written text. However, today literacy is often used in the sense of understanding one's surroundings and reading the world, often in the push for social change (Hull, 2003; Street, 2003). In a sociolinguistic study Bernstein (2003) found children from the middle classes in London used the same language as their school teachers. These children did well at school, while the children from the working classes, characterized by poorer language, did not do well. This differential in language use became a mechanism of exclusion and marginalisation (Halvorsen, 2016). When language is considered to include not only words and speech, but also cultural competences, attitudes and behavior (Farrington et al., 2012), it is evident that schools may invisibly reproduce the inequalities inherent in society (Bourdieu, 2003).

When we translate literacy into a social justice context it means the ability to read and write equality and equity. Equality refers to the relative levels of access that people have, for example, to resources, information and opportunities. In a socially just world, people would have equal opportunities to access these things (Chapman and West-Burnham, 2010). Unfortunately this is not the case and the world is highly unequal within and between nations (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). Equity refers to the deliberate practices that are required to provide equal access to resources, information and opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to them (Chapman and West-Burnham, 2010). 'Equalities Literacy' therefore refers to the ability to 'read' or have an awareness of equality, equity and associated social justice issues, to choose how to intervene, and to 'write' or act to create equality, equity and social justice through our daily actions. Inherent in these actions is the need to challenge meritocratic ideologies that perpetuate 'blame' and competition (Wiederkehr *et al.*, 2015) as these are both barriers to equality and equity. The framework renders the processes and reproduction of inequalities visible.

The fact that so many young people do not complete their education and marginalised in society is unequal, inequitable and socially unjust. And yet there is no public outcry, demonstration or state initiated reform in the UK, Norway or Denmark. It is as if these societies have become blind or immured to educational inequality (Heffernan, 2012). Society does not notice the negative labels applied to young people, does not see the discrimination, marginalisation and oppression. If society does notice, it does not do anything about it – perhaps overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. If the inequality is not seen, acknowledged, addressed, then society becomes complicit in its perpetuation. This research situates itself in this problematic socio-cultural space.

Inequity has two facets. One facet is comprised of disadvantage, oppression, marginalisation, isolation and deprivation. But this only exists in relation to the other facet comprising privilege, advantage, liberation, and social capital. It is therefore necessary to simultaneously discuss both disadvantage and privilege and all the positions in between (Hays, Dean and Chang, 2007). Any unequal system needs both winners and losers, privilege and deprivation exist only as relative to one another and therefore the whole socio-cultural landscape must be considered. The Equalities Literacy framework does just this, proposing that equality is a complex interaction of elements; cultural, social, inter and intra personal, with an imperative to render them visible.

Methods

The MaCE action research project seeks to achieve social change through multiple iterative action research cycles. Action research is defined as: “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p.1). The MaCE project draws academics, students and young people together to participate in co-inquiry and co-creation. It was focussed on developing practical knowledge of how ‘education’ might be more equitable, and grounded in the experience of young people some of whom have valuable sensitivity from similar experience as ESL’s themselves.

Action research has a focus on praxis – bringing theory and practice together through inquiry and reflection (O’Brien, 2001; Kemmis, 2009). This principal was important to the research which attempted to draw together theoretical perspectives on equality in education from action research cycle one with young people’s experiences of education in action research cycles two and three. Such co-inquiry and co-creation of solutions with young people both redresses the endemic marginalisation of young people from policy spaces (Treseder, 1997; Ledwith, 2005; Hart, 1997) and models an inclusive and equitable mode of working with youth. This marks a departure from the subversive, ‘pseudo-placebo’ participatory action research proposed by Giannakaki, McMillan and Karamichas (2018, p.204). We propose that tackling systemic inequality demands an open and transparent approach rather than mimicking very ‘placebo treatments’ that are critiqued by the authors themselves (ibid, p.193).

The first action research cycle in year one developed the Equalities Literacy framework from the practice experience and theoretical knowledge of the international and interdisciplinary research team alone to co-create the Equalities Literacy framework. As such it comprises second-person action research with the research team co-inquiring and co-creating the Equality Literacy framework. This occurred through collaborative work at three week long Transnational Partnership Meetings. The model was co-created from extensive dialogue at and beyond these meetings and has had several developmental iterations. This represents an initial

attempt to map the terrain and to surface the beliefs and assumptions of the research team. The Equalities Literacy framework is the projects first attempt at rendering a complex phenomenon comprehensible without reductionism.

Whilst the Equalities Literacy framework was developed from the team's knowledge and experience, the data presented in this paper is drawn from an indirect interview. This data arose from the team piloting the planned interview approach at one of the Transnational Partnership Meetings with English speaking students from a nearby secondary school. These interviews were conducted using an 'Indirect Approach'.

The Indirect Approach (Moshuus and Eide, 2016) developed and used by the Norwegian research team is an unstructured, participatory research practice. The method is premised on the contextual challenges involved when researchers, students and young people from different and even possibly antagonistic meritocratic positions meet in dialogue. The method first posits that the researcher and the young people do not share the same cultural setting. Second, it posits that both questions and answers that direct the inquiry should come from the young person. In this respect, the Indirect approach is a participant led conversation enabling some levelling of the power dynamics innate in interview situations.

The Indirect Approach draws on an ethnographic biographical framework that evoke notions of methodological approaches like the unstructured interview (Tanggaard & Brinkman, 2015; Brinkman, & Kvale, 2015). The Indirect Approach reflects that all social phenomena take place within contextual frames produced within a contested ground shaping both the lives of our participants and our inquiries. A key element in the approach is the researcher's *indirect* way of approaching the life world of the participant, making sure not to introduce ideas, concepts or notions into the conversation that was not first presented by the participant. Reading something into the conversation or introducing the researchers own concepts would be polluting the conversation, making it *too direct*. This places the method within the qualitative approaches in the social sciences that are thought of as explorative; discovering something that we did not already know (Moshuus and Eide, 2016) and resonant with Participatory Action Research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). The research situation should make the participant a storyteller, making whatever he/she emphasise guide the conversation. This opens the research to a wide variation of interpretative efforts that enables the phenomena of ESL to be understood as a part of the young person's holistic and situated life.

Codes were drawn inductively from the ten pilot interviews in a process of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). These codes were compared to the Equalities Literacy framework in a deductive process in order to bring it to life. This inductive and deductive analytical process is known as abductive analysis (Tavory and Timmermans, 2013) and will lead to on-going iterations of the conceptual framework throughout each action research cycle.

Findings and Discussion

The Equality Literacy Conceptual Framework

The six elements of the Equalities Literacy framework are interrelated and dynamic. In the ensuing discussion each is presented theoretically with examples drawn from Kaz's practice experience and the young person's narrative in order to bring the framework and praxis to life.

1. Pre-existing Context

From a theoretical perspective it is known that people are born into situations that are not of their choosing (Archer, 1995). We are not able therefore to deploy an entirely free will as some of the conditions into which we are born will enable and constrain our actions. That is not to say that our lives are pre-determined, but shaped by contexts that pre-exist us and that are of significance (Archer, 1995). Whilst the context pre-exists the person they are open to mediation over time. People are born into unequal circumstances; wealth and poverty, good or ill health, inclusion or exclusion are examples of the almost infinite number of differentials people are born into (Dorling, 2010).

Some of the situations that people are born into are socially and culturally produced and reproduced (Thompson, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The very discourses of 'drop outs' and 'NEETs' are evidence of these socially created constructs. These socio-cultural factors exist at a micro, meso and macro levels. They include the norms and customs and invisible rules of families, communities, areas, nations, and of the world. These are technically known as habitus (Bourdieu, 1999) and as hegemonic discourses (Gramsci, 1971). These are not fixed but ever changing as illustrated by recent changes in smoking behaviours and attitudes to gay marriage in various places in the world.

Kaz's practice experience working with young people labelled as 'gang involved' and self-identifying as 'groups of young people' powerfully highlighted the importance of context. Eight months of research with these young people revealed that they had no real choice as to whether to associate with the people they grew up with, or whether to behave in the ways those people behaved in. The choice was to conform to the habitus of intimidation and violence, or to be victimised. One of the reasons the young people who participated did not want to be labelled as 'gang members' was that they had not 'joined' a gang, they had merely grown up en-cultured into certain ways of behaving. Had they been born 40 miles away in a rural area they may not have know of such ways of behaving.

The interview with the young person in Norway revealed a range of contextual factors that shaped her life:

- *YP: I am 17 I am adopted from Columbia, I have a brother who is 20 years old, my parents are still together, my parents live not far away about 2 hours away by car, so I live here with my room mate in a flat...*
- *YP: And now I go to International Baccalureat (IB), and I go to high school over here, I am in my first year of IB, its only two years. Do you know of it?*
- *YP: Its, its er... a little different from Norwegian standards as it follows an English curriculum [as in curriculum from the UK]*

- *YP: There are a lot of teenagers into motocross and physical labour and the good working, farm kind of people I guess, so they were perfectly happy where they were.*

With these factual statements the young person shows some contextual factors that define her as different. She was from Columbia but living in Norway, she was living in a rural town but studying at an International School, she is in a Norwegian school, but studying an English curriculum. These illustrate a context that was not of her choosing in which she has to navigate her way.

2. Personal Lived Experience

The contexts described above set the scene, literally, for the lived experiences of individuals and groups across a range of domains of wellbeing (Maynard and Stuart, 2018). These domains are theoretically defined as: wealth, health, education and employment (Dorling, 2015), social capital and social mobility (Bourdieu, 1999; Putnam, 2000), security, precarity and fear (Furedi, 2005; Butler, 2006; Lorey, 2015). Lived experiences are open to change rather than being confined to the pre-existing context, however, the more disadvantaged that context is, the harder it maybe to change it. This is why the context is not deterministic of future outcomes although it may be highly constraining.

Drawing from Kaz's practice experience, young people who were 'gang involved' experienced poverty living in a highly disadvantaged area of the UK. Many did not attend school, negatively impacting on educational and employment options. They were trapped where they lived and had few choices to change their life courses. They were subjected to high levels of violence, insecurity, precarity and fear. A few had moved to new areas of the UK with the support of professionals in order to escape these pre-existing cultural norms, this was a difficult task however, involving a complete separation from family and friends.

In contrast, the young person studying for an International Baccalaureat in Norway experienced life very differently. This young person participated in a privileged level of education:

YP: Yeah, its kind of hard to get in so you need a certain set of, I think its called GPA, so only certain people get in, most people are from regular Norwegian schools.

Her choice to attend this school has cost her a number of relationships with people in her home community, and even her family:

YP: I don't socialise, I just stay in and do homework, I don't like the people I used to go to middle school with, and they are usually in the city.

YP: I don't think it has been difficult for them, but it has been difficult for me. My brother, well he isn't that smart and he really conforms to the norm at home because he is into labour work.... my parents always found it easier to help him because his difficulties were easier to help with like Norwegian and maths, and I got on my own they couldn't help me, and my dad is an engineer and mum a kindergarten teacher and dad could help me with maths. It was just all a mess, we were just really struggling with different aspects of my intelligence.

Despite living in a rural area with a family who focus on vocations, this young person has achieved highly and moved to an international school to undertake an academic pathway. Her home environment has not defined or determined who she will be.

Kaz's practice experiences and the young person's narrative illustrate a relationship between context and lived experience. The context may be replicated in the lived experiences, reproducing itself within young people and groups, yet it may also enable or provoke young people to be different, to change the conditions that they find them in.

3. Positioning by Others

The real life experiences detailed above create a 'position' that is relative to other people. Theory documents the ways in which these relative positions are inscribed by labels and stereotypes. These labels are created by the state, media and society (Jones, 2015; Bourdieu, 1999) and produce, reproduce and protect a status quo (Dorling, 2010; Fox, Piven and Cloward, 2015). The resulting discourses are hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971; Ledwith, 2016; Wearing, 1998) in that they protect the interests of the 'haves' against the 'have not's', or distance a subgroup from the norm (Tyler, 2013; Dorling, 2010, Blackman and Rogers, 2017; Piven and Cloward, 1993).

An example of these discourses from British culture was the phenomenon of 'Vikki Pollard' a female underclass acted by Matt Lucas, and 'Lauren Cooper' a school failure acted by Catherine Tate. Both of these characters were comedy successes epitomising unsuccessful youth. Their creation was galvanised by societal distaste for young people and enabled members of society; to position people as different to themselves, to protect themselves from becoming like 'the other', and to protect themselves from their responsibility to support them.

From Kaz's practice example it is clear that the young people defined as 'gang involved' had little material goods, social mobility or choice about who or what to be. They were defined as 'gang involved' (a label they refuted) and described as hoodies, druggies, yobs, as violent. They felt totally alienated by professional services that often criminalised them, misunderstood by a society they had no access to, and disenfranchised and betrayed by media representations. This shows the power of the positions that may be inscribed onto other members of society.

In contrast the Norwegian young person had a high quality education, material wealth and many choices open to her. Whilst the 'privilege' of a high quality education and being 'high achieving' meant that society treated her well, however, the young person described the pressure she felt as society 'positioned' her as responsible for dealing with many contemporary issues:

YP: Yes! There is a lot of expectations..... And its just, most young people are not like that, they are just still kids and a lot of people get annoyed that adults kind of expect them to be extraordinary and different and smart and involved in politics.

YP: But most of my peers just want to live their lives playing video games and hanging out with friends and that burden of being socially invested is really tough for a lot of young people I think as you are expected to be really into politics and if you are not you are not really helping, helping to change.

This responsibility could be very overwhelming:

YP: And do your civic duty yeah..... Teenagers go through some insane changes, and then at one time that was all we had to do, it was just do that and develop but now we have to do that and everything else too about 20 other things, a lot, its hard to differ, its like is this who I am or someone I am impressioned to be.

She summarises that trying to work out what to do in life, with all these expectations layered upon you is; *“like trying to shoot an arrow through a hole with your eyes closed”*.

Both the ‘gang involved’ youth and the ‘high achieving’ young person experience a positioning from other people in society. The ‘gang youth’ are positioned as undesirable and the ‘high achiever’ positioned as responsible for herself and society. These labels were unhelpful and unwanted by the recipients. This highlights that wherever you are on the privilege-deprivation spectrum, positions are applied and status’ defined by others.

4. Technologies of Oppression or Liberation

Theory helps illuminate how positions are imposed on people through a set of technologies or tools. These technologies ensure prescribed positions have impact and endure. They are called technologies of liberation or oppression depending on the extent to which they align with the individual’s or group’s self image and the extent to which they constrain or enable access to resources. As such they are key to in/equality and thus central to the Equalities Literacy framework.

The most commonly used and understood technology is perhaps stereotyping and labeling (Dorling, 2010) which most people experience at school in one form or another. These can be for small things at an individual level such as dress sense or huge stereotypes at a global level such as racism. The labels we accrue early in our school lives such as ‘failure’ or ‘high achiever’ may be carried with us throughout our lives.

When we stereotype we make people ‘other’ to ourselves, we draw an invisible line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (either as better or worse) and create a set of characteristics that separate us. This process of ‘othering’ psychologically protects us from the possibility of becoming like the other, or of the other having any similarities to ourselves (Foucault, 1978; 1982, Lacan, 1988; Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Said, 1994).

Another technology, 'social abjection' (Tyler, 2013) is an extension of 'othering' whereby the 'other' is made vile and disgusting and not worthy of consideration. It preserves 'us' from becoming 'them' (Tyler, 2013; Dorling, 2010, Blackman and Rogers, 2017). This is the mechanism that has been applied with the Vikki Pollard and Lauren Cooper characters in British comedy. They have the potential to erode all empathy and enable the rest of society to look down on or indeed straight through people who need support.

Once people are objectified (Bourdieu, 2003) and socially abject, it paves the way for us to treat them as inhumane or shameful (Nussbaum, 2004, Brown, 2010) and to adopt a willful blindness (Heffernan, 2011) where we refuse to acknowledge their human rights or even existence. Shaming and willful are therefore two further technologies of oppression.

The 'other' is however always in our psyche and we remain insecure and fearful (Furedi, 2005) of the risk that they pose us, and feel the division between us as precarious (Lorey, 2015; Butler, 2006). This fuels the willingness of society to adopt negative discourses about them, to accept forms of 'legislation' (Bauman, 1989) and 'surveillance' (Foucault, 1978, 1982) that keep the 'other' in their places. The UK has seen a prevalence of reality television that presents vulnerable people as 'benefit scroungers'. This positioning erodes public empathy for people who need benefit support and could be argued to enable the government to reduce investment in the welfare service. The presence of these technologies serves to oppress and marginalize, defining who people are and how they are treated by the rest of society. When people are not subjected to these technologies they have more opportunity for liberty. The absence of shaming, 'othering', social abjection and other such technologies are therefore conditions of liberation.

The young people who were 'gang involved' were stopped and searched by the police more often than young people from more affluent areas, they were treated with disrespect, fear, loathing. They felt undesirable, unwanted and unseen until visible and then reviled, dehumanised and shamed. Indeed many practitioners and members of the public would not even go to the places where they lived, creating almost 'ghetto' areas. Even the research commission under which I was employed was a mechanism of oppression creating the sense that they were 'special cases' that needed investigation.

In contrast, the young person from Norway had experienced some stereotyping and name calling, due to her position of privilege:

YP: It's a line for the smart people, so it's a really challenging line and going there goes with a set of stereotypes.

YP: But I think you need to have the confidence, I think its very easy to get down and to let other people get to you when you are into stuff other people consider geeky.

YP: Yeah... and the three others they stayed where they are and we never really kept I touch as my group were like the outcasts and there were groups in my year and we

were just the girls who didn't fit in with the other groups and so we just sort of cling to each other and we were really good friends with really close relationships.

Whilst these young people had all experienced technologies of oppression the differences between them were stark. The Norwegian young person had only experienced a few technologies of oppression whereas the 'gang-involved' young people had experienced most all of them on a daily basis. It is perhaps here that the wedge between the deprived and privileged is driven deepest as the technologies of oppression imposed on the deprived further wound and dispossess them.

5. Positioning of Self

The power of the technologies of oppression and liberation provokes reactions from the people who are targeted. Individuals and groups might respond to the positioning in a range of ways. Some might comply and accept messages imposed on them, others may adopt positions of victimhood, and others again move to rebel or be deviant. This is an inter-personal process as it is in response to the positions bestowed, it is also intra-personal as individuals reconcile the messaging with their sense of self. The resulting self-position is in response to these contexts, the relative experiences of others, the positions imposed by others, the technologies of oppression and liberation experienced, and personal response. Theory shows the self-position adopted may have a major impact on the identity, agency and social mobility then experienced (Cote and Levine, 2002; Lawler, 2008). This further accounts for why there can be no fixed or determined trajectories of any individual or group. One person may respond to deprivation with resignation and victim mentality, whilst another may fight for a better outcome.

All of these positions were evident in the young people who were 'gang involved'. Some lived up to the reputation and propagated violent reputations for themselves. Others acquiesced where necessary to behavioural norms of the 'gang', some lived the lives they wanted counter to the dominant 'gang' culture despite the issues that created for them, and some wanted to support other young people to avoid the pitfalls that they had experienced becoming peer mentors.

The Norwegian young person positioned herself as different in a range of ways – different in ethnicity, in education, in sexuality, in outlook in life. This was perhaps a meaningful narrative given some of her life circumstances:

YP: And I always thought I was different to my peers at home and so it was necessary for me to get a new set of surroundings, environment and friends.

YP: And me being into English meant that I liked different things to my peers. So being into different books and movies and popular culture, and I was always different, so even from middle schools, so now I have just gotten used to it.

YP: I found my sexuality and dressed more comfortably, not really conforming to gender roles so I dressed a lot differently to my friends, 'cos as I am just a lot more interested in being comfortable and that just kind of makes me different, and

made me a lot different from those at home everyone was the same and all shopped at the same stores.

This young person was also very aware of her response to the narratives imposed on her:

YP: I know who I am, it doesn't really matter to me what you think!

The theory, practice experience and data illustrate the range of responses possible to any context and positioning and the dynamic nature of the Equalities Literacy framework.

6. Impact and trajectory

The culmination of the contexts people are born into, lived experiences, positioning by others and self mediated by technologies of oppression all lead to an impact and future trajectory. This is only fixed moment by moment as the societal responses to individual's and groups and are not a deterministic end point. People re-author their lives moment by moment (Clandinin, Steeves, Caine, 2013).

Whilst the impact of privilege and deprivation are not fixed, theory shows that groups of people experiencing deprivation on the whole experience a higher prevalence of negative trajectories of inequitable outcomes than the privileged (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Sen, 1999). This is the case across all areas of wellbeing – financial, social, health and education. In this respect, the negative consequence of the lack of education experienced by ESL's is well documented (European Union Education and Culture DG, 2013). Whilst these negative outcomes are not fixed, they are increasingly likely for young people who are ESL and may be reproduced in on-going generations and attitudes, expectations and behaviours are reproduced.

The young people who were 'gang involved' were experiencing poor outcomes. Many were reliant on state benefits and food parcels (Kaz met many of them at a food bank) and they could not work due to a lack of education. Their benefit-dependent status reinforced low self-esteem and made some of them more prone to negative self-image and self-positioning. Further poor outcomes were possible, as, for example, a lack of money leads to eating un-nutritious food. Whilst hypothetical, this discussion highlights the complex, interwoven aspects of deprivation and ways in which one initial deprivation may lead to further inequalities.

The Norwegian young person had many more options and potential open to her than the 'gang involved' young people. Whilst a privilege she ironically found this a terrifying and disabling potential:

YP: What if I choose something wrong and then arrghh I have to go back to school and choose something new and people keep telling you you can go to school for the rest of your life if you want, and I want more and ...I don't know what sort of job I will do, but it wont be for 30 years like my mum.

YP: I am so scared of taking the wrong choices, really so scared!

The differences in outcomes and trajectories documented further illustrates the impact of inequality. Whilst the 'gang involved' young people could achieve anything, there was a high likelihood of them having low paid jobs. Whilst the Norwegian young woman could experience any outcome, it looked likely that she would achieve well and get a good job – however stressful that experience in the current day. Impact and trajectory in the Equalities Literacy framework therefore prompt insight about the cumulative affect of all the other elements of the Equalities Literacy framework. The conditions a person is born into, lived experiences, the treatment they get from others, and how they respond all interact to create an outcome or trajectory. This itself is not fixed and deterministic, but can change at any point. It is a dynamic interaction of the inter personal, intra personal, and socio-cultural.

When added together diagrammatically the interwoven and dynamic nature of the Equalities Literacy framework comes to the fore and highlights the potential of the framework to emphasise a complex, holistic and socio-cultural nexus of in/equality. People are subject to a range of deprivations, oppressions and inequalities simultaneously. These constellations (Hart, Hall and Henwood, 2015) or matrices (Collins, 2015) of deprivations, oppressions and inequalities are combinations of types of difference, levels and contexts (Ledwith, 2005). The Equalities Literacy framework is therefore intersectional (Collins, 2015, Hooks 1994, Crenshaw, 1989) and intersubjective (Hegel, 1908; Habermas, 1987). This further illustrates the need for a model that was avoided reductionism.

Without such a conceptual framework people may make faulty assumptions or work from biases. Practitioners may unintentionally disempower and disable (Illich, 1971; Le Grand, 2008) as they overly help and assistentialise those they sought to empower (Jefferies, 2011). Without equity literacy there is potential for unconsciously reinforcing existing power relations and therefore positions of inequality (Bourdieu, 1979). Equity literacy is required to interrupt these trajectories, to enable people to lever assets (McCashen, 2010), and to challenge the unequal and inequitable conditions that prevail in contemporary global society (Dorling, 2010; Blackman and Rogers, 2017).

The full Equalities Literacy model is shown in figure one below:

Figure 1 situated here

Implications for Practice

There are four reasons why practitioners who support the wellbeing of young people (such as teachers, nurses, social workers and youth workers) need to have high levels of Equalities Literacy. Firstly practitioners need to understand the unique contexts and lives of the people they support. This is similar to cultural competence (Rathje, 2007; Like, 2011) and includes having an inequalities imagination (Hart, Hall, Henwood, 2002). Secondly, practitioners need to understand the ways in which their life experiences and professional enculturation impacts on their language, choices

and actions in practice (Bourdieu, 1999) in order for the to avoid unconsciously using technologies of oppression themselves. Once Equality Literate practitioners are able to make choices and take action that support social justice. These approaches are often referred to as 'empowering' (Illich, 1971; Friere, 1970; Maynard and Stuart, 2018) or 'critically pedagogical' (Giroux, 2011; Smyth, 2011). These collective actions enable societies to deliberately work towards a more socially just world. Thirdly, practitioners need to ensure they do not inadvertently create further marginalisation by treating people as the locus of the problem (Illich, 1971). Finally, practitioners, particularly teachers and youth workers, have opportunities to support the Equalities Literacy of the people they support - a process akin to 'conscientization' (Freire, 1974, Andrade and Morrell, 2008). If children and young people became Equalities Literate they would hopefully then avoid unconsciously perpetuating inequality and instead treat one another with respect creating a more socially just world.

From a research perspective the Equalities Literacy framework highlights the need for researchers to reflexively acknowledge their privileged position and to understand how that interplays with the position of their participants. Methods such as the Indirect Approach, and Participatory Action Research should be used to address the inequity of such power relationships. Further, we need to do more with our research findings. Collating stories of in/equality on our living room floors is not enough as Michelle Fine has challenged and shown (2017). Researchers have a moral obligation to lift their work to the macro level to support social justice at a systemic level.

This is the aim of the MaCE research project and we look forward to reporting what we learn with young people, the solutions we co-create, the ways we go about that and the overall impact on society in the future.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to colleagues and students from the University of Southeast Norway, VAI University in Denmark and the University of Cumbria in the UK who have worked collaboratively in the Marginalisation and Co-Created Education Project (MaCE) and to Erasmus+ for funding the project.

Declaration of Interest Statement

There are no conflicts of interest.

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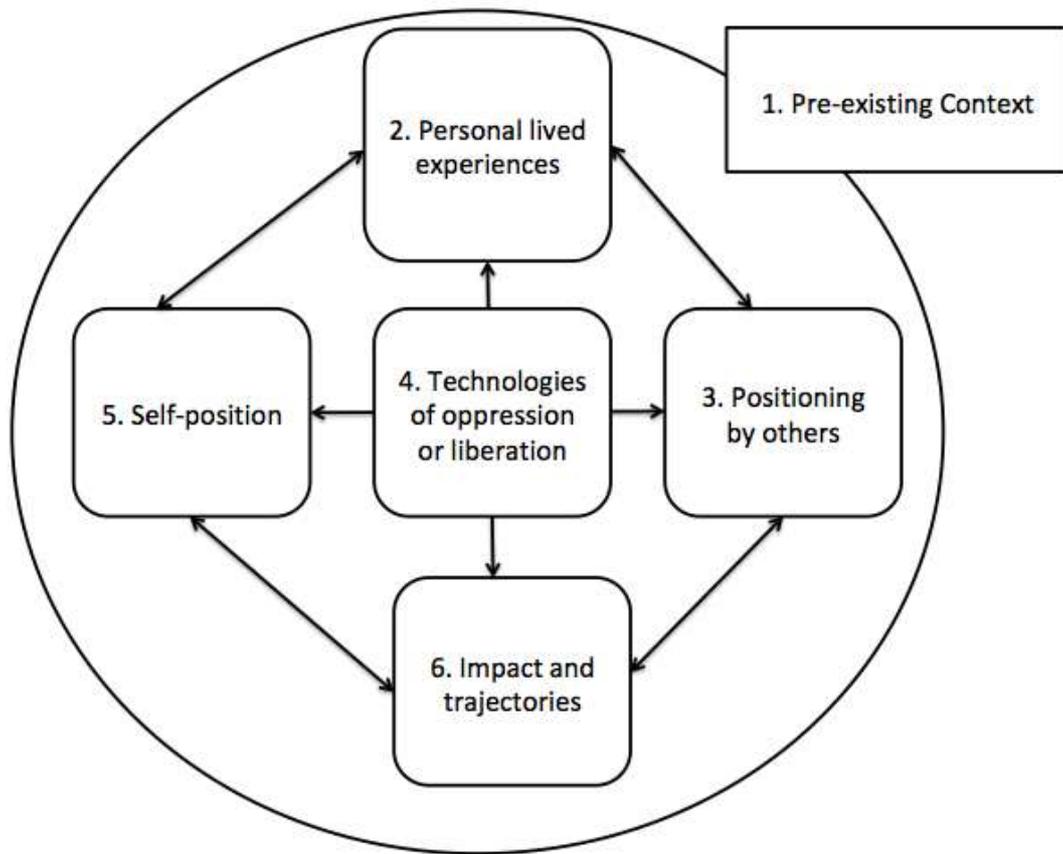


Figure 1: The Equalities Literacy Framework

Norway		Denmark		United Kingdom	
Primary school 5-12 Compulsory	Not known	Folkeskole 6-16 Compulsory	6% ESL	Primary 5-11 Compulsory	Not known
Lower secondary school 12-15/16 Compulsory	Not known	Not applicable	-	Not applicable	-
Upper secondary school 16-21 Voluntary	23% ESL (14% from general programmes and 27% from vocational programmes)	Upper secondary 16-21 Voluntary	20.9% ESL	Secondary 11-16 Compulsory	From 16 onwards 11.2% ESL
		Higher Education / vocational education 16-21 voluntary	9%-50% ESL from vocational programmes 16% ESL from Higher Education	Vocational / Further Education 16-18 Compulsory	11.2% ESL
				Higher Education 18 and above, selective and fee paying	6.2% all students ESL

Table 1: A summary of young people not in education in the Norway and Denmark and the UK.