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

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Manuscripts

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.

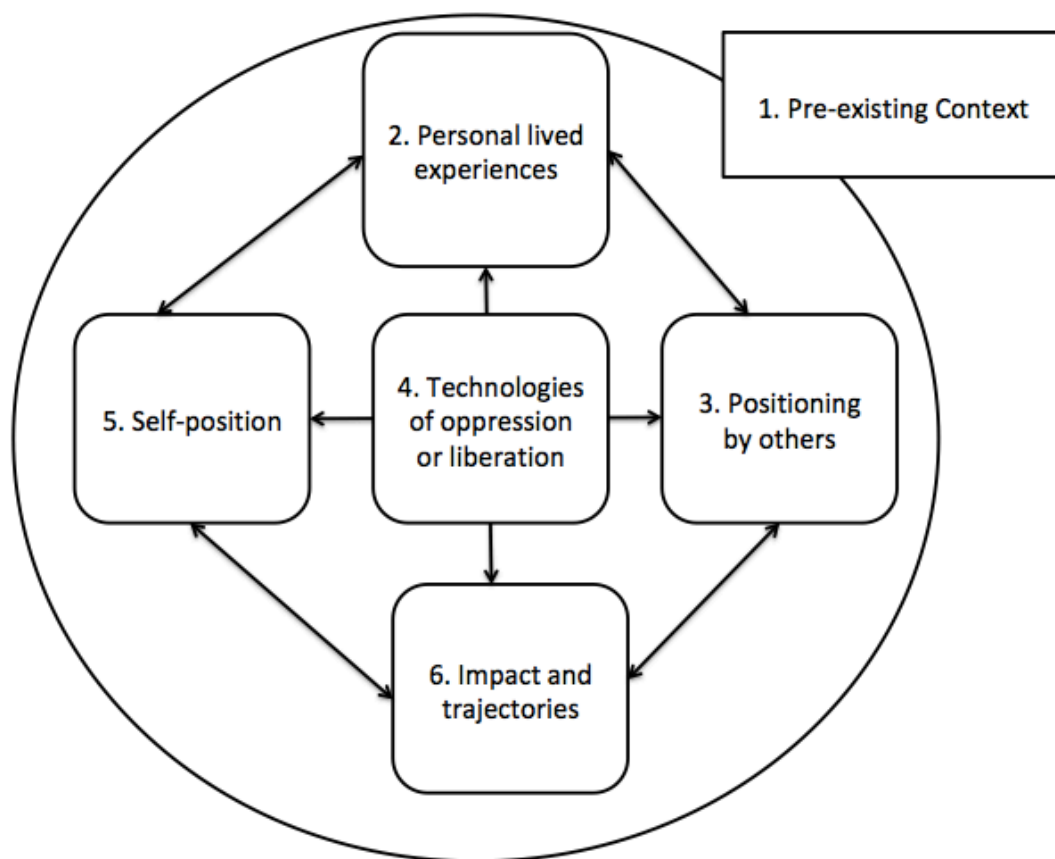


Figure 1: The Equalities Literacy Framework

Developing an Equalities Literacy for Practitioners Working with Children, Young People and Families through Action Research

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.

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 involved 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.

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

16 A wide range of metrics are used to compare the performance of the education
17 systems across the three countries such as attainment, attendance, and truancy. This
18 project is focussed on young people in secondary education who are early school
19 leavers (ESL) as this phenomenon is indicative of something seriously amiss in the
20 student-school experience. Whilst the term ESL is used as a collective noun
21 throughout we do not imply any homogeneity within this group of young people or
22 between the countries involved. Some of the differences between the education
23 systems in the three countries are presented below to start to build a comparative
24 contextual picture.
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29 In Norway children start primary school when they are six and progress to lower
30 secondary school at age 13 to 15/16. Upper secondary school for young people aged
31 16-21 is an entitlement which young people must compete for based on their
32 academic achievements from lower secondary school. There are 15 study
33 programmes available, three in a general programme leading to higher education
34 and 12 in the vocational studies. The latter is known as the '2+2 model', comprising
35 two years in school and two years of apprenticeship (Bunting and Moshuus, 2017b).
36 Students can also go from the apprenticeship system to complete a general
37 academic course, extending their schooling to a third year and enabling them to
38 access higher education (Markussen, Frøseth, & Sandberg, 2011). According to
39 national statistics, 27% of young people in upper secondary school are early school
40 leavers. 24% of these ESL's are from the general programmes and 41% are from the
41 vocational strand (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016).
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46 Compulsory schooling in Denmark starts at age six when children enter grade 0 in
47 the Danish Folkeskole and continues until children reach the age of 15-16 years in
48 the 9th grade (The Danish Ministry of Education, 2017). Upper secondary education
49 is then available for students followed by Higher Education. Data shows that 20.9%
50 of students have not completed any upper secondary education
51 (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd, 2017) and the European Union (2016) cites a
52 7.8% ESL rate in Danish education overall. Between a 9% and 50% of ESL's in
53 Denmark are from vocational strands of education (European Union, 2015; and
54 Eriksson and Vetvik, 2012) and there is a 16% ESL rate from higher education
55 (Styrelsen for Forskning og Uddannelse, 2018).
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3 In the United Kingdom children are in compulsory education from 5 to 18 years of
4 age. Primary school spans from 5 to 11 years of age, followed by secondary
5 education from 11-18. The last two years of this may be vocational rather than
6 academic in nature. Further or higher education is then available to students on a
7 non-compulsory basis. Data is not collected on the number of students missing from
8 school in primary school in the UK and the term ESL is rarely used or measured.
9 Instead data is collected on young people described as 'Not in Education,
10 Employment or Training' or NEET. National data shows 11.2% of young people are
11 NEET (The House of Commons, 2018). The European Union (2016) statistics indicate
12 the UK has a 13% ESL rate. Students also leave Higher Education at a rate of 6.2% in
13 the UK (Universities UK, 2018).
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18 A summary of ESL is shown in table one below, although the differences in age of
19 various stages of schooling make it difficult to compare like for like.
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21

22 *Table 1 situated here.*
23

24 The table might suggest that there are fewer issues of early school leaving in the UK
25 than in Norway and Denmark, it is unlikely that this is the case however. The UK has
26 no clear measure for ESL. The Office for National Statistics collects data on young
27 people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training but this only applied to 16
28 to 24 year olds. There is no measure of young people below 16 not attending school.
29 There are no national statistics for young people who truant from school or who are
30 home educated but there are statistics for young people excluded from school. As
31 ESL is not measured it may seem as if it does not exist, but this is far from the truth.
32 Despite the variations, it is clear that young people are missing school in all three
33 countries. Given the causality between attendance and attainment (OECD, 2014) and
34 the individual lifetime cost of ESL consequences ranging from 100,000 EUR to 1.1
35 million EUR (European Union Working Group, 2016), there is significant impact on
36 the future prospects of these young people. This is an unacceptable inequality that
37 the research project proposes to expose and address.
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41 ***The Marginalising Potential of Education***

42 The education systems in each of the three countries was developed from
43 international educational theory and policy. These educational systems claim to
44 address inequality through policies such as ability streaming, standardised testing,
45 and targeted support. These approaches have been shown to be deeply flawed and
46 problematic (Giannakaki, McMillan and Karamichas, 2018). As such, young people's
47 experiences of school are fundamentally unequal.
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51 Young people who are not in school are variously described as 'drop outs', 'early
52 school leavers' and 'NEET'. This terminology defines young people as the locus of the
53 issue. This terminology is "flawed and intolerable" (Fine, 2017) in three respects.
54 Firstly, it defines a young person by something that they have not done (i.e. not been
55 in school), secondly, it defines young people by deficits alone such as failing school
56 (Stuart, 2018), and finally it places the entire blame of the phenomenon at the young
57 person's feet (Orr, 2014). Such discourses sidestep the actions taken by schools to
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3 'disenfranchise', 'facilitate out' or 'push out' young people from classrooms
4 (Clandinin, Steeves and Caine, 2013). Identification of such negative discourses
5 reveals the extent to which young people may be marginalised and oppressed (Fine,
6 2017). This process may exclude and isolate some of the most vulnerable young
7 people doubly compounding the issues they face from a lack of education.
8
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10 This demonising discourse is not contained within education, but is appropriated and
11 reproduced in the media influencing society to view young people negatively. Indeed
12 the dislike and fear of young people is so endemic it has even been given a name:
13 ephibiphobia. This is indicative of a continuing moral panic about young people
14 (Cohen, 2011).
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18 The asset-balanced participatory youth research embodied in the MaCE project is
19 needed to understand the complex and nuanced inter and intra socio-cultural
20 process of young people deciding to leave school early. It has potential to inform
21 education, youth development, practitioner development and future research, and
22 ultimately aims to contribute to social justice.
23
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25 ***Equality, Equity and Social Justice***

26 Not all groups of young people are equally likely leave school early. UK data
27 illustrates demographics trends of young people who are NEET:
28

- 29 • 37% Looked After (in the UK Care System)
- 30 • 18% with statement of Special Educational Needs
- 31 • 16% English as a Second Language
- 32 • 12% entitled to Free School Meals
- 33 • 8% living in one of the 25% most deprived areas in the UK
- 34 • 6% mixed ethnicity (Department for Education, 2018).
35
36

37 This indicates that young people with additional needs are particularly prone to
38 NEET status. From the same data set are three key statistics suggesting young people
39 with a negative experience of school (evidenced by an exclusion or being education
40 in a Pupil Referral Unit) are also highly represented in the NEET demographic. This
41 suggests a downward spiral of educational disadvantage is occurring:
42

- 43 • 27% from Pupil Referral Units (schools for young people with behavioural
44 issues)
- 45 • 26% permanently excluded from school between age 11 and 14
- 46 • 22% permanently excluded from school between age 14 and 18 (Department
47 for Education, 2018).
48
49

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

Originally literacy was understood solely as the use of written text. However, today literacy is often used in the sense of understanding one's surroundings and ability to read the world, often with a drive for social change (Hull, 2003; Street, 2003). In a sociolinguistic study Bernstein (2003) found that middle class children in London who had the same idioms of speech as their teachers 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; Fine and Weis, 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 there is great inequality within and between world nations (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). Equity refers to the deliberate practices that are required to provide equal access to resources, information and opportunities to everyone in society (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.

Ultimately the 'Equalities Literacy' framework is rooted in the sociological construct of structure and agency (Archer, 1995). This field acknowledges that people are born into a world full of pre-existing structures which influence life opportunities and reproduce those very same structures (Bourdieu, 2003). People do, however, have agency – the ability to act within and on those structures. The 'Equalities Literacy' framework maps these structures and illustrates the deployment of agency. This mapping is a source of awareness, choice, and future action (Maynard and Stuart, 2018). Whilst these grand theories situated in/equality, they were not able to fully document its processes and practices. As a result the research team turned to a broader interdisciplinary field of models and theories to lend nuance to the structure and agency debate.

The fact that so many young people do not complete their education and are 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

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3 society does notice, it does not do anything about it – perhaps overwhelmed by the
4 enormity of the task (Stuart, 2019, p.1) or because they unconsciously assume some
5 people’s lives matter less (Harrison and Hatfield, 2017, p.ix). If the inequality is not
6 seen, acknowledged, addressed, then society becomes complicit in its perpetuation.
7 This research situates itself in this problematic socio-cultural space.
8
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10 Inequity has two facets. One facet is comprised of disadvantage, oppression,
11 marginalisation, isolation and deprivation. But this facet only exists in relation to the
12 other facet comprising privilege, advantage, liberation, and social capital. It is
13 therefore necessary to simultaneously discuss both disadvantage and privilege and
14 all the positions in between (Hays, Dean and Chang, 2007; Fine and Weis, 2003). Any
15 unequal system needs both winners and losers and privilege and deprivation exist
16 only as relative to one another and therefore the whole socio-cultural landscape
17 must be considered. The Equalities Literacy framework does just this, proposing that
18 equality is a complex interaction of elements; cultural, social, inter and intra
19 personal, with an imperative to render them visible.
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25 **Methods**

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27 The MaCE action research project seeks to achieve social change through multiple
28 iterative action research cycles. Action research is defined as: “a participatory,
29 democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of
30 worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view” (Reason and
31 Bradbury, 2001, p.1). The MaCE project draws academics, students and young
32 people together to participate in co-inquiry and co-creation. It was focussed on
33 developing practical knowledge of how ‘education’ might be more equitable, and
34 grounded in the experience of young people, some of whom have valuable
35 sensitivity from similar experience as ESL’s themselves.
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40 Action research has a focus on praxis – bringing theory and practice together
41 through inquiry and reflection (O’Brien, 2001; Kemmis, 2009). This principle was
42 important to the research which attempted to draw together theoretical
43 perspectives on equality in education from action research cycle one with young
44 people’s experiences of education in action research cycles two and three. Such co-
45 inquiry and co-creation of solutions with young people both redresses the endemic
46 marginalisation of young people from policy spaces (Treseder, 1997; Ledwith, 2005;
47 Hart, 1997) and models an inclusive and equitable mode of working with youth. This
48 marks a departure from the subversive, ‘pseudo-placebo’ participatory action
49 research proposed by Giannakaki, McMillan and Karamichas (2018, p.204). We
50 propose that tackling systemic inequality demands an open and transparent
51 approach rather than mimicking very ‘placebo treatments’ that are critiqued by the
52 authors themselves (ibid, p.193).
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57 The first action research cycle in year one developed the Equalities Literacy
58 framework from the practice experience and theoretical knowledge of the
59 international and interdisciplinary research team. This knowledge and theory alone
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3 was used to co-create the framework. As such it comprises second-person action
4 research with the research team co-inquiring and co-creating the Equalities Literacy
5 framework. This occurred through collaborative work at three week long
6 Transnational Partnership Meetings. The model was co-created from extensive
7 dialogue at and beyond these meetings and has had several developmental
8 iterations. This represents an initial attempt to map the terrain and to surface the
9 beliefs and assumptions of the research team. The Equalities Literacy framework is
10 the projects first attempt at rendering a complex phenomenon comprehensible
11 without reductionism.
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15 Whilst the Equalities Literacy Framework was developed from the team's knowledge
16 and experience, the data presented in this paper is drawn from one indirect
17 interview. This data arose from the team piloting the planned indirect interview
18 approach at one of the Transnational Partnership Meetings with English speaking
19 students from a nearby secondary school. The young people had all volunteered to
20 take part in these interviews and came from a range of backgrounds that did not
21 necessarily include ESL experience. Indeed, the interview analysed below is from a
22 young woman who may be considered 'privileged' in many ways, although
23 disadvantaged in others. In some respect this was a good interview to view through
24 an Equalities Literacy lens, as it would hopefully demonstrate the potential of the
25 framework to surface nuance.
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30 The Indirect Approach (Moshuus and Eide, 2016) developed by the Norwegian
31 research team is an unstructured, participatory research practice. The method is
32 premised on the contextual challenges involved when researchers, students and
33 young people from different and even possibly antagonistic meritocratic positions
34 meet in dialogue. The method first posits that the researcher and young people do
35 not share the same cultural setting. Second, it posits that both questions and
36 answers that direct the inquiry should come from the young person. In this respect,
37 the Indirect Approach is a participant led conversation enabling some levelling of the
38 power dynamics innate in interview situations.
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42 The Indirect Approach draws on an ethnographic biographical framework with
43 similarities to the unstructured interview (Tanggaard & Brinkman, 2015; Brinkman, &
44 Kvale, 2015). A key element in the approach is the researcher's *indirect* way of
45 approaching the life world of the participant, making sure not to introduce ideas,
46 concepts or notions into the conversation that were not first presented by the
47 participant. Reading something into the conversation or introducing the researchers
48 own concepts would influence the conversation, making it *too direct*. As such, the
49 Indirect Approach is situated within explorative qualitative approaches, discovering
50 something that we did not already know (Moshuus and Eide, 2016) and resonant
51 with Participatory Action Research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). The research
52 situation should make the participant a storyteller, making whatever he/she wishes
53 to emphasise the focus of the conversation. This opens the research to a wide
54 variation of interpretative efforts that enables the phenomena of ESL to be
55 understood as a part of the young person's holistic and situated life.
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3 Codes were drawn inductively from the ten pilot interviews in a process of thematic
4 analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). These codes were compared to
5 the Equalities Literacy Framework in a deductive process in order to bring it to life.
6 This inductive and deductive analytical process is known as abductive analysis
7 (Tavory and Timmermans, 2013) and was used to substantiate the Equality Literacy
8 Framework as it currently stands. In each future action research cycle this process
9 will lead to on-going iterations of the conceptual framework.
10
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12 13 **Findings and Discussion**

14 15 ***The Equalities Literacy Conceptual Framework***

16
17 The six elements of the Equalities Literacy Framework are interrelated and dynamic.
18 In the ensuing discussion each is presented theoretically with examples drawn from
19 Kaz's practice experience and one young person's narrative in order to bring the
20 framework and praxis to life.
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22

23 24 **1. Pre-existing Context**

25 From a theoretical perspective it is known that people are born into situations that
26 are not of their choosing (Archer, 1995). We are not able therefore to deploy an
27 entirely free will as some of the conditions into which we are born will enable and
28 constrain our actions. That is not to say that our lives are pre-determined, but
29 shaped by contexts that pre-exist us and that are of significance (Archer, 1995).
30 Whilst the context pre-exists the person they are open to mediation over time.
31 People are born into unequal circumstances; wealth and poverty, good or ill health,
32 inclusion or exclusion are examples of the almost infinite number of differentials
33 people are born into (Dorling, 2010).
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36
37 Some of the situations that people are born into are socially and culturally produced
38 and reproduced (Thompson, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The very discourses of
39 'drop outs' and 'NEETs' are evidence of these socially created constructs. These
40 socio-cultural factors exist at a micro, meso and macro levels. They include the
41 norms and customs and invisible rules of families, communities, areas, nations, and
42 of the world. These are technically known as habitus (Bourdieu, 1999) and as
43 hegemonic discourses (Gramsci, 1971). These are not fixed but ever changing as
44 illustrated by recent changes in smoking behaviours and attitudes to gay marriage in
45 various places in the world.
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48
49 Kaz's practice experience working with young people labelled as 'gang involved' and
50 self-identifying as 'groups of young people' powerfully highlighted the importance of
51 context. Eight months of research with these young people revealed that they had
52 no real choice as to whether to associate with the people they grew up with, or
53 whether to behave in the ways those people behaved in. The choice was to conform
54 to the habitus of intimidation and violence, or to be victimised. One of the reasons
55 the young people who participated did not want to be labelled as 'gang members'
56 was that they had not 'joined' a gang, they had merely grown up en-cultured into
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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 Bacculaureat 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.

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2
3 Her choice to attend this school has cost her a number of relationships with people
4 in her home community, and even her family:

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

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

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

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22
23 Kaz's practice experiences and the young person's narrative illustrate a relationship
24 between context and lived experience. The context may be replicated in the lived
25 experiences, reproducing itself within young people and groups, yet it may also
26 enable or provoke young people to be different, to change the conditions that they
27 find them in.
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29 30 31 32 **3. Positioning by Others**

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35 The real life experiences detailed above create a 'position' that is relative to other
36 people. Theory documents the ways in which these relative positions are inscribed
37 by labels and stereotypes. These labels are created by the state, media and society
38 (Jones, 2015; Bourdieu, 1999) and produce, reproduce and protect a status quo
39 (Dorling, 2010; Fox, Piven and Cloward, 2015). The resulting discourses are
40 hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971; Ledwith, 2016; Wearing, 1998) in that they protect the
41 interests of the 'haves' against the 'have not's', or distance a subgroup from the
42 norm (Tyler, 2013; Dorling, 2010, Blackman and Rogers, 2017; Piven and Cloward,
43 1993).
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47 An example of these discourses from British culture was the phenomenon of 'Vikki
48 Pollard' a female underclass acted by Matt Lucas, and 'Lauren Cooper' a school
49 failure acted by Catherine Tate. Both of these characters were comedy successes
50 epitomising unsuccessful youth. Their creation was galvanised by societal distaste for
51 young people and enabled members of society; to position people as different to
52 themselves, to protect themselves from becoming like 'the other', and to protect
53 themselves from their responsibility to support them.
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57 From Kaz's practice example it is clear that the young people defined as 'gang
58 involved' had little material goods, social mobility or choice about who or what to
59 be. They were defined as 'gang involved' (a label they refuted) and described as
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3 hoodies, druggies, yobs, as violent. They felt totally alienated by professional
4 services that often criminalised them, misunderstood by a society they had no access
5 to, and disenfranchised and betrayed by media representations. This shows the
6 power of the positions that may be inscribed onto other members of society.
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10 In contrast the Norwegian young person had a high quality education, material
11 wealth and many choices open to her. Whilst the 'privilege' of a high quality
12 education and being 'high achieving' meant that society treated her well, however,
13 the young person described the pressure she felt as society 'positioned' her as
14 responsible for dealing with many contemporary issues:

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

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

26 *YP: And do your civic duty yeah..... Teenagers go through some insane changes, and*
27 *then at one time that was all we had to do, it was just do that and develop but now*
28 *we have to do that and everything else too about 20 other things, a lot, its hard to*
29 *differ, its like is this who I am or someone I am impressioned to be.*
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33 She summarises that trying to work out what to do in life, with all these expectations
34 layered upon you is; *"like trying to shoot an arrow through a hole with your eyes*
35 *closed"*.
36
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38 Both the 'gang involved' youth and the 'high achieving' young person experience a
39 positioning from other people in society. The 'gang youth' are positioned as
40 undesirable and the 'high achiever' positioned as responsible for herself and society.
41 These labels were unhelpful and unwanted by the recipients. This highlights that
42 wherever you are on the privilege-deprivation spectrum, positions are applied and
43 status' defined by others.
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47 **4. Technologies of Oppression or Liberation**

48

49 Theory helps illuminate how positions are imposed on people through a set of
50 technologies or tools. These technologies ensure prescribed positions have impact
51 and endure. They are called technologies of liberation or oppression depending on
52 the extent to which they align with the individual's or group's self image and the
53 extent to which they constrain or enable access to resources. As such they are key to
54 in/equality and thus central to the Equalities Literacy framework.
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58 The most commonly used and understood technology is perhaps stereotyping and
59 labeling (Dorling, 2010) which most people experience at school in one form or
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3 another. These can be for small things at an individual level such as dress sense or
4 huge stereotypes at a global level such as racism. The labels we accrue early in our
5 school lives such as 'failure' or 'high achiever' may be carried with us throughout our
6 lives.
7

8
9 When we stereotype we make people 'other' to ourselves, we draw an invisible line
10 between 'us' and 'them' (either as better or worse) and create a set of
11 characteristics that separate us. This process of 'othering' psychologically protects us
12 from the possibility of becoming like the other, or of the other having any similarities
13 to ourselves (Foucault, 1978; 1982, Lacan, 1988; Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Said, 1994).
14
15

16 Another technology, 'social abjection' (Tyler, 2013) is an extension of 'othering'
17 whereby the 'other' is made vile and disgusting and not worthy of consideration. It
18 preserves 'us' from becoming 'them' (Tyler, 2013; Dorling, 2010, Blackman and
19 Rogers, 2017). This is the mechanism that has been applied with the Vikki Pollard
20 and Lauren Cooper characters in British comedy. They have the potential to erode all
21 empathy and enable the rest of society to look down on or indeed straight through
22 people who need support.
23
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25
26 Once people are objectified (Bourdieu, 2003) and socially abject, it paves the way for
27 us to treat them as inhumane or shameful (Nussbaum, 2004, Brown, 2010) and to
28 adopt a willful blindness (Heffernan, 2011) where we refuse to acknowledge their
29 human rights or even existence. Shaming and willful blindness are therefore two
30 further technologies of oppression.
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33
34 The 'other' is however always in our psyche and we remain insecure and fearful
35 (Furedi, 2005) of the risk that they pose us, and feel the division between us as
36 precarious (Lorey, 2015; Butler, 2006). This fuels the willingness of society to adopt
37 negative discourses about them, to accept forms of 'legislation' (Bauman, 1989) and
38 'surveillance' (Foucault, 1978, 1982) that keep the 'other' in their places. The UK has
39 seen a prevalence of reality television that presents vulnerable people as 'benefit
40 scroungers'. This positioning erodes public empathy for people who need benefit
41 support and could be argued to enable the government to reduce investment in the
42 welfare service. The presence of these technologies serves to oppress and
43 marginalize, defining who people are and how they are treated by the rest of
44 society. When people are not subjected to these technologies they have more
45 opportunity for liberty. The absence of shaming, 'othering', social abjection and
46 other such technologies are therefore conditions of liberation.
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51 The young people who were 'gang involved' were stopped and searched by the
52 police more often than young people from more affluent areas, they were treated
53 with disrespect, fear, loathing. They felt undesirable, unwanted and unseen until
54 visible and then reviled, dehumanised and shamed. Indeed many practitioners and
55 members of the public would not even go to the places where they lived, creating
56 almost 'ghetto' areas. Even the research commission under which I was employed
57 was a mechanism of oppression creating the sense that they were 'special cases'
58 that needed investigation.
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5 In contrast, the young person from Norway had experienced some stereotyping and
6 name calling, due to her position of privilege:

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

9 *YP: But I think you need to have the confidence, I think it's very easy to get down and*
10 *to let other people get to you when you are into stuff other people consider geeky.*

11 *YP: Yeah... and the three others they stayed where they are and we never really kept*
12 *in touch as my group were like the outcasts and there were groups in my year and we*
13 *were just the girls who didn't fit in with the other groups and so we just sort of cling*
14 *to each other and we were really good friends with really close relationships.*

15
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18 Whilst these young people had all experienced technologies of oppression the
19 differences between **them** were stark. The Norwegian young person had only
20 experienced a few technologies of oppression whereas the 'gang-involved' young
21 people had experienced most all of them on a daily basis. It is perhaps here that the
22 wedge between the deprived and privileged is driven deepest as the technologies of
23 oppression imposed on the deprived further wound and dispossess them.
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28 **5. Positioning of Self**

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30 The power of the technologies of oppression and liberation provokes reactions from
31 the people who are targeted. Individuals and groups might respond to the
32 positioning in a range of ways. Some might comply and accept messages imposed on
33 them, others may adopt positions of victimhood, and others again move to rebel or
34 be deviant. This is an inter-personal process as it is in response to the positions
35 bestowed, it is also intra-personal as individuals reconcile the messaging with their
36 sense of self. The resulting self-position is in response to these contexts, the relative
37 experiences of others, the positions imposed by others, the technologies of
38 oppression and liberation experienced, and personal response. Theory shows the
39 self-position adopted may have a major impact on the identity, agency and social
40 mobility then experienced (Cote and Levine, 2002; Lawler, 2008). This further
41 accounts for why there can be no fixed or determined trajectories of any individual
42 or group. One person may respond to deprivation with resignation and victim
43 mentality, whilst another may fight for a better outcome.
44
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48 All of these positions were evident in the young people who were 'gang involved'.
49 Some lived up to the reputation and propagated violent reputations for themselves.
50 Others acquiesced where necessary to behavioural norms of the 'gang', some lived
51 the lives they wanted counter to the dominant 'gang' culture despite the issues that
52 created for them, and some wanted to support other young people to avoid the
53 pitfalls that they had experienced becoming peer mentors.
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57 The Norwegian young person positioned herself as different in a range of ways –
58 different in ethnicity, in education, in sexuality, in outlook in life. This was perhaps a
59 meaningful narrative given some of her life circumstances:
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3 *YP: And I always thought I was different to my peers at home and so it was necessary*
4 *for me to get a new set of surroundings, environment and friends.*

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

8 *YP: I found my sexuality and dressed more comfortably, not really conforming to*
9 *gender roles so I dressed a lot differently to my friends, 'cos as I am just a lot more*
10 *interested in being comfortable and that just kind of makes me different, and*
11 *made me a lot different from those at home everyone was the same and all shopped*
12 *at the same stores.*

13 This young person was also very aware of her response to the narratives imposed on
14 her:
15

16 *YP: I know who I am, it doesn't really matter to me what you think!*
17

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19
20 The theory, practice experience and data illustrate the range of responses possible
21 to any context and positioning and the dynamic nature of the Equalities Literacy
22 framework.
23

24 25 26 **6. Impact and trajectory** 27

28
29 The **culmination of the previous five elements is encapsulated in the final element;**
30 **impact and future trajectory.** This 'final' impact trajectory is only fixed moment by
31 moment as each element of the in/equality experienced is dynamic. **Situations**
32 **change and people themselves** re-author their lives moment by moment (Clandinin,
33 Steeves, Caine, 2013).
34

35
36 Whilst the impact of privilege and deprivation are not fixed, theory shows that
37 groups of people experiencing deprivation on the whole experience a higher
38 prevalence of negative trajectories of inequitable outcomes than the privileged
39 (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Sen, 1999). This is the case across all areas of wellbeing
40 – financial, social, health and education. In this respect, the negative consequence of
41 the lack of education experienced by ESL's is well documented (European Union
42 Education and Culture DG, 2013). Whilst these negative outcomes are not fixed, they
43 are increasingly likely for young people who are ESL and may be reproduced in on-
44 going generations and attitudes, expectations and behaviours are reproduced.
45
46

47
48 The young people who were 'gang involved' were experiencing poor outcomes.
49 Many were reliant on state benefits and food parcels (Kaz met many of them at a
50 food bank) and they could not work due to a lack of education. Their benefit-
51 dependent status reinforced low self-esteem and made some of them more prone to
52 negative self-image and self-positioning. Further poor outcomes were possible, as,
53 for example, a lack of money leads to eating un-nutritious food. Whilst hypothetical,
54 this discussion highlights the complex, interwoven aspects of deprivation and ways
55 in which one initial deprivation may lead to further inequalities.
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3 The Norwegian young person had many more options and potential open to her
4 than the 'gang involved' young people. Whilst a privilege she ironically found this a
5 terrifying and disabling potential:
6

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

11 *YP: I am so scared of taking the wrong choices, really so scared!*
12
13

14 The difference between the outcomes and trajectories of the 'gang involved' youth
15 and the Norwegian youth further illustrates the impact of inequality. Whilst the
16 'gang involved' young people could achieve anything, there was a high likelihood of
17 them having low paid jobs. Whilst the Norwegian young woman could experience
18 any outcome, it looked likely that she would achieve well and get a good job –
19 however stressful that experience in the current day. **Reviewing impact** and
20 trajectory in the Equalities Literacy Framework therefore provides insight about the
21 cumulative affect of all the other elements. The conditions a person is born into,
22 their lived experiences, the treatment they get from others, and how they respond
23 all interact to create an outcome or trajectory. This itself is not fixed and
24 deterministic, but can change at any point. It is a dynamic interaction of the inter
25 personal, intra personal, and socio-cultural.
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30 When added together diagrammatically the interwoven and dynamic nature of the
31 Equalities Literacy Framework comes to the fore and highlights the potential of the
32 framework to emphasise a complex, holistic and socio-cultural nexus of in/equality.
33 People are subject to a range of deprivations, oppressions and inequalities
34 simultaneously. These constellations (Hart, Hall and Henwood, 2015) or matrices
35 (Collins, 2015) of deprivations, oppressions and inequalities are combinations of
36 types of difference, levels and contexts (Ledwith, 2005). The Equalities Literacy
37 framework is therefore intersectional (Collins, 2015, Hooks 1994, Crenshaw, 1989)
38 and intersubjective (Hegel, 1908; Habermas, 1987). This further illustrates the need
39 for a model that was avoided reductionism.
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44 Without such a conceptual framework people may make faulty assumptions or work
45 from biases. Practitioners may unintentionally disempower and disable (Illich, 1971;
46 Le Grand, 2008) as they overly help and assistentialise those they sought to
47 empower (Jefferies, 2011). Without equalities literacy there is potential for
48 unconsciously reinforcing existing power relations and therefore positions of
49 inequality (Bourdieu, 1979). Equalities literacy is required to interrupt these
50 trajectories, to enable people to lever assets (McCashen, 2010), and to challenge the
51 unequal and inequitable conditions that prevail in contemporary global society
52 (Dorling, 2010; Blackman and Rogers, 2017).
53
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55 The full Equalities Literacy model is shown in figure one below:
56

57 Figure 1 situated here
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Learning from this Action Research Cycle

This first action research cycle has been completed in the preliminary year of the project. As a result of the action research the research team has consolidated the Indirect Approach, developed the Equalities Literacy Framework and planned teaching materials ready for the second action research cycle commencing in September 2018.

We have been surprised to note that most of the research team have had some experience of marginalisation, including ESL, and perhaps this is the motivation for many of us working within this project. In this respect we have found the Equalities Literacy Framework useful in understanding our own educational biographies. We found our drive to understand the experience of inequity was at the forefront of our hearts and minds. Whilst conceptually sound (Fine and Weis, 2003, pp.11-12) it was a hard step for us to take a broader view than disadvantage alone. Accepting we needed to also understand the experiences of privilege and the practices that create it took hours of debate. Deciding on participant demographics was also problematic due to the differences in school systems, categorisation and measurement of ESL in each country. We noted our initial drive for 'comparability' in ages, demographics and experience stood in tension to reality. We settled, with some difficulty, on the pragmatic and ideological stance that all experiences of all young people have something to contribute to our understanding of ESL, whatever their demographics. The impact of this decision will be fully felt and no doubt revisited when we come to analyse the data and tackle issues of similarity and uniqueness in over 100 narratives.

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 choices and actions in practice (Bourdieu, 1999) in order for them to avoid unconsciously using technologies of oppression themselves. Once Equalities 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) and need to take a broader view that takes account of the socio-cultural structures acting on individuals.

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4 Not only is 'Equalities Literacy' a key skill for practitioners. This concept has huge
5 potential for direct work with people, particularly young people. Each researcher has
6 found the framework useful in understanding their personal educational biographies
7 from a structure and agency perspective. Kaz has used the model within four
8 different undergraduate teaching settings and found it a potent tool for individual
9 self-awareness and collective understanding of in/equality at play. We suggest that
10 young people could benefit hugely from using this tool in school settings in a process
11 akin to 'conscientization' (Freire, 1974; Andrade and Morrell, 2008). The Equalities
12 Literacy Framework has potential to increase their awareness, choices and action, to
13 empower them to contribute to social justice within the classrooms and beyond, and
14 perhaps even social change in the school system.
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19 From a research perspective the Equalities Literacy Framework highlights the need
20 for researchers to reflexively acknowledge their privileged position and to
21 understand how that interplays with the position of their participants. Methods such
22 as the Indirect Approach, and Participatory Action Research should be used to
23 address the inequity of such power relationships. Further, we need to do more with
24 our research findings. Collating stories of in/equality on our living room floors is not
25 enough as Michelle Fine has challenged and shown (2017). Researchers have a moral
26 obligation to lift their work to the macro level to support social justice at a systemic
27 level.
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31 Within the project we are conducting two further action research cycles one per
32 year 2018 - 2021. Each cycle will comprise a training course for higher education
33 students with experience of marginalisation in the Indirect Approach and Equalities
34 Literacy framework. These are a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate
35 students from all three countries. Once trained, these students and the nine
36 academics work as co-researchers collecting between one (for undergraduate
37 students) and four (for post graduate students and staff) narratives each. Each
38 person writes up their findings individually or as a collective, and the entire data set
39 is then used to understand ESL in each country and across the three countries.
40 Feedback and evaluation data is used to refine the Indirect Approach, Equalities
41 Literacy framework and teaching process between the second and third action
42 research cycles. At the end of the project the team will have co-created a set of open
43 access peer reviewed papers, teaching materials, research method materials, and
44 book. The challenge will be to ensure the solutions we co-create will have an impact
45 in the schools who participated, their regions, countries and wider society in the
46 future.
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Declaration of Interest Statement

There are no conflicts of interest.

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