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Why we need an Equalities Literacy Framework

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Why educational inequality in an issue, particularly in the UK
11.2% of all 16-24 years olds are NEET (House of Commons Library, 2019)
18% of students do not complete upper secondary education and are drop outs / ESL’s (OECD, 2017)
4.5% of children have absences from school
10% of those miss 10% of school (DfE, 2019)
54% of school pupils report being bullied (UK Annual Bullying Survey, 2019)
10% of children under 16 experience a mental health issue. Only 30% of them receive treatment (NHS England, 2019)
Many UK youth have bad experiences of education - so what?

• Are young people broken? Failing? Weak?
• Are some young people naturally better than others?
• Do some young people deserve to have a bad experience of school?
• Are our schools and education system broken? Failing? Weak?
Deprivation and marginalisation

Privilege and advantage
Deprivation
- Early school leaver
- Drop out
- NEET

Privilege
- High achievers
- School success
- Graduates
Deprivation

Because we are rubbish

Privilege

Because we are great

Individualistic – you not the system
Deficit – what you can’t do
Meritocratic – what you deserve
How do we understand what is happening?
Context is king

- Anthropology / sociology / education / youth work perspectives state context matters, we are socio-culturally shaped.
- Inequalities have always existed (Dorling, 2010)
- Social and cultural production and reproduction, through habitus and hegemonic structures (Bourdieu)
- Humans are socially and culturally embedded (Thompson, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
Context and lived experiences
Contextual facts questions

• Where did you live, what sort of house?
• How stable is your household?
• Who do you live with?
• How wealthy are you?
• Where was that, what sort of community?
• Who did you hang out with?
• Who was around to support you learn?
• What sort of school did you go to?
• What rules were there in the school?
• What was your experience of those places?
• How happy were you?
• How was your wellbeing?
Positioning by others

- People in society position ‘other’ individuals and groups in relation to themselves – it is a psychological defence
- Positions also created by the state, media and society (Jones, 2015; Bourdieu, 1999)
- People then produce, reproduce and protect a given status quo (Dorling, 2010; Fox, Piven and Cloward, 2015)
- It is often hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971; Ledwith, 2005; Wearing, 1998)
- This positioning protects the interests of the haves against the have not’s (Tyler, 2013; Dorling, 2010, Blackman and Rogers, 2017)
Context and lived experiences

Positioning by others
Positioning by others questions

• How did the people you come across treat you?
• Who treated you as an equal?
• Who looked down on you?
• Who put you on a pedestal?
• Who made you feel uncomfortable?
• What do you think other people said about you?
• What labels were you given?
• What stereotypes were applied to you?
Technologies oppression slides

- Stereotyping and labelling (Dorling, 2010)
- Objectification (Bourdieu, 2003)
- Social abjection (Tyler, 2013)
- Dehumanising, shame, stigma (Nussbaum, 2004; Brown, 2010)
- Willful blindness (Heffernan, 2011)
- Insecurity (Lorey, 2015; Butler, 2006),
- Fear (Furedi, 2005)
- Legislation (Bauman, 1989 and surveillance (Foucault, 1978, 1982) to keep people in their place.
Context and lived experiences

Technologies of oppression or liberation

Positioning by others
Technologies questions

- How did people put you down?
- How did people make you feel powerful?
- When / why were you ignored or silenced?
- How did other people make you do what they wanted you to do?
- How did people make you feel bad?
- What did other teachers and parents say to you?
- What did people do to make you feel good?
- How were you given recognition and esteem?
Self position

- Status is socially inscribed and self-ascribed
- We sometimes adopt a position from a childhood ‘script’ (Berne, 1966)
- These can be positions of compliance and acceptance, victimhood, rebellion, deviance etcetera.
- This has a major impact on our identity, agency and social mobility (Cote and Levine, 2002; Lawler, 2008)
Context and lived experiences

Self-position

Technologies of oppression or liberation

Positioning by others
Self-position questions

• How did you respond?
• How did you feel about yourself?
• What did you think about yourself?
• What were your self-beliefs?
• What were the critical messages about yourself?
• How did you behave?
• Did you rebel? Act the victim? Comply with what they say?
Trajectory

• Intrapersonal impact of these technologies e.g. low self-esteem, self-efficacy, identity, agency etc. (Bandura, 1997; Giddens, 1993; Archer, 2005)

• Interpersonal impact e.g. low trust, fear, insecure, shame, stigma (Nussbaum, 2004)

• Supporting further self-positioning and further positioning by others in on-going cycles (Bourdieu, 1995)

• Nested poor outcomes intergenerationally.
Context and lived experiences

Self-position

Technologies of oppression or liberation

Positioned by others

Trajectories
Trajectory questions

• What impact did all this have?
• Where did you think you were heading educationally?
• Was that where you wanted to go?
• What could you change to make it different?
• What did you need to do to keep it on track?
• To what extent is your outcome the same as that of other people in your family or community?
Without an equalities literacy framework people may:

- Make faulty assumptions / work from biases
- Disempower and disable
- Blame, label and individualise (‘it’s their fault mentality’)
- Unconsciously reinforce existing power relations and therefore positions of inequality
Towards a solution?
**Equality**: the same rights, freedom, opportunity.

Benefit from society on the basis of equal terms.

**Equity**: different rights, freedom, opportunity.

Benefit from outcomes of society on the basis of fairness and need.

**Social Justice**: deliberate interventions to ensure equality and equity.

**Critical Pedagogy**
References

• Brown, B. (2010). *Gifts of Imperfection.* XXX

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