

Stuart, Kaz ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7952-5779> (2022) Problematic participation: reflections on the process and outcomes of participatory action research into educational inequalities. *Educational Action Research*, 30 (3). pp. 342-356.

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5832/>

***Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.***

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

## **Problematic Participation: Reflections on the Process and Outcomes of Participatory Action Research into Educational Inequalities**

**Professor Kaz Stuart, Director of the Centre of Research in Health and Society, University of Cumbria. ORCID: 0000-0002-7952-5779.**

### **Abstract**

This paper reports on the process of participatory action research from a three-year project to co-create ideas to reduce educational inequity with young people funded by Erasmus+. The project involved 10 academics and 50 university students from Norway, Denmark and England who co-researched 200 young people's experiences of educational inequity. The process of participatory action research was challenging but rewarding for its potential for social justice. The participatory process used and the difficulties encountered are identified and discussed in this paper for the benefit of future research. The co-created output from the research, the Wellbeing, Education, Learning and Development Model (WELD) is provided as an example of the potential of action research to inspire multi-level social change.

### **Keywords**

Education, equity, social justice, action research, participation, co-creation.

**Funding Details:** The Marginalisation and Co-Created Education (MaCE) Project in which this research was conducted was funded by Erasmus+.

### **Introduction**

Whilst education may be considered a universal human right, its provision is far from equitable. There are great variations between countries in terms of where, what and how education is provided. Variations also occur within **countries with locations** having different quality schools and systems enabling the most privileged opportunity to pay for a higher quality education for their children. Within schools there is also much inequity. Many countries have initiatives to 'close the gap' between those who attain the highest and lowest. Some countries closely monitor the academic attainment of a range of known 'at risk' groups, such as those in poor socio-economic conditions, with special educational needs, and those of different ethnicities. Differences also play out within each classroom, with some young people getting more support than others depending on whether they are considered 'good' or 'bad' students. Young people therefore find themselves in what is known to be a globally, nationally and locally inequitable education system (**Clegg et al., 2017**).

**The three year Marginalisation and Co-Created Education Programme (MaCE)** was ambitious in exploring the extent to which these inequities were experienced and perceived by young people and how that impacted on them. The aim of this extensive work was to co-create recommendations to teachers, educational establishments, local authorities and governments as to how young people would prefer their education to be organised. **We discovered the findings were also more broadly relevant to anyone working with young people, such as youth workers, community workers, social care staff, health staff etcetera.**

The entire project was motivated by notions of emancipatory social justice and the recommendations, it was hoped, would be a catalyst for educational change locally, regionally and nationally.

The first year of the project involved ten academics developing a programme to engage two consecutive cohorts of international undergraduate and postgraduate students in a year-long participative and co-constructed research project. In the first year the academics also developed a theoretical framework which could be employed as a theory framework, reflexive tool, interview guide, or deductive analytical framework. This was called the Equalities Literacy Framework (Stuart et al., 2019). This became significant in the process of participatory action research as well as offering a tool for work with young people.

The second and third years of the project each comprised:

- Recruitment of students in each country
- Online induction – 4 x three hour sessions
- Week long residential to learn and develop the theories and research methods
- Conducting research with young people in own country
- Week long residential to analyse and write up the research
- Submission of dissertations, journal articles and book chapters.

The outline above indicates the programme was time and resource rich as a result of the Erasmus+ funding.

The design of the research process is outlined in the methodology below in terms of our positive, and perhaps, naïve intentions. A praxeological account (discussing the science of this human action (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014)) of the benefits and difficulties encountered along the way is then presented along with the final WELD model with its potential for educational and wider social change.

## Methods

The team of ten multi-national and multi-disciplinary academics were aligned in social justice values and had from the outset planned to work in a participatory way with a range of 'young' people in order to create proposals for more equitable education. The research was, therefore, participatory and democratic in its process and outcome as it hoped to make education work for everyone. In this respect it resonated with Reason and Bradbury's definition of action research 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, 2001:1). The academic researchers' educational philosophies favoured a socio-cultural co-constructive approach to the project which also resonated with the paradigm of participatory research.

Each year the team invited 30 higher education students to participate in the project. They were a combination of existing undergraduate and postgraduate students who wanted to add this research experience into their studies and new postgraduate students recruited from practice who wanted to undertake new studies. Despite the opportunity to undertake

a 'free' programme of study, recruitment of co-researchers was a struggle due to the demands of being a student, having a job, and wider life commitments. It is useful to note that opportunity alone is not necessarily enough to enable people to participate in research.

As a 60 strong co-research team, we each sought to engage five young people aged 11-18 in discussions about their lives. The co-researchers contacted practitioners in schools, youth services, social services and community settings in order to reach young people. The practitioners then extended the invitation to participate to the young people they supported and parental consent was secured alongside that of the individual and organization where relevant. As the recruitment was so open, the young people had a wide range of demographic and social characteristics.

The co-researchers were all trained in using an Indirect Approach (Moshuus and Eide, 2016) developed and used by the Norwegian research team as an unstructured, participatory research practice. The method seeks to level the power differential between 'researcher' and 'researched' by adopting an unstructured approach and encouraging participants to direct the conversation to aspects of their life they wish to share. The Indirect Approach draws on an ethnographic biographical framework and has similarities to unstructured interviews (Tanggaard & Brinkman, 2015; Kvale & Brinkman, 2015). A key element in the approach is the researcher's *indirect* way of approaching the life world of the participant, discussing what is important to them, rather than *directly* referring to their own experiences, agenda or questions, an approach resonant with Participatory Action Research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). The aim is to work with the participant as a storyteller, with the researcher following their lead, deepening their understanding of what is meaningful in their situated contextual lives and the relevance 'education' has within them. This approach was new to eight of the ten academics and enabled a greater degree of co-research as we were all learning together with the higher education students.

At the outset we did not know how we would analyse the data we collected. We knew we would have around 200 audio and video recordings of indirect discussions with young people. The academic team did not want to impose an analytical approach on the students but rather co-created it with them as discussed below.

Navigating ethics was complex in a multi-national research project. Our individual national governing bodies had differing conceptualisations of what was ethical. In Norway, for example, collecting demographic details is considered unethical as the low population in each geographic area means that demographic data would enable identification of individuals. The team agreed to adopt the most stringent ethical guidelines to ensure all the co-researchers and research participants were equally protected. Individual applications to university ethics boards were completed in advance of the higher education students joining the team, and the practicalities of managing ethical consideration for each researcher with each of their young participants discussed in research workshops. Still ethics were not managed without difficulties. The co-research team avidly explored the experiences of: the young people who wanted structure and questions, the young people who wanted to participate but who did not speak, those who became unbounded and those who shared more than we should know. To mitigate these, alongside our organisational ethical approval, we used running ethics (Ramcharan and Cutcliffe, 2001) and continual consent

checking (Lund and Kjedaahl, 2019). These issues became the focus of some of the journal articles written by the team (Hornbaek Frostholm, 2019; Lund and Kjedaahl, 2019).

## Discussion

The following discussion of the process and outcomes of the participatory action research is praxeological in that it is a meld of my reflections on practice along with key theory, developing something of a theory of participatory practice. My hope is that the discussion will help other researchers and educators (in its broadest sense) in developing equitable research and education (Kemmis, 2010:10). The discussion takes two parts, the first addressing the concept of participatory action research and its practice and the second presenting the theoretical outcomes of the research. Review of the concept of power opens the discussion, as participatory action research seeks to disrupt traditional power relationships (Fine, 2018). A discussion of the different perspectives possible within action research follows, linked to the participatory ethos of the project. The discussion concludes by reviewing the extent to which the project achieved a knowledge democracy, 'action' and social justice.

### 1. Power and Participation with Higher Education Students

Complexity arose from the outset with regard to power. The academic team held a range of sources of power which we could not ignore. Firstly, the academic team had written the project application which committed us to certain methodological approaches such as the indirect approach, and so the students had no choice in how to go about their research (Haggerty, 2004). This was perhaps tempered to some extent by their choice of research setting, analytical approach and publication route. Secondly, the academics had spent a year together designing a programme which facilitated 50 higher education students to become co-researchers and 'equal' participants in the research. This meant it was hard to be "with them" as learners as we were also at times "in front of them" teaching them research skills. The difficulty of having to facilitate their skills before we could research together was reinforced by some academics having previous teacher-student relationships with the co-researchers, and power-over them in terms of assessing their final dissertations. A fourth source of power was the academics privileged level of theoretical and practical knowledge having all been educators and academics in the field for many years. And finally, the intersecting power bases of age, class, gender, ethnicity and language could not be put to one side. These are difficult aspects of power to manage and we were literally painfully aware of them.

The academic team genuinely and authentically wanted to co-research with the students and were dedicated to avoiding a 'pseudo-placebo' participatory action research (Giannakaki, McMillan and Karamichas, 2018: 204). We attempted to achieve authentic participation in several ways.

The structure of the programme was a great enabler of the participatory process in that we had a lot of time together online and face to face. Time alone will not ensure a participatory practice, but it afforded us the space in which to conduct activities which would enable participation. The first of these was our extensive engagement in informal play. This

included planned name games, icebreakers, team games, and unplanned discussion at meal times, on walks together, sitting by a lake. The power of these in creating community should not be underestimated. These spaces built understanding, empathy and trust between people, the foundations of participation.

Secondly, we explicitly stated what we could contribute and what we could learn from one another, and when we were doing that. This meant that we took turns in explaining our backgrounds and experiences as well as what we felt were blind spots and areas for development. We all did this as co-researchers. This invoked the sense that everyone had something to contribute and that everyone had something to learn. We maintained respectful listening and there was a power in owning strengths and admitting vulnerability. The openness to do both communicated we were serious about learning together. Many of the students were astonished at the academics engaging in real conversation with them, rather than talking at them, and the candour of those conversations. In addition, the academics very consciously modelled debate and dialogue to the students – we would openly and warmly disagree, add ideas, build new ideas and take criticism. We carefully invited the students into this space asking them what they thought. In an apprenticeship manner (Wenger, 2010; Lave, 1991) the students learned to say what they thought, to contribute their knowledge and experience, and to question others views. This took time, it was a skilled endeavour, testing the fabric of our trust. This level of dialogue was fundamental to being able to co-create models of practice together.

A similar apprentice model of learning occurred in the research workshops (Gillies and Alldred, 2002). Whilst a member of the academic team might present an aspect of ‘theory’ or a research ‘skill’, all the other academics would engage in learning about it with the students. They did not withdraw as elite ‘knowers’. This again communicated openness to learn and develop together as equals with different knowledge capitals (Bourdieu, 1986), all in the process of becoming a researcher (Maguire, 2014). Once we embarked on the data collection we were all in new territory, all learning new things from young people. Equipped with research skills, the students moved from peripheral positions of novice researchers to more central positions as experts of their own lives and experts on the conversations they had with young people (Lave, 1991).

An accidental discovery was that the Equality Literacy Framework (Stuart et al., 2019) was fundamental to us working together as co-researchers. The Equality Literacy Framework (EQL) was designed by the academics as a theoretical framework with which to consider the relative privilege and disadvantage young people experience in school and the structures and agency invoked in that process. We shared this model with students in a workshop format in order to bring it to life. We had no idea it would surface such a depth of personal reflection and how this would deepen the community of practice. A short description of each element of the EQL was presented (see figure 1 below) and each co-researcher individually annotated their own copy of the diagram with the factors that affected their education in response to the questions. We then shared reflections around these before moving onto the next element. We were suddenly discussing challenging personal circumstances, growing up with drug addicted parents, caring for a parent, living in poverty. We were debating how we had each been made to ‘feel’ at school and the mechanisms for that. We shared how we had each responded to those factors, whether we complied or

rebelled. Ultimately, we discussed the privilege and disadvantage which had led to us each being in that room. This was a visceral and raw conversation. There was laughter and tears, we all took part and we all gained.

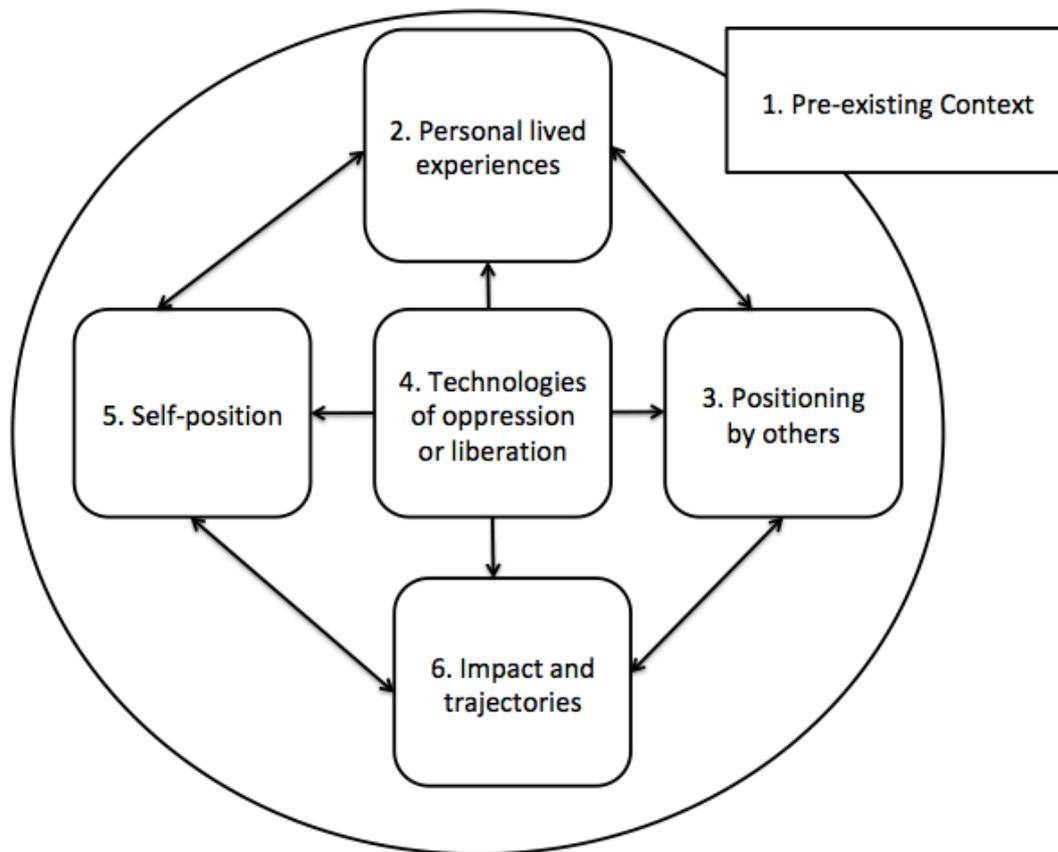


Figure 1: The Equalities Literacy Framework (reproduced with permission).

The time to develop social relationships, the apprenticeship mode of learning, the authenticity of researching together, and the depth of communication enabled us to name and semi-manage the power dynamics present. At an inter and intra personal level we had developed processes to manifest, model and sustain trust and this was evident in the ease with which we rubbed along together, and the candor, support and challenge in our conversations.

## 2. Power and Participation with Young People

As outlined above, the research with higher education students was participatory in that we became a co-research team. We had all also hoped to do research ‘with’ young people rather than ‘on’ them (Rowell et al., 2017; Pauwels, 2011) engaging them in participatory research too. We soon realized, however, that this was not possible. Too many layers of decisions had already been made for the young people’s full participation. The methodology was largely determined, the focus set. All that remained was for the young people to choose whether to participate or not, and what to talk about. Despite our participatory aims therefore, we had to acknowledge that the young people were the subjects of the co-researchers work. Therefore, whilst we achieved research ‘with’ the higher education

students, we conducted research 'on' young people, however uncomfortably that sits. This was moderated to some extent by the 'choice' the young people had to talk about whatever they liked in our indirect conversations, but this still felt unsatisfactory. Whilst this may not have lived up to our expectations of participatory research, it was perhaps participatory youth or education work. The Lundy Model of Participation (Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015:21) states participation of children involves:

- Space – safe inclusive opportunities to form and express their views
- Voice – opportunity to express their view
- Audience – their view to be listened to
- Influence – their views acted on, as appropriate.

In this respect the work with young people was a form of participatory practice, if not participatory research. A further consideration in participatory action research is the extent to which the participants want to be involved. It may be easy to assume that every young person wants to be fully involved in the design, delivery and dissemination of a project, but in reality, young people may not have the time, interest or ability to participate this fully. Providing **participants** with the appropriate level and type of participation is therefore the key consideration (Treseder, 1997; Cahill and Dadvand, 2018). We did not ask the young people who participated how they would like to be involved and on reflection, this was a serious shortcoming in the research and learning for the future. Despite these reservations, listening to young people was humbling for the co-research team. The young people's experiences were invaluable in developing recommendations for the future of education, and also, in deepening the co-researchers' commitment to participatory practice.

### **3. The 'Person' in Participatory Action Research**

Action research is sometimes categorised by the stance adopted by the researcher, namely; first, second or third person (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). We started this research with second and third person action research **in mind**. As Froggatt et al., (2013) state; "First, second and third person inquiry bring different but complementary aspects to an action research project that facilitate both knowledge generation and change. First person inquiry provides an important basis for inquiring into one's own engagement with the value-laden and political nature of action research. Second person inquiry focuses on inquiry with others while third person inquiry looks to dissemination of findings to a wider audience" (p.38).

From the second person perspective we each sought to understand how we might better support children, young people and students. This was a second person perspective in that we were enquiring into equitable education together as a collective, although with different participants and in different ways. Participatory, collective action research will perhaps always lean most strongly to the second person perspective as it seeks to achieve a 'we' voice. We achieved the second person perspective by continually asking one another 'what are you finding out from the young people you speak with', and 'what is theory telling you right now'? These continued empirical and theoretical enquiries, across two years, kept a collective praxis alive.

From a third person perspective we were concerned with revealing inequalities and proposing solutions to those issues locally, regionally and nationally. Some participatory

action research **projects** may align well to the third person perspective as they seek to disseminate findings in a 'you could / you should' voice, effecting change at a range of **levels** in society. Key to this perspective was drawing together the individual research projects into one collective set of findings and recommendations as discussed later in this paper. The central question here was 'what have we found out together, and what does this mean'?

Whilst the second and third person perspectives were both explicitly stated aims of the research, what unexpectedly emerged was the first-person perspective. Personal experience of educational failure blended with theory and the voices of young people. Our internalised values of equity and participation were reinforced and became more explicit. Within every action research project, no matter whether participatory or not, there is perhaps a first-person perspective, the 'I' voice. **This may be implicit in the design and conduct of the research for example, with autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) or made explicit through reflective and reflexive work (Etherington, 2004).** We found our experience of co-research provided us each with; "a foundational practice and discipline through which we can monitor the impact of our behaviour" (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). We found that by researching equity we became more committed to behaving equitably ourselves.

This led us to realise the participatory action research had enabled us to move between perspectives blending personal realisations with collective findings and a call for societal change. As Froggett et al., (2013) stated, the realisations across the **first, second and third person** were complementary. This also supports the notion that participatory action research has potential to lead to personal, organisational and societal change (Fine, 2008). Just as Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001:5) describe action research as alternating between inquiry and action, practice and innovative thinking, we also discovered ourselves productively alternating between perspectives; 'I will, we found, society should'.

#### **4. Educational Philosophy and Practices**

Whilst the project was grounded in **participatory action research methodology**, it also had a learning intent and was informed by educational theory and practice. Action research is positioned as able to raise the critical awareness of participants (Winter and Munn-Giddings 2001: 261; Reason 2003; McIntosh 2010), and we hoped increased critical consciousness and emancipation would result for all the co-researchers. Embedded in higher education institutions as we were, wider aspects of pedagogy were also informing our actions. These included the dialogical, emancipatory practices and ideals of critical pedagogy (Greene, 1986; Giroux, 2011), the educational premises of apprenticeship in communities of practice (Lave, 1991; Wenger, 2010) and a socially constructivist paradigm (Burr, 2006). Being critical together was a fundamental component of discussions once we had developed trust and openness. Sometimes catalyst objects were problematised in order to generate criticality, openness and trust – for example, what to do if a co-researcher didn't show up to a session. In our MaCE community of practice focused on educational inequity, we discovered that examples of power lay in the smallest of incidents. Considering these brought us together and, from our various positions of expertise, we journeyed together becoming more expert in both research and educational justice.

To find out whether the project had been beneficial to the co-researchers we held review conversations at the end of each stage of the programme and evaluation forms at four points in each year. This data provided unequivocal evidence that the entire co-research team (academics and students alike) were gaining new perspectives, new research skills, new experiences and gaining confidence as researchers (Stuart and Dooley, 2020). The reasons they provided for these were the openness and trust, the time together in meaningful discussion and the equal status of all co-researchers. This supports the sense that socially constructed educational philosophy coupled with critical pedagogical practice are potent allies of participatory action research.

## 5. Knowledge Democracy, Action and Social Justice

By working together in a participatory action research project shaped by a socially constructed educational philosophy and critically pedagogical practices we hoped we could achieve some degree of knowledge democracy (Smith, 2012). Rather than white, western academics producing knowledge in an 'epistemological exclusion' (Stuart and Shay, 2008), we hoped a wide range of young people would tell their experiences to co-researchers who would each bring their own experiences to bear on the narratives creating a rich web of different perspectives (Cotton, 2007). As Darder (2015) states, "the deeply serious problems students face within schools and their private lives are ignored, swept under the carpet of institutional efficiency, meritocratic fantasies, and the politics of social containment". We wanted to disrupt this, to reveal these problems and heighten everyone's obligation to address them.

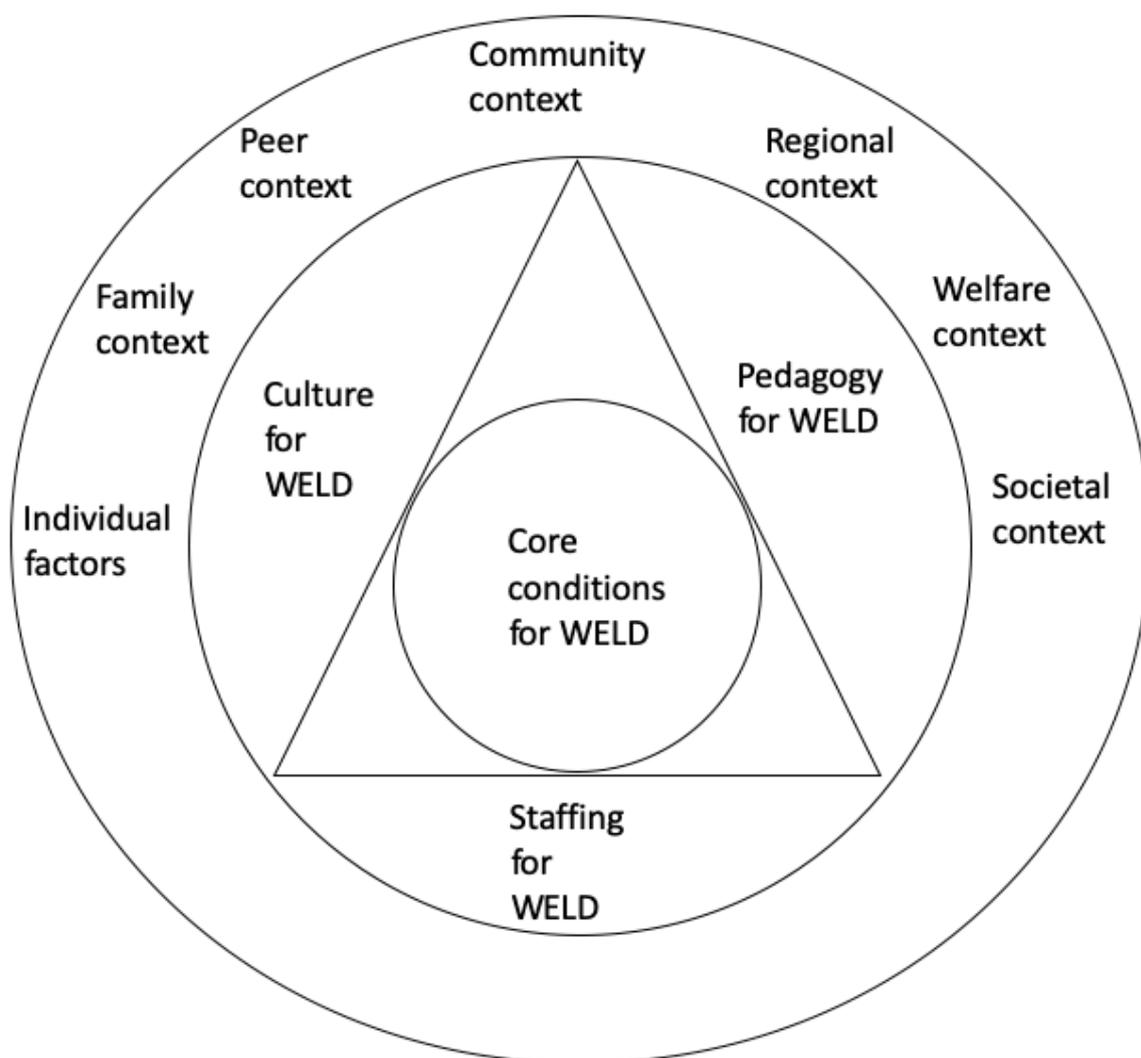
On reflection, knowledge democracy was embedded into the project at a number of levels. Firstly, the desire to hear from young people first-hand placed their knowledge in a privileged position, albeit analysed and interpreted by 'adults'. However, those adults were from a range of backgrounds and mostly had experiences of educational failure or disadvantage themselves. Knowledge democracy further happened in the analysis of the data. Each co-researcher was responsible for the conduct of their own research project with five young people. They made choices about where to collect data and who from, how to manage the ethics, how to capture the data, and how to analyse and publish it. Despite these efforts, the multi-national and cross-sector and demographic mix of the team, the knowledge generated was no doubt still invisibly constrained to some extent by its higher education institution setting.

Some co-researchers used an inductive thematic approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006) seeing what 'story' emerged from an open coding, e.g. Linnell (2020). Others adopted a deductive approach, using the EQL categories for closed coding, e.g. Stuart and Walker (2019). Another choice was to analyse the narratives abductively (Tavory and Timmermans, 2013). This meant they would have some loose categories in mind such as the elements of the EQL, whilst also looking for new codes to develop the theory or story e.g. Stuart et al., (2019).

The final data corpus was large in qualitative terms, with 200 youth narratives. A 'scientific' approach to this data set might have seen the academics analysing all the data, using inter-rater analysis to confirm findings and publication of a neat and tidy set of recommendations. However, this was not aligned to our participatory methodology. The

young people's narratives had already been analysed and any re-analysis would undermine the work of the individual co-researchers. If the academics undertook the work it would no longer be co-created but standard academic research. This was also problematic in positivist terms as the sample varied enormously in demographics, use of the indirect approach varied (e.g. conversational, arts based or walking) and the analytical approach varied as discussed.

In order to develop a participatory analysis we asked all the co-researchers in each year to discuss what they had found in their projects. Each co-researcher provided an account of their findings and recommendations and these were compiled into a master list. We then reviewed this list together and stepped into in an extended dialogue of national recommendations to address these inequalities. This discussion was recorded, transcribed and the recommendations thematically analysed. These analyses were sent back to the entire research team to check and edit. The academics then proposed a model from the final agreed analysis and this was also sent to the whole research team for comment and amendments. After several edits we arrived together at the final Wellbeing, Education, Learning and Development model (see figure 2) (WELD).



*Figure one: The Wellbeing, Education, Learning and Development Model.*

The model presents a nested model with core conditions for wellbeing, education, learning and development in the centre, supported by appropriate pedagogy, culture and staffing, embedded in a context comprised of individual factors, family, peer, community, regional, welfare and societal context. It has resonance with both the Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological model and Dahlgren and Whitehead's (1991) determinants of health model and yet stands distinct as a contextually situated model for multi-disciplinary praxis with young people. It provides both a theoretical framework and practice guide for any one supporting young people's development. But that discussion is for another paper. What is of import here, is that the model was developed from the narratives of 200 young people as interpreted by 60 co-researchers with different demographics and disciplines. As such it represents some disruption of hegemonic western knowledge production (Fine, 2018b).

The final point of discussion is the extent to which the research achieved 'action' and improved 'social justice'. Action is not only a fundamental part of the philosophy of action research, but also a moral prerogative. As Michelle Fine compellingly states:

"Once critical researchers chronicle the scar tissue and desires of those who have been shut out, we carry the responsibility to theorise, historicise, make visible, re-present and re-circulate their stories in the courts, in policy, in text-books, classrooms, curriculum, organising and popular media..... Critical researchers are neither tape recorders nor ventriloquists. And so what do we do with these luscious transcripts scattered around our living room floors?" (Fine, 2018a:12).

On reflection, I propose action did arise from the MaCE project through the three different voices of the action research – the first, second and third person. Each individual co-researcher had a range of 'I' statements at the final check-in focused on what they would do as a result of this research. They ranged from statements such as *'I will listen to children in my class more often'*, and *'I will focus on becoming a researcher now'*. From a second person perspective we had developed a collective voice and two collective models – ELQ and WELD. These gave us two tangible ways of talking about the learning from the project. They were both theoretical models but also informed practice. 'We' became concerned with how we could implement these changes in our local practices, for example; *'I want to talk to my head teacher about how to bring in WELD'*, and *'I need to see how the rest of my HEI can use these ideas'*. One co-researcher even established their own school grounded in the learning from the project.

The third person impact is harder to define. 'We' developed a voice and 'we' disseminated locally, regionally, nationally and internationally in practice and academic forums, but the extent to which this has affected change is impossible to evidence. Perhaps this dissemination has changed attitudes or increased critical consciousness even if not transformed the sector. This baton will be picked up, however, by a second Erasmus+ funded project whose aim is to elevate the findings from the MaCE project to the level of national policy in what is now five participating EU countries.

## Conclusion

Participatory action research may be a difficult and messy process (Cook, 2008), however, it is a meaningful endeavour. It is impossible within the constraints of an academic paper to convey the warmth and depth of relationship fostered on this project and the impact it had individually and collectively.

The melding of perspectives – across nations, demographics and interests could be framed as inter-disciplinary, international or intersubjective. What matters, I propose, is that these different perspectives were woven together into the tapestry of participatory action research (Townsend, 2014). The tapestry was richer for the different perspectives, it documents the commitment of the ‘weavers’ to their process and their change, and also challenges those who view it as to what they will do, how they will change. Further, the tapestry is by and of the people, it is generated from life experience, it informs the world from the first hand and therefore offers a more democratic form of knowledge.

The democratic process we engaged in led to nothing ‘new’ or ‘surprising’ in the WELD model. Rather it restated taken for granted, long-known principles that underpin wellbeing, education, learning and development that are still imperative for educational justice. However, the 200 young people we spoke with indicated these principles are not well practiced, eroded perhaps by; a lack of funding (Britton et al., 2019), centralised control over schools (Coffield, 2017), and a narrowing of the curriculum (Marsh, 2020). We hope raising these issues may be the spark needed for teachers to make different choices and to take different actions (Maynard and Stuart, 2018).

Whilst the approach aims to level power in a collective and shared process, transcending power is not possible in practice (Gallagher, 2008; Mannay, 2016). Even our decision to work in a participative paradigm was an act of power (Kothari, 2001). Instead, power has to be acknowledged and discussed openly, managed transparently and explicitly dealt with. Sweeping under the carpet just won’t do. And perhaps the close alliance between critical pedagogy and participatory action research as deeply relational processes that seek to liberate all (Udas, 1998) was of fundamental importance.

At a point of international crisis, with global racial, financial and health issues escalating, we exhort colleagues to co-design and co-research through participatory action research so as to emancipate, increase knowledge democracy and affect social change.

## References

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital in Richardson, J. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Britton, J., Farguharson, C., Sibieta, L. (2019). *The 2019 Annual Report on Education Spending in England*. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies. Accessed on 26/5/2020 at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14369>

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Burr, V. (2006). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Cahill, H., Dadvand, B. (2018) Re-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to inform action, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 95, pp.243-253.

Clegg, N., Allen, R., Fernandes, S., Freedman, S., Kinnock, S. (2017). *Commission on the Inequity in Education*. London: The Social Market Foundation. Accessed 8/11/20 at <https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Education-Commission-final-web-report.pdf>

Coffield, F. (2017). *The Research Evidence For and Against OFSTED*. British Association of Educational Research Blog, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017. Accessed on 26/5/2020 at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-research-evidence-for-and-against-ofsted>

Coghlan, D., Brydon-Miller, M. (2014). Praxeology, *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Action Research*. London: Sage. Doi. [10.4135/9781446294406.n288](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406.n288)

Cook, T. (2008). *Ways of Seeing – Ways of Learning: the role of honest methodology in research and evaluation*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Northumbria.

Cotton, T. (2007). What is it like to be here? A methodology., *For the Learning of mathematics*, 27(2), pp.40-44.

Dahlgren G., Whitehead M. (1991). *Policies and Strategies to Promote Social Equity in Health*. Stockholm, Sweden: Institute for Futures Studies.

Darder, A., (2015). *Imaging Justice: Politics, pedagogy and dissent*, in A., Jolivet (Ed.) *Research Justice. Methodologies for Social Change*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Ellis, C., Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject, in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)*, Sage Publications, pp. 733-768

Etherington, Kim. (2004). *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher - Using Our Selves in Research*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Fine, M. (2018a). *Just Research in Contentious Times. Widening the Methodological Imagination*. New York: Teachers University Press.

Fine, M. (2018b) Accumulation and its Dis'(sed) Contents: The Politics of Evidence in the Struggle for Public Education, Spooner, M., McNinch, J. (Eds.) (2018) *Dissident Knowledge in Higher Education*. Saskatchewan: University of Regina Press, pp.134-158.

Froggatt, K., Hockley, J., Heimerl, K. (2013). First, second and third person inquiry in  
Froggatt, K., Hockley, J., Heimerl, K. (Eds.), *Participatory Research in Palliative Care*. Oxford  
University Press, Oxford, pp. 53-63.

Gallagher, M. (2008). Power is not an Evil: Rethinking power in participatory methods,  
*Children's Geographies*, 6(2), 137-51.

Giannakaki, M.S., McMillan, I.D., Karamichas, J. (2018). Problematizing the use of education  
to address social inequity: Could participative action research be a step forward?, *British  
Educational Research Journal*, 44(2), 191-211.

Gillies, V. & Alldred, P. (2002). The ethics of intention: research as a political tool. In  
Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J., & Miller, T. *Ethics in qualitative research* (pp. 33-52).  
London: SAGE Publications Ltd doi: 10.4135/9781849209090

Giroux, H. (2011) *On Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Greene, M. (1986). In Search of a Critical Pedagogy, *Harvard Educational Review*, December  
1986, 56(2).

Haggerty, K.D. (2004). Displaced expertise: Three constraints on the policy Relevance of  
Criminological Thought, *Theoretical Criminology*, 8(2), 211-311.

Hornbaek Frostholm, P. (2019). Exploring Young People's Voices in Ethnographic Research,  
*The Journal of Youth Voices in Education: Methods, Theory, Practice*, 1(1): 59-65.

Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015). *National Strategy on Children and  
Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020*. Accessed 19/8/20 at  
<http://dcya.gov.ie/documents/playandrec/20150617NatStratParticipationReport.pdf>

Kemmis, S. (2009). Action Research as a Practice Based Practice, *Educational Action  
Research*, 17 (3), 463-474.

Kemmis, S. (2010). Research for praxis: knowing doing, *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 18(1),  
pp.9-27.

Kothari, U. (2001). Power, knowledge and social control in participatory development in B.  
Cooke and U. Kothari (eds.) *Participation: The New Tyranny*. London: Zed Books, pp.139-52.

Kvale, S., Brinkman, S. (2015). *Interview. Det kvalitative forskningsinterview som håndværk*.  
Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Lave, J. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press.

Ledwith, M., Springett, J. (2010). *Participatory Practice: Community-based Action for  
Transformative Change*. Portland OR: Policy Press.

- Linnell, G. (2019). Perceived expectations and young peoples' self-perceptions; exploring disadvantage in the context of a grammar school, *The Journal of Youth Voices in Education: Methods, Theory, Practice*, 1(1), pp.14-24.
- Lund, A., Kjeldahl, A. (2019). The Indirect Approach – Refleksion, kritik og potentialer, *The Journal of Youth Voices in Education: Methods, Theory, Practice*, 1(1),66-75.
- Maguire, P. (2014). Feminist Participatory Research in A. Jaggar (ed.) *Just Methods An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Press, pp.417-31.
- Mannay, D. (2016). *Visual, Narrative and Creative Research Methods*. London: Routledge.
- Marsh, S. (2020). Ofsted Chief: Funding Cuts Forcing Schools to Narrow Curriculum. The Guardian, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2020. London: Guardian Press.
- Maynard, L., Stuart, K. (2018). *Promoting Young People's Wellbeing Through Empowerment and Agency: A Critical Framework for Practice*. 179 pages. London: Routledge.
- McIntosh, P. (2010). *Action Research and Reflective Practice: Creative and Visual Methods to Facilitate Reflection and Learning*. London: Routledge.
- Moshuus, G., Eide, K. (2016). The Indirect Approach: How to Discover Context when Studying Marginal Youth, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, January-December, 1-10.
- Pauwels, L. (2011). An Integrated Conceptual Framework for Visual Social Research, E.Margols and L.Pauwels (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods*. London: SAGE, pp.3-23.
- Ramcharan, P., Cutcliffe, J.R. (2001). Judging the ethics of qualitative research: considering the 'ethics as process' model, *Health and Social Care in Community*, 9(6), 358-366.
- Reason, P., Bradbury, H. (2001). Introduction: Inquiry and participation in search of a world worthy of human aspiration, in Reason, P., Bradbury, H., (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice*. 1st edn. London: Sage, 1-14.
- Reason, P., Bradbury, H. (2008). Introduction, in, Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.)*. London: SAGE, p.6.
- Rowell, L., Bruce, C., Shosh, J., Riel, M. (2017). *The Palgrave Handbook of Action Research*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Zed Books.

Stuart, K., Bunting, M., Moshuus, G., Thore Graveson, D., Holvig, S., Frostholm Hornbaek, P. (2019). An Equalities Literacy Framework for Practitioners Working with Children, Young People and Families through Action Research, *Educational Action Research*, doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2019.1593870

Stuart, K., Shay, M. (2018). Epistemological Exclusion, in *Educational Research in the Age of the Anthropocene: Chronology, Context and Contestability*, In Vicente Reyes, Jennifer Charteris, Adele Nye & Sofia Marvopoulo (Eds), *Educational Research in the Age of the Anthropocene*. pp.188-210. Hershey, PA, United States: IGI Global.

Stuart, K., Dooley, P. (2020). *The Marginalisation and Co-Created Education Project (September 2017-June 2020) Evaluation of the Higher Education Programme*. Carlisle: University of Cumbria.

Stuart, K., Walker, S. (2019). 'Great Expectations' in the UK Education System, *The Journal of Youth Voices in Education: Methods, Theory, Practice*, 1(1), pp.3-13.

Tanggaard, L. & Brinkman, S. (2015). Interviewet: Samtalen som forskningsmetode. In: S. Brinkmann & L. Tanggaard (red.), *Kvalitative metoder: En grundbog*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Tavory, I., Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive Analysis: Theorising Qualitative Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Townsend A. (2014) Weaving the Threads of Practice and Research. In: Rauch F., Schuster A., Stern T., Pribila M., Townsend A. (eds) *Promoting Change through Action Research*. SensePublishers, Rotterdam. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-803-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-803-9_2)

Treseder, P. (1997). *Empowering Children and Young People*. London: Save the Children.

Udas, K. Participatory Action Research as Critical Pedagogy. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 11, 599–628.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities Of Practice, Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Winter, R., and Munn-Giddings, C. (2001). *A Handbook for Action Research in Health and Social Care*. Routledge: London.