# Developing a critical pedagogy for activist research

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**PhD by Publication**

**September 2023**

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## Declaration

I declare that all the material which is not my own, has, to the best of my ability, been acknowledged. The material in this thesis has not been submitted previously by the authors for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed Date 26/9/2023

## Acknowledgements

There are many I am thankful for in the development of this thesis, and who even before that guided me in my development as a researcher. In particular, Pete McCarthy, now retired, who guided me through my junior research years and who first inspired me to consider myself a researcher, and more than that, an activist. I must also thank Liz Todd, who gave me the freedom and autonomy to do things differently, experiment and try new things as an educational researcher. I thank her also, alongside Rachel Pain, for their unwavering faith in me and their dogged determination to ensure I completed my PhD when I always wanted to prioritise doing the research that mattered to others.

I would also like to thank my co-writers, who consist of other academics, independent researchers and on occasion, practitioners. I very much enjoyed working with you all and acknowledge the contributions you all made to my thinking. In similar vein, my gratitude and thanks go to all my colleagues in CfLaT, who supported me throughout, believed in me, and were always willing to help, whether by reading drafts, commenting on publications, co-writing, or just listening to me rant! I could not have done this without you all, and I count myself lucky to be part of such a warm, caring, supportive research community.

Thanks also go to my loyal band of friends, who nagged me incessantly to finish, held me up and helped me to believe in myself and were always there.

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9763 words (excluding references and appendices)

## Abstract

This thesis uncovers the learning from a portfolio of peer-reviewed publications (published between 2018-22) in order to build a new conceptual model of activist educational research, alongside presenting an analysis of practical considerations for the enactment of it. This body of research derived from five separate research programmes utilising mixed methods and approaches including a research secondment; a residential research trip with young women; co-production of research with young people; embedded research approaches; and qualitative studies examining young people's views of fairness. Drawing on research undertaken between 2015 and 2021, I apply the theories of Freire and Edwards to examine the 'practice' of research as a pedagogy, i.e., a process of co-learning (rather than a process of teaching or knowledge transfer) that is multi-modal and multi-dimensional.

In order to build the model, I develop a new methodology which I have termed an 'auto-meta-ethnography', which draws on the principles of meta-ethnography. Seven research papers and book chapters form the data for the application of meta-ethnography, in a lines-of-argument synthesis. Nine themes are uncovered which form both a conceptual model for researchers wishing to develop their activist research approaches and suggestions for how this model can be practically applied. The nine themes are: respect for difference; dialogue; relationships; flexibility; collaboration; relational, justice-driven ethics; frameworks and tools; embracing complexity; and reciprocity. The commentary describes the process of synthesis, before presenting the model and discussing the themes generated within it, and further presenting a discussion about the implications for future activist research.

I conclude by suggesting that promoting equity within and beyond research can be pursued by adopting an active pedagogy, in other words, a process that can enable learning. By building what Anne Edwards describes as relational agency, pedagogy can be seen as instrumental in promoting social justice and provides a space in which dialogue and criticality can be nurtured.

# Foreword

My research career started following my undergraduate degree in 1998. As a new researcher in Social Policy, I took up a post that was part of a 'quantitative research team' and was responsible for collating and analysing large datasets to inform government policy (Walker et al 2001; 2004; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2009a; 2009b). Over time, I became more and more interested in qualitative methods and theory-based approaches as I realised that my quantitative research was very good at answering some questions but left many more unanswered, and the process of policy (and practice) change could sometimes be decided by the (unhelpful) selective use of quantitative data without considering those data within the context of people's everyday lives. In 2009, I moved from undertaking social policy research to an education department to undertake case studies of educational policy in action (Cummings et al 2010a; 2010b; Carpenter et al 2010; 2011). My work has since evolved further to concentrate on social justice and how people work together to tackle inequality and involve families, children and young people (see e.g., Clark and Laing 2012; Clark et al 2013; Laing, Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2016; Clark et al 2017; McKean et al 2017; Laing, Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2018a; Mazzoli Smith, Todd and Laing 2018). This has led me on a journey to discover how social research can itself be enacted in a way that supports principles of social justice and equality, and to find ways to ensure that research is an integral part of changemaking in this regard (Laing, Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2018b). I am now a Senior Research Associate, and until recently, a Co-Director of the Centre for Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University. This thesis represents my reflections over the years on my learning and makes the case for a critical pedagogy of research methodology that gives primacy to dialogue, reflection and action in undertaking research that can promote educational justice. This is timely as universities are moving towards revisiting and understanding more about their role as civic institutions in encouraging a fairer society (Goddard 2016) and creating impact from their work (Irwin 2017).

In many ways, the writing of this commentary has felt self-indulgent, but I have approached it in the spirit of trying to make sense of my experiences through some of

my more recent publications (2018-2022) to suggest that research can be undertaken in a spirit of activism that goes beyond operating in 'spaces of resistance' (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly 2021) towards the enactment of a pedagogy of research. In other words, a way of *doing* research that can encourage collaborative learning in order to enhance social justice in a way that brings about change, just as the processes and projects that are often the subject of educational research aim to do. In this way, I am aiming to 'make the pedagogical more political' (Giroux 2011) and refute notions that research must stand apart and above the processes of change but argue it can be an embedded part of social change. I situate my approach within existing literatures on change-oriented approaches to educational research.

I have often been asked whether my approach is unique to me, about my 'personality' or about a particular set of skills I have learned as a researcher. Is this approach one that can be learnt by others? This synthesis of my work so far is an attempt to delineate whether there can be a pedagogy of activist research that goes beyond the (my) self to look at the key principles of a pedagogy that can be applied by others wishing to undertake such research and adds new evidence to the emerging, but relatively scarce, knowledge about activist research approaches.

I therefore start with the three following assumptions during this commentary as follows:

1. That research methods can be seen to have a 'pedagogy'
2. That meta-ethnography can be adapted to study a body of self-authored work
3. That activism is and can be enacted by and through research

# Introduction

This commentary forms a synthesis of published work for a PhD by Publication. Although this type of PhD is increasingly popular in the UK, there is often no consensus around what the commentary or synthesis is, and how it is supposed to look (Nygaard and Solli 2021). There is little guidance in the Newcastle University regulations that specifies how the commentary must be presented (other than the word count, between 5 and 10k). I have, therefore, had flexibility in how to form the commentary to make sense of my contribution to knowledge in the form of my publications.

I present a portfolio of research as a series of journal articles and book chapters, supported by a wider set of publications, and subject this to analysis. From this, I assess to what extent a 'pedagogy of activist research' provides a novel and useful approach, drawing on Freirean ideas and the ideas of Anne Edwards (2017).

The analysis is by necessity a process of self-examination and critical reflection, given that I undertook the original research projects, and wrote the corresponding publications. Thomas and Harden (2008) recommend synthesis to bring together research as it can encourage conceptual innovation. Yet Doyle (2003) portrays a 'paradox' of synthesis in that it can be conceptualised in many different ways and utilise different methods, but stresses that meta-ethnography offers the potential to empower and amplify different voices, facilitate praxis and disrupt the 'othering' that can happen in research:

> *Meta-ethnography may also be a process for rethinking and expanding democratic practices into research where there is a presumed supremacy of researchers over those whom they research. Typically, research methodologies are focused on subject-object relationships in which the researcher is the subject and practitioners are the objects*. (Doyle, 2003, p.338).

Rather than a simple thematic exploration or review of the publications, I therefore decided to use a more structured approach that was informed by the principles of meta-ethnographic analysis (which I describe in the following section), resulting in what I have termed as an 'auto-meta-ethnography', first reading each publication, coding it, and then bringing first, second and third order themes together, before considering them in the light of Freire's conception of pedagogy and theories of social justice.

I define 'activist' research in a broad way, as research that is designed and/or carried out in such a way that it stimulates or leads to a change in respect of educational or social justice. Here, justice is defined as the equalising of rights and opportunities and valuing diversity for all, particularly those who are currently excluded from full participation in society due to structural economic, political and social inequities.

## The approach to the commentary

A meta-ethnography is a way of synthesising written accounts. It was developed by educationalists Noblit and Hare in 1988 who explain that the 'ethnography' refers to a process that is akin to an ethnographer making sense of a culture (p7). For my work, the term gains extra resonance as the body of work to be synthesised is my own, such that the process forms an 'auto' meta-ethnography. In this sense, while I follow some key principles of the meta-ethnographic approach, it by necessity varies, as I did not set out to interpret other researcher's texts, but to provide an additional layer of interpretation on my own writings, derived from my own research projects. While the projects and much of the writing were undertaken collaboratively with others, the ideas that are presented in the synthesis are very much my own and reflect the passion I have that research should make a difference in terms of social justice and is undertaken from a position of service to others. My auto-meta-ethnography (as I have now termed my approach) enables me to offer more than a review of literature but an interpretation of what my texts offer when considered alongside and across each other. As such, my approach to synthesising my texts is situated in an interpretive paradigm and stays true to my values and beliefs about the ability of research to enable an understanding of the everyday. It has been suggested that this kind of work needs to be undertaken by experienced researchers using a collaborative team approach, so that different perspectives and interpretations are considered, subsequently increasing rigour and transparency (Lee et al 2015; Cahill et al 2018). While I am a very experienced researcher, this work necessarily needs to be my own and so a truly collaborative or co-created approach to the synthesis is not possible for this commentary. This means that this work is very much rooted in how I construct my own understanding of the ideas in the research publications. As Noblit and Hare (1988, p.25) explain:

> *'a meta-ethnography based in notions of translating studies into one another will inevitably be partially a product of the synthesiser'.*

Nevertheless, I posit that, as the publications were written by me originally, my interpretations are likely to have greater consistency and thus validity than those undertaken on articles written by others.

One criticism of using such an approach is the belief that any findings generated are largely not generalisable, as they are rooted in meanings generated in particular contexts and at different times. Meta-ethnography has been described as an 'objective realism', in that it aims to discover an overall theory that can be applied, rather than exposing multiple realities (Barnett-Page and Thomas 2009). I do believe, however, that models can be built up over time such that when similar experiences lead to similar results over a number of contexts, those models can act as predictors of the likelihood of outcomes (Dyson and Todd, 2010). A further criticism of meta-ethnography is that the results are often conceptual and need further translation in order to inform practice (Barnett-Page and Thomas 2009). In order to address this, I have provided both a conceptual model and discuss how this might work in practice and my synthesis explores not only the approaches I used in the studies but also what the findings say about working in partnership.

Noblit and Hare outline 7 phases that should be completed in a meta-ethnography (Table 1). I go on to describe each phase in turn in relation to my own method of synthesis.

| Phase descriptor | Meta-ethnography tasks | Method |
|---|---|---|
| **Phase 1: Identifying an 'intellectual interest'** | | Developing research questions and a conceptual framework |
| **Phase 2: Deciding what is relevant** | Deciding what is relevant to the research question | Identifying the publications to be included |
| **Phase 3: Reading the studies** | Reading the selected publications | Reading the publications |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Phase 3 and 4: Determining how studies are related** | Making a list of key ideas, concepts or 'metaphors' | Used each text as 'data' in its own right and coded for theoretical approaches and findings publication by publication |
| **Phase 5: Translating the studies into each other** | Looking across texts for their relationship to each other | Looking across in detail at overlapping codes |
| **Phase 6: synthesising translations** | Finding encompassing metaphors or themes | Grouping the codes into 9 key concepts |
| **Phase 7: expressing the synthesis** | Communicating the synthesis | Developing a visual model and narrative explanation |

*Table 1 The phases of meta-ethnography*

**Phase 1: Identifying an 'intellectual interest' (and outlining my conceptual framework)**

In recent years, policy and economic incentives have encouraged universities in the UK to embrace notions of themselves as 'Civic Universities' and to think more deeply about how to generate (and measure) the impact of their work (Upton, Vallance and Goddard 2014; Brink 2018). This has resulted in an increased focus on engagement and working in partnership with others outside the academy and an interest in approaches such as co-production and co-creation (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016; Facer and Enright 2016; Shucksmith 2016). Previous research (including my own, e.g., Clark et al 2017) has stressed that this kind of work requires a negotiation of 'boundary crossing' i.e., confronting unfamiliar contexts in a shared problem-solving space and finding a way to generate hybrid solutions that draw on different kinds of knowledge and different perspectives (Akkerman and Bakker 2011; Smith and Ward 2015). However, there is a growing recognition that the processes involved in generating meaningful change from research are neither unidirectional nor simple (Knight and Lyall 2013). My involvement in the Horizon 2020 project ACCOMPLISSH (Laing et al 2017) built on my interest in finding ways to undertake research in partnership with others that were meaningful to them and went beyond knowledge acquisition to a form of co-learning.

***Why a focus on pedagogy?***

As Bourdieu (1993) outlines, academia situates itself as a 'field' with its own set of mechanisms that reproduce social inequality. The academy exerts forms of power that can inhibit innovation because the ways in which academics are encouraged to enact membership of the field (e.g., through the production of academic papers), can serve to elevate intellectual capital, at the expense of valuing knowledge generated or experienced in different fields (or sectors). This theorisation of course assumes that the primary motivation for academics is to enhance their position in the Higher Education field, which is especially pertinent in the face of metrics-based drivers such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF). I would argue, however, that for many social researchers, including myself, the motivation to make a difference to society and generate impact from research takes primacy, resulting in a lack of consensus. This lack of consensus creates a space in which it is possible to counter the negative effects of exerting academic status through particular methodologies and pedagogies (Naidoo 2004). I argue that this space enables the development of new practices that consider and facilitate the academic as relationally situated within the social context in which the relationships are enacted.

I suggest that promoting equity within research can be pursued by adopting an 'active pedagogy', in other words, a process that can enable learning, requiring a change in both the learners and the facilitators of that learning. Freire (2001) enables a conceptualisation of an active pedagogy as the dialogic discovery of new knowledge which leads to reflection and effective action. In this way, pedagogy is seen as instrumental in creating impact or change, and co-creation (or co-production) provides a space in which dialogue, criticality and reflection can be nurtured. Giroux (1997) goes on to say that in order to create effective learning, differences in values, ideology and power relationships must be confronted in order to make the knowledge generated meaningful. Effective practices can produce those capable of reflecting and exercising agency, resolving differences in values, ideology and power, to create learning. Any form of pedagogical practice values some forms of knowing above others, so members of a collaboration need to explore and adopt reflexivity about their own ideological, political, socio-economic and organisational baggage, value positions and ethical stance.

The approach underlying the thesis, therefore, is one that draws on theory to examine the 'practice' of research as pedagogy, i.e., a process of co-learning (rather than a process of teaching or knowledge transfer) that is multi-modal and multi-dimensional. Further, it draws upon notions of critical pedagogy (Giroux 2011) and Freire's pedagogy of hope (Freire 1970; 2001) and will explore how the co-creation of knowledge production can realise the potential for social justice. In this way, I assess the opportunities and the challenges that I have faced in attempts to become part of the solution to educational inequality, offer a pragmatic and rigorous alternative to paradigms situating researchers as impartial observers, and build on existing action research approaches to offer a new approach for activist research. For me then, my reflections have raised the following key questions:

- How can research approaches be conceptualised as a critical pedagogy for activist educational research?
- What are the implications of a critical pedagogy of activist research for the practical application of research methods?

**Phase 2: Deciding what is relevant (the scope of the thesis)**

The scope of what is relevant for this auto-meta-ethnography was necessarily boundaried by university regulations for the production of a PhD by Publication, which mandated that texts should be peer reviewed academic pieces (including journal papers and book chapters) and recently published. During the period late 2018 to early 2022, I published more texts than those presented as part of this synthesis. I chose to study those texts that reflected most closely participatory approaches or involved partnerships between different sectors and where I was a primary author. Some are evaluative, others based in what could be seen as a 'pure' research tradition.

***The underpinning research***

Seven publications are included in this thesis, which were the result of 5 research studies or programmes of work. Reflecting a larger shift in the social sciences towards collaborative work, the majority of my research projects have been undertaken with

collaborators, usually in interdisciplinary teams. While many of my publications are subsequently joint-authored, I have made substantial contributions to each, outlined in Table 2. Wherever possible, authorship is denoted alphabetically in the interests of equity for different kinds of contributions, but I was responsible for writing in what might traditionally be thought of in educational research as a 'first author' role. The publications feature 4 peer reviewed academic journal articles, and 3 book chapters in peer reviewed edited books (one book co-edited by me). This thesis provides a representation of some of my work between 2015-2021, with the corresponding publications covering the period 2018-2022. While the requirements for a PhD by Publication require the equivalent of 500%, I have actually included a higher percentage for the purposes of the auto-meta-ethnography.

| | Publication | Contribution (%) | Underpinning research |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Laing, K**. and Todd, L. (2022) 'Using a collaborative theory of change approach for evaluating out-of-school learning'. In Jo Rose, Tim Jay, Janet Goodall, Laura Mazzoli Smith and Liz Todd (eds) *Repositioning Out-of-School Learning: Methodological challenges and possibilities for researching learning beyond school*. Emerald Publishing Limited: Bingley. 109-122. | 90 | The evaluation of Thinking Differently (funded by Joseph Rowntree Foundation) |
| **2** | Clark, J. and **Laing, K**. (2022) 'Research co-production with young women through an out-of-school residential trip'. In Jo Rose, Tim Jay, Janet Goodall, Laura Mazzoli Smith and Liz Todd (eds) *Repositioning Out-of-School Learning: Methodological challenges and possibilities for researching learning beyond* | 90 | Being a Girl in Wallsend (study undertaken as part of an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account Knowledge Exchange Secondment with |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *school*. Emerald Publishing Limited: Bingley. 61-71. | | Wallsend Action for Youth) |
| **3** | **Laing, K**. (2022) 'Democratising evaluation: The contribution of a 'synergic theory of change' approach', *Research for All*, 6(1): 1-17. | 100 | The evaluation of Thinking Differently (funded by Joseph Rowntree Foundation) |
| **4** | **Laing, K.**, Robson, S., Thomson, H. and Todd, L. (2022) 'Creating transformational change through partnership'. *In:* Kathrin Otrel-Cass, Karen Laing, Janet Wolf (eds) *Partnerships in education: Risks in transdisciplinary educational research*. Springer: Cham: 359-384. | 85 | Developing a Children's Community in Newcastle (ESRC Open Chair and various funders) |
| **5** | **Laing, K.**, McWhirter, J., Templeton, L. and Russell, C. (2019) 'M-PACT+: Supporting families affected by parental substance misuse', *Health Education*, 119(1): 63-82. | 85 | Evaluation of M-PACT+ (The Royal Foundation and Comic Relief) |
| **6** | **Laing, K**., Mazzoli Smith, L. and Todd, L. (2019) 'Using the concept of relational justice to apply fairness in schools', *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 18(1): 128-142. | 80 | Educational fairness (various funders) |
| **7** | Clark, J. and **Laing, K**. (2018) 'Co-production with young people to tackle alcohol misuse', *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 18(1): 17-27. | 90 | The evaluation of Thinking Differently (funded by Joseph Rowntree Foundation) |
| | **Total** | **620** | **Equivalent to 6.2 publications** |

*Table 2 Publications submitted and my percentage contribution*

***Study 1: Evaluation of M-PACT+ family intervention in schools***

Role: Principal Investigator

This study aimed to describe the implementation and outcomes of a pilot project (M-PACT Plus) that offered families access to a programme aimed to reduce the hidden harm of alcohol and drug misuse (M-PACT) which was made available through schools in collaboration with Place2Be counselling services from 2013-2015. Analyses focused on survey data collected by Action on Addiction and Place2Be as well as further qualitative data collected by the researchers to outline the key learning with respect to outcomes for children, parents and carers, the school environment and sustainability, and to make recommendations for funders and partners. One of the publications submitted as part of this thesis (publication 5) concerns this project and describes the outcomes for children and families as well as analysing how the ways in which schools conceptualised their collaboration with the partner organisations influenced the success (or not) of the project.

***Study 2: Evaluation of Thinking Differently***

Role: Co-investigator

Thinking Differently was a £1.2m programme funded by a consortium in Scotland to trial innovative interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm through working with young people to influence their families, peers and communities, rather than positioning young people as problematic drinkers themselves. The evaluation took place between 2013 and 2017, and developed a theory of change for each of three projects which concentrated on how young people could be facilitated to become agents of change in terms of their peers, parents and the wider community. As part of the evaluation, young people were trained by the researchers to undertake their own research. Three of the publications submitted for this thesis are based on this evaluation. Two of them describe and critically analyse the processes of creating a theory of change for the projects (Publications 1 and 3). A further article explores co-production between researchers and young people to create change as part of the evaluation (Publication 7).

***Study 3: Being a girl in Wallsend***

Role: Principal Investigator

The Being a Girl in Wallsend project was undertaken during an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account Secondment undertaken by myself during 2016-2017. A group of girls aged 14-16 attending a girls youth group participated in the design and analyses of focus groups with other girls in the area to find out what life was like for them, and what challenges they experienced in growing up. The girls group subsequently invited researchers on a residential trip which they organised themselves in order to create a research agenda on their own terms and learn more about research. I submitted a book chapter as part of this thesis which explores the research processes involved in the residential trip (Publication 2).

***Study 4: Developing a Children's Community in the West End of Newcastle***

Role: Principal Investigator/Co-investigator

The development of the West End Children's Community (WECC) started in 2015 when I was invited to undertake a feasibility study with practitioners from a variety of organisations in Newcastle to assess the appetite for creating a place-based, collaborative, cradle to career model for tackling poverty. A subsequent ESRC IAA Open Chair facilitated a variety of meetings and workshops aimed at bringing people together to set priorities and develop a plan of work. Ongoing funding from a wide variety of sources, including Newcastle University, has enabled the creation of a steering group, and workstreams around children's transitions to independence, play, and music. I have acted as an embedded researcher throughout, helping to develop the work, developing theories of change and supporting evaluation. In 2023, WECC became a Charity, and I became a Trustee, alongside continuing to document and evaluate its development. I have submitted a book chapter that was published in my own co-edited book as part of this thesis, which describes and analyses the development of the WECC as a collaborative partnership (Publication 4).

***Study 5: Fairness in schools (Various funders)***

Role: Principal Investigator/Co-investigator

I have been undertaking research on fairness since being part of investigating a fair education for Newcastle's Fairness Commission, established in 2011. Subsequent research has included focus groups with young people about what they see as 'fair'. One publication submitted as part of this thesis explores a framework for educational fairness, developed from this body of work (Publication 6).

**Phases 3 and 4: Reading the studies and determining how they are related**

The third phase of an ethnography is the reading, and re-reading of studies. This was an interesting experience for me, as I returned to publications I had written and re-familiarised myself with them, while attempting to cast a critical eye on the contents.

I approached each publication as 'data' in its own right discovering what 'was there' and making decisions about how to work with the data. Treating the publications as data meant that I could consider them as a whole, and take into account the contributions of theory, practice and research in my synthesis. Meta-ethnography usually aims to find metaphors (or themes) in privileging participants voices, but on re-reading my publications, I found practice experiences difficult to disentangle from my own role as researcher, and in the spirit of co-learning, I wanted to explore the messages from the whole publication (including myself, other researchers, practitioners, families and young people) to assess multiple contributions rather than privileging single voices. I thought about how to code theoretical ideas, the voices of participants in my studies, and my own interpretations in discussions and conclusions.

I approached each publication in turn, coding each separately, and looking for key ideas that could help me to answer my research questions. This produced a document for each publication listing the key concepts relevant to that particular publication, seven documents in all.

**Phase 5: Translating the studies into each other**

This phase of the synthesis was very much a thinking phase, looking across my publications to see where similar or contrasting ideas were forming. Noblit and Hare (1988) term this process as looking for reciprocal and refutational ideas. I found many reciprocal ideas (i.e., data that seemed to correspond and corroborate) and few refutational ideas (where ideas conflict). Nevertheless, my publications are different enough (about different projects, and different topics) whereby rather than deciding that what I was doing was a reciprocal meta-ethnography, I preferred to use the idea of a 'lines-of-argument' meta-ethnography whereby I was trying to say something about a research 'culture' or approach by drawing on different contexts and examples, and by theorising, suggesting new meanings from translating the studies into one another. This led to phase 6 of the synthesis.

**Phase 6: Synthesising translations**

I sought out ways of categorising how the publications related to each other and developed 9 new themes (or metaphors as Noblit and Hare refer to them). At first, I felt that 9 might be too many, but then I also thought about the purpose of a synthesis, which is to be useful in developing understandings. Both research and practice concerned with social justice happen in complex contexts, and so a co-learning process, or critical pedagogy, cannot be understood as a simple process.

**Phase 7: Expressing the synthesis**

I decided to create a visual model of a critical pedagogy for activist research, as well as to provide a narrative account, and to set this in context of pedagogic and social justice theories to further understand what this model might add. I further go on to explain how this model might be operationalised taking lessons from the publications. I have given example codes for each theme that reflect the process of phases 5 and 6. For the sake of simplicity and brevity, I have chosen not to reproduce the documents produced in phase 4 in this commentary.

## Results of the synthesis

The learning derived from my publications using the principles of meta-ethnography can be categorised into 9 major themes: respect for difference; dialogue; relationships; flexibility; collaboration; relational, justice-driven ethics; frameworks and tools; embracing complexity; and reciprocity. Some of the codes overlap between themes, and so the themes are not mutually exclusive in all cases, but this serves to demonstrate a coherence in the overall understanding. I discuss each one in turn.

### 1. Respect for difference

This theme relates to the differences in knowledge, skills, capacity, ontology, epistemology and values that partners bring to bear on the research process. In order to have the potential to work together effectively in the pursuit of knowledge creation for changemaking, each partner's contribution needs to be valued, and differences and capabilities seen in a non-hierarchical (everyone as expert) way and perceived to be of equal value. This is particularly important in navigating different contexts, experiences and situations. This sometimes requires people to be prepared to step out of the boundaries of their usual practice, challenge their own assumptions and relinquish some control of the research process. Publication 1, for example, outlines how the development of the theory of change in a collaborative way means that differences between collaborators can be articulated and how the knowledges that participants brought to the process are treated as equally valid. Publication 3 goes on to describe how the theory of change was used in such a way that it countered deficit notions of practitioner expertise in research and enabled a growing criticality that moved away from positioning the evaluator as all-knowing and authoritative in respect of research.

### 2. Dialogue

This theme relates to the processes by which partners come to understand each other, challenging their own and other's assumptions, and the kinds of professional or cultural languages they use. It also refers to the processes by which reflection and criticality can be encouraged in the changemaking process. I have conceptualised dialogue as

something that encompasses talk, but which can also draw on multi-modal forms of communication. In publications 1 and 3, the use of theory of change as a visual tool supported dialogue to take place, and publication 6 introduced the concept of 'helpful language', using fairness as a way of including all participants of the roundtable in dialogue. Publication 4 discusses the vital role of dialogue in ensuring people involved in the West End Children's Community could develop a shared vision, and hold onto that vision, so that the actions they took were effective. Publications 1 and 4 also highlight that dialogue is not always easy, particularly in performative environments where the priority is on getting things done, and achieving positive outcomes, rather than thinking about the process.

### 3. Relationships

I identified relationships as a compelling theme in stimulating changemaking through research. Without strong relationships, that are built, strengthened and sustained over time, it is difficult to establish the trust needed to work together, and gain the understanding and insights that enable dialogue and reciprocity to flourish. Relationships were a key theme throughout all of the publications, whether relationships between individuals or between organisations. In publications 2 and 7, for example, the work with young people would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, had time and value not been given to developing the relationships between the researchers and young people from the start of the projects. In publication 5, relationships were key in enabling Place2Be staff and teachers to work together to best effect.

### 4. Flexibility

The publications demonstrate the importance of flexibility in research. This kind of flexibility encompasses the roles that partners play in the process, and the ability of partners and researchers to step outside professional boundaries and take on new roles that are helpful to changemaking partnerships. Flexibility also concerns the spaces, both physical and conceptual in which research takes place, leading to different kinds of knowledge creation. Flexibility in terms of the research activities can shift the control of the process to participants and enhance inclusion and incorporate a diversity of

understandings about what constitutes credible data. This is particularly exemplified in publication 2 where the residential experience created a different kind of research space, and the girls wanted to use that space in their own ways to engage with research. The researchers also needed to be flexible in their roles, 'mucking in' and helping out. Other publications also describe how the role of the researcher flexed, e.g., publication 3 which describes how my role was conceptualised and re-conceptualised as the evaluation progressed.

### 5. Collaboration

Collaboration is a term often used freely but can mean different things in different contexts. I define it here as working together in partnership, such as the different approaches used in co-production or participatory research or in the development of place-based partnerships. It involves the critical examination of power relationships and incorporates other themes such as relationship building and dialogue. This definition of collaboration may challenge some existing notions of research collaboration, where collaborators may be involved in, for example, recruiting participants, but may have no involvement in research design or co-learning. Collaboration can be facilitated by tools (such as a visual theory of change) and methods that enable partners to work together. Power dynamics are actively considered and explored such that learning is a shared endeavour rather than the sole responsibility of researchers. Collaboration means exploring competing views and reaching consensus and establishing a shared vision to work towards. It often requires that decision-making is democratic, that partners have responsibilities to each other, and that there are accountability processes that bind people together. Publication 5, for example, highlights that the most effective project delivery took place where schools saw children's wellbeing in a holistic way and thus perceived that supporting the wellbeing of children was a shared responsibility and were able to work collaboratively with others to achieve this.

### 6. Relational, justice-driven ethics

Activist research requires a consideration of ethics that moves researchers beyond formal institutional procedures towards a more nuanced and dynamic ethical practice. It involves seeing ethics from the point of view of justice, or indeed fairness, in that it

requires researchers to stop seeing people as 'subjects' in their research (which positions researchers as powerful and protectionist), and explore the ethics involved in research practices and the relationships we have with others, supporting the agency and decision-making capacity of all involved. Thus, key principles and ethics as a practice become more important than formal processes of ethical approval. This theme emphasises the ability to conceive of people as capable and asset-rich, rather than seeing them as deficit in some way. 'Everyday ethics' (of the kind outlined by Banks 2016) is an approach to being able to respond ethically in this kind of research. It means a consideration of what is ethical in terms of the outcomes we are seeking, not just what is ethical in our dealings with those we research with. Publication 2, in particular, explains the tensions involved in freeing up the agency of young people in a culture that normally positions young people as in need of protection.

### 7. Frameworks and tools

This category refers to the approaches taken in activist research, and the kinds of tools used to support it. In my publications, I have used co-production techniques (e.g., publications 2, 4 and 7) and theory-based methodologies, dialogic approaches and participatory research (e.g., publications 1, 3 and 5), while supporting those with tools such as a visual theory of change (publications 1, 2 and 5), boundary crossing activity, and visual and participatory methods such as diamond ranking and crafting (publication 2). It also refers to the use of physical space, and the positionality of the researcher in terms of decision-making and control over the research process.

### 8. Embracing complexity

In the studies portrayed in my publications, complexity took a variety of forms. The theme of embracing complexity often refers to intricate, multi-level and complicated change processes, and the difficulties in attributing multiple outcomes to specific processes (e.g., publications 1 and 3). It also refers to the complexity of navigating the competing and sometimes conflicting knowledge and assumptions held by people in the process, such as between adults and young people (e.g., publication 2). It also refers to the complexity of the research processes needed to be able to cope with these issues, necessitating different kinds of research practices.

### 9. Reciprocity

Reciprocity refers to the ability of researchers, and the research process, to be able to respond so that mutual (but not necessarily the same) benefits arise for all who take part. This can happen through the adapted practices of researchers (e.g., publications 1 and 2), the adapted use of tools such as theory of change (e.g., publication 3), or the establishment of mutual obligations and accountability for those (e.g., publication 4).

## Making sense of a critical pedagogy for activist research

Undertaking the auto-meta-ethnography has brought to light nine components for a new approach that, I argue, forms the basis for a socially just, critical pedagogy for activist research (Figure 1). Seven of the themes are used to form a conceptual framework for activist research pedagogy. Two further themes relate to some suggestions for the practical enactment of the pedagogy. A critical pedagogy for activist social research is relational and collaborative, and prioritises dialogue, flexibility and reciprocity. Activist research is undertaken in a respectful and enabling way, respecting the difference between people, while embracing the complexity inherent in the process, and in the context, it operates within.

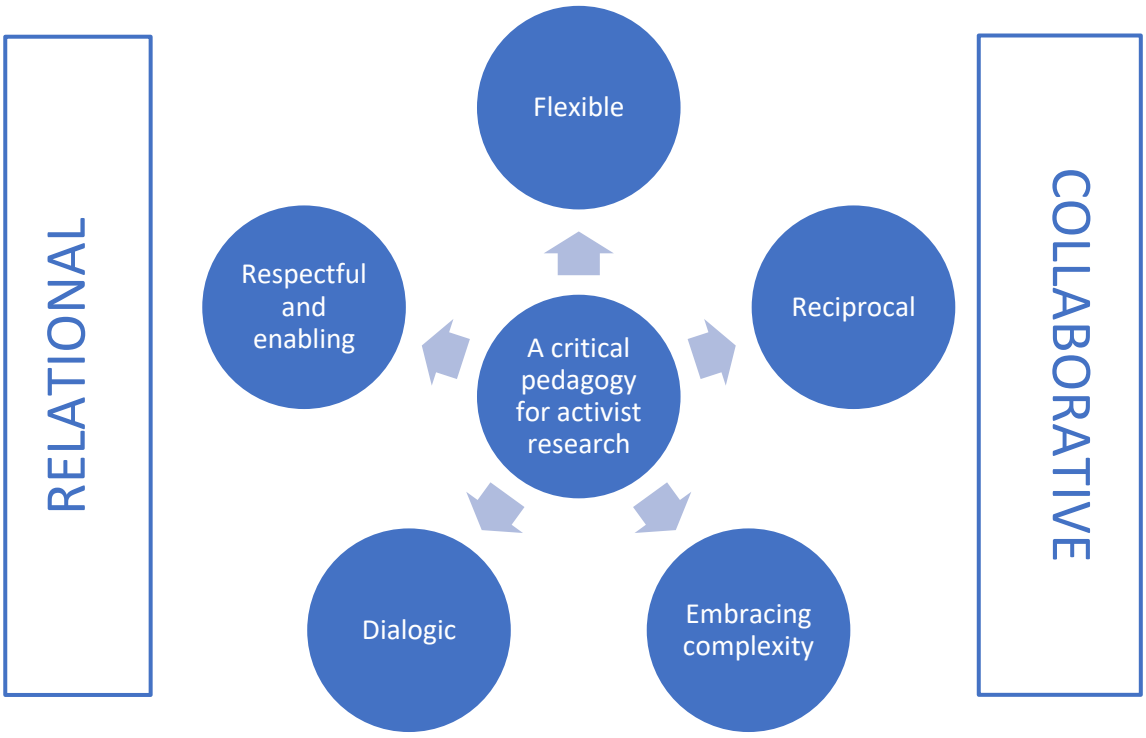


*Figure 1 A critical pedagogy for activist educational research*

Activist research involves being open to a change in what Beach and Vigo-Arrazda (2021) term our 'habitus of organic intellectualism'. By this they mean that by working with others to co-construct knowledge, researchers can develop new embodied understandings about their responsibilities in enacting social justice. Their view is that

critical research should challenge and change, not simply describe, systems of oppression. Ward et al (2021) use the metaphor of a garden growing to describe the relationships between embedded researchers and others, with the power dynamics conceptualised as a river running through the garden. This is a useful metaphor as, for me, it emphasises the interdependency of people, processes and contexts in producing knowledge. The dialogue, reflection and action seen by Freire (1970; 2001) to be essential components of change seem to me to reflect the design, ingredients and nurturing that is essential to create the garden, which everyone can enjoy and reap the fruits of.

Ann Edwards (2017) stresses that in order to develop relational agency (the ability to take action together) there needs to be the development of 'common knowledge'. Building this common knowledge involves knowing what matters to others and developing a respectful understanding of different motives in a partnership. I suggest that many of the facets in my new model of a critical pedagogy for activist research form ways of encouraging that common knowledge, and as such, form a pedagogical approach. Community organizing approaches (such as those used by Citizens UK) do this remarkably and researchers, including myself, are beginning to learn from them (Steer et al 2021; Jarvis 2023) but, on the whole, researchers have yet to find effective ways of routinely developing common knowledge and indeed often do not find it relevant or important to their research objectives.

At a BERA roundtable in 2017[1], my co-presenter asked what tools I used in my research to develop common knowledge. This synthesis has enabled me to understand, and articulate, that the processes of relationship building incorporate collaboration and flexibility. Building these relationships in a respectful and enabling way can build the levels of trust needed to engage in the kind of dialogue that Freire advocates for a critical pedagogy. Edwards (2001) further notes that learning should focus on knowledge building, not simply in terms of different psychological processes, but as a socially useful enterprise that enhances each individual's learning capacity, as well as providing the

[1] Learning for Change: Researching pedagogies, BERA Roundtable, Newcastle, 11 July 2017.

capacity to produce knowledge and to bring it into the public domain. Boaler's (2008) concept of 'relational equity' is useful here in helping to understand how dialogue can happen. He emphasizes that equity in relationships has both a social dimension and an intellectual one. Boaler explains that respect for other's ideas can lead to the ability to think critically and reflectively. Reflection is a key part of a critical pedagogy for Freire, as otherwise we risk taking action without knowing why or learning from experience (as I refer to in publication 4).

Several of my studies describe the beginnings of a collaborative relationship as a process of 'being there' or 'hanging around'; essentially a process of being visible and present, communicating and engaging in activity that may be perceived as tangential to the research process, without a particular research agenda other than developing common knowledge and establishing relationships (for example building a fire with the girls on the residential trip in publication 2). Freire calls this a process of conscientization. Meeting people and visiting places thus become important activities in their own right rather than being simply a means to an end to realise research objectives. In my previous work I noted that engaging in unfamiliar activities together can enable a 'boundary experience' to happen (Clark et al 2017) which enables the sharing of understandings. Cheung Judge and Blazek (2022) also describe a process of 'hanging around' in their research with young people and found that it allowed a mutual familiarity to develop which, in turn, enabled researchers and young people to build common knowledge. Developing familiarity and sharing a commitment to change supports the development of social relationships (Beach and Vigo-Arrazda 2021). These relationships contribute to the emergent nature of many collaborative projects, in which combined expertise changes the way the projects progress and researchers in academia may be uniquely placed to respond flexibly due to the nature of their role (Rose and Jay 2022). In order to adapt and respond to the changing circumstances, however, means becoming comfortable with less control over the research process (Nind 2014).

For me, relationships form the cornerstone of the pedagogy of activist research that I propose in figure 1. Freire sees learning processes as relational indicating that knowledge can only be produced by interactions with others and by engaging together

to investigate the world. This engagement thus requires a social element, perhaps of 'friendship', but some commentators posit that developing this social intimacy can raise the risk of making critical challenge in co-learning more difficult (Bartlett 2005). Perry disagrees, and rather argues for an epistemic praxis, that balances the necessity of the emotional and care 'work' involved in nurturing relationships with collaborators, alongside the more traditional demands of research positions within universities (Perry 2022).

According to Freire (2001), developing the kind of collaboration that can result in co-learning needs trust and mutual respect. He describes the relationships as ones of 'caring' and 'love'. Yet trust and respect certainly do not always develop easily when people collaborate in a meaningful way. It requires what Anne Edwards (2005) describes as 'relational agency', and she helps us to understand the need for people to acquire common knowledge and expose different understandings and a sense of what matters. However, Edward's concept of relational agency does not help us to understand what happens when the process of acquiring common knowledge results in a lack of consensus and conflict. Schmachtel (2021) encourages us to think of relational agency as a micro-political process, where people need to negotiate between acting relationally and bringing different interests to the table, finding a balance between them. The ability to do this is shaped by the context and the power relationships in partnerships. Jill Colton (2022) conceptualises these moments of conflict as 'nodes of tension'. I would argue that acknowledging and naming these moments can normalise the process and facilitate the exposure of these different interests in a constructive way. Multi-modal ways of communicating facilitate distrustful partners to make explicit these differences and thus begin to reframe conventional research relationships (Smith and Ward 2015). Using a theory of change certainly acted as a visual aid for my research partnerships to be able to expose and uncover assumptions and differences in language (as described in publication 3).

Respectful and enabling dialogue that incorporates reciprocity, embraces complexity and challenges power imbalances contributes to what Edwards refers to as relational expertise. Relational expertise is defined as a capacity to interpret problems with others

and work relationally with them. Depending on the different relational stances of the researcher (e.g., critical friend, advocate, evaluator), different kinds of dialogue can take place and power is enacted to a greater or lesser degree (Ward et al 2021).

My publications indicate that trust is an essential ingredient in enabling people to work together to stimulate change. Trust is experiential and is created over time, forming a process of both recieving trust and being percieved as 'trustworthy' and as such can both contribute to the develpment of relational expertise, and result from it. The growing body of research on trust suggests its importance for collaboration, but little is known about how trust can be operationalised in the context of relationships (Wasko and Faraj 2005). The notion of relational capital is helpful here to understand how trust works. It can be seen as a dimension of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) and it implies that relationships are seen as as resources for social action. Relational capital will appear in settings or collectives in which members have a strong identification with the collective, trust other members, perceive an obligation to participate in the collective and recognize and abide by its cooperative norms (Wasko and Faraj 2005).

The new conceptual model of a critical pedagogy for activist research presented here builds on previous theories of critical pedagogy by proposing a relational approach that can be used to develop common knowledge and relational agency with the aim of gaining the relational expertise needed to be able to engage in research as a process of learning together. Nevertheless, applying the concepts in the model to research practice is not always easy, and the next section turns to a consideration of some implications (not exhaustive) of implementing the pedagogy.

## Enacting a critical pedagogy for activist research: Some implications for research methods, researchers and the academy.

Achieving social justice needs multiple kinds of expertise. While a shared commitment to tackling social problems can be the mechanism that brings people together (such as addressing child poverty in publication 4), the relationships between those people need to be developed and nurtured in order for shared action to succeed (Edwards 2017). Activist researchers can contribute, not solely with the findings they generate, but by the *way* in which they engage people in research. Figure 2 outlines what the auto-meta-ethnography has uncovered about how an activist critical pedagogy of research can be practically enacted. Drawing on the conceptual model and the two remaining themes from the auto-meta-ethnography ('relational, justice-driven ethics' and 'frameworks and tools'), I have delineated three categories to consider: the values and attitudes of researchers; the actions and approaches taken during the research process; and the methods and tools that were used in my studies.

| Values and attitudes | Actions and approaches | Methods |
|---|---|---|
| □Valuing different knowledge, skills, capacities, ontology, epistemology<br>□Commitment to the learning of all participants<br>□Taking an asset-based stance, positioning people as knowledgeable and capable<br>□Ethics as justice-driven process rather than formal requirement | □Prioritising the development of relationships over time<br>□Using frameworks and tools that position research and evaluation as a learning journey or voyage of discovery<br>□Ensuring different stakeholders all benefit from the research process (not necessarily in the same ways)<br>•co-creation and/or co-production with stakeholders | □Providing choices of different kinds of research activity<br>□Providing choices of different kinds of spaces<br>□Participatory and visual methods<br>□Valuing different kinds of data<br>□Theory of change |

*Figure 2 A framework for enacting a critical pedagogy for activist educational research*

Many educational researchers, including myself, aim to disrupt patterns of inequality and oppression, taking the position that it is no longer good enough to observe, describe, analyse and explain them (Nygreen 2006). These values of social justice run strongly through my research and my publications, and as time has gone on, my work has evolved from undertaking research *on*, to undertaking research *with* (Clark 2015). Adopting this positioning has meant that my role and identity as a researcher has had to change to prioritise the mutuality of social connections. I developed a co-creation tool during 2019 in collaboration with Carnegie UK Trust, Federation of Small Businesses, Children North East and Success4All[2] which drew on the work of Julia Unwin (2018) to describe the importance of the balance between the 'rational' and the 'relational' aspects of a partnership. By this, we meant that understanding the values and attitudes of each partner is just as important as agreeing the processes and outcomes. By having similar values that respect different contributions can mean that the differing interests and expertise of partners in the process can accommodated. Each partner thus gains something from the process of research, even if the benefits obtained are not the same. Maintaining this reciprocity has implications for the research process, however. Tim Jay and I (Jay and Laing 2022) describe being reciprocal as a dual role for researchers who can then need to become 'more than' (pg. 126). This reciprocity has time implications (both within and beyond projects) and is not always easy to predict or incorporate into project planning systems. Truly collaborative activist research that entails the kind of flexibility and reciprocity described in my conceptual model remains in tension with the need for precise project descriptions for funding bids, ethical approval and similar processes (Durose et al 2023; Edwards and Stamou 2017; Goodyear-Smith, Jackson and Greenhalgh 2015).

Publication 4 demonstrates the blurring of the researcher roles such that many activities I undertook in the development of the West End Children's Community could not be categorised as traditional research tasks. Further, involvement in that project was always in a dual role, as both a resident of the West End area, and as an academic professional. Now I am no longer a resident of the area, but my personal involvement

[2]Working Together to Co-create Knowledge: A unique co-creation tool. Available at: https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:39bdf5ae-8158-4e59-9a09-9cbce8040b7b

continues alongside the research, notably by adopting a trustee role when the West End Children's Community formed a charity. This 'blurring' does not mean de-skilling researchers, or restricting their academic contribution, but it does imply that researchers need to become aware of the skills they bring with them to work *within* the research context as well as *upon* it and, similarly, be able to recognise what values they hold, and what matters to them (Edwards and Stamou 2017). This means that staff development opportunities to support this are critical, not only for early career researchers, but for more established researchers who may also engage in thinking about what entails good leadership of such research (Durose et al 2023).

Using a critical pedagogy for activist research implies that researchers must turn from academic ownership towards shared ownership of the research they undertake. This is another source of tension for the academy as the current performative nature of how impact is conceptualised in universities necessitates researchers to 'own' the research they are part of, and the corresponding impact that is generated (Laing, Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2018). Resolving those tensions would require a different kind of academic regulation that takes account of the evolving ways researchers are working with, and for, communities (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016).

Undertaking research in a relational way can be an inherently deeply ethical practice, as it foregrounds what matters to others (Edwards 2017). Yet, ethical procedures in universities can continue to reinforce unhelpful power dynamics, positioning collaborators as subjects, or participants, rather than helping to disrupt power imbalances (for example through the co-design of projects), and encouraging innovation in ethical research practice. Activist research pedagogy necessitates an ethical approach that situates people as part of the solution to injustice rather than the perpetrator or victim of it (Edwards 2017). I have suggested previously (Clark et al 2022) that one future possibility is to shift ethical regulation away from sets of principles, towards a more values-based approach. This entails a reflexive consideration of the context in which research is being conducted, and several researchers have suggested the kinds of attitudes and dispositions researchers need in order to do this, such as integrity, honesty, courage and respectfulness (Pellegrino 1992; Schaffer 2009; Macfarlane 2009).

The auto-meta-ethnography leads me to add that further attitudes involved in activist research include valuing different kinds of knowledge and skills, and maintaining a commitment to ensuring learning for all, not simply those in the academy.

These values and attitudes require a rethinking, or at the very least, a flexibility in research approaches. Different kinds of spaces, both conceptual and physical, for this kind of activist research to take place are needed. Such spaces have the potential to enable the co-creation of new imagined futures (Durose et al 2022). Secondments might provide more freedom for this to occur (as in publication 2) as several researchers have found (e.g., Cheung Judge and Blazek 2022) but as yet, these are not commonplace.

Research methods that incorporate multi-modal ways of communicating, and that enable participation are those well-positioned to support activist research. Tools and frameworks for research may not always be relevant or acceptable to collaborators, and so having a range of tools and approaches that can be flexibly applied based on what matters to those engaged in the research process is likely to increase the effectiveness of the research (Clark et al 2013; Hasse 2017). There is no set formula for all those involved in research to learn together and to benefit from the process (Upton, Vallance and Goddard 2014). Instead, I would argue that a pedagogy of activist research is one that draws on methods and approaches flexibly and contextually and is prepared to adapt and change with a certain level of pragmatism.

Burke and Lumb (2018) suggest that pedagogical methodologies are those that open up spaces for shared meaning making and that these should be relational spaces that can identify and expose inequity and seek to challenge it. This entails considering the process of research as more than collating evidence from particular kinds of data, but as a process that in and of itself enables co-learning. In this way, I suggest that an activist research pedagogy needs to 'flip the normative' (Mavin et al 2023) and thus facilitate new ways of knowing such that:

*'Research becomes a form of pedagogy, as part of the process of meaning-making, learning and making sense of ourselves and our relation to others' (Burke and Lumb, 2018, p.20-21)*

## Further reflections

I have introduced the concept of 'auto-meta-ethnography' for the first time in respect of approaches to synthesis. Although I have used the principles of meta-ethnography, the corpus I was exploring was my own work, specifically boundaried for the purposes of a PhD and of necessity the process was a solo one. Although this solo process was borne of necessity, it is not an approach I am particularly comfortable with. Team science which involves collaboration, challenge and different perspectives (particularly if those are interdisciplinary, see e.g., Clark et al, 2017) can (although it is by no means a certainty) result in more robust and reliable conceptual innovation. Nevertheless, I must own my work here and demonstrate my own unique contribution to informing how research produces change and the possibility of social justice.

One major criticism that I have of the process of auto-meta-ethnography is that it provides a snapshot of a particular body of work, but with little sense of the passage of time, or any real way of capturing a journey of development of ideas from one publication to the next. This is a flaw that I have tried to overcome by conceptualising this commentary as the culmination of my research career to date, and a new attempt to try to make sense of how much my thinking and practice has changed since its inception in 1998, and certainly since I started my educational research in 2009/10.

I presented this synthesis at ECER 2023 (Laing 2023). During the presentation the feedback from attendees confirmed that this work was valuable and a new addition to the field, even as to me it almost seems second nature now. It is still the case that activist research is not widespread across Europe, and there is still much to learn. Meta-ethnography, I believe, can help us to make sense of the disparate studies that have been undertaken and start to delineate a way of doing research that others can test out and further refine. Noblit and Hare (pg. 18) remind us that a meta-ethnography can help us to anticipate what might be involved in future situations and how things might connect and interact. Considering my own praxis and reflecting upon my own writing can be seen as a pedagogical method in its own right (Misiaszek 2022). For me, this

process has not just been a process of understanding the everyday but a desire that this knowledge is used in itself to contribute to change for social justice.

## Moving forward

The new model of a pedagogy for activist research is conceptual, although rooted in both theoretical and empirical research. My model is built from a synthesis of different projects over different times and contexts and as such has the potential to be applicable to future research. It can act as a guide to practice and can be tested as an approach for those with differing research skills, working in different contexts, to be applied. Testing and refining the model is now needed, examining the practices and processes of academic researchers and those of others, drawing on further knowledge outside the education discipline to support this. While this commentary has not had scope to examine closely what happens when things go wrong or do not work, by using and testing this model, more knowledge can be gained about what works, in what contexts and for whom, and what does not, in order that more researchers can be encouraged to explicitly consider activist approaches to research in the pursuit of social justice.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Example codes for each theme

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Respect for different knowledges needed to make sense of situation and context<br>• Differences in ontology and epistemology of participants<br>• Valuing the knowledge others can bring<br>• Access to insider knowledge<br>• Making sense of complexity |
| **Publication 2** | • Challenging power relationships<br>• Practitioner assumptions<br>• Young people want to know about research and how to stimulate change<br>• Researchers working alongside young people in practical ways<br>• Everyday experiences of sexism<br>• Access to different kinds of knowledge<br>• Relinquishing control<br>• Joint experience of the everyday |
| **Publication 3** | • Evaluation as shared endeavour<br>• Evaluators helping and supporting<br>• Knowledge construction as joint endeavour<br>• Different contributions are equally valid<br>• Making sense of complexity<br>• Validity found in using a variety of skills, knowledge and experience<br>• Evaluator as part of the team |
| **Publication 4** | • Building on assets<br>• Bringing different knowledges together |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Relationships underpinned by shared values and principles<br>• Power relationships between large and small organisations with differing capacity for co-design and dialogue<br>• Driven by values of social justice<br>• Equity of decision making in a culture of competition |
| **Publication 5** | • Success dependent on school's ethos and values |
| **Publication 6** | • Fairness is about equality and equity<br>• Social context critical to relational justice – how people treat each other and the practices and procedures governing that<br>• Justice as recognition – who counts and is valued<br>• Students prioritise respectful egalitarian relationships<br>• Collaborative approaches afford recognition of competing views |
| **Publication 7** | • Lack of participation risks marginalising young people<br>• A need for people to come together with different skills and knowledge<br>• Young people as agents of change<br>• Evaluators facilitating young people<br>• Young people want to make their own decisions<br>• Young people as capable<br>• Not assuming what young people need<br>• Shared values enable participation<br>• Assumptions about young people can stifle participation<br>• Being explicit about values<br>• Young people as community assets<br>• Knowledge exchange not training |

*Table A1 Respect for difference*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Dialogue<br>• Language of different professions<br>• Visual mediation of ideas and concepts |
| **Publication 2** | • Critical friend<br>• Crafting and annotation<br>• Different kinds of conversations<br>• Hearing the 'right' voices<br>• Researchers as active partners in a dialogic process |
| **Publication 3** | • Theory of change as a questioning tool<br>• Professional language<br>• Theory of change to expose misunderstandings<br>• Evaluator as critical friend<br>• Privileging dialogue<br>• Visual mediation<br>• Theory of change as scaffold for dialogue<br>• Dialogue and trust |
| **Publication 4** | • Time consuming dialogue<br>• Differences in understanding and language<br>• Lack of resources for dialogue |
| **Publication 5** | • Visually mediated encounters |
| **Publication 6** | • Fairness as helpful language to expose competing interests |
| **Publication 7** | • Adult assumptions challenges<br>• Relevance of topics to young people<br>• Not 'recruitment' but dialogue |

*Table A2 Dialogue*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Primacy of relationships |
| **Publication 2** | • Invited guests<br>• Building relationships<br>• Joint experience of the everyday<br>• Alternative approach foregrounding relationships, authenticity and different kinds of knowledge |
| **Publication 3** | • Evaluators helping and supporting<br>• Evaluator as part of the team |
| **Publication 4** | • Relationships underpinned by shared values<br>• Relationship building takes time<br>• Relationships paramount for researchers as active participants |
| **Publication 5** | • Need for trusting relationships<br>• Intervention has potential to damage relationships<br>• Success dependent on building relationships over time |
| **Publication 6** | • Interpersonal relationships and social context critical to justice<br>• Relationships open up space to understand different interests and contradictions |
| **Publication 7** | • Developing strong relationships between young people and researchers<br>• Relationships and trust as important<br>• Social activity strengthens relationships |

*Table A3 Relationships*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Visual mediation of ideas, concepts<br>• Flexibility<br>• Traditional roles of practitioner and evaluator<br>• Access to different data/greater range of data |
| **Publication 2** | • Girls deciding activities<br>• Cosy surroundings for activity<br>• Access to different kinds of knowledge<br>• Space for reflection (physical and conceptual)<br>• Reframing traditional notions of researcher<br>• Methodologically messy<br>• Redefining what counts as data |
| **Publication 3** | • Flexibility to incorporate change<br>• Evaluators helping and supporting<br>• Visual mediation<br>• Change in mindset for the researcher to stimulate change |
| **Publication 4** | • Complex roles and responsibilities in partnership<br>• Varied role of researcher – non-traditional tasks<br>• Flexing of roles to needs of vision, not jobs<br>• Challenging schools, universities and partnerships to change and adapt |
| **Publication 5** | • Visually mediated encounters with children<br>• Schools going beyond focus on attainment |
| **Publication 6** | • Opening up spaces of understanding |
| **Publication 7** | • Young people participating in research in ways meaningful to them<br>• Flexible spaces<br>• Researchers as responsive not prescriptive |

*Table A4 Flexibility*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Co-production<br>• Boundary crossing<br>• Collaborative theory of change<br>• Common tool<br>• Non-hierarchical relationships<br>• Valuing knowledges<br>• Access to insider knowledge<br>• Brokerage<br>• Learning journey |
| **Publication 2** | • Knowledge exchange<br>• Co-production<br>• Participation<br>• Learning together<br>• Working alongside<br>• Access to different kinds of knowledge<br>• Relinquishing control<br>• Active partners<br>• Power as dynamic and shifting<br>• Joint experience of the everyday<br>• Authentic real-world process |
| **Publication 3** | • Collaborative working<br>• Power dynamics<br>• Co-production<br>• Democratisation of evaluation<br>• Knowledge construction as shared endeavour<br>• Embedded evaluation<br>• Theory of change as scaffold<br>• Contributions equally valid |
| **Publication 4** | • Place-based partnership |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Need to address issues holistically<br>• Agreed vision to guide work<br>• Bringing different knowledge together<br>• Power relationships between large and small organisations<br>• Roles evolving from traditional to collaborative<br>• Flex of roles to needs of the partnership, not 'the job'<br>• Equity of decision-making |
| **Publication 5** | • Partnership working<br>• School partnerships<br>• Different models of working<br>• Going beyond traditional focus |
| **Publication 6** | • Need for considerations of the relationships between people and the process of decision-making<br>• Collaborative approach affords recognition of competing views<br>• Opening up space to understand different interests and see areas of contradiction<br>• Justice as mutuality – mutual obligations binding people together |
| **Publication 7** | • Boundary space or experience through co-production<br>• Co-production as building young people's capabilities<br>• Not assuming what young people need but evolving it in partnership<br>• Participation dependent on feelings of agency<br>• Not 'recruitment' but dialogue and relationship building<br>• Mutual benefits<br>• Challenge to academic power relationships<br>• Purposeful engagement<br>• Knowledge exchange not training |

*Table A5 Collaboration*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Valuing knowledges<br>• Non-hierarchical relationships |
| **Publication 2** | • 'dipping in and out' of research activities<br>• Girl's control over the research environment<br>• Hearing the right voices<br>• Ethics as practice rather than process<br>• Ethics as justice<br>• Ethics as key principles not formal processes<br>• Reflexive and nuanced informed consent |
| **Publication 3** | • Reconceptualising failure<br>• Trust<br>• Everyday ethics |
| **Publication 4** | • Shared values and principles<br>• Driven by values of social justice<br>• Equity of decision-making<br>• Current structures demanding individual rather than shared accountability<br>• Everyday ethics |
| **Publication 5** | • Success dependent on school ethos and values |
| **Publication 6** | • Educational justice insufficient without considering more general social justice concerns<br>• Relational justice – positions interpersonal relationships and social context as critical – the practices and procedures governing how people treat each other<br>• Justice as recognition – who counts and who is valued<br>• Students prioritised respectful, egalitarian relationships<br>• Relational equity – respect for others ideas and a commitment to the learning of others<br>• Fairness as a democratic process |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Tensions in enacting socially just practices |
| **Publication 7** | • Young people want to make a difference to others<br>• Participation dependent on feelings of agency<br>• Researchers being explicit about values<br>• Ethos of discovery not deficit |

*Table A6 Ethics as relational and justice-driven*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Co-production<br>• Theory-based methodology<br>• Boundary crossing<br>• Visual mediation<br>• A common tool |
| **Publication 2** | • Co-production<br>• Participatory research<br>• Space – physical and methodological<br>• Girls deciding activities<br>• Diamond ranking<br>• Crafting and annotation |
| **Publication 3** | • Synergic theory of change<br>• Critical friend<br>• Toc as questioning tool<br>• Toc exposing misunderstandings<br>• Evaluator as critical friend<br>• Evaluators helping and supporting<br>• Toc as planning tool<br>• Visual mediation<br>• Toc as scaffold for dialogue, critical thinking and reflection<br>• New ways of asking questions |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Publication 4** | • Place-based partnerships<br>• Participatory research, community development<br>• Co-production<br>• Agreed vision<br>• Toc- not easy to articulate<br>• Varied role of researcher – tasks not normally carried out in a traditional researcher model |
| **Publication 5** | • Holistic partnership approaches<br>• Theory of change<br>• Visually mediated encounters with children<br>• Portfolio of evidence through toc |
| **Publication 6** | • Dialogic approaches<br>• Fairness audit as contextualised, collaborative, critical, capability-driven and conceptualised |
| **Publication 7** | • Co-production with young people<br>• Theory of change<br>• Boundary space or experience<br>• Flexible spaces |

*Table A7 Frameworks and tools*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Out of school learning has no clear toc but outcomes are complex causal chains<br>• Change is not a linear process<br>• Making sense of complexity |
| **Publication 2** | • Adult assumptions and concerns contradicting young people's priorities<br>• Access to different kinds of knowledge<br>• Different kinds of conversations |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Different kinds of research practices<br>• Power as dynamic and shifting |
| **Publication 3** | • Different understandings of evaluation<br>• Different understandings of valid knowledge<br>• Making sense of complexity<br>• New ways of asking questions |
| **Publication 4** | • Addressing issues holistically – multiple outcomes<br>• Complex roles and responsibilities in partnership<br>• Competition versus coherence<br>• Toc not easy to articulate in complex situation<br>• Current structures demanding individual rather than shared accountability |
| **Publication 5** | • Different models of working with schools evident<br>• Schools needing to go beyond focus on attainment |
| **Publication 6** | • Can't look at educational justice in isolation from wider social justice concerns<br>• Fairness as accessible concept but used in different ways<br>• Tensions in enacting socially just practices<br>• Audit opens up spaces to understand different interests and see areas of contradiction |
| **Publication 7** | • Mismatch between young people's and adults ambitions for change |

*Table A8 Embracing complexity*

| Source | Example codes |
|---|---|
| **Publication 1** | • Reciprocity |
| **Publication 2** | • Researchers invited guests of the girls<br>• Young people want to know about research and stimulate change from the research process |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Young people developing their own research agenda |
| **Publication 3** | • Evaluators helping and supporting<br>• Toc as a planning tool, not just evaluation tool<br>• Evaluator as 'part of the team' |
| **Publication 4** | • Dialogue v being seen to do something<br>• Formalising partnership for credibility and accountability<br>• Flexing of roles to the needs of the vision and partnership rather than 'the job' |
| **Publication 5** | • Where schools shared responsibility, referrals more likely to be made |
| **Publication 6** | • Justice as mutuality – mutual obligations binding people together<br>• Commitment to the learning of others |
| **Publication 7** | • Co-production building young people's capabilities<br>• Young people as active participants in change<br>• Young people developing their own research<br>• Young people enabled to take action<br>• Reciprocity is important<br>• Mutual benefits<br>• Two-way exchange |

*Table A9 Reciprocity*