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EMA

E822 Dissertation

Disrupting disadvantage in schools: An exploration of the factors that shape practitioner's pedagogic responses to educational inequality within widening participation.

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Abstract [101 words]

Whilst separate from the context of formal learning and teaching, widening participation is nonetheless a pedagogical act, often operating within settings where learners experience varying forms of pedagogy according to their socioeconomic status. This dissertation seeks to explore the potential for practitioners to disrupt the practices that maintain educational disadvantage and considers the complex factors that influence pedagogic responses to inequality. Drawing upon the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière, the dissertation contends that widening participation has the potential to be a vehicle for both social change and emancipation and concludes by proposing further research that investigates this possibility.

Introduction [864 words]

Despite a long history of widening participation policy, the UK still faces a social divide in access to higher education and there is an incipient danger that the current portfolio of activity is not fit for purpose (Harrison and Waller, 2017). Furthermore, whilst the expansion of higher education and consequent efforts to address underrepresentation continues to be a prominent issue in policy discourse, widening participation initiatives have not overcome the enduring influence of social class and educational inequality (Webb et al., 2017). Whilst separate from the context of formal schooling, widening participation is a pedagogical act and this dissertation seeks to explore the role of practitioners in disrupting the practices that sustain educational disadvantage. Through an extended literature review, the dissertation contends that the practice of widening participation operates within a context where deficit discourses manifest in ways that reproduce and legitimise class differences and educational inequalities (Olivier, 2017; Reay, 2017). The following literature review and proposed research study is therefore an important resource that aims to equip practitioners with a stimulus for reflection and promotes the possibilities of actively disrupting deficit discourses through their practice (Humphry, 2014).

Throughout this dissertation, the term widening participation will refer to the efforts undertaken by practitioners to extend the opportunity to enter higher education to those who have the potential, but due to their educational, social and cultural background, may not consider it as a realistic option (Harrison and Hatt, 2010, p.69). The following literature review and proposed research study focuses on widening participation interventions delivered by practitioners based permanently in secondary schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged young people. The portfolio of outreach interventions delivered by practitioners can include mentoring, academic enhancement activities and sustained curriculums of information, advice and guidance (Harrison and Waller, 2018).

When considering the existing literature, the role of widening participation practitioners in ameliorating the impact of educational inequality is surprisingly absent and there is an increasing demand for further integration between theory and practice (Gazeley et al., 2019). Therefore, identifying limitations in the literature has supported the development of a proposed enquiry that seeks to explore the perspectives of practitioners and amplify the voices of students, drawing upon critical perspectives and the theories of both Pierre

Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière. For both Bourdieu and Rancière, education acts as a vehicle for the ongoing reproduction of educational disadvantage. However, in contrast to Bourdieu, Rancière situates his theories on an axiom of equality (Olivier, 2017, p.14) and contends that pedagogic practice can be a site for social change and educational equality. The proposed research is therefore situated in a secondary school and grounded within a critical paradigm whereby the intent of both the researcher and participants is to expose hegemony and promote social change (Given, 2008).

The extended literature review has aimed to provide a systematic identification and analysis of material related to the research topic and acts as a point of reference for discussing the contribution of the dissertation and proposed research (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). The question that has guided the direction of the review has focused on the factors that influence widening participation practitioner's attempts to disrupt the practices that produce and maintain educational inequality. The search for literature has focused on studies published within the last 15 years to ensure relevance to practitioners who are operationalising widening participation policies in the current educational and political landscape. Key search terms have included widening participation, widening participation practitioners, educational disadvantage and pedagogy. However, words associated with peripheral constructs have emerged throughout the review and have been employed to elicit additional information (Kelley, 2011). To elucidate findings, an approach informed by a literature review undertaken by Thurlings, Evers and Vermeulen (2015), investigating teachers' innovative behaviour was adopted. As illustrated within their study, a resource has been created to summarise each research enquiry and document reflections regarding quality, clarity of methodology, generalisations of results and strengths of claims. In addition, each study was rated as either very important, moderately important or mildly important, as exemplified by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), in their guidance for developing qualitative literature reviews.

This dissertation endeavours to combine a number of key constructs from the module material, in order to understand the practice of widening participation within a school context. Throughout the learning and teaching pathway, exploration of topics including pedagogy, agency, student voice and educational disadvantage have been applied to the context of widening participation due to my own professional practice as a practitioner. Opportunities to conduct qualitative research in previous modules have also cultivated an

incipient interest in the impact of pedagogic choice within this context. Furthermore, investigation into research design, conceptual frameworks and ethical considerations has significantly informed the development of the dissertation by fostering an understanding of the practical applications of particular methodologies and paradigms.

The subsequent chapters will explore the topic related literature that has been examined throughout the independent study for this dissertation, in addition to seminal literature related to assumptions about the conceptual framing and methodological approach of the proposed research. The dissertation will then conclude by presenting the proposed research study and examining how the development of the enquiry has been informed by interrogation of the extended literature review.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review (The Topic) [3,870 words]

The following chapter aims to provide a narrative synthesis of literature and empirical research that examines the factors that influence widening participation practitioner's pedagogic responses. Following the proposed steps outlined by Cronin et al., (2008), the review topic has been selected and literature has been gathered, read and analysed to identify whether the study's problem has been previously addressed, and also determine key patterns, trends, similarities, contradictions and contrasts (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). Engagement with the literature has exposed emerging themes, theoretical frameworks that illuminate educational disadvantage in relation to widening participation and also strengths and limitations of particular research methods. Whilst the literature associated with practitioner's pedagogic responses in widening participation interventions is limited, exploring literature on the periphery has provided useful constructs that have helped inform the direction of the review (Kelley, 2011). This particular chapter will focus on the emerging themes associated with the identified topic.

Before interrogating the existing constructs within the literature, it is beneficial to first provide a brief analysis of the key terms within the dissertation title in order to establish a coherent understanding throughout the succeeding discussion. As defined within the introduction to this dissertation, the term widening participation alludes to initiatives that aim to increase access for social groups currently underrepresented in higher education and is perceived as a means for overcoming social inequality (Harman, 2017). It is also necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by the term pedagogy and whilst interventions delivered by widening participation practitioners are less recognised in the study of learning and teaching, they are nonetheless a pedagogical act (Rainford, 2021a). Throughout the dissertation, the term pedagogy will adopt the definition suggested by Watkins and Mortimore (1999, p.3) which proposes that pedagogy is 'any conscious activity by one person, designed to enhance learning in another'.

In this dissertation, the terms educational disadvantage and educational inequality are used interchangeably and are concepts that are dominant in policy discourse. However, different understandings of disadvantage in varying contexts inform different approaches to the development and delivery of interventions (Gazeley, 2019, p.676). Within the field of widening participation, the term disadvantage incorporates criteria designed to capture

individual, institutional and geographical dimensions and often includes measures of higher education participation rates and area deprivation in order to reach learners from lower socioeconomic groups (Harrison and Hatt, 2010; Gazeley, 2019). However, this identification of disadvantage is often problematic for schools as data on socioeconomic classification is limited. Therefore, a more suitable indicator of disadvantage within a school context is the allocation of individual funding for economically deprived pupils which is reflective of redistributive principles (Keddie, 2012). Furthermore, educational disadvantage has also been defined as the material disadvantage young people experience, in addition to associated social and educational dimensions (Gazeley, 2019). Whilst a variety of definitions have been examined, this dissertation will draw upon the work of Kellaghan (2001) and will use the term to refer to the impediments to education, arising from social, cultural and economic factors that prevent students from deriving appropriate benefits from schooling.

2.1 The influence of school context

In order to explore whether the practice of widening participation practitioners contributes to the amelioration of disadvantage or perpetuates inequalities, the following chapter aims to provide a critical analysis of existing literature which examines the factors that influence practitioner's pedagogic responses to educational inequality. This first section will focus on the environment in which widening participation practitioners are often situated and seeks to identify factors that either enable or constrain their resistance towards a pedagogy of poverty.

In addition to promoting equitable outcomes and equal access to education, raising the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds progressing to higher education has been a key policy objective for successive governments since the 1990's (Harrison and Waller, 2018). In order to address the social differences in participation and support young people to make informed decisions about their future, institutional widening participation initiatives are now complemented by additional government funding through the Uni Connect programme (Office for Students, 2018). Focused on collaborative partnerships within areas of low participation, the work of Uni Connect and widening participation has therefore become more prominent in schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged pupils.

Within the context of teaching, research has shown that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately subject to didactic, teacher controlled, teaching-to-the-test pedagogies and learners often experience varying forms of pedagogy according to their socioeconomic status (Hempel-Jorgenson, 2009). Further studies exploring the quality of schooling in areas of high deprivation have concluded that a disadvantaged context significantly influences practice, with a greater emphasis placed on classroom control rather than the effective implementation of socially just pedagogies (Lupton, 2005).

Furthermore, schools that serve predominantly working-class children are often characterised by 'myriad gradations of poverty and affluence jostling side by side' (Reay, 2017, p.93). Rainford (2021a) contends that the young people who have been exposed to a traditional, highly passive practice of teaching and a culture of student compliance, are often those who are targeted for widening participation programmes. Practitioners are therefore required to deliver targeted interventions in schools where there are additional contextual challenges. The limitations of the aforementioned studies include the exclusion of student voice and findings may also be perceived to be exhortatory, encouraging generalisation across all educational settings. Despite these drawbacks, the literature highlights the need for practitioners to recognise the influence of prevailing discourses within schools on their own pedagogic practice. The assertions that there are systematic deficits in the quality of teaching in areas where high quality education is needed most should consequently challenge practitioners, who work closely with students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to consider whether their pedagogic response disrupts the practices that produce and maintain educational inequality, or constrains the emancipation of learners by reinforcing a 'pedagogy of poverty' (Haberman, 2010; Hempel-Jorgenson et al., 2018).

Martin Haberman (2010) describes this traditional, didactic form of teaching as the 'pedagogy of poverty' and warns educators that by failing to address its pervasiveness in the current educational landscape, the functions that characterise this approach will become inexorable. This prevalent pedagogic repertoire is powerful enough to undermine the implementation of any school improvement reform or widening participation initiative and is a strong determinant of the way pupils spend their time, the behaviours they display and their own constructed identities as learners. Practices within the classroom may therefore cause unintended harm by failing to adequately meet the needs of individual students (Ball et

al., 2012). This chapter argues that without an understanding of the dominant pedagogies that reinforce rather than address disadvantage, widening participation practitioners are at risk of strengthening the pedagogic culture that is created by constant teacher direction and student compliance (Thandani et al., 2010). In support of this assertion, Rainford (2021a) argues that this risk is increasingly likely in a highly marketised sector where widening participation is framed by an economic imperative and the exigency for equitable educational outcomes are reinforced by a human capital rhetoric. A more detailed exploration regarding the ability of practitioners to navigate the competing demands of social equity and economic incentive within widening participation policy will be presented later in the chapter.

A further consideration for widening participation practitioners is the association between family income and educational achievement. Children and young people raised in low-income families are often at risk of academic and social disadvantage and the correlation between socioeconomic background and academic achievement has been documented across all levels of schooling (Engle and Black, 2008; Education Policy Institute, 2019; Education Endowment Foundation, 2020). Whilst educators and widening participation practitioners are restricted in their ability to address the origins of disadvantage, 'they can offer the best chances to support students, regardless of their home circumstances' (Hattie, 2015, p.6). Rainford (2021a, p.13) argues that 'whilst work done by widening participation practitioners is less formal than teaching in a school or a university context, it is nonetheless a pedagogical act'. Therefore, to provide the best response to educational inequality, practitioners must be alert, not only to the social and economic factors that impact learners, but also the consequences of their own pedagogic choices. Within the context of formal education, it is accepted that pedagogic preferences determine how learners experience education and therefore, to ensure widening participation teams are fulfilling their role as agents of emancipation, further exploration is required to examine whether practitioners are alert to the manifestation of educational inequality and understand how their pedagogic choices are informed.

As previously discussed, research has contended that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately subject to performative pedagogies, underpinned by a discourse of high-stakes testing (Hempel-Jorgenson, 2009). The context of disadvantage significantly influences pedagogic response and this has been exemplified in a study seeking to explore

the pedagogical constraints within working class schools. When exploring practice in schools situated in varying socioeconomic contexts, researchers subsequently identified substantial differences in pedagogic repertoire (Lupton and Hempel-Jorgenson, 2012). Pupils who were educated in a predominantly working-class context were positioned passively, with very little agency and the role of the teacher was to regulate pupil behaviour. Further qualitative studies exploring schooling in low socioeconomic contexts have also highlighted the emphasis on classroom management at the expense of purposeful teaching and socially just pedagogies (Lupton, 2005). Whilst these particular studies have not been conducted to contribute to the knowledge base within the field of widening participation, the findings highlight the importance of understanding the complexity of educational disadvantage and developing a reflective awareness of the impact of pedagogic response. However, both studies sought to gather insight from teachers and there consequently remains unanswered questions about how learning and teaching is experienced by students, particularly those from a disadvantaged background. Despite this limitation, the conclusions remind practitioners that pupils who start school at a disadvantage due to their low socioeconomic status, are often further disadvantaged by educational practices and discourses that constrain, rather than accelerate progress (Francis et al., 2017).

The portfolio of widening participation activities within the UK has become increasingly focused on working in collaboration with schools to provide targeted support to disadvantaged pupils who aren't on a trajectory towards higher education. Strategies to increase participation in areas of low participation must therefore be based on a subtle appreciation of context and practitioners would benefit from developing an understanding of how disadvantage presents itself within interventions through additional training. The concern with social justice demands practitioners to assemble a sophisticated repertoire of pedagogical practices developed in negotiation with the students they support and also develop a critical understanding of what occurs outside of the school gates. Once this context is appreciated, promising practices and policies are likely to follow (Lupton, 2005)

2.2 The positioning of practitioners in policy

Addressing educational inequality is an enduring feature of educational policy in England (Baker et al., 2014; Raffo et al., 2015; Spencer et al., 2017) and widening access is at the heart of current higher education regulation (Rainford, 2021a). The expansion of higher

education over recent decades has consequently led to the development of several national initiatives, aimed at addressing the underrepresentation of particular groups in universities. The prominence of access to higher education within the political narrative has therefore contributed to a greater emphasis on the role of widening participation practitioners in translating policy discourse into practice. Furthermore, research over the last decade has indicated an incipient interest in practitioner identities in relation to policy enactment (Wilkins and Burke, 2015; Sapir, 2012; Rainford 2021a).

Those within the field of education and widening participation have argued that policy is increasingly constructed in economic-instrumental terms which commodifies individuals and reduces higher education to a consumerist experience (Marvelli, 2014). Efforts to increase the participation of underrepresented groups are motivated primarily by economic factors and policy discourse has concentrated on enhancing employability, in addition to increasing choice and competitiveness. However, running parallel to an economic rationale is also an emphasis on social justice and social mobility. The tensions generated by this juxtaposition have been evidenced in recent qualitative studies, seeking to explore how policy enactment is shaped through practitioners' professional and social class identities.

Through a critical discourse lens, Wilkins and Burke (2015, p.441) captured the experiences, perspectives, identities and underlying epistemologies of widening participation professionals through interviews with 7 managers and practitioners. By paying attention to how policy discourse was translated and practiced, the authors were able to uncover the continuous negotiation between competing demands of social equity and economic incentive. Additional studies have also made reference to the canonical concepts particular to widening participation discourse and running centrally is the view of the student as the consumer, which consequently positions higher education outreach initiatives as market-driven activities that are judged against their return on investment (Harrison and Waller, 2018). However, it is worth acknowledging that both studies explored the experience of practitioners before and around 2010 and since then, both widening participation policy and the higher education landscape has significantly evolved. Furthermore, the research was undertaken by outsider academics and whilst there is a wealth of academic literature concerning widening participation, questions remain about how this then influences the complexities of professional practice (Gazeley et al., 2019).

A more detailed account of navigating institutional demands is provided in a qualitative study conducted by Rainford (2021a). Drawing upon data from 16 semi-structured interviews, practitioners from 10 higher education institutions shared their experiences of navigating tensions between adapting pedagogical practice to meet individual learner's needs and promoting institutional recruitment targets. Rainford therefore argues that widening participation practitioners occupy a space on two differing continua (ibid., p.8). Firstly, whether they adopt a position of compliance with both national and institutional policy or implement a transgressive position that promotes emancipation. Secondly, whether their pedagogic response is based on what is right for the institution or what is right for the young people that are perhaps switched off from traditional, didactic schooling. Whilst the two aforementioned studies examine data gathered from small samples of widening participation professionals, the findings provide a catalyst for further consideration regarding the influence of institutional policy on pedagogic response and whether compliance constrains attempts to disrupt the practices that maintain educational disadvantage (Hempel-Jorgenson, 2015).

Further research within a formal education setting has corroborated the association between policy discourse and teachers' pedagogic practice. Findings from an Australian study highlighted the negative correlation between high-stakes assessment policy and teaching practices, with several teachers sharing their experiences of becoming more instructional and reducing the range of activities in the classroom (Polesel et al., 2014). Whilst this particular study provides limited scope for generalisability due to the dissimilar educational and political context, the inquiry provides beneficial insight into the impact of policy on practice and again stimulates further reflection for practitioners who work closely with cohorts of pupils in a context of educational disadvantage.

Due to the expansion of higher education, widening participation has acquired an elevated status within educational policy discourse. Practitioners therefore play a key role in bridging policy and practice. However, the positioning of practitioners within this political narrative presents a risk whereby compliance with government and institutional policy, without an understanding of the causes and impact of educational inequality, may be to the detriment of the young people that the policies aim to support. How practitioners interpret and enact a policy is contingent on many factors, including the young people in the room, their own histories, their professional knowledge, their experiences and their pedagogical repertoires

(Comber, 2016, p.403). In order to continue exploring the factors that influence pedagogic response within widening participation, the following section aims to provide a synthesis of the positioning and identities of the young people targeted for interventions and also the professional identities of practitioners.

2.3 The identities of widening participation students and practitioners

When examining the complexities surrounding practitioner's pedagogic responses, it is also worth exploring how the identities of both students and practitioners manifest through widening participation interventions and impact on pedagogic choice. Within the policy narrative surrounding widening participation, the emphasis has been on improving the representation of young people categorised as disadvantaged in higher education (Gazeley, 2019). However, the positioning of disadvantaged students within policy discourse has received prolific criticism, with many contending that the narrative signifies cultural and linguistic lack in terms of skills, experiences and competencies and rather than fostering an empathetic understanding towards disadvantaged young people, instead promotes perceptions laced with distaste and pity (Reay, 2017; Krutkowski, 2017). Therefore, the prominence of policy which is perceived to promote widening participation through a deficit model, has the potential to encourage the implementation of a pedagogy of poverty, which appeals to those who believe at risk pupils are best served by directive and controlling pedagogies (Haberman, 2010; Wilkins and Burke, 2015).

Practitioner's professional identities are interlaced with how they locate themselves and others experientially and socially with wider socio-cultural, institutional and professional discourses (ibid.). It is also important to recognise the variegation of cultural dispositions, attitudes and motivations, in addition to the unique educational and life experiences that practitioners bring to the widening participation agenda (Gazeley et al., 2019). Therefore, unpicking the assumptions underpinning practice is integral to 'generating the knowledge and confidence needed to reconfigure practice' (ibid., p.1017).

Within the context of formal teaching, the assertion regarding the personal experience of teachers and the need to explore perceptions of educational disadvantage is corroborated in an exploratory investigation conducted by White and Murray (2016). Through this qualitative study, the researchers aimed to examine how student-teachers articulated views about the

effects of poverty on educational attainment. Findings demonstrated that several students had limited experience with disadvantage and issues of poverty were outside their 'frame of reference' (p.510). Their concluding analysis led them to assert that teacher education does not support innovations in teaching for social justice and further exploration is therefore required to develop pedagogies that guide teachers beyond stereotypical views and address the effects of poverty within the classroom. Further studies have also revealed a reticence towards educational inequality, whereby implicit social class stereotypes and deficit models of disadvantaged students have been internalised by student teachers (Gazeley and Dunne, 2007). Whilst the research regarding the perceptions of educators provides a catalyst for considering whether deficit viewpoints constrain emancipatory pedagogies, in both studies, the exposed deficit stereotypes were left unchallenged. A more critical study would therefore seek to not only discover practitioner's perceptions, but also facilitate collaboration between students and practitioners to develop pedagogies that challenge discriminatory attitudes towards disadvantaged young people.

Returning to a widening participation context, Rainford (2021a) contends that having experience of disadvantage provides a greater understanding of the structural and cultural issues faced by disadvantaged young people, therefore equipping practitioners with a cognisant repertoire of solutions to the challenges that may arise. In contrast to the practitioners that possess a personal understanding, practitioners with no lived experience of the realities of the lives of widening participation students may experience a disconnect between the actualities of structural barriers to participation and the narrative of policy. These inferences are constructed through in-depth interviews with 16 practitioners from across 7 higher education institutions and therefore, the representativeness of the study is limited. Furthermore, findings have the potential to discount the efforts of practitioners with no experience of the obstacles faced by students. However, the research provides a stimulus for exploring how practitioners can be equipped with the resources to understand disadvantage from the perspectives of students and enact pedagogies that transform circumstances of inequality (Keddie, 2012).

Considering the identities of students, it is valuable to explore how policy assumptions filter down to those who participate in widening participation interventions (Baxter, Tate and Hatt, 2007). A criticism of widening participation has been that students feel stigmatised when

targeted for interventions and their engagement in such activities impacts adversely on perceptions of themselves. In contrast to this conjecture, findings from a research study evaluating the experience of students participating in a widening participation intervention indicated that those involved felt that their selection for the activity was a positive affirmation regarding their ability (ibid.). However, this particular study focused on students who had been selected and excluded from the research those who were not targeted for the programme. Therefore, amplifying the voices of those who were not selected may elicit contrasting results.

A limitation of the dissertation thus far has been the absent discussion regarding the potential for students to be active agents in their own subordination. Disengagement within the context of education can be initiated through the effects of an unequal society in school and the rejection of formal teaching may be a consequence of the disconnect between schooling and experiences outside of the classroom (Smyth and McInerney, 2012). In a study exploring the relationship between students' aspirations and identities, as rendered within discourses of power, Stahl (2018) observes a desire amongst working-class students to be average, everyday citizens and resist any potential shifts in agency. To rationalise the resistance towards emancipatory pedagogies that challenge dominant discourses, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps elucidate the opposition that practitioners may experience in widening participation (Gale and Parker, 2015; Hart, 2019). Habitus represents the permeable product of people's histories (Webb et al., 2017) and influences an individual's capacity to accept or reject discourse. Shaped by a complex negotiation between doxic aspirations, power constructs, peer and family influence and forms of capital, habitus plays a powerful mediating force in the identity construction of all students (Stahl, 2018). When considering the factors that influence pedagogic response within widening participation, practitioners are therefore required to navigate myriad evolving identities throughout interventions. The diversity of students should consequently encourage practitioners to reflect critically on the changing pressures that shape the construction of student identities (Thompson, 2019).

Discussion

This chapter has critically examined the complex factors that influence practitioner's pedagogic responses in widening participation interventions. Whilst literature exploring the

role of practitioners in recognising and disrupting educational disadvantage within a school context is limited, research has acknowledged that their direct involvement with young people, through the delivery of interventions, provides them with a privileged perspective on how practices are shaped by and experienced by learners (Harrison and Waller, 2018). Furthermore, what is also recognised across the literature is the need to do more to fully understand the complexities of each student in order to navigate the challenges of disadvantage (Gazeley and Dunne, 2007). However, it is worth recognising that research to date has tended to amplify the voices of practitioners over students and studies are often focused on the recruitment, retention and progression of widening participation students within higher education.

The proposed research study has evolved out of an in-depth interrogation of literature associated with the topic of the dissertation. Investigation of the factors that influence pedagogic practice such as school context, policy discourse and the identities of both practitioners and students, has led to the conclusion that further exploration of the potential for co-development of pedagogic innovations, that speak back to deficit narratives in widening participation is required (Comber, 2016). However, 'pedagogical practice without theory is meaningless' (Alexander, 2008, p.16) and the subsequent chapter will therefore continue to explore the theories of Bourdieu, in order to provide a theoretical framework that examines the relationship between educational disadvantage and widening participation and supports the development of the proposed research.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review (Conceptual Framework) [3,193 words]

Having explored the existing literature associated with the influences on pedagogic responses within widening participation, the following chapter will focus on theoretical frameworks that help interrogate the research questions and the underpinning philosophy of the proposed research. To develop a framework for the analysis of disadvantage, the chapter will focus specifically on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière. The chapter will then examine the researcher's positionality in relation to the research and the association between the discussed theories and the chosen methodology for the planned study.

3.1 Pierre Bourdieu and Widening Participation

Within the field of widening participation, the work of Pierre Bourdieu has been influential in developing a shared understanding of the barriers that prevent the development of the cultural capital needed to be successful in higher education (Harman, 2017). His findings have also supported practitioners to understand the complexities surrounding educational aspirations, a common policy focus in OECD countries, and the social conditions in which they are imagined (Gale and Parker, 2015). Most notably, Bourdieu's prominent concepts of habitus, field and capital provide a framework that explicates how disadvantaged children and young people are implicated in the reproduction of cultural and social status through their upbringing and education. Within the context of widening participation, it could therefore be argued that Bourdieu's influential concepts not only equip practitioners with the tools to comprehend the complex manifestations of disadvantage within their unique context, but also develop a reflexive knowledge that supports emancipation.

When considering how Bourdieusian theory has been used in existing widening participation research, a meta-analysis review conducted by Sue Webb and colleagues from Australian Higher Education Institutions identified the versatility of Bourdieu's theories concerning social class in widening participation (Webb et al., 2017). Whilst, the review acknowledged the advantages of engaging with Bourdieu's theoretical tools to better understand empirical data and think critically throughout research, the authors also identified an eclectic approach to the deployment of these notable concepts within widening participation enquiries. A criticism of the work of Bourdieu could be his opaque and complex language, which in his defence, is a reflection of the complexity of social reality (Power, 1999). However, this

evaluation of Bourdieu's work raises further questions regarding the accessibility of his theory for widening participation practitioners and how theoretical understanding of his concepts manifest in pedagogic practice. Returning to the aforementioned meta-analysis, whilst the literature provides a persuasive account of the potential for Bourdieu's theories to inform widening participation research, further exploration regarding the translation of theory into practice and the ability of practitioners to navigate the complex interplay between habitus, capital and field within their settings is required.

To determine which theoretical resources are most useful for considering educational inequality within the context of widening participation, it is valuable to explore Bourdieu's key concepts and how these relate to the proposed research study. For Bourdieu, the concept of habitus describes the embodiment of social structures and history in individuals and is constructed by the 'conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). Habitus is therefore a product of an individual's own history and consequently drives feelings of incongruence for students from a lower socioeconomic background where participation in higher education is limited (Webb et al., 2017). Drawing upon this concept to explore the complexities of aspirations within widening participation, Trevor Gale and Stephen Parker (2015) conducted research concerning the aspirations of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in regional Australia. Using the concept of habitus as a resource to think inductively throughout the research, Gale and Parker report on both the doxic and habituated aspirations of the participants. Whilst habituated aspirations derive from the biological and historical conditions of the students, often aligning to parental occupations, doxic aspirations refer to the out-workings of dominant beliefs and assumptions of individual students and reflect what carries value in societal structures. Therefore, when considering pedagogic response within widening participation, practitioners must be alert to the structural limits on aspiration and educational engagement, according to where each student is positioned within social, cultural and economic arrangements (Bourdieu et al., 1990). Furthermore, the enactment of both doxic and habituated aspirations presents a challenge to practitioner's attempts to disrupt disadvantage as within interventions, students may verbalise responses that they judge to be acceptable and carry value within their context.

The generalisability of the influence of Bourdieu's theoretical resources within the field of widening participation in both the meta-analysis and research investigating the construction of aspirations could be problematic due to the Australian context. However, the parallels between the Australian and English context are significant. Widening participation practitioners in both Australia and the UK operate within a heavily marketised higher education sector where, as alluded to in the previous chapter, practice is informed by policy that corroborates deficit discourses and frames widening access interventions within an economic argument (Rainford, 2021b; Gale and Parker, 2015). Both studies therefore provide a stimulus for researchers to engage with Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to understand how 'people and institutions interact and function within the field in which they operate' (Webb et al., 2017, p142).

Having defined Bourdieu's concept of habitus, it is also worth exploring the concepts of field and capital in relation to examining the factors that influence the enactment of pedagogies in widening participation interventions. For Bourdieu, practice can only be understood through thinking with habitus, field and capital and his thinking conceptualises action as the outcome of the intricate relationship between these three tools (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 1997). Regarding field, this concept is used by Bourdieu to illustrate the structured spaces organised around types of capital and denotes areas of production, circulation and appropriation of goods, knowledge and status (Power, 1999). Fields cannot exist without capital, a concept central to Bourdieu's understanding of social class. According to Bourdieu, capital can be understood as the means by which individuals are equipped to reproduce their position within the social field and manifests itself economically, socially and culturally. Fusing together Bourdieu's concepts therefore equips both practitioners and researchers with the tools to navigate the complex reproduction of inequality and recognise widening participation interventions as a potential site for social change and emancipation (Harman, 2017).

Whilst the examined studies provide a constructive narrative of the application of Bourdieu's theories in widening participation research, the operationalisation of concepts within the literature resemble a pick and mix approach which consequently fails to challenge the status quo (Webb et al., 2017; Reay, 2004). Therefore, to address this criticism in future enquiries, researchers can consider the tacit ways in which theories frame research and think more

comprehensively with the wider theoretical concepts of Bourdieu in order to analyse whether practitioner's pedagogic responses disrupt the practices that maintain disadvantage. For example, Bourdieu's additional concepts of *illusio* and *misrecognition* equip practitioners with tools to understand the role of individual choice in education trajectories and also provide a way of analysing why removing barriers to participation may not necessarily overcome inequality (Thompson, 2014). Bringing together an assortment of conceptual frameworks may be perceived as incongruous. However, the continuing exploration of multiple theories enables researchers to make sense of how best to interrogate enquiries in widening participation.

3.2 Challenging the traditional logic of emancipation

The previous section has highlighted the potential of Bourdieu's theoretical toolbox to interrogate the connection between education and social inequality and analyse the manifestations of disadvantage that surface within widening participation contexts. Nonetheless, his concepts are not without criticism. One assessment of his work is his tendency to focus on university instead of school education (Olivier, 2017). This observation aligns with the extensive research drawing on Bourdieu's theories to examine the recruitment, retention, progression and achievement of widening participation students in higher education and their acclimatisation to the university context (Thompson, 2019). This prominence within the literature therefore identifies a lack of research exploring the role of widening participation practitioners in ameliorating the impact of disadvantage within schools. Returning to the critiques of Bourdieu, perhaps the most polemical evaluation of his work comes from French philosopher Jacques Rancière.

Whilst Bourdieu and Rancière agree on their assessment that education contributes to the ongoing reproduction of educational disadvantage, for Rancière, Bourdieu's attempts to uncover and criticise the source of inequality declares such inequalities as unchangeable (Olivier, 2017). Rancière's work by contrast is 'predicated on an axiom of equality' (ibid., p14) whereby pedagogic practice is a key site for producing social change and educational equality is a starting point, rather than an end goal. A further tension between the philosophies of Bourdieu and Rancière is the contrasting pathways to emancipation. For Bourdieu, the pathway to emancipation is underpinned by a traditional logic where the exposition of power requires an intervention by an external agent, not subjected to the power that needs to be

overcome (Biesta, 2010, p44). Based upon an inequality between the emancipator and the one to be emancipated, this traditional logic exhibits itself through traditional explicatory pedagogies where teachers are in the know and students facing disadvantage are yet to know. Such logic dictates that disadvantaged young people require an external intervention to inform them of the barriers they are experiencing and how they should overcome these obstacles. When considering widening participation, this therefore raises questions over whether interventions developed external to the context of disadvantaged young people create spaces for enacting equality or introduce a dependency on academic knowers who are equipped to reveal the hidden operations of power (Harman, 2017).

It is worth noting that Rancière does not critique the methodological validity of Bourdieu's research or even the veracity of his findings, but rather the performative effect of his discourse (Pelletier, 2009). Rancière rejects the presupposition that the student is unequal to the teacher in terms of knowledge and challenges the hierarchical, didactic model of explication by conceiving emancipation as something that people do to themselves. He instead advocates for pedagogies of equality that promote self-discovery and the capacity of students to learn for themselves. For Rancière, 'to pose equality as a goal is to hand it over to the pedagogues of process' (Rancière, 2004, p223) and assuming inequality can only lead to the reproduction of hierarchies of inequality (Rancière, 1995). At the heart of this new idea of emancipation is the prerequisite of an equality of intelligence and pedagogic practice within Rancière's philosophy is therefore grounded within this critical principle (Biesta, 2010).

Employing the work of Rancière within widening participation raises intriguing questions regarding how practitioners articulate their commitment to equality and emancipation. Underpinning his findings is a persuasive conviction that the assumption of inequality within explicatory pedagogic practices provides a site for the continuous enactment of educational inequality (Harman, 2017). As alluded to in the previous chapter, one could argue that the pedagogy of traditional emancipation that Rancière vehemently opposes, runs parallel to the didactic, teacher controlled, teaching-to-the-test pedagogies that disadvantaged young people are disproportionately subject to (Hempel-Jorgenson, 2009). It is therefore imperative that widening participation practitioners are equipped to reflect on whether there is an assumption of deficit and inequality within their own pedagogic practice and within the disposition of the intervention they are delivering.

However, it is worth acknowledging that Rancière's contention is predicated on the assumption that a pedagogy of equality is the panacea to educational inequality. This assertion therefore omits the wider contextual factors that contribute to the reproduction of disadvantage within schooling. For instance, the segregation of pupils by attainment through setting and streaming approaches has been shown to have a detrimental impact on outcomes as learners, particularly those from a working-class background, experience educational practices that constrain rather than accelerate their progress (Francis et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has indicated a correlation between set allocation and self-confidence as learners perceive labels to describe fixed ability and educability, rather than current attainment (William and Bartholomew, 2004). Whilst setting and streaming approaches are implemented to enable more effective and efficient teaching, misallocation is a particular problem for pupils from a disadvantaged background who are at greater risk of being allocated incorrectly to a lower attaining group (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Therefore, whilst Rancière argues that pedagogic practice can be a site for producing social change, teachers and practitioners working within settings where the needs of disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately represented will face varying contextual challenges, which consequently influence the degrees of agency that they can exercise.

Despite these shortcomings, I argue that Rancière's vision for education, whereby knowledge and authority are no longer amalgamated to the body of the teacher or practitioner (Pelletier, 2009), has the potential to rekindle optimism and provides a catalyst for widening participation practitioners to speak back to the assumption of deficit by identifying enabling practices that interrogate pedagogies of poverty (Comber, 2016). Whilst there remain unanswered questions regarding the kind of classrooms Rancière envisages when transmissionist teaching is replaced by pedagogies of equality, how such pedagogies of equality are enacted in widening participation and how practitioners can promote self-discovery within interventions to support the emancipation of learners, his theories provide an incentive for widening participation to be a site for enacting equality and disrupting the reproduction of disadvantage. The following section and chapters aim to provide an exploration of how such questions identified through the literature review can be investigated through the proposed research and methodological framework.

3.3 Exploring a Critical Paradigm

For Rancière, his emancipatory interest in pedagogy focuses on the analysis of oppressive structures, practices and ideas. As explored in the previous section of this chapter, a prominent conception within his work is the assertion that emancipation can be achieved if individuals gain an adequate insight into the power relations that constitute a particular situation (Biesta, 2010). In explicit opposition to Bourdieu's discourse which speaks on the basis of supposed inequality, Rancière formulates an answer which contends that 'there are no other means to achieving educational equality than to assume it, affirm it, have it as an epistemological starting point and then systematically verify it' (Pelletier, 2009, p.142). Within the context of widening participation, this chapter has therefore argued that it is necessary for practitioners to reflect on the existence of assumed deficit and inequality within interventions and implement Rancière's specific methodological approach by questioning what image is projected of the young people they are supporting through their pedagogic practice (ibid., p.141).

Congruent with Rancière's philosophy is the paradigm of critical theory which draws attention to relationships that involve inequities and aims to develop a programme of action to bring about social change (Willis, 2007). This particular form of theorising is motivated by a concern to overcome social injustice and establish conditions that encourage the development of the practice architectures that enable the amelioration of oppressive structures (Kemmis et al., 2015; Mathison, 2005). As alluded to previously, the theories of Rancière provide a stimulus for widening participation to be a vehicle of social change and emancipation. However, the discourse of widening participation cannot be disentangled from a background of widening social and economic inequalities (Marvelli, 2014). Therefore, by adopting a critical approach to widening participation research, the inquiry specifically acknowledges the political and social context in which it is situated and regards the research as an opportunity to improve the situation for disadvantaged groups.

All research is conducted within a particular framework of ideas which defines both the ontology and epistemology. Within a critical theory paradigm, the ontological assumptions classify reality as a concept which is shaped by cultural, political and social values. The epistemological assumptions are subjectivist and the framework consequently adopts an interpretivist perspective whereby 'all knowledge is produced through different kinds of

social and discursive practices involving subjective human perceptions, values and negotiated interactions' (Tikly, 2015, p.242). The paradigm contrasts with the assumptions and methodology of natural sciences, instead accentuating the role and position of norms, values and meanings in the constitution of knowledge (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010).

Furthermore, according to critical theory, the nature of any social scientific theory is shaped by the historicity of the study objects it seeks to explain and adopting this paradigm is therefore an ethical choice that gives voice to and shares power with disadvantaged individuals and communities (Given, 2008; Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010).

At the centre of critical theory is a determination to expose and question hegemony, particularly the traditional power assumptions held about communities, in addition to the structural relationships of control and discrimination, in order to promote social change (Given, 2008). When considering research within a widening participation context, recognising how power has previously presented itself through didactic, performative pedagogies is central to the critical theory paradigm. The proposed research will therefore seek to emancipate learners from the educational practices that reinforce inequality by facilitating meaningful collaboration that actively challenges dominant discourses (Thandani et al., 2010; Kemmis et al., 2015). Furthermore, commenting on the enduring attributes of critical theory, Mills, Durepos and Wiebe (2010) highlight that research within this paradigm must simultaneously be explanatory, practical and normative and findings should consequently indicate what ought to be. To promote social change within widening participation research and disrupt the practices that maintain educational inequalities, studies must therefore adopt a prefigurative approach whereby researchers and research participants are involved in the generation of practical knowledge useful for sustainable change (Given, 2008).

Before exploring the proposed research in more detail, it is worth acknowledging the positionality of the researcher within a critical theory paradigm. A central tenet of critical theory is the commitment to break down the dominance and privilege of researchers, who are encouraged to question the assumed power that they hold over the research participants (ibid). The researcher therefore works closely with the stakeholders of the enquiry to define the problem, set the research agenda and work towards solutions. Participants are consequently empowered and are invited to work alongside the researcher to explore and

discuss issues relevant to the circumstances of their own lives (Kemmis et al., 2015). Within small scale qualitative studies, it is also imperative that the researcher is acutely aware of what they themselves bring to the study in terms of beliefs, values, opinions, prejudices and experiences. For the proposed study, the researcher will be positioned as an insider which therefore advantages an established network of practitioners and draws upon an existing knowledge of context. However, the researcher will need to be transparent about how positionality has shaped the rationale for the proposed enquiry and seek to obtain collective commitment to the desired social change (Costley, Elliot and Gibbs, 2010).

This chapter has explored the theories of both Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière in order to provide a framework for the analysis of educational disadvantage in relation to widening participation. In response to Bourdieu, Rancière's new logic for emancipation provides a catalyst for widening participation practitioners to enact pedagogies that emancipate disadvantaged pupils from a dominant deficit narrative. Combining the concepts of Rancière with a critical theory paradigm enables researchers to develop a change orientated enquiry that promotes social transformation and influences sustainable change (Given, 2008). The following chapters will therefore present further detail of the proposed research, providing insight into how this has been informed by the interrogation of existing literature, in addition to the conceptual framework and paradigm position.

Chapter 4 – The Research Proposal [814 words]

The purpose of this dissertation has been to examine the factors that shape widening participation practitioners' pedagogic responses to educational inequalities within schools. Through critically analysing the existing literature, the synthesis has illustrated the complexities surrounding widening participation practice and has highlighted the influence of several factors on the interpretation and enactment of policy discourse (Comber, 2016). Furthermore, the assertions regarding both the systematic deficits in the quality of teaching in areas of deprivation and the educational experiences of learners who are often targeted for widening participation interventions, indicate a number of practical implications for practitioners which require further exploration (Rainford 2021a; Hempel-Jorgenson et al., 2018; Lupton, 2005).

Whilst examples from the literature have illuminated the experiences of practitioners, many have been small scale, qualitative studies and therefore, justifying the generalisability of findings is problematic. Making systematic comparisons across enquiries is also a challenge as young people from a disadvantaged background are not a homogenous group and the intersectionality of socioeconomic marginalisation causes further complexity (White and Murray, 2016). However, what is recognised across the literature is the need for practitioners to assemble a sophisticated pedagogic repertoire and instantiate a vision through their practice that ensures widening participation is a vehicle for social change (Comber, 2016; Marvelli, 2014).

Existing research on the subject of pedagogy in widening participation has been mostly restricted to the experience of disadvantaged students studying in higher education and researchers have amplified the voices of practitioners over students. However, disadvantaged students within a school context, when provided with a genuine opportunity, are able to articulate their own barriers and identify the support they need in order to flourish. Therefore, to develop the existing literature further, a greater focus on the role of students in co-transforming practices, could produce beneficial findings that generate practical knowledge for sustainable change (Given, 2008).

As alluded to in the previous chapter, adopting a critical theory paradigm provides an opportunity to break down the dominance and privilege of the researcher and empower

participants to explore and discuss issues relevant to the circumstances of their own lives (Kemmis et al., 2015). The development of the methodology and conceptual framework for the proposed research study has been considerably influenced by the enduring ideas embedded in critical theory and the work of Jacques Rancière, who advocates the removal of a traditional logic of emancipation whereby students who are at a disadvantage require an external intervention (Biesta, 2010; Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). In tandem with the development of a conceptual framework, my own positionality as a researcher has progressed throughout the exploration of the literature and has been extensively shaped by my own values, beliefs and interests as a widening participation practitioner. Within the proposed theoretical framework and methodology, my position as a researcher will focus on stewarding deliberation and engaging participants as co-researchers in a dialectic process of questioning, in order to recognise and articulate the social change that is required (Mathison, 2005; Given, 2008).

Despite the attraction of large-scale positivist research for policy makers, interpretivist studies illuminate local contexts and knowledge and enable researchers to work collaboratively with those under study. The proposed research study therefore adopts a critical participatory action research methodology, underpinned by a critical theory paradigm and aims to amplify the voices and experiences of those facing disadvantage, in order to transform pedagogical practice (Valls and Padros, 2011). In addition to exploring how students and practitioners can work collaboratively to transform practice, the enquiry will also examine the factors that constrain practitioners' attempts to pursue pedagogical change. However, it is worth noting that critical action research adopts a cyclical design involving regular reflection and action and therefore, the focus of the enquiry has the potential to grow and adjust in order to develop socially appropriate solutions (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).

During the development phases of the dissertation, previous iterations of the research questions have focused on the relationship between widening participation and educational attainment and also the theoretical tools useful for conceptualising this relationship. However, the definitive research questions have been shaped by engagement with the module material, the extended literature review and my own professional practice. Furthermore, the opportunity to conduct qualitative research in the Stage 2 module incited

an interest in the impact of pedagogic choice within widening participation and consequently led to further reflections on how pedagogic knowledge could be expanded (Goodman, 2020). The following research questions have therefore been generated and will be explored in further detail in the next chapter.

- How can students studying in schools targeted for widening participation interventions collaborate with practitioners to co-develop pedagogical practices that disrupt the systems that maintain educational disadvantage?
- What factors influence practitioner's attempts to disrupt the practices that produce and maintain educational disadvantage?
- How do the assumptions and views held by practitioners about the causes of educational disadvantage influence their own pedagogic practice?

Chapter 5 – Research Design, Research Methods and Research Analysis [2,638 words]

The next chapter provides an overview of the proposed research design and the ways in which this has been informed by the interrogation of literature associated with the dissertation focus and conceptual framework. It will then describe the proposed research methods, the characteristics of the research participants, criteria for determining the quality of the study, ethical considerations and the proposed methods of analysis.

When considering the research questions that have been generated for this proposed enquiry, the methodology is both dialectical and hermeneutical, meaning interpretation and the exchange of perspectives are indispensable. The dialectical nature of research underpinned by a critical paradigm corroborates the notion that individuals are created by and simultaneously create social realities (Strunk and Locke, 2019). Therefore, this enquiry adopts an interpretivist view whereby all individuals exist in a relationship with a social world that has shaped them and 'all knowledge is produced through different kinds of social and discursive practices involving subjective human perceptions, values and negotiated interactions' (Tikly, 2015, p.242).

As explored in earlier chapters, Ranci re argues that the emancipatory impetus to release students from oppressive practices is prominent amongst critical researchers, who argue that the exposition of power, repressive structures, practices and theories is crucial for emancipation (Biesta, 2010). Critical theory research therefore provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding educational inequalities and shifts the analytical focus away from individuals to the systems, ideologies and institutions that perpetuate the continuity of oppression (Strunk and Locke, 2019). The preceding exploration of theoretical literature has therefore contributed to the identification of an appropriate paradigm and development of consequent research questions for the proposed study.

5.1 Critical Participatory Action Research

Critical theory remains a central theoretical framework in educational research that strives for equity and social justice. Research that applies this paradigm incorporates a critique of existing conditions and aims to produce amelioration of oppressive circumstances (Mathison, 2005). The proposed research adopts a critical participatory action research methodology and seeks to explore the factors that constrain widening participation practitioner's

pedagogic responses, in addition to facilitating collaboration between students and practitioners to transform practice. According to Kemmis et al., (2013), critical participatory action research promotes an ongoing discourse that aims to consider practice differently through creating safe, communicative spaces whereby participants engender a sense of shared decision making and commitment to social change. Through this subjective, ideologically orientated enquiry, the researcher will therefore be able to support the development of a programme of action to bring about change and elicit the student voice to help those currently without power acquire it (Willis, 2007).

Whilst a number of models have been advocated for when undertaking participatory action research (Bassey, 1998; Moroni, 2011), the proposed research will draw upon the suggested framework of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), presented in Figure 1. It is worth acknowledging that within this framework, steps can be recursive and moved through in various sequences due to the flexible nature of this mode of enquiry. However, central to this particular framework is the principle of reflexivity which provides the epistemological basis for emancipatory action research. Furthermore, data collected throughout the research can prompt additional cycles of the framework and feedback within and between each cycle is essential for facilitating reflection and pursuing sustained pedagogical development (ibid.; Hegazy et al., 2021).

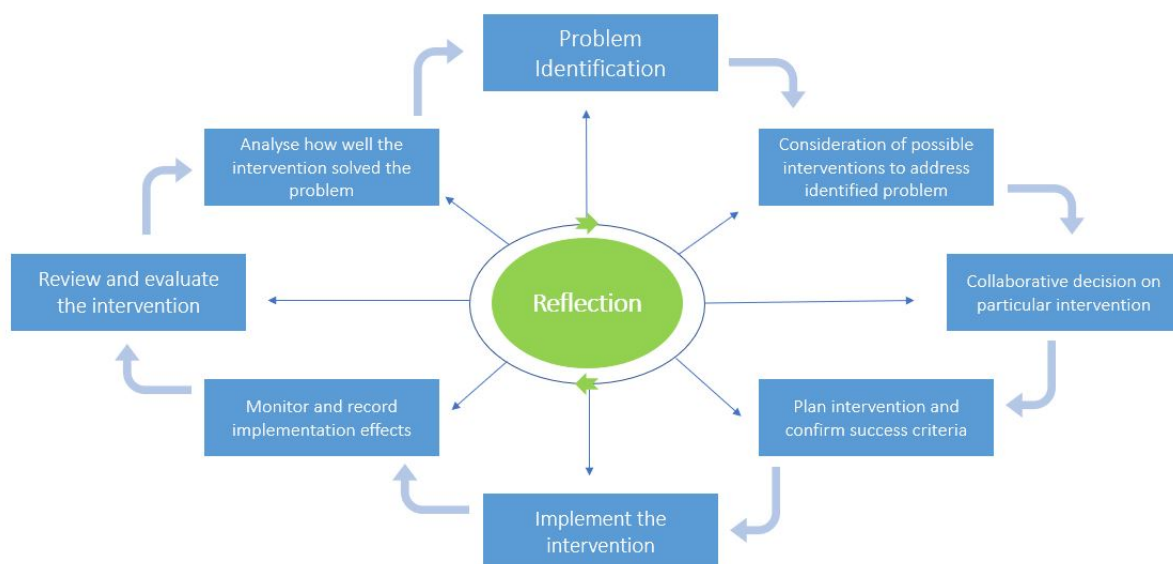


Figure 1: A framework for Critical Participatory Action Research

Running parallel to the critical participatory action research cycle, qualitative data will be collected to respond to the research questions and illuminate the lived experiences of participants, exploring educational inequality from their perspective. As with all research methods, they can either afford or constrain the data collection process and it is therefore imperative to consider the limitations of any chosen methodology. For a critical participatory action research enquiry, a variety of data collection tools can be used to address the research questions and engage participants in a process of dialectic questioning (Mathison, 2005).

To elicit the voice of both students and practitioners and elucidate their understanding of educational inequality in relation to widening participation, cyclical interviews and focus groups will enable the researcher to engage in regular dialogue and develop a medium of solidarity amongst all involved in the research (Kemmis et al., 2015). Through repeated semi-structured interviews, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the participant's unique life worlds and this method provides greater flexibility for phrasing and rephrasing questions and encouraging elaboration of answers (Marvasti and Freie, 2017). The prominent use of interviews within widening participation research has been well documented in academic literature. To explore concepts of success and impact in widening participation, Harrison and Waller (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with two generations of practitioners. During the same research enquiry, the interviews also aimed to explore how practitioners constructed their practice within the wider political discourse (Harrison and Waller, 2018). Rainford (2021a) has also employed in-depth interviews within widening participation research in order to explore how policy enactment is shaped by the experience of practitioners.

Whilst the use of interviews in the aforementioned qualitative studies elucidated the lived experience of participants, the interviews were tacitly infused with cultural and social norms and multiple factors shaped how they are conducted (Marvasti and Freie, 2017).

Furthermore, due to the insider positionality of the researchers within these enquiries, the existing affiliation with participants may have impacted the extent to which participants were willing to disclose their perceptions and experiences (Harrison and Waller, 2018). To mitigate these limitations in the proposed study, the researcher must be explicit about their positionality within the research and be aware of the contextual factors that influence how the participant constructs their responses.

In addition to scheduling cyclical interviews with students and practitioners, focus groups, strategically embedded at key milestones throughout the research process, will provide opportunities for both students and practitioners to collaboratively identify the problem and reflect on the implementation of the co-designed intervention.

A risk with all research enquiries and the proposed data collection methods is inconsistent participation and participants doubting whether their contribution will lead to positive change. This is particularly imperative for critical participatory action research and therefore, through carefully considered data collection methods, the researcher will need to continuously foster solidarity, secure commitment to the aims of the enquiry and integrate action, enabling participants to achieve emancipation from master narratives (Mathison, 2005).

5.2 Proposed Research Participants

The massification of higher education has led to the prominence of widening participation initiatives, aiming to address the underrepresentation of certain groups in society (Wilkins and Burke, 2015). Such underrepresented groups are now the focus of institutional access and participation plans and include potential or current students, for whom the Office for Students can identify gaps in equality of opportunity (Office for Students, 2021). In order to address concerns regarding the discrepancies in higher education participation, institutional widening participation programmes are now complimented by additional government funding under the Uni Connect initiative (Rainford, 2021a). The Uni Connect programme aims to reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups and partnerships between universities and colleges focus their work on schools in areas where participation is lower than what might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there (Office for Students, 2021, p.4). Schools targeted are therefore characterised by low progression and are often in areas of high deprivation due to a policy shift towards area-based data that measures various indicators of disadvantage (Krutkowski, 2017). The location for the proposed research will be in a school targeted for the Uni Connect programme and the researcher will therefore need to consider contextual factors, such as examinations and holidays, when implementing the enquiry. It is intended that the research will take place over two school terms, allowing flexibility for additional iterations of the action research cycle.

The proliferation of widening participation projects and government funded initiatives has led to the development of a strong and vibrant community of practitioners (Thompson, 2019). Practitioners are often responsible for the development and delivery of interventions, in addition to mentoring, summer schools, administration and evaluation (Rainford, 2021b). Furthermore, to build stronger relationships with students, practitioners can often be based permanently in targeted schools. The proposed research enquiry therefore seeks to empower practitioners as co-researchers and work collaboratively with students to enhance pedagogic practices for widening participation interventions. Interviews will also seek to explore practitioner's views regarding educational disadvantage and highlight the factors that influence their pedagogic responses.

In addition to the practitioners responsible for delivery in targeted schools, the proposed research also aims to engage students in a dialectic process. Students targeted for widening participation interventions are often the first in their family to consider higher education and are likely to have experienced obstacles in their previous educational experience (Krutkowski, 2017, p.229). Furthermore, criteria based on household income and parental education and occupation can also be used to identify students (Gazeley, 2019). Through involving these students in the research enquiry, practitioners will be able to gain an understanding of how widening participation interventions are experienced and will consequently be provided with invaluable insight that has the potential to transform practice.

5.3 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are often employed as criteria to judge whether the claims made in research are well founded and whether another researcher can replicate similar results using identical methods and instruments. However, both validity and reliability are positivist concepts rooted within the physical sciences. Therefore, the plurality of approaches to qualitative research and the divergent theoretical and methodological frameworks has led to the development of more appropriate criteria to judge the credibility and quality of interpretivist enquiries (Hammersley, 2011).

Before exploring the measures of quality for the proposed research study, it is worth acknowledging the axioms that underpin naturalistic evaluation. For interpretivist researchers, multiple realities are socially constructed and the relationship between the

researcher and participant is respectful and involves reciprocal learning. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on values throughout the enquiry. In response to these principles, Lincoln and Guba (1986) contend that criteria centred around trustworthiness and authenticity is capable of testing the rigour of interpretivist research. The criteria refer to the extent to which the methods of enquiry enable conclusions that relate closely and accurately to the phenomena under study and also whether the conclusion exhibits relevance beyond the confines of the specific study which generated them. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba contend that interpretivist and critical research should promote fairness by serving a social agenda and ensuring all stakeholders are empowered.

Regarding the authenticity and trustworthiness of the proposed research, the research will aim to evidence credibility through prolonged engagement and triangulation of data. Furthermore, the enquiry will attempt to provide what Lincoln and Guba (1986) describe as catalytic and ontological authentication whereby the research stimulates further action and improves individual's conscious experience of the world around them. Integral to critical participatory action research enquiries is the potential to catalyse praxis and emancipate participants from socially unjust practices. Therefore, the proposed research can be assessed against its ability to integrate action and enable participants to explore the narrative, engage in conversation and account for the next edition of their story (Mathison, 2005).

Considering the quality of the chosen research methods, the semi-structured interviews require preliminary fieldwork to understand the cultural and linguistic norms of the participants to ensure that the questions are methodologically rigorous and are understood by the participant (Roulston, 2010). Reflexivity throughout the research process is also an imperative quality marker that distinguishes qualitative research from quantitative and researchers are therefore required to undertake a process of self-criticism where their position in the world and in relation to the subject under study is acknowledged.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

For qualitative studies, accessing potential participants not only requires providing information about the research, but also ensuring that individuals are in a position to exercise personal choice regarding whether or not to give their consent to participate (Miller and Bell, 2012, p. 62). In addition, such research relies upon gate-keepers to access participants. The

researcher would therefore need to gain consent from a school gate-keeper and negotiate an effective way of gaining consent from proposed participants, that complies with the procedures in place in the educational setting. Ethical consideration will be given to all stakeholders and through gaining consent, the researcher will take the necessary steps to ensure participants understand the process, the importance of participation, how data will be used and to whom it will be reported (Maguire *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the proposed research will respect the confidentiality and autonomy of all participants and the researcher will ensure that throughout all stages of the research, decisions are based on an informed personal code of ethics.

It is integral that consequential, ecological, relational and deontological ethical considerations are embedded throughout the research process (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). Regarding ecological ethical considerations, it is worth considering to whom and how a researcher meets the expectations of others and also the research. This includes a researcher's responsibility to the academy of researchers in a particular field, compliance with overarching codes of ethical guidance and also national expectations which are legal responsibilities. For the proposed critical participatory action research enquiry, the researcher would need to ensure that the research is guided by the BERA ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2018). It is also essential that support from the Open University is received and academics are reassured that the research is ethically responsible and will not lead to detrimental effects for potential participants. Additional ethical considerations are identified in the E822 Ethical Appraisal Form, included in the appendix of the dissertation. Underpinning all of these codes of ethical practice are the principles of showing respect to participants and developing effective research relationships (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

When considering the key ethical dilemmas related to the proposed research, issues of equality and equitable selection and inclusion of participants are pertinent. The researcher will also need to consider the increased workload on participants, particularly the widening participation practitioners. To mitigate these ethical concerns, the researcher will need to foster open and transparent communication and allow all participants to ask questions and raise concerns throughout the process. In addition, a recognition of the required shifts in

agency will be essential for empowering all participants to amplify their voice and bring about change (Taylor and Robinson, 2009).

5.5 Methods of Analysis

Lastly, the final section of this chapter will briefly outline the proposed methods of analysis for the research enquiry. In order to analyse the qualitative data collected throughout the study, the researcher will synthesise the key themes that have arisen from both the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, drawing upon their own knowledge, experience and literature to contextualise the data (Harrison and Waller, 2017). The proposed thematic analysis will aim to interpret the findings by identifying dominant themes or patterns of cultural meanings and will employ both labelling and annotating techniques for managing the transcribed qualitative data. Through ideological interpretation, analysis will then be used to enlighten and emancipate. However, it is worth recognising that due to the nature of critical participatory action research, the process of deductive analysis will be undertaken collaboratively with participants to ensure that the meanings generated are reflective of the lived experiences of those engaged in the research.

It is also essential that the dissemination of findings reflect the adopted critical paradigm and nature of the participatory research. Therefore, rather than the researcher affixing authorial intent and assuming full responsibility for the generation of ideas, the authorial rights over the research findings must be shared with the participants of the study to reflect the characteristics of the research (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019). To expand the relevance of widening participation, the presentation of findings must also speak to a plurality of audiences and strategic interests (Reed, King, Whiteford, 2015).

EP Post Script – Narrative Critical Reflection [519 words]

This final section of the dissertation aims to provide a brief reflection of the process of undertaking the extended proposal and document elements of my own learning journey. Through reflecting on my Personal Development Planning (PDP), I will discuss progress against the goals I established at the beginning of the module and identify how PDP supported me to navigate challenges I faced during the development of the dissertation. To support this reflection, a summary of key targets and actions taken to develop as a researcher have been included in the appendices.

The focus for the investigation has evolved over the last two modules and has been significantly influenced by regularly relating module material and literature back to my own professional practice as a widening participation practitioner. Furthermore, through establishing professional PDP goals at the beginning of the module, I have been regularly challenged to utilise my engagement with the Masters programme in order to make a contribution to knowledge within my field. A key event within the pursuit of this goal has been the publishing of a blog focused on the role of pedagogy within widening participation interventions (Goodman, 2020). Furthermore, a personal goal that was documented in my PDP was to develop specialist knowledge regarding my own area of interest and through extensive independent study, I have been able to examine the importance of pedagogy in relation to widening participation further.

Through the PDP audit undertaken at the beginning of the module, I was supported to identify key areas for development. This included being able to articulate my own perspective on research approaches, in addition to explaining and justifying the processes entailed in carrying out an extended literature review. The module material has consequently enhanced my understanding regarding the practice of applied research within education and the scheduled learning events have provided me with opportunities to further explore various frameworks underpinning educational research through discussions with other students. Overall, I feel I have made significant progress against my PDP audit and have aimed to embed moments of reflection in conjunction with the Our Journey resource.

In order to exemplify the role of PDP in navigating challenges throughout the development of the dissertation, I will provide a brief overview of a specific obstacle I encountered. At the

beginning of the module, I was eager to conduct a small-scale investigation, in order to influence practice within my own setting and enhance the knowledge of practitioners within my team. However, following the completion of TMA01, I was required to change to an extended proposal due to the challenges imposed by Covid-19 and a change in job role. Through tutorials, I was able to discuss this with my tutor and also other students who had experienced a similar obstacle. PDP then allowed me to establish new goals which focused on undertaking an extended review and the audit provided me with an opportunity to take stock of the skills that I needed to develop for this new proposal. Regular reflection then allowed me to document progress against action plans and consider further steps for my own development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth



NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking ‘in-person’ data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols not least in seeking Gatekeepers’ permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhere to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation and included as part of the submission for the EMA for those submitting an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research.

For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all “no” you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/supervisor can assess the proposed research.

Section 1: Project details		
a.	Student name	Joanne Goodman
b.	PI	
c.	Project title	Disrupting disadvantage in schools: An exploration of the factors that shape practitioner’s pedagogic responses to educational inequality within widening participation.
d.	Supervisor/tutor	Ray Chatwin
e.	Qualification	Masters in Education <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Masters in Childhood and Youth <input type="checkbox"/>
f.	MA pathway (where applicable)	Learning and Teaching
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	n/a
h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	n/a

i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk for advice on travel.</i>	United Kingdom
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Section 2: Ethics Assessment		Yes	No
1	Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a 'gatekeeper' (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a 'police check' or appropriate level of 'disclosure' before carrying out your research? ¹	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. ²	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? ³	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? ⁴	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹ You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure ('police check') can be obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

² This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

³ Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

⁴ Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.

8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If you answered 'yes' to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (<http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/>).

Appendix 2 – EMA Evidence Reflection Grid

Category	Feedback received, targets achieved and areas of development worked on	How did this shape my dissertation
<p>Knowledge and understanding: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to knowledge of current debate and issues in your specific area of focus; drawing out concepts and themes; choosing a focus area for your dissertation; identifying and overcoming ethical issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A personal PDP goal that I set at the beginning of the module was to develop an area of expertise, related to the field of widening participation. I was also keen to ensure that I was regularly applying module material to my own practice. I feel this has been achieved through the development of the extended proposal. - Feedback following the first draft submission included the need to define key concepts surrounding the practice of widening participation and the topic of the dissertation. This was met through further critical exploration of the literature. 	<p>Extensive exploration of the literature and application of the module material to my own professional practice significantly shaped the development of the dissertation.</p> <p>Acting upon this feedback allowed me to explore concepts related to the dissertation and develop a coherence through the chapters.</p>
<p>Critical analysis and evaluation: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to justifying or challenging your personal perspective; interpreting and critically analysing evidence and methodologies from your own and others’ research; analysing and evaluating themes and issues; sourcing and critically reviewing a wide range of publications; creating an academic argument using synthesis; comparing and connecting practice and theory.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An important academic PDP goal was to read resources critically. Engagement with the module material regarding the process of undertaking literature reviews supported with. Reflections of articles and empirical research were documented in my research journal. - A key competency that I have needed to develop this year has been managing an extensive amount of literature. I have used a spreadsheet to record findings from literature and this has helped me identify links between the articles. - Feedback from the second draft highlighted the need to be more critical of the theories of Rancière. 	<p>I aimed to read all sources with a critical eye and through documenting reflections in my research journal, I was able to identify limitations in the literature and this informed the direction of the review and the proposed research.</p> <p>The spreadsheet has been integral for developing the structure of the extended review and has enabled me to develop coherence between the chapters.</p> <p>Following this feedback, I was able to read back through the key pieces of literature and identify limitations.</p>

<p>Links to professional practice: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to: designing and/or applying research methods; developing ideas from previous research and frameworks; reflecting and making adaptations during the research and writing process; addressing problems in research design; identifying implications for practice and professional debate; challenging your own assumptions; managing workload and personal motivation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I developed new goals when changing from the SSI to EP which helped navigate the adaptations that I needed to make to the dissertation. This involved considering how the initial research questions could be amended to direct a literature review. I also used the PDP audit to record areas where I needed development. - A central theme within the feedback on all draft submissions was setting daily writing goals and managing my time. I therefore created a writing timetable that supported me to manage my workload. 	<p>PDP, engagement with my tutor and tutorial group and learning events helped me transfer my thinking for an SSI to the EP. Reflections recorded in my research journal also helped me consider the strengths and weaknesses of varying research questions.</p> <p>Creating a writing timetable was extremely valuable in supporting me to manage the development of a large body of text and also helped me to schedule in time for proofreading and editing.</p>
<p>Structure, communication and presentation: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to using academic style and referencing; presenting, managing and sharing information in different modes; communicating concepts, findings and ideas for different audiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A goal throughout the Masters has been to develop my academic vocabulary. I have therefore maintained a glossary over the last 3 years which has been extremely beneficial in helping me communicate my ideas. - I have also utilised the Manchester University Academic Phrasebank. - One of my PDP goals was to disseminate learning from my Masters within the field of widening participation. Having the opportunity to write a blog therefore enabled me to consider adapting my academic writing for different audiences and forums. 	<p>Both the glossary and Manchester University resource has enabled me to communicate my ideas academically and present arguments in a coherent and structured manner.</p>