

## **Promoting professional growth to build a socially just school through participation in ethnographic research**

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## **Promoting professional growth to build a socially just school through participation in ethnographic research**

We have used the concept of ethnography as explanatory critique in earlier research in three projects in Spain relating to teacher professional development and leadership for socially just schools. This research involved participant observations, interviews, informal conversations, document analysis and virtual ethnography. However, we have also conducted a meta-ethnographic analysis on research products from the projects. Our intention was to try to identify any potentially common themes and ideas concerning how interaction between researchers and participants may have influenced the research and the contexts they were part of as a means to generate useful knowledge for leadership and professional development for educational change and social justice. We describe and analyse these themes in the present article and conclude by highlighting key aspects and possible implications.

Keywords: knowledge production, professional development, practical knowledge  
National perspective: Spain

### **Introduction**

Education justice relates to how societies protect and recognize the means and qualities individuals require through and in their education by which to live a good life: i.e. to fulfil personal and interpersonal ambitions and be satisfied and virtuous in terms of one's intellectual reasoning and making decisions in life. Education justice is thus both a process and a goal that demands an equally fulfilling participation of all groups in an education. Yet currently education systems do not provide this, not even in globally highly regarded democracies such as those of the Nordic welfare states (Beach 2018). Identifying and developing models of professional learning for social justice leadership and professional development could therefore be of value. But if learning, leadership

and development for and toward social justice in and through education systems and the schools in them is an aim (Forde and Torrance 2017), sensitivity toward social contexts and their particular material conditions and cultural history is also important (Bolívar 2011; Hamilton et al. 2018; Jones 2010).

Ethnographic research can play a significant role here, not only in developing sensitive contextual knowledge for professional development and education leadership for social justice, but also in creating just changes within schools, their curricula and their leadership ideologies and practices as well (Beach 2017, 2018; Harris 2011; Murillo and Hernández 2014). Where there are needs of change in participants' lives there are always also possibilities for change as well (Bogotch and Reyes-Guerra 2014; Mansfield 2013, 2014) and there is a value in ethnographic research when it comes to identifying and contributing to these developments. Interaction between researchers and participants can influence the practices researched, the perspectives held by actors on these practices, their knowledge, and the ways they put this knowledge to work in schools and classrooms (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Parsons Walsemann, Jones, Knop, and Blake 2018).

In this article, we will attempt to illustrate how ethnography can be useful for supporting leadership and/or professional development for social justice in the respects presented in the above paragraph and explicated in the research writings of Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Parsons et al (2018). We will point to several key functions identified in earlier research. The first concerns providing concepts for the development of professional knowledge from reflection on action. The second involves opening up spaces and opportunities for reflection between practical experience and theorised discourse. The third concerns collectively deconstructing and reshaping taken for granted world-views and practices as part of a professional development process.

Working collectively is important as it overcomes the division of labour that has developed in expert societies with a strong division of knowledge and differentiation between research/science and practice and researchers/scientists and others. These conventional distinctions between researchers and their practices and others and theirs obstruct emancipatory theory-building (Beach 2005; Harding 1995). Collective ethnography in the interests of justice has the capacity to generate a sense of community between researchers and researched that can overcome the lure of performativity and the reproduction of dominant class interests in research (Beach 2005).

The first point of reference for this article concerns these principle aims of collective intellectual labour through ethnography against performativity and for education justice. The second is three studies conducted in Spain where researchers had tried to live out these principles through their research designs and in their research practices. Spain is a country whose national political-economic relationships have been internally transformed in a neo-liberal direction recently, with this bringing about significant changes in relation to education policy and the management and organization of schools and teachers' work (Verger, Lubienski and Steiner-Khamsi 2016). There has been a shift in ideology away from State governance and goals of equivalence toward goals of freedom of choice and parental influence but the outcomes of reform seem to have rarely led to more socially just and equitable institutions and outputs (ibid). Rather the reverse is the case and this provides us with our research problem: how do researchers successfully engage with teachers and education leaders in/for professional development for social justice in adverse conditions and education markets.

When addressing this research problem, we have reanalysed publications from the three

projects<sup>1</sup> from the perspective of social justice and with respect to implications for the work of education leaders and leadership groups. The two first projects ran from 2008 to 2011 in three small rural schools. The third ran from 2012 to 2015 in eight rural and urban primary and secondary schools. Together they comprised 2000 hours of participant observation, over two hundred interviews with school inspectors, education leaders, teachers and parents, some informal conversations and document analysis and, in the third project, some virtual ethnography using Face-book, blogs and web sites (Hine 2004; Shumar and Madison 2013).

There were two main research objectives in this research. The first objective was to understand the production of creative teaching practices in the interests of inclusion in mixed age non-selective classrooms. The second was to gain information about interactions between family and school and the strategies used by teachers to encourage family involvement. Encouraging family involvement was important to successful and productive learning and professional development for social justice according to the three projects. In the present article, we have applied a meta-ethnographic analysis in an attempt to develop an ethnographic synthesis around these findings that can connect them to professional development and education leadership. Three professional development research questions have guided this analysis:

What kind of professional learning did the projects generate?

How was it communicated?

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<sup>1</sup> *Evaluation and methodology: Bases to improve teaching in an inclusive rural school* [grant number 262-101]; *the improvement of teaching and learning in a rural school from a creative perspective inclusive* [grant number 262-103]. *Families and schools. Discourses and everyday practices on the participation in compulsory education* (EDU2012-32657). Sub-program. Fundamental Research Projects MEC. (2012-2015).

What implications are there for professional development initiatives, for educational leaders and leadership strategies for social justice?

As stated in the first paragraph of the article, education justice is both a process and a goal for full and equal participation of all groups in an education, and this makes professional development for educational change and social justice ethically imperative given current conditions of inequality, injustice and marginalisation in schools, education systems and society (Beach 2017, 2018).

### **Initial method: Ethnography as explanatory critique**

Ethnography as explanatory critique was the research method in the three research projects. Formed within critical ethnography, ethnography as explanatory critique involves exploring the co-incidences that materialize within the empirical reality of education and investigating how they are lived, experienced, challenged, and changed from within by subjects themselves (Beach 2017). The method credits subjects with agency therefore, but not in a simplistic way, as it also emphasises the dialectics and complexity of the social world. Relationships to participants are different therefore to those common in traditional intellectual research (Beach 2017). Guided by the metaphor of the Theatre of oppressed (Denzin 2018), participants are co-enquirers and co-producers of valuable knowledge that can stimulate and focus individual and collective awareness on new action. Using ethnography as explanatory critique in education research is therefore not just a way to generate a more progressive contextually sensitive research based knowledge for and about leadership and professional development. The method also counters tendencies toward audience pacification in traditional qualitative research (Denzin 2018).

The tendency toward pacification is a flaw in conventional science and leads it to not only fail to recognise the possibility of collective (counter hegemonic) intellectualism against the dominant class interest (Gramsci 1971), but to also critique such work as unscientific (Hammersley 2006). The argument is that science should strive for neutrality and objectivity and should therefore not become involved in politics or take sides as this represents a form of partisanship and is not a legitimate research position (ibid; Hammersley 1993).

We see things differently. In line with Gramsci (1971) and Harding (1995) our position is that when acting ethically in the interests of marginalised groups, researchers should strive for deep familiarity with the researched and their life-situation in order to generate deep/strong forms of objectivity in relation the social and material conditions and interests of research contexts and those in them (Harding 1995). Deep familiarity and strong (committed) objectivity form a basis from which to criticize and challenge processes of class rule and power in ways and their foundations ([author] 2017). Researchers should strive to make a difference through commitments to activism against domination, exploitation, and the power of the dominant class hegemony and by establishing and sustaining more rational and socially just research circumstances and relationships (Harding 1995; Madison 2011) and the production of knowledge for political purposes. The misconceived idea of personal/ subjective/ political neutrality and (false/weak) objectivity needs to be overcome (Harding, 1995) as a step toward building impetus for social transformation towards a more just education and a fairer socio-political economy and culture (Madison 2011).

### **Researching family participation as an act of social justice**

Educational policies have long recognized the importance of family participation and involvement in schools to facilitate school success for all students, and ethnographers have provided rich and evocative descriptive and narrative accounts of this participation. Examples include writings such as those by Cerletti (2013), Lea *et al.* (2011), Mansfield (2013, 2014), Parsons *et al.* (2018), Posey-Maddox *et al.* (2014), Symeou (2008) and Theodorou (2008). These articles recognise the possible influence of research results through professional development on the participants and on their reflection on their practices, and the subsequent reconstruction of these practices. However, they can also tend to describe in a sense a selfish research process that confirms the clarity of the research, its validity, and the creativity and skills of the researcher/s but does not explain how contributions to just forms of social change take form, or what may support or hinder them (Mansfield 2013, 2014).

Work by Bergnehr (2015), Boivin and Cohen-Miller (2018), Crozier and Davies (2007), Crozier (2005), Schecter and Sherri (2009) or Bouakatz (2007) are some exceptions. In line with Freire's (1970) notion of conscientisation, their research treats practical actions and common sense knowledge as a subject for critical appraisal. Relationships to the mode of production form a starting point for social transformation and potentially (if at times only locally) revolutionary practice ([author] 2019) as a pre-requisite to creating the possibility for effective action against the dominant class and capitalist hegemony ([author] 2017). We have therefore also used meta-ethnography for the present article to try to identify, analyse, and produce a narrative account of value to educational leadership and professional development for social justice from studying in detail individual ethnographies that attended to action and change against hegemony.

### **Using meta-ethnography**



Noblit and Hare (1988) introduced the method of meta-ethnography into educational research in an attempt to systematically identify patterns that they felt had begun to emerge from individual ethnographic writings when they were compared and as a way to expand the horizon of analysis and its comparative base ([author] 2017; Eisenhart 2017). We used three sorts of data to these ends. They were:

1. Original data from our own research projects
2. The published outputs from these studies
3. Other research literature from (a) projects that we were familiar with or (b) systematic searches in Scopus, Eric, Google Scholar and Sciencedirect using search items such as ethnography OR ethnographic AND family OR parents and education OR school AND equity OR inclusion.

Steps 2 and 3 (above) are the meta-ethnographic parts of the analysis. We followed a stepwise process to select the literature that was most relevant. This involved:

- A. Reading the abstracts of the list of identified works to select a research sample of articles considering ‘ethnography’ and ‘parental involvement’, and strategies for developing this involvement in school, for further closer detail analysis.
- B. We made a complete reading on these selected articles to identify the details relating to interaction between researcher and research subjects
- C. Coding and indexing the material using coding practices inherited from grounded theory methodology

What we were aiming to do here was identify and catalogue key concepts in the research, which we then examined for similarities and overlap. We then explored the relevance of each concept within the individual studies and set out to find and describe any possible

common grounds from which to form a general claims narrative from them about professional development for educational leadership for social justice.

### **Knowledge for educational leadership and professional development**

Research about parental participation in school was the kernel of analysis in the three original projects and had been an important aspect of educational politics recognised by international organizations of education for several decades (OECD, 2019). Article 27 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution relating to the right to education, grounded this aim politically in Spain. Article 27 noted that public authorities must guarantee the right to education and that parents, teachers and students should be able to influence the control and management of all institutions funded by the public Administration (art. 27.5, 7, CE). The participation of families in schools was a prime example and the exchange and coordination of information in teaching and research were important aspects. From having been a recommended practice, parental involvement had become a politically emphasised requirement in national policy of paramount importance for school quality and for changing the nature of education in schools.

Parental involvement had become an aspect of national democracy and educational research had the task of contributing knowledge about the conditions of development for the realisation of these aims. In the coming pages we will try to elucidate on this in relation to knowledge for and about professional development and educational leadership for educational change and social transformation. We will begin by drawing attention to the following distinct points that emerged in the research concerning which kinds of research contexts had according to the meta-ethnographic analyses led to the strongest and most sustainable forms of parental engagement:

1. Research that had been able to transform research situations into horizontal communities of learning where ethnographers and teachers challenged and changed understandings of their role in research by opposing traditional intellectualism and its divisions between active seekers and producers of knowledge versus passive objects and recipients. These conditions are necessary for the development of strong objectivity (Harding, 1995)
2. Research where thus, teachers and parents were recognised as creative agents in the research who were attributed consciousness and an ability to enter into the research process as responsible researcher-reporters of their own history who were capable of taking action in their own interests
3. Research that engaged research subjects in acts of empowerment in which researchers and researched melded as co-inquirers who were collectively engaged in the transformation of research and/through acts of public intellectualism

The identification and analysis of research that illustrates these different points is useful in its own right in relation to research as praxis and social emancipation (Lather 1986). However, for the present article, we need not consider what implications the findings might have for the development of knowledge for education leadership and professional development for social justice. We found two further dimensions or themes in these respects. One related to research conditions in which a partial transformation of conventional research and educational social relations had taken place. The other involved a deeper and more explicitly voiced and materialised challenge to traditional intellectualism and its social relations of production. They represent in a sense, the main research results. We will present them in the coming pages under the headings of (a) *Research as dialogue around the development and communication of scientific*

*knowledge for education justice and (b) Deconstruction and reconstruction processes for social transformation and transformative learning and development.*

### ***Research as dialogue around the development and communication***

The research examples organised into this category all recognise the value of representing participant's voices and promoting reflection and transformation in researched situations:

We have tried to enable participants to be active by turning the ethnography into a dialogical collaboration project to confront history as opposed to just reacting to it... We listened to teachers and parents as conscious and reflective agents who are seeking to understand the why of their situation and not just the what and how aspects. We dialogued with teachers and with the families. We shared our experiences and our background tried to share thoughts about our common lives and experiences. (Researcher Fieldnotes)

These aspects of listening to teachers and parents, narrating experiences and giving voice and feedback resulted in the production of a research report from researchers for each school and meetings were created for presenting the report to the participants. There were meetings both with individual schools and with representatives from all schools. This was organised centrally by researchers using the facilities available at the university:

In order to present the analysis of the information from different schools we organised a meeting in the Faculty... Families and teachers and researchers are there together. We are presenting how each school is carrying out different ways of parental' participation and some teachers are reflecting

about their practices when they now know about also other ways of working. One teacher says ‘We could do other things in order to facilitate the participation of the families in the school’. We want teachers and families to feel recognised. Another adds “families appreciate that the research had acknowledged teachers”. We say ‘recognising and representing voices and trying to engage in theoretical reflection on observed practices and to contrast different models of action is one of our aims’. (Fieldnotes)

As in the first example, there is recognition here of the voices of informants and their perspectives. However, giving voice can work in different ways. Researchers and research subjects can voice to present points of view on experiences of ingrained forms of oppression and marginalisation in education or alternatively, words may disguise/disfigure and misrepresent injustices as primarily linked to individual causes. Changing discourses and changing social practices are thus dialectically inter-related, and networked together and voices are thus possible to rearticulate in the interests and goals of greater educational justice. The research adopted critical theory to problematize the contradictions underlying daily practices to these ends:

Through the sessions at the university I began to rethink, where are we? Exchanging experiences and knowing the knowledge behind our practices is a perspective that you do not realize when you are working ... Sitting makes you think and reflect on what you are doing. You have an opportunity to contrast your ideas with others and organize your ideas about how to work (with family participation) in the school. (Small Rural School Teacher)

You think about other possible references. You get to know each other's ways of thinking. In general, there is no time for this normally. This session has been a way of creating space for dialogue and thinking (about) a diversity of approaches when (encouraging) the participation of families in the school... Knowing other practices enriches the different ways in which these practices can be carried out. (Secondary School Teacher)

When commenting on statements like these researchers generally referred to two principles. The first was the importance and value of creating a space for reflective conversations. These conversations were about how teachers used their experiences of family participation in the school in a collective debate (Cerletti 2013). The second was for promoting reflection that aimed to connect teachers' connections with the life of children and their families and to enliven these connections within the curriculum.

### ***Deconstruction and reconstruction processes during the research***

Recognising and representing participant's voices as a way of promoting reflection in researched situations is discussed in the previous section and the possibility of evidence in some cases also of the development of a critical consciousness during the research as part of a natural interaction process between researcher and research subjects as co-analysts, data-producers and producers of practical knowledge. *Yet giving voice in these circumstances* was not just about letting people express themselves, however deeply. In addition, it was also a culturally and historically constructed metaphor and practice for agency, representation, identity, and power (Harding, 1995).

In the present section, we will show further examples of ways of this political act of giving voice as political agency. These examples relate to the second level of results. They relate

to ways of constructing spaces to promote and engage in social transformation in a material sense, beyond just talk and reflection, in circumstances where researchers, teachers and parents not only came together to discuss their practices but also to recognize the value of their practices and develop and test strategies of change. Working collectively in the interests of social justice and equity came to involve both a collective deconstruction and collective reconstruction of research practices in these circumstances.

Today we are in a school. Researchers, teachers and families are commenting on the analyses we have been doing during the research process. Teachers are highlighting their changes, how they are thinking of their teaching practices in a more aware way and they are looking for more possibilities to consider the children's life in the classroom. They are asking too about possibilities to change the ethnography into a dialogical collaboration project incorporating on-line resources as well as a way to confront history as opposed to just reacting to it. (Field-notes from the meeting at the school)

The value of ethnographic research toward educational leadership and professional development is not directly obvious here but relates to empowerment processes where teachers and families have extended their actions in the research, to both point out and point to development options in the research context. This situation, where research leadership and professional development for social justice seem to develop a progressive turn is described further in Vigo-Arrazola et al. (2015, 2016), in Vigo-Arrazola (2017) and Vigo-Arrazola (2020). Researchers learnt from their engagements with teachers and parents about the critical skills and knowledge of these people. They then transformed their grasp of own reality in accordance and reconceptualised themselves as people and as professionals. They were no longer uniquely special privileged possessors of expert

knowledge with automatic rights to determine courses of action in research about others. They had become co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge not individual solution makers.

The interaction between the experience of the teacher and the experience of the researcher has motivated teachers to create a free text project in their school, promoting that the lives of children and families enter the school. Their experiences and those of their families are heard and discussed among all. These experiences are then connected to the curriculum of the class through topics such as cohesion, coherence, syntax or morphology... Progressive relationships between reflection and action appear inside dialogue that involved confronting contradictions of practice from a dialectical perspective similar to Freire's idea of conscientization... (Field notes in Suburban School)

Performativity demands, such as requirements to publish and answering the questions of governments and financiers, had blocked more far-reaching developments previously. It was as if we simply had to be in control somehow.... Performativity demands had to come second to engagements in change. We knew this of course from Gramsci's writings. Yet it had taken us some time to see what the practical obstacles were and how to overcome them. We did this thanks to dialogical activity with teachers and parents first. Then by connecting theory back to practice to regenerate experiences and understandings about how to enhance family participation and influence. We had to go beyond and challenge the common sense of our own practices in



ways that resulted in cognitive conflict followed by change. (Field notes in Suburban School)

Considerably more equality in terms of interactional rights emerge here. Research roles have successively become more horizontal. They ultimately finish up with a redefined contract for university academics. At this point, research collaboration has not only opened up a space for reflection between practical experience and theorised discourse, it has also led to people collectively deconstructing and reshaping taken for granted views and practices. New ideas about how a research project might take shape emerge. They are presented as a way to establish useful knowledge and promote actions that are recognised as valid by the community first, and then only afterwards, almost as a secondary value feature, by educational authorities and university employers.

The project aim is to systematize well-founded experience to create new and scientifically informed foundations for an educational practice and enhanced critical awareness. It will draw on researchers to support the process and feedback sessions will be set up collaboratively as part of this... The interaction between the participants and researchers will form a space where teachers and families generate a critical dialogue as a basis for rethinking and re-forming lived social relations... and as a means to create solutions. In this way, the project will go beyond the description of what happens in a space and time, favouring a process of transformation and professional development from within. Changes in action will be based on new knowledge generated in context from participant perspectives and experiences based on their meanings and their interpretations. (School Project)

These project aims describe a process of a progressive intellectualization of practice for a project that lasted one year. However, after this the teachers, supported by the head teacher, then created a further project with a larger group of teachers and parents entitled “Textos en libertad. Inclusión del texto libre en las aulas” [Texts from freedom. Inclusion of free text in classrooms]. Once again they asked for collaboration with university researchers (see also Vig-Arrazola et al. 2016).

The aim of this project is to improve the learning of Language through writing as an act of freedom... An important part of is the creation of a working group in which readings, experiences, perspectives are exchanged in feedback sessions. The central axis is the inclusion of the free text and, therefore, the inclusion of students. Feedback sessions will create conversational contexts between teachers, other stakeholders and researchers in a horizontal way in two- or even three-way dialogue. There will be collective meeting sessions between the researchers, families and teachers to try to encourage, share and by this enrich individual and group reflections. The project will generate spaces for making comparisons and engendering further thinking about future actions. Actions will be established, developed and assessed scientifically. Committed agents will do this in context. (Project of the school)

This project description was written by teachers, the head-teacher and parent representatives at one of the research sites. The centrality of the concept of strong objectivity is obvious in the description, though not named as such but perhaps more important is how description also illustrates how research had become part of day-to-day praxis. The project established a praxis circle as a foundation for/of educational leadership and professional development and as a way to discover, deconstruct, explore, learn, contribute to and shape reflection and action upon the world in order to transform

it (Bouakaz 2007; [author] 2015). Informed by critical praxis theory, the research from which this project developed had been able to develop feedback to research subjects. These ideas that then played a role in transforming the research situation as part of a professional development process of collaborative, interactive, research based teaching and educational leadership as professional praxis and public intellectualism.

The research thus went as far as transforming the research production relations and overcoming the differentiation of theory and practice in common sense and as a conditioner of behaviour and relations between researchers and others (Boivin and Cohen Miller, 2018). The traditional researcher-participant relationship had shifted from researcher-led to co-constructed research, which is significantly different from merely seeking to describe, observe, report on, discuss and analyse the content of action in specific researched places and spaces. It connects to a quest for a professional development that is actually based on (and is not just for) social transformation.

## **Discussion**

This article has aimed to render an account of the meaning of professional development in/as and for social transformation using ethnographic research as/for explanatory critique and meta-ethnography. It has progressed by describing and analysing how interaction between researchers and participants influenced both the unfolding research process, the practices researched, and the perspectives held by practitioners on these practices and the contexts of which they were part. Different examples show how the contribution to knowledge development and professional development was driven and contributed to leadership education and professional development for social justice, as processes that build on respect, care, recognition, and empathy that lead to social transformations.

Ethnography worked in different ways to promote this development in different types of school. These different developments from the methodology are quite normal for ethnography. Ethnographic research is contextual and socially, spatially and temporally located. So as a result, the schools developed different participation strategies for parents in relation to the characteristics of the students and their families. However, there were consistencies as well: particularly in relation to the development of deep and sustained parental participation. The most consistent and important was overcoming the research divide in the social transformation of the researched situations, which seems to be a difficult challenge that is far from easy to overcome (Denzin, 2018).

We have identified two points for consideration in these respects. They are related to (1) *Research as dialogue around the development and communication of scientific knowledge*; (2) *Deconstruction and reconstruction processes during the research*. They attend to key concepts of horizontality in the research, the role of the researcher and the research subjects, the empowerment during the research process, and the transformation in researched situations respectively. They corresponded to evidence about:

- Overcoming the division of labour that has developed in expert societies with a strong division of knowledge and a strong differentiation between research and practice (Beach 2005) to contribute to emancipatory theory-building and to empower researchers and researched to change their actions together
- A common struggle to demystify and denaturalise what is normally taken for granted and to challenge the structures and divisions of labour in research that normally differentiate and privilege researchers from and over the researched
- Recognising performativity demands and the (sometimes self-imposed) requirements to get the highest citation rating, satisfy a funding agency or shake

another grant of the funding tree for what they are and making these demands secondary demands to the development of change. It means putting progressive change first in research for leadership and professional development for social justice, before the accumulation of external credits and funding

The basic commodification of research is a great problem in these circumstances. Giving time to research so the aims of social change and justice can be attained is another important requirement. As Jeffrey and Troman (2004) point out, without time to engage with participants as informants the possibilities for ethnography are seriously challenged in the original sense of the concept. Yet the original forms of ethnography along these lines have actually usually done very little to contribute to social transformation in these respects. Time is important therefore but also other demands too, such as the demands of context sensitivity, deep familiarity and strong objectivity (Harding, 1995). The key may be we suggest, to put these other demands first and to acknowledge that fulfilling them will take a significant amount of time and effort.

The work of Bergnehr (2015), Bouakaz (2007), Cerletti (2013), Schechter and Sherri (2009), [author] (2015) and to a lesser extent perhaps Crozier and Davies (2007) and Crozier (2005) may be examples. The research they have done seems to have consciously developed spaces for interaction and a horizontal dialogue that is driven by and in the interests of participants and not only researchers. There is also an attempt to contribute to a logic of reflection that focusses on the reconstruction and not only deconstruction of researched situations and the changes necessary to educational situations for successive social improvement to take place as part of the cyclic processes of critical research. These changes involve the role-content and role-relations between researchers and other participants. They form when the research process provides an opportunity for respondents to grow through and change related to thoughtful assessments of their

experiences (Lather 1986, p.70). Their value is expressed in terms of catalytic validity (value for change) based on conscientisation by responding to the challenges the research offers to the metaphors of conventional theatre in research activities and as social relations of conventional research production (Denzin 2018).

The struggle for conscientisation and catalytic validity reaches back to the opening paragraph of the article about the means and qualities individuals require through and in their education to live a good life as being both a process and a goal. Discrimination, marginalization and segregation are serious global problems in schools today however, and there is therefore a serious need to assist policy makers and educational leaders in creating more equitable educational systems and experiences for all pupils (Forde and Torrance 2017; McMahon and Forde 2019; Verger et al, 2016). There is, in other words, a serious practical and ethical need for educational leadership and/or professional development for social justice and though this may happen rarely, hopefully our research will help to contribute to some basic guidelines as to how it could be encouraged.

Exclusion and marginalization are often based on differences related to social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, locality, and language, but additionally, market-based and privatization reforms have had significantly detrimental consequences (Beach 2017, 2018). Education systems may be said to operate without class/ color/ disability/ gender and race bias, but aggregated performances clearly show that class, gender, color/ whiteness and positions on various ability-spectra remain significant in relation to education differentiation as challenges for progressive leadership and future professional development (Forde and Torrance 2017; McMahon and Forde 2019). Justice and inclusion are still very limited, even in countries that have leading positions on OECD justice barometers (Jones 2010; King 2019; Pihl et al 2018).

Almost all OECD countries have national policies for common comprehensive education and teacher education and school leadership and management projects that should produce intellectually and ideologically prepared teachers and managers to work in these schools (ibid). Yet in normal use, these policies nevertheless produce exclusion, hierarchy and injustice more obviously than they do inclusion, equality and justice (Forde and Torrance 2017). Policies remain ineffective it seems, perhaps because they avoid acknowledging and confronting marginalization and injustices head on (Jones 2010). Yet doing so may be beneficial (ibid). The present research suggests this at least.

What we are implying here is that the turn to neoliberalism and increased educational performativity may have worsened the problem of education inclusion, justice, and equality, but they did not cause the problem in the first place. The problem preceded neoliberal marketization, as a proposed but deeply flawed solution (Jones 2010). There are of course however also variations here too. These variations range from *extreme neoliberalism* with unregulated markets, minimal welfare states, extensive income differentials and gross social inequalities to *regulated neoliberal states* with regulated markets as part of a dominant class project that is run and has been designed in the interests of dominant global elites as a means to restore and consolidate class power (Beach 2018). Neoliberal states do not auger well for the struggles for education justice equality and inclusion in the future or for the preparation of teachers and educational leaders who are committed to take on these educational challenges (Forde and Torrance 2017; Jones 2010). Teachers and education leaders who are able to work as researchers and drivers of their own professional history, as organic intellectuals within that history acting together with other stakeholders in the interests of education and social justice might be a step in the right direction.

Madison (2011) set up five questions to consider in relation to critical engagement for change in these respects. The article attends to three of them. They involve asking:

1. How we reflect upon and evaluate our own purpose, intentions, and frames of analysis as researchers and education professionals
2. How a dialogue of collaboration between ourselves and others becomes established and is maintained in practice
3. How the specificity of the local story relevant to the broader meanings and operations of the human condition is identified, constructed and interpreted into future political action

The point here is, as we interpret it, that both critical ethnography and education for social change begin with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain (Jones, 2010). This is the first step. The next one involves recognizing that lived conditions of existence are not always (or are indeed in some cases of structural oppression and exploitation are never) as they *could* be (Madison 2011), and that as a result, there is an obligation to make a contribution toward changing these conditions (ibid; Beach 2018). This recognition has also been our point of departure and our insistence.

## **Conclusions**

Research projects using critical ethnography as explanatory critique played a vital role in process of development for educational leadership and professional development for social justice in two ways. These two ways involved firstly digging at (in order to penetrate beneath) surface appearances of the *status quo* and to unsettle neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions. They involved secondly, accomplishing these acts in active partnership with other social actors. They were not things than could be



accomplished by academics acting alone on behalf of others to stimulate “their” reflection. Bringing to light to underlying and obscure operations of power and control was important, but changing them was the key to social transformation and this was not possible acts of studying and researching can and do deteriorate into acts of domination.

Beyond the sense of the ethnography as a research method to describe and to produce knowledge to be communicated in professional education for professional development, we thus always have to try to overcome the risk of a traditional intellectualism that reproduces structures and relations of hierarchy and subordination that obstruct professional empowerment. Instead, we argue for the necessity for a researcher commitment toward engagement, empathy, critique and feedback in the interests of social change, including the transformation of the social relations of production of education and of research as well for a more emancipatory education leadership and professional development for social justice. We do this for the following reason.

The creation of new history follows from emergent dialectical processes of mediation and negation that comprise a complex totality of dynamics and antecedent socio-cultural forms manifesting in ideas about what is possible and feasible (Gramsci 1971; Maisuria 2018). However, as well as this there is also the efficacious capacities held by all human beings in terms of their abilities through their consciousness, (material) labour, and intellectual power to challenge dominant ideas and institutional forms and practices of the ruling class of their historical epoch (Beach 2017; Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971). Ethnography for educational leadership and professional development for social justice can play a critical role in this process of the making of history. However, in order to do so, like all useful social science, it has to both produce knowledge for social change and political purposes and also accomplish this and contribute to such changes as well, within teaching communities for progressive leadership and professional development.

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