

JET REF: 4982 SI

**SEEING DISADVANTAGE IN SCHOOLS:  
EXPLORING STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY  
AND DISADVANTAGE USING VISUAL PEDAGOGY**

ML White\* and Jean Murray

*The Cass School of Education and Communities, University of East London, England*

**Article History**

Received 15 November 2015

Accepted 14 March 2016

\*Corresponding author. Email: [m.l.white@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.l.white@uel.ac.uk)

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper describes exploratory research into the development of innovative visual pedagogies for investigating how pre-service student teachers articulate their views about the effects of poverty on educational attainment. Social class emerges as the strongest factor in poverty and educational disadvantage in the UK. The resulting issues are often awkward for students to discuss and conventional pedagogies may not have effective 'reach' here. Findings from this study showed that the visual methods deployed gave students pedagogically well structured spaces for the expression and exchange of a diversity of views about poverty and social class, engaging them in both heated discussions and prolonged 'silences'. However, the pedagogies did not challenge the stereotypical deficit models of 'the poor' which some students expressed. Nevertheless, we argue that reconfigured versions of these visual pedagogies have considerable potential for innovative social justice work in teacher education.

## **Keywords**

Pre-service teacher education, poverty, pedagogies for social justice, visual pedagogy, visual research methods

## INTRODUCTION

The UK is one of the most unequal societies in the ‘developed world’ (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), with all the damage to the social, educational and moral fabric of society, which such extreme inequality can bring. Not surprisingly then, educational inequalities, often associated with social and economic disadvantage in general and with living in poverty in particular, persist (DfE, 2010). Nearly half of the poorest children in England (those eligible for free school meals) fail to achieve nationally recognised qualifications at age sixteen (DFE, 2011). The UK is not alone in this depressing picture, of course: evidence quoted in an OECD report (OECD, 2006) shows that the adverse impact of living in challenging socio-economic circumstances on children’s academic attainment is statistically significant in fifty three of the fifty four OECD countries.

Despite this grave situation, the precise effects of poverty on children’s achievements, beliefs and aspirations remain significantly under-researched, as are schools’ and teachers’ views on poverty and educational disadvantage and how these issues might be most effectively tackled. We also know very little about how student teachers on pre-service courses in England conceptualise poverty and are prepared to work with children from deprived socio-economic circumstances in proactive and effective ways.

It seems essential to us, and to many other teacher educators, that pre-service programmes should develop student teachers’ awareness and understanding of such social justice issues and equip them to respond appropriately in their teaching. But given the lack of research, a major issue is how we, as teacher educators, can respond to these multiple

challenges (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013). How do we establish relevant ways to work with pre-service students to prepare them to teach pupils living in poverty and coming from diverse backgrounds? In particular, what types of pedagogies might prepare student teachers for the experiences they may have of working in schools in socio-economically deprived areas? And how do we develop students' awareness of schools where poverty, though less prevalent and perhaps less visible, still has a significant, detrimental effect on a minority of learners (Thompson et al., 2015)?

In this paper, we describe and analyse one initiative to develop pedagogical frameworks for discussing issues around poverty and its effects on educational attainment. This initiative is called 'Picturing Poverty'; it is designed to be a three-stage pedagogical research project, but the work presented here is the first and experimental stages of that larger project. The focus is on a research-informed enquiry with pre-service students training to be English teachers, exploring appropriate pedagogies to discuss some of the complex intersectionality in England between poverty, social class, disadvantage and educational attainment in East London schools.

This research is located at a time when the ubiquity of digital and web technologies means that visual materials and methods are increasingly accessible and affordable to educators. Although the use of photography in anthropology, sociology and cultural studies is well documented (Banks, 2001; Pink, 2007), in educational practice ethical concerns of anonymity and censorship, have limited its use (Pauwels, 2010, Prosser, 1998) and it is only now becoming more common place (Thomson, 2008).

Our starting point for the design of this project was an emphasis on visual pedagogies to explore students' thinking about poverty and deprivation in education. This focus is partly designed to draw:

attention to the process through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addressed the 'how' questions involved not only in transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also in its production. Indeed, it enables us to question the validity of separating these activities so easily by asking under what conditions and through what means we 'come to know'. How one teaches ... becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns. (Lusted, 1986, 2-3).

The specific aim of the workshop is to develop visual pedagogies as a means of exploring how student teachers articulate their views on, and experiences of, the effects of poverty and deprivation in education. As we indicate below, these issues are often seen as challenging and conflicted discussion topics for which more conventional pedagogical strategies may not have effective 'reach'. But we should stress that the pedagogies in use here are exploratory and experimental, and that, in this pedagogical research enquiry, we are not engaged in a quest to 'prove' their effectiveness. The workshop also had a secondary focus on using images in the classroom and offered suggestions for visual learning as pedagogy. This was relevant for these students as some may teach Media Studies in future.

Visual pedagogies are developed as 'a model of collaboration' (Harper, 1998, 35), between teacher educator/researcher and student teachers/participants. Here, the importance of photography is not just as a pedagogical tool to be used in place of or in addition to other methods, rather we see it also as a research practice and a methodology that demands collaboration and the consideration of questions of agency - 'the starting place of doing' (Oakeshott, 1975, 32) asking who has the authority to speak for whom? (Behar, 1996). The structure of the pedagogical enquiry also owes much to Freire's (1970) problem-posing pedagogy, the process of working together to explore community issues. This is a pedagogy

which recognises that people bring their knowledge and experience into the classroom and is bound to engaging with issues of social justice to frame the practices of teaching and learning.

### **Poverty And Class In Schooling And Teacher Education**

Poverty, injustice and disadvantage in education, long important themes in educational discourses in the UK, have become renewed areas of concern in this century as the levels of social inequality in British society have increased (Dorling, 2011). Analysis of educational outcomes for the UK in international surveys such as PISA reveals a growing achievement gap in which children from marginalised groups have poorer educational outcomes and consequently often poorer employment and life chances in comparison to their more economically or socially privileged peers. The economic crisis of 2008, the recession, the slow recovery from it between 2008 and 2014 and draconian cuts in welfare benefits by the previous Coalition government (2010 – 2015), and the ‘promise’ of yet more cuts to come from the current Conservative government, have only exacerbated these trends and the resulting concerns for those concerned with equity issues. Some have argued that the market-led education and social policies introduced by successive governments have led to greater social and economic polarisation in schooling (Smyth and Wrigley, 2013).

Further issues are around the inter-sectionality of socio-economic marginalisation in England; living in poverty is clearly ‘co-related’ with class, ethnicity and gender. The effects of population distribution over time in both urban and rural settings are also important to consider (Dorling, 2011). Definitions of poverty have long been contested (Townsend, 1979)

but for a number of writers, social class emerges as the strongest factor in poverty and educational disadvantage (Reay, 2006; Smyth and Wrigley, 2013). As Jones (2011, 5) notes, there are multiple ways in which historically rooted ideas of ‘class’ continue to operate as powerful social underpinning structures in British society. In his view, contemporary policy and media statements attempt to gloss over these ‘class’ issues, presenting stands above ‘class and sectional interests’ and divisions. Smyth and Wrigley (2013) similarly note that in educational terms, ‘the official policy discourse, while acknowledging poverty (or at least disadvantage) is virtually silent about class’ (p.2). These authors make ‘a conscious decision to break that silence’, stating that in their views ‘poverty derives from class, in the senses of differences of power and position’ (ibid). For Reay (2006), social class remains ‘the troublesome un-dead of the English education system’ (p.289), this is not least because ‘social class injustices have never been adequately tackled within education’ (p.291).

These analyses of ‘silences’ around social class and education at policy levels mirror the discomfort which many English people feel in discussing class issues. This discomfort can be compounded by an all-too-familiar national trait of not wishing to cause offence by inadvertently using the ‘wrong’ or ‘politically incorrect’ terms (Fox, 2004). But talking about class in England is complex, since, paradoxically, as Jones (2011) identifies, this polite, ignoring, seemingly politically correct, silence can also exist alongside the derogative use of terms such as ‘chav’ to denote members of the working class. Jones sees this term as now encompassing ‘any negative traits associated with working-class people – violence, laziness, teenage pregnancies, racism, drunkenness’ and being ‘a term of pure class contempt’ when ‘used by a middle-class person’ (p.8). In this kind of discourse, prejudices around the working class, their ‘respectability’, work ethics (or lack of them) and the causes of any resulting socio-economic marginalisation continue to create derogatory, judgemental and

homogeneous stereotypes of many of those living in poverty as ‘the poor’. For this project, the implications of these multiple paradoxes of ‘silence’, political correctness and ‘derogation’ are that in asking student teachers to talk about poverty and education, we are also asking them to discuss issues of class which many will find difficult and uncomfortable. This is then certainly an area in which more conventional pedagogies may not have effective ‘reach’ (Thompson et al., 2014), hence our experimentation with the affordances offered by visual pedagogies.

A further issue is that aspects of the current context for pre-service teacher education in England do not support innovations in teaching for social justice. The system, which has been under almost continuous reform since 1984, has high levels of regulation, accountability and compliance characterising the increasingly fragmented and school-led provision (Gilroy, 2014). There are now multiple routes into teaching, but regardless of the route followed, student teachers spend at least two thirds of their time learning in their placement (practicum) schools. This places particular importance on the learning occurring in those schools.

All routes aim to prepare students to teach diverse groups of learners, including pupils who are marginalised and disadvantaged. Student teachers are assessed against a short list of ‘baseline’ standards for all teachers (DFE, 2012); these have been described as ‘regulatory rather than developmental in intent’ (Beauchamp et al., 2014, 6). They do not, however, make direct reference to the promotion of social justice, and there are therefore, predictably, no specific references to social class. There are similarly no references to the ‘achievement gap’ which features so strongly in government discourse, nor to the need for teachers to engage with marginalised or disadvantaged pupils, living in poverty, who may be under-achieving in terms of education. The Standards do stress the more generic areas of inspiring, motivating



and challenging pupils (Standard [S]1), promoting ‘good progress and outcomes’ for all (S2) and adapting ‘teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils’ (S5). But the omission of explicit references to social justice agendas is not helpful to many teacher educators and student teachers who see these agendas as being central to their avowed practices.

Pre-service cohorts in England, despite the previous New Labour government’s initiatives to diversify the teaching force, still tend to be dominated by students from more socio-economically advantaged (‘middle class’ in conventional British terms) households and geographical areas and from the ‘white British’/Caucasian ethnic majority. This demographic suggests that few student teachers will have sustained personal experience of living in poverty, or other types of disadvantage. But we should note that a commitment to diversity does not have to be embodied in ‘difference’ or membership of a minority and/or disadvantaged group (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013). Many student teachers, for example, bring rich life, work and academic experience into pre-service programmes that influence the ways in which they understand the material, socio-cultural and educational effects of poverty; many have strong commitments to ‘making a difference’ in society; and many will go on to work as teachers in schools in under-privileged areas, attended by pupils from multi-cultural, -ethnic and -linguistic backgrounds who live in poverty and consequently face significant social, economic and educational disadvantages.

As indicated above, in England, we know very little about student teachers and their preparation for working with children living in poverty. Cox et al.’s (2012) research in the USA, however, shows that students’ attitudes to poverty often follow stereotypical patterns, rely primarily on middle class norms and are deeply engrained. Gorski (2012), also in the

USA, discusses how such ‘poverty-based stereotyping’ feeds an ideology of deficit and ‘mis-directs’ practices and policies for schools. In this and similar research, student teachers and other educators are positioned as largely ‘resistant’ to challenges around teaching for social justice and change. Other US studies, in contrast, show student teachers strongly committed to social justice agendas on entry into teacher education, to challenging social and educational stereotypes and to critiquing schooling (Sleeter et al, 2004; Beyer, 2001). This does not, however, mean that these aspirations can be channelled into positive and effective teaching to combat disadvantage.

Thompson et al.’s research is one of the few large-scale studies of student teachers’ attitudes set in England (2014, 7). Their findings suggest that ‘deficit models were widely accepted by many of the student teachers’ in their sample group who ‘saw ‘aspirations’ as more important and influential on children’s achievements than social class or poverty’. As the authors comment, following Gorski, such deficit views from student teachers can lead to low expectations in the classroom, and this in turn may impact negatively on the effectiveness of students’ teaching during the practicum. But Thompson et al. also acknowledge that many students enter teacher education wanting to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of children as learners. The issue here, again, is how such aspirations might become the principles that underpin effective pedagogies to combat social and economic disadvantage in schools.

A further issue around creating pedagogies for social justice in teacher education is the demographic of teacher educators. Goodwin & Kosnik (2013, 341) describe teacher educators in the USA as a group predominantly ‘mono-cultural, mono-racial in make-up’. The same categorisations would apply to many teacher educators in the UK, with the

additional comment that most, like their student teachers, would come from relatively privileged socio-economic backgrounds. From these demographics, it might seem that as a group teacher educators, like their students, will have little sustained experience of living in poverty and disadvantage. Many teacher educators, however, have worked in schools in socio-economically disadvantaged and/or ethnically and linguistically diverse areas and therefore have experience of working with pupils from diverse backgrounds living in poverty (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013; Murray & Maguire, 2007). Indeed, commitments to working in this area of social justice have often been forged in that teaching experience, in the sustained experiences of preparing student teachers or in researching educational disadvantage.

## **PICTURING POVERTY: A PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH INITIATIVE**

The setting for this pedagogical research enquiry is a teaching-intensive university in a densely urban context in East London, which has long been the area of the city where new immigrants to England first settle. The London Borough of Newham is at the heart of the university's catchment area and hence many of the students have placements within schools in this community. Historically, this has been one of the most disadvantaged boroughs in London (Newham Case Report 83). Newham was host to the Olympic games in 2012 and although the area has benefited from £9 billion of private investment (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2013) and is now seeing some significant re-development and 'gentrification', the borough still has the second highest level of child poverty in London. In 2014 the Newham Household Panel Survey noted that more than half (55%) of the borough's children live in households in poverty, compared to 17% nationally (NHPS, 2014). Since

September 2009, all Newham's primary school children have received free school meals in recognition of this.

A large number of pupils in Newham schools receive a 'pupil premium' because they live in socio-economic disadvantage; this 'premium' is additional government funding awarded to 'publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers', with each of these 'disadvantaged pupils' over the age of 11 currently attracting a payment of at least £935 (DfE, 2015,1). The pupil premium is now commonly used as a measure of the levels of disadvantage in schools or regions. Nationally, the average percentage of pupils in each school receiving the pupil premium is 27%; in East London that figure rises to over 70% in some schools. An Ofsted inspection report on the university partnership noted that these 'challenging urban schools' provide 'ethnically, socially, economically and culturally diverse contexts' (Ofsted, 2012, 14). The report continues that these schools are learning environments which demand 'perseverance and commitment' (p.12) from the student teachers working within them.

The Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) students within the teacher education programme at this university are amongst the most ethnically diverse cohorts in the country (approximately 22% of all students belong to Black or Ethnic Minority groups in an average intake, compared to a national average of approximately 14%). Socially, the majority of students come from relatively privileged socio-economic groups, although some will have been the first in their families to go to university. Many of them start their teaching careers in the multi-ethnic, -cultural and -lingual schools of East London.

In this research, all students on the PGCE English course (total cohort n=16) were invited to participate in a workshop with a clear focus on visual pedagogies and engaging in ‘the process of critically analyzing and learning to create one’s own messages – in print, audio, video, and multimedia, with emphasis on the learning and teaching of these skills through using mass media texts’ (Hobbs, 1998,16). The workshop was part of the planned programme for the whole cohort, but was not assessed. The project was conducted following strict ethical guidelines, approved by the university, with all students given full choices about participation. In consideration of the potentially sensitive nature of the data, participants were given additional assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. For this reason pseudonyms have been used here.

The research design used visual and qualitative data collection methods, including documentary analysis of written materials generated during the workshop and the session notes from the teacher educator, content analysis of questionnaires completed by students, interviews with a relevant teacher educator and photo analysis of the visual materials produced during the workshop. Records of the placement schools for each student were also made available. All of this data was used to form and inform the findings presented here.

## **USING VISUAL PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES**

The workshop included various activities briefly described in non-sequential order below. It began with the sharing of stories about motivations to enter teaching and experiences of school placements. This sharing was intended to locate the workshop firmly within the

context of the pre-service course, highlighting the importance of experience and reflection (Schon, 1983), and exploring how these narratives might affect the student teachers' current educational beliefs and pedagogical choices. The students told stories about their experiences as pupils in school and while beginning to train as a teacher. Without exception, personal narratives here were positioned as informing the choices that they made ('I'm doing a PGCE because I want to get a good job – I'm poor now but that will change I hope!') and their attitudes to social class and poverty ('I was the first person in my family to go to university but I knew others in school who went ... I will be able to help my students (*pupils*)').

### ***What you think you see - and what you don't***

The teacher educator also provided an analysis of a photograph by Betsy Schneider after posing a series of questions using the SHOWED interview schedule (Wang et al 2004, 912) to frame discussions of the visual images used:

1. What do you See here?
2. What is really Happening here?
3. How does this relate to Our lives?
4. Why does this concern, situation, or strength exist?
5. How can we become Empowered through our new understanding?
6. What can we Do?

In discussions of the Schneider (2013) photograph, students were concerned to address the ethical issues raised by the image and they approached the subject matter (a young child who is sitting in what appears to be a plastic bucket) with reluctance. One

student teacher suggested ‘this is about being poor’ adding ‘the boy is dirty’ while another suggested that ‘he looks uncomfortable ... he is looking right at me and I feel bad, like something is wrong’. Within this type of visual pedagogical approach, the act of seeing and the gaze (Mulvey 1989; Sontag, 1979) are central to theorising and making meaning from visual representations. The discomfort felt by the audience (in this instance the student teachers) reflects the shift of focus from the subject of the image to the social identity and experience of the viewers. Students were ‘relieved’ to find out that the photographs were of the photographer’s child and that the image was ‘rooted in the snapshot, originating from the experiences I have with the children, watching them grow and discover the world’ (Schneider, 2013).

One of the central tasks of the researcher or educator is to contextualise images (Davies, 1999; Pink, 2001, 2007), to provide detail on the context in which the image was made, as well as on the photographers’ history and the context (and purpose). Throughout any visual research project the history and context of production and recording must be made clear because our interpretative practices have a material effect on the world; there is a materiality. The task allowed consideration of the complexities of a photograph and thinking about how ethical issues can shift as the site of the image changes. The analysis of the image addressed the ethics of photographic practice at the site of production, at the site of the image itself and in the social spaces of the audience viewing the work. In providing her analysis of the image, the teacher educator aimed to support students both in their future teaching and their effects to ensure a dialogical relationship between theory and practice.

### ***Teacher power?***

In an activity designed to make explicit the constructed nature of images, students were asked to represent the different roles they inhabit in the classroom. In pairs they used their camera phones to take a series of images which were then deconstructed. In this situated performance (Rose & Finders, 1998), the students produced images that were structurally similar; in each photograph, hierarchical power relationships were represented through physical presence, spatiality and action. Those embodying the teacher role were positioned in the centre of the frame and physically pointed towards the interactive whiteboard, a pupil's work (represented in all images as in a static paper form) or standing over a pupil, who in each image appeared submissive or static. In these photographs 'relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparent innocent spatiality of social life' (Soja, 1989, 6). Just as ethnographers often photograph rituals and cultural activities during fieldwork (Pink, 2001) it is perhaps to be expected that the classroom is a significant space for teachers where the semiotic resources of identity are embodied. Theorising the practice and analysis of photography, Bourdieu (1990, 6) considers that 'the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of perception, thought and appreciation common to a whole group' and, as Wright (1999, 9) notes, 'anyone who uses a camera or views a photograph will almost probably be subscribing, albeit unwittingly, to some or other theory of representation'. The process of image production, analysis, and reflection encourages reflexivity and the exploration of personal pedagogies, and we contend that 'how teachers and students use gaze, body posture, and the distribution of space and resources produces silent discourses in the classroom' (Jewitt, 2008, 262).

### ***Reading poverty***



In another group activity, students were asked to offer *readings* of found visual texts from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, William Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1751), an etching depicting a poverty-stricken area to the north of Covent Garden, a film still of *Oliver Twist* famously asking for more food and a promotional image from Channel Four's *Skint* (2013). Hogarth, made famous by his portraits of London life, depicts a dystopian life, with gin addicts fallen in the street, a half dressed mother dropping her child and in the background a corpse being thrown into a coffin. The image of *Oliver Twist* is a still from David Lean's 1948 film of the Dickens classic. Set in the slums of Victorian London the director presents the orphan's quest as a darkly gothic moral tale. The final image is another still, this time from a Channel 4 observational documentary series telling 'intimate stories of how people live with the devastating effects of long term unemployment' (Channel 4, 2013). Although set in the north of England, this series mirrors the struggles with poverty found in many socio-economically deprived areas of London.

The texts were chosen as they variously represent and depict poverty: they gave students the opportunity to interpret them through the lens of their own experience and using their own value systems. Media theorists have long argued that media (and visual) engagement is not a passive act and viewers/readers actively shape cultural meanings (Buckingham, 2000). In popular culture generally, and in these images specifically, poverty is *othered* through the language used to describe the experience of those living in poverty, and in the imagery used, to define and ultimately stereotype people. Here it is not the poor who represent themselves.

Images were used as a stimulus to generate discussion (Harper, 2002) and to enable students to talk about poverty in the abstract. In these ways they were able to explore the

lived experiences of others, engaging in the kind of processes which Vygotsky (1978) describes in young children as 'play without action'. Here the 'playing' comes through students drawing from their personal and cultural resources of visual experiences, referencing familiar visual forms, styles and discourses. From a pedagogical point of view the activities also provided the students with an opportunity to critically analyse visual texts and focus on the three sites of meaning making (production of an image, image itself and the audience) outlined by Rose (2001), knowledge that will be vital when they later work with pupils in schools.

### ***Talking about poverty: beliefs and silences***

Following these various activities using visual pedagogical approaches, the students were asked to discuss and agree on a definition of poverty. As indicated earlier, such definitions have long been contested (Townsend, 1979) and terms relating to class, social or economic disadvantage and inequality are often used interchangeably in talking about poverty in England. Here, and throughout the workshop, the students also tended to conflate poverty with other social issues such as unemployment, alcohol or drug dependency and those who require financial support (benefits) from the state. While one group defined poverty as 'inequality - a lack of access to food, shelter and education', another group focussed on 'deprivation' and noted that those in poverty would have 'limited experience of culture and opportunities', that they were likely to have 'poor health and hygiene', and might feel 'a sense of isolation'.

When prompted to provide individual definitions of poverty, the most significant and prolonged silences in the workshop occurred. Here Louise, eventually responding when

everyone else was silent, said 'It's a touchy subject. Everyone's experience is different'. Charlotte then agreed, adding, 'This is outside my frame of reference so it's all new to me and you don't really know what to say. It feels bleak...'. Pooja added, 'This is hard – I don't know the right words...'. Most expressed some consensus with Louise's view that class is strongly related to poverty and it 'still plays a huge role... social class and what pupils have access to has a huge impact on development and opportunity.' Sophie said, 'I didn't really think about it (*poverty*) before starting the course'.

Discussion of poverty and children's lives in school proved to be a slightly easier topic, although here too there were silences and senses of hesitation in speaking out. Students identified factors such as the roles of parents, schools and pupils themselves in overcoming educational under-achievement. Pooja stated:

*Households play, in my opinion, a huge role in a child's attitude, as with their right kind of support and encouragement they would go on to pursue their dreams and goals.... People who may struggle with poverty may not see their education as a priority as they may have bigger issues to consider.*

Louise saw differentiations in parental attitudes, saying 'Sometimes education is not an immediate concern/interest and therefore isn't always pushed whereas with other parents it is the main priority.' Some students stressed the power of pupils' individual agency in overcoming disadvantage. Rania stated:

*I do not consider income levels as determinous (sic) in people's aspirations. I believe that children coming from very poor families have aspirations and are hardworking and really (emphasis in the original) want to do something with their lives.*

Similarly in Sophie's view, pupil agency could overcome parental attitudes, 'sometimes parents can have an impact but pupils are their own people so they will not always follow what their parents do.' Jessica added, 'It is totally dependent on an individual's aspirations

and goals as to whether they want to do well and succeed and it is not necessary predetermined by social class' (sic). Other students showed understanding and empathy for the living conditions of pupils and the limitations these might impose, even on the most motivated. Typical statements included: 'some pupils have a large amount of responsibility at home. Sometimes working for extra money and they might be exhausted'; 'When students live in poverty there is a lack of working space or quiet space at home'; and 'Pupils who might be from a low income household might not have access to the latest technology or travel or theatre opportunities so this will affect them.'

When discussing their practicum, some students considered that they had been placed in schools where issues of poverty impacted on the lives of pupils, but it was not an issue they had considered or discussed. Placements had clearly been diverse, but all talked about their school experiences positively, describing their work in the school and their roles as part of a school community. Senses of belonging and commitment were demonstrated in the language they used describing '*our* students (*pupils*)', 'those students that were part of *our* school community', and 'the students in *my* school' identifying the centrality of their work, but experiences in school had differed markedly. Lucy, for example, described her placement in a school in a deprived area as being 'really diverse ... many students are new to the country and the pupil premium is used to pay for their breakfast and a study space so that kids can do their homework'. Charlotte said, 'At my school the school works closely with parents, welfare officers and Newham to ensure pupils and families have access to help.' Like Lucy, she had clearly seen these practices demonstrated in her school and had a clear sense of how the school supported disadvantaged pupils and their parents. In contrast, Jess had been in a school where 'parents pay for tutors but they [*the pupils*] don't care: they know that they will

be ok and get good jobs'. Jess felt that she had had little experience of seeing how schools work with pupils living in poverty.

One student teacher contrasted her experiences at her first placement school with those she anticipated at her second school, which she had already visited. She talked about her desire to work in a school with similar pupils to those in her first placement and the importance of an affinity with the school ethos:

*I know that it will be different at [placement two school] when I go there, you can just tell by what teachers say about students and their expectations really, I want to work in a more challenging school where students might be the first in their family to go to university or they have problems and we can help, that's what we should do. At [placement two school] they just expect, they know that they will do well without really trying. At [placement one school] everyone was really committed to making a difference ...*

At some schools students reported a 'silence' about poverty and social class, which mirrored the silence on these issues in the university element of the programme. Pooja stated:

*We never talked about this (in the university) and in school we know it's true but you don't ask teachers about kids and poverty, like we know the ones who have a hard time but we don't talk about it or ask them.... I thought about when I was in school but I don't [think] we understood class or money like it wasn't there but it was.*

Concerned about this absence, Pooja asked her mentor about her own experiences of pre-service education, 'I talked to my mentor in school about this and ... they did not talk about class or poverty on her course (*either*)'.

While student teachers drew on personal, often limited, experiences of poverty and disadvantage, they were alert to the expectations that they felt were appropriate for the profession: as Sophie stated,

*I was very lucky growing up but I do see poverty as a real issue and I know friends and family who have [experienced a] hard time ... we don't think about it but in school we see it [poverty] everyday'.*

Considering the impact of poverty and disadvantage on education was 'much harder to think about' and one student noted 'teachers need to be supported by the school - a teacher on their own is powerless to deal with poverty' later adding 'you feel so helpless. It's frustrating but what can I do?'

Here recognition of the challenges in defining poverty and its effects on educational achievement reflects the need to explore the complex issues of teacher identity discourses and consideration of 'how language that challenges traditional educational paradigms is obligated to create new categories in order to reclaim new spaces of resistance, to establish new identities, or to construct new knowledge/power relations' (Giroux, 2005,17).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The first findings of this pedagogical research initiative indicate that many of the student teachers had little personal experience of disadvantage. In the workshop they were sometimes reluctant to define poverty and its relationship to class, fearing that they might 'get it wrong'. As one student stated, 'I think you know but you don't want to upset people by pointing it out.' Our findings suggest that many of the group saw issues of poverty and disadvantage as alien, unfamiliar, uncomfortable and 'other', viewing the issues through the lenses of their own often middle class and norm-referenced perspectives. Some, like Charlotte quoted above, pushed the discussion away altogether by stating that the issues were

‘outside my frame of reference’, or like Sophie, confessed that they had never considered them before starting the pre-service course.

Our findings also indicate that some of the students identified limited aspirations of parents, schools and pupils as important factors in educational under-achievement. Stereotypical views of lack of parental aspirations, in particular, were often explicitly or implicitly positioned as more influential on children’s learning than material or cultural factors around poverty. In this use of deficit models, based on stereotypical and homogenised ways of understanding poverty, our findings mirror those of other studies of student teachers (Cox et al., 2012). Other students, such as Rania and Sophie, saw pupils themselves as sometimes having positive aspirations and being able to use personal ‘agency’ to overcome disadvantage. These views seem more positive at first sight but here, again as in previous research (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013), the responsibility for educational achievement is devolved to the individual and their ability (or inability) to overcome the effects of poverty. Again, aspirations and personal efforts are seen as more influential than the material and cultural effects of poverty. However, a few students’ views, like those of Louise, were more nuanced and show more consistent indications of awareness of the inter-sectionality of poverty, class and other forms of deprivation than in the earlier study of ITE students in England by Thompson et al. (2014) and in the work of Cox et al. (2012) in the USA.

As we have indicated above, there were significant silences and pauses during the workshop, together with senses that the questions under discussion were ‘hard’ or ‘new’ or ‘bleak’ as topics. We argue that the narratives constructed and shared in this research cannot be disarticulated from those silences. Understanding silence depends on the context in which it occurs, how it is interpreted and by whom, but it has long been accepted that silence does

not just represent an *absence* in conversation (Tannen, 1985) and that '(L)istening to silences can be just as instructive as listening to voices' (Losey, 1997, 191). The words the students speak (and the deficit views of 'the poor' which they sometimes express) therefore need to be read alongside their awkward silences as indicative of a pre-service education version of the familiar English trait of not causing offence by inadvertently using the 'wrong' language in an area of discussion seen as 'other'. Here these silences effectively close down or close off the topics under discussion, often rendering both student teachers and teacher educator unable to speak freely or, indeed, sometimes, to speak at all.

These group silences in the workshop are reinforced by other silences or absences in teacher education. We also found silences on poverty and social class at the meso or institutional levels of the research: the university programme, for example, included a strong commitment to teaching about the broad principles of social justice, but there was no direct focus on the educational factors associated with socio-economic disadvantage or preparation for working in schools of high poverty. The silence at the university was in some cases compounded by the variable provision for student teacher learning within the placement schools. In some schools, the student experience was of yet more silence on poverty and social class issues, and, again, atmospheres in which 'you don't ask teachers about kids and poverty', sometimes again because of fear of 'getting it wrong', causing 'offence' or not knowing the 'right words'. In other schools, it was clear that student teachers were able to work in supportive, insightful and seemingly effective ways with children living in poverty. In a pre-service system which is now largely school-led the variability in this provision matters greatly for individual and communal student learning. In these silences, university and schools alike are open to Reay's (2006) critique that social class injustices are inadequately addressed in both pre-service teacher education and schooling. Finally, we also



recognize silence at the macro level of pre-service education; the Teaching Standards in England, as indicated above, do not directly reference broad issues of social justice or have any specific focus on combating educational inequalities caused by poverty.

As stated above, our intention in designing this workshop was to explore and experiment with ways in which visual pedagogies might challenge and facilitate student discussions. There was never any intent to ‘prove’ the effectiveness of these pedagogies and we did not set out to measure any changes in students’ attitudes. Nevertheless, our findings enable us to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of these pedagogies. The strengths, as we see them, are that the visual methods used engaged the students in sometimes heated discussions of images of poverty and class; they focused their attention on some of the issues around poverty and educational attainment and gave them pedagogically well structured ‘spaces, in which they could express their views and experiences, as they wished to do so. ‘Listening’ to the views of others, through both silences and interchanges of opinions, made them aware of the diversity of views and of how difficult and contested issues around poverty and class are. We would also hope that, in the longer term, the workshop might make the student teachers think more deeply about pupils living in poverty that they teach in their placement schools.

Some readers might see it as a ‘weakness’ of the workshop that a number of the students expressed stereotypical deficit models of the poor, yet our aim was only to *explore how* they articulated their views on and experiences of the effects of poverty and deprivation in education and not necessarily to challenge thinking. This exploration was intended to provide a starting point for later stages of the project. We would argue that, as the baseline for social justice work, all teacher educators need to know and understand their students’

views. Nevertheless, following Gorski (2012), we acknowledge that such poverty stereotyping and ideologies of deficit are certainly not ‘neutral’, not least because they can impact adversely on children’s educational outcomes. In retrospect then, we could, and perhaps should, have challenged the deficit models expressed, for example, by citing research which contradicts such thinking (see Jones, 2016, in this issue). Such challenges could not, however, be processes of judgement by which students’ views were labelled as simply inadequate or wrong. Rather the workshop could perhaps have included more work on exploring personal and professional identities and past experiences for the students. Such work can, of course, be ‘uncomfortable and challenging’, not least because ‘identity is rooted in personal histories and ... some of the underlying fixed positions are deeply held ethical positions’ (Boylard & Woolsey 2015, 63). As these authors recommend, compassionate pedagogies are needed here, with orientations to kindness and empathy rather than judgement (ibid, 66). For us, further work on visual pedagogies offers the ideal vehicle for such identity work, since as Pink (2007, 17) states ‘images are ‘everywhere’.....They are inextricably interwoven into our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, space and truth.’

With every indication that English society will continue to be characterised by inequality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), it is vital that student teachers are aware of the patterns of educational under-achievement often associated with social and economic disadvantage in general and with living in poverty in particular. To achieve this undoubtedly, teacher educators in universities *and* schools need more sophisticated ways of teaching about issues of poverty, class and educational under-achievement; and these need to be pedagogies that might guide students beyond stereotypical deficit views. We therefore consider it vital that in both the university element of the programme and while on school placements, student

teachers have the opportunity to talk about their own views and experiences in relation to the complex relationships between social and economic deprivation and the effects of poverty on educational achievement. In taught sessions at the university using visual materials as stimulus to generate talk and discussion should, in our view, be considered as viable pedagogical strategies, allowing for both abstract and sometimes metaphorical discussions before moving on to the more challenging talk of lived experience. Whilst we are not suggesting that images should replace words as the dominant mode of pedagogical practice (or representation), like others (White, 2009), we are asking for more consideration to be given to visual knowledge production. Over the past decade the growth of new digital technologies has changed the way we interact with visual culture, how we access, read, produce and share visual materials. We no longer need a camera when we engage in photographic practices and often a mobile phone is used in place of specialized photographic equipment. Pictures can be easily uploaded to the internet and shared creating new forms ‘for self-narration and representation’ (Richter & Schadler, 2009, 171). Yet these new social emphases on the visual are not always well represented in the pedagogies of teacher education.

In developing this research project, we now aim to run a revised version of the workshop working from the evaluation of the initiative described here. In the further interlinked stages of the project, we will investigate how spaces and places of poverty affects the possibilities for the (re)construction of knowledge and identities, challenging deep cultural and ethical beliefs as students work with learners in schools in deprived communities. We also want to develop a bespoke theoretical framework for analysing the results of later stages of the project. For this, we intend to combine perspectives on teaching for social justice, research on learning to teach and studies of place/space and spatiality. We

will aim to explore how the places and spaces of poverty in local schools (and the often under-developed and impoverished geographical landscapes in which they exist) both structure, and are structured by, the social practices of schooling and teacher education. In designing this framework, we are then interested in how distinctive spaces and places affect teacher educators' pedagogies and student teacher learning. Following Hargreaves (1995, 32), we argue that 'what it means to *be* in teacher education... can only properly be understood by firmly locating our studies of teacher education in space as well as in time'.

Finally, to emphasise how important it is that we find new pedagogies for social justice which overcome the silences about class and educational disadvantage and start to challenge compassionately pre-service teachers' understanding of these relationships, we conclude with the words of Reay (2006, 304),

Social class remains the one educational problem that comes back to haunt English education again and again and again; the area of educational inequality on which educational policy has had virtually no impact.

## REFERENCES

- Banks, M. (2001) *Visual Methods in Social Research*, London: Sage.
- Behar, R. (1996) *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Berger, J. (1977[1972]) *Ways of Seeing*, London: BBC, Penguin.
- Boylan, M. and Woolsey, M (2015) Teacher education for social justice : mapping identity spaces. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 46, 62-71.
- Buckingham, D. (2000) *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media*, London: Polity.
- Buckingham, D. (2003) *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*, London: Polity.
- Centre for Economic and Business Research (2013)
- <https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/News/Nine-billion-pounds-of-private-investment-in-Stratford,-Newham,-since-the-2012-games-were-announced.aspx>
- Denzin, N.K. (2002) Confronting ethnography's crisis of representation [Contribution to Review Symposium: Crisis in Representation], *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 31(4), 482-490.
- Emmison, M. and Smith, P. (2000) *Researching the Visual*, London: Sage.
- Foucault, M. (1977): *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Geertz, C. (1988) *Works and Lives: the anthropologist as author*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Giroux, H. (2005) *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, 2nd Edition, New York: . Routledge Publishing

Goldfarb, B. (2002) *Visual Pedagogy: Media Cultures in and beyond the Classroom*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Jones, H. (2016) Discussing Poverty with Student Teachers: the Realities of Dialogue. JET ?? pp. ??

Harper, D. (1998) On the authority of the image: visual methods at the crossroads, in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London: Sage.

Harper, D. (2002) Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17, 13-26.

Hodgetts, D., Chamberlain, K., and Radley, A., (2007), 'Considering photographs never taken during photo-production projects', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 4 (4), 263- 280.

Hobbs, R. (1998) R. "The seven great debates in the media literacy movement" *Journal of Communication*, 48(1), p.16-32.

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: television fans and participatory culture*. New York: Routledge.

Jewitt, C. (2008) Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms, *Review of Research in Education*, February (32): 241-267.

Knowles, J. G. and Holt-Reynolds, D. (1991) Shaping pedagogies through personal histories in pre-service teacher education. *Teachers College Record*, 93, 87-113.

Aldridge, H., Bushe, S., Kenway, P., MacInnes, T. and Tinson, A. (2013) London's Poverty Profile, New Policy Institute Available at:

[http://www.londonspovertyprofile.org.uk/LPP\\_2013\\_Report\\_Web.pdf](http://www.londonspovertyprofile.org.uk/LPP_2013_Report_Web.pdf)

Losey, M. K. (1997). *Listen to the silences: Mexican American interaction in classroom and the community*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Lusted, D. (1986) "Why Pedagogy?" Screen, no. 27 (September-October 1986): 2-14.

Mulvey, L. (1989): *Visual and Other Pleasures*. London: Macmillan.

Newham Case Report 83 *CASE Report 83 114*. London: LSE.

Nieto, (2003). Nieto, S. (2003) *What keeps teachers going?*, New York: Teachers College Press.

Oakeshott, M. (1975) *On Human Conduct*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pauwels, L., (2010), 'Visual Sociology Reframed: An Analytical Synthesis and Discussion of Visual Methods in Social and Cultural Research', *Sociological Methods and Research*, 38 (4), 545-581.

Pink, S., (2007), *Doing visual ethnography: images, media, and representation in research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Prosser, J., (1998) *Image-based research: a sourcebook for qualitative researchers*. London: Falmer.

Rose, G. (2001) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. London: SAGE.

- Rose, S. K., and Finders, M. J. (1998) "Learning from Experience: Using Situated Performances in Writing Teacher Development." *Writing Program Administration* 22.1: 33-51.
- Richter R and Schadler C (2009) See my virtual self: dissemination as a characteristic of digital photography – the example of Flickr.com. *Visual Studies* 24(2): 169–177.
- Schneider, (2013).
- Schön, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner. How professionals think in action*, London: Temple Smith.
- Sontag, S. (1979): *On Photography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Soja, E. (1989) *Postmodern Geographies*, London: Verso.
- Tannen (1985) Silence: Anything but. In D. Tannen & M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on Silence* (pp. 93-111). Norwood, NJ. Ablex.
- Tiidenberg (2014) Tiidenberg K (2014) Bringing sexy back: reclaiming the body aesthetic via self-shooting. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 8(1): Article 3.
- Thomson, P, (2008) Children and young people: voices in visual research. In: Thomson, P, ed., *Doing visual research with children and young people* Routledge. 1-19.
- Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, London, Allen Lane and Penguin Books.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). The Role of Play in Development (pp. 92-104). In *Mind in Society*. (Trans. M. Cole). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



Wang, C., Morrel-Samuels, S., Hutchison, P.M., Bell, L. and Pestronk, R.M., Flint  
Photovoice: Community Building Among Youths, Adults, and Policymakers. *American  
Journal of Public Health*: June 2004, Vol. 94, No. 6, pp. 911-913.

Wright, T. (1999) *The Photography Handbook*, London: Routledge.