University of Stirling Project:
Making a Positive Difference (MaPD)

Fostering critical educational spaces as catalysts for translating equity policy and theory, so as to transform communities of practice.

Final Report

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Project: *Making a Positive Difference* (*MaPD*)

Executive summary:
The aim of this project was to promote teachers' in-depth professional thinking and practice so as to sustain system-wide change that addresses the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC).

The project builds upon previous research at the university of Stirling that mapped and audited the support of early career professionals in the induction phase (I'Anson & Eady, 2017; Drew & Watson 2014). In terms of teachers' professional judgements in relation to acknowledging pupil difference, this work identified:

(i) that beginning teachers often struggled with translating theory and values into their ongoing practice, and often resorted to strategies, which were only successful in certain circumstances and did not promote the wider reflexivity necessary to change thinking and practice in relation to pupil difference.

(ii) the support of mentors that have the capacities to support early career phase teachers in the promotion of equity of opportunity and attainment, was vital, but in practice, the quality of support offered was variable.

(iii) the university, as a space separate-from-yet-linked-to schools, had a key role in supporting the development of teachers' professional educational judgement, especially with regard to interrupting patterns of socialisation that fail to acknowledge the complexities of thinking and practice that are necessary if more inclusive approaches are to be foregrounded.

In response to this, the MaPD offered a new Master's level course *Promoting Equity*, (together with courses on criticality, designing interventions, and mentoring practice), for experienced teachers with mentoring roles in their schools. An oblique angle was therefore taken in relation to the broader SAC aims: the intention was to leverage change in the very communities of practice within which beginning teachers practice, through focussing on the pivotal role of mentors in promoting more equitable and inclusive practice.

Our investigation therefore centred upon whether a focus upon *mentors* (rather than immediately upon beginning teachers or pupils) might have broader, system wide impacts in relation to equitable practice. Having had the opportunity to engage critically, and in depth, with equity issues in both theory and practice, would teachers on this project occupy more informed and confident positions to support beginning teachers (in the induction phase, and students on teaching practice within ITE)? And, if so, was there evidence of change within communities of practice, more broadly considered? More ambitiously still, was there evidence that might support the deployment of a cascade model, beginning with mentors, and tracing impacts through beginning teachers, communities of practice, through to the learning and attainment of SIMD 1-40 pupils?

It was envisaged that a broad range of research data sources would be drawn upon in relation to this inquiry, including qualitative interviews with mentors, colleagues in schools, and observation in schools, together with data from seminars, and assignments that included critical reviews of actual equity and mentoring initiatives. In the event, restrictions imposed because of COVID-19 limited the scope of data collection: no in-person visits to communities of practice were possible, for example, and this led to a focus upon forms of data collection that could be collected virtually.

In spite of these limitations, the research team has been able to draw some conclusions from its work to date:

1. the courses of study undertaken can be shown to have heightened practitioners' awareness of new theoretical approaches to (in)equity and strengthened their capacity to connect such approaches with their own pedagogical practice.

2. the mentoring course and its associated mentoring intervention, provide evidence of teachers' confidence in acknowledging the complexities and translations involved in supporting beginning teachers' practice, in ways that draw upon, and are informed by, relevant theory.

3. this suggests teachers will be able to deal more critically, imaginatively and confidently with equity-related issues within their communities of practice, both through innovative pedagogical practice and through mentoring student and beginning teachers in how to understand and negotiate the complexities associated with pupil difference.

4. These findings, in turn, serve to reinforce the significance of university space – as critical educational spaces that are separate from, and yet linked to actual schools where teachers practice.

5. Common themes emerging from interview responses were: broader understandings of communities of practice; the importance of relationship building, multidirectional mentoring/dissemination of ideas, and professional learning communities, spaces and resources.

Due to the above noted restrictions re. data collection, it has not been possible to address broader impacts, which would have necessitated empirical observation. However, the research has identified a series of new critical issues which have emerged in the course of this work, and which, it is hoped, might inform future work:

1. In what does an *educational* approach to equity consist? All of the teacher-participants identified with an extended model of professionalism (Sachs, 2003) in which their responsibilities to the wider lives of pupils are acknowledged. However, there is clear evidence that teachers struggled in setting *limits* to this responsibility. For what are they responsible as educators, and where might some of the broader social, structural, economic and political equity issues 'belong' policy wise? Evidence from this project suggests that, if anything, issues associated with the pandemic have further heightened this as of pressing concern. Thinking critically about what an educational approach to equity consists in is a vital question, going forward.

2. In relation to equity, there is a tendency for considerations of pupil difference to collapse into socio-economic issues, whereas equity embraces multiple forms of difference that need to be acknowledged in their specificity.

3. A related issue that has arisen concerns the discourse of equity: the language used to make sense of, and which informs actual situations of practice. In the courses undertaken, teacher-participants drew upon a wide range of interdisciplinary resources that included poetry, film, political treatise, as well as anthropological and philosophical texts. These, amongst other things, pointed up some of the limitations of current policy discourse in relation to equity which deploys metaphors such as 'closing the gap' – and which clearly do not address the complexities that teachers face on a day to day basis.

4. In the light this, findings from this project suggest that rather than deploying a language of mastery, (where what is necessary is assumed to be already known), support for teachers needs to address *un/knowings in practice*: how, that is, teachers can be equipped to act confidently, acknowledging that their knowledge will always be partial and provisional – especially in relation to children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds but also if other categories of difference are to be acknowledge too.

5. The significance of play, as a pedagogical practice that can promote equity, emerged as a strong theme with one of the cohorts.

In response to these emergent issues (which were not anticipated at the outset of the project) the research team, as one of its outputs, has been engaged in writing a textbook *Promoting Equity*, that addresses these, and other issues, associated with promoting equitable practice. *Promoting Equity* aims to be a useful resource for practitioners, providing access to the resources and interdisciplinary approaches offered in the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' and its associated Mentoring module; this also draws upon the insights and contributions of teacher-participants, who have agreed to become a reference group throughout its production.

This research project was the outcome of prior work that took forward a number of key issues that had emerged previously. It is hoped that, going forward, it may be possible to engage the five issues identified here, which, we believe, warrant further investigation.

List of abbreviations

EAL   English as an additional language

ITE   Initial Teacher Education

LGBT+   Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender plus.

MSc   Master of Science

MaPD   Making a Positive Difference Project

SAC   Scottish Attainment Challenge

Introduction

The University of Stirling project, MaPD, was focused on engagement with teacher-participants undertaking Master's level courses that explore critical understandings of equity (in relation to theory, policy and practice) and how these might translate into supporting mentee teachers and students, so as to promote broader changes within communities of practice. Research findings suggest that alignment with existing policy conceptions of equitable practice alone will not foster the shifts in understanding and practice that are required in order to effectively address differential attainment among pupils (Drew and Watson, 2014; I'Anson and Eady 2017).

The MSc programme in question, Professional Education and Leadership, offers the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module, together with the 'Coaching and Mentoring: Principles and Practices' module, which has been developed to include material related to equity in order to complement the first course.

These two modules address core aspects of MaPD: understandings of equity, its role in educational practice and the sustainability of shifts within communities of practice, through both the transmission of ideas and practices and the medium of mentoring. This project focusses upon two teacher-participant cohorts, who undertook the first module in 2018/19 and 2019/20 respectively. The course has been well received and will henceforth be available at both the first- and second-year stages of the MSc in Professional Education and Leadership.

The current cohort are in the process of completing their second-year course, which affords them opportunities to engage with a range of resources related to equity and education, reflecting on their experiences and on their pedagogical practices, discussing these issues in regular meetings guided by the course tutors. The resources selected for the module are varied in nature and format, featuring a range of approaches – educational, literary, philosophical and sociological – to equity. Their inclusion in the module fosters the questioning of existing pedagogical traditions and educational frameworks and the challenging of assumptions, encouraging the students to connect the conceptions of equity raised within their own professional practice. The students have further opportunities to develop their own understandings of equity in the context of their practice through a series of assignments which include a critical evaluation of an equity-related project in their own setting, followed by a review of an actual mentoring intervention that they themselves have designed and enacted.

While the work with teacher-participants through the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module facilitates the development of conceptual understandings of equity, the challenging of assumptions and the reimagining of pedagogy, which are core aspects of MaPD, relate to a further stage of the project that consists of empirical research. Dr McKelvey interviewed those members of each cohort who agreed to participate in order to gain an insight into their experiences of the course content, the influence it has had on their professional development and understandings of equity, and therefore its relevance to, and impacts on, their professional practice. This was important both in terms of ascertaining the role of universities in supporting practitioners to develop more inclusive practices and obtaining

feedback from teacher-participants so as to continue shaping the modules in question to be as useful as possible to practitioners.

Due to restrictions associated with the lockdown, these interviews had to be carried out online; this will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology section. A proposed second phase of empirical research, was conditional on measures related to COVID-19 being relaxed, since this involved in-person data collection and classroom observations carried out by the Research Assistant, Dr McKelvey. Unfortunately, due to the second wave and the measures associated with this, it has not been possible to undertake this phase of the research. An opportunity to consider the connection between conceptual understandings and the realities of practice, gaining an insight into communities of practice, would have been beneficial to the project. The opportunity to observe and evaluate the ways in which teacher-participants may actually influence and inform their professional environment and their colleagues would also have been especially pertinent to the mentoring aspect of the research. In lieu of this empirical data, researchers have drawn upon teacher-participants' own critical reviews of their equity-related practice and their mentoring interventions within their respective communities of practice.

As the project developed, the value of producing a resource that will support current and future students on educational courses concerned with equity and inclusion has become clear. Additionally, the project team have determined that raising awareness of the equity-related resources and learning provided by the two 'Promoting Equity' modules in question has the potential to contribute to the development of more equitable education policy and practice more widely, lessening the impact of inequity on student attainment. As such, the MaPD team have completed a book proposal, provisionally titled *Promoting Equity*. The book aims to make the distinctive educational approach to equity as developed in the 'Promoting Equity' course and its associated Mentoring module available to a broader audience of teachers, education professionals, school leadership and policymakers. There is a strong focus on practice, with case studies and insights offered by the students participating in MaPD included in order to provide support and inspiration to those who can potentially shape more equitable approaches to education in future.

Research questions

1. What barriers to greater inclusivity do practitioners identify?

2. Which discursive resources are drawn upon in the framing of problematics and in proposals offered in response?

3. What work upon the self do these proposals imply?

4. How are these approaches translated into practice?

5. In what ways does the mentor encourage the new teacher to learn from their practice?

6. How, and to what extent, does the translation of (critical, educational, social, ecological, gender and equity-related) theory into practice inform this?

7. To what extent are such shifts in practice promoted more widely?

8. To what extent are more equitable practices sustainable?

9. How do practitioners evaluate equitable practices and proposals?

Framing the question

MaPD was focused on discursive approaches to equity and their translation into practice, particularly in the context of communities of practice. Previous research (Drew and Watson, 2014; I'Anson and Eady 2017) that mapped the support available to early career teachers during their induction process indicated that there were two significant challenges at play regarding the fostering of more equitable pedagogical practice. These challenges were identified as, firstly, the necessity of translation from theoretical understandings of relevant issues to their implementation in practice and, secondly, the transmission of these equitable concepts and values between and among practitioners, particularly with respect to early career teachers. In terms of addressing this second challenge, the role of mentoring for student and beginning teachers was highlighted.

In light of these findings, MaPD, aimed to support in-depth professional learning for teachers that fosters significant and sustainable change within the Scottish education system, facilitating the development and dissemination of more equitable practice and thereby addressing the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) goals. The role of higher education in supporting teachers' professional learning was also highlighted by the aforementioned research (Drew and Watson, 2014; I'Anson and Eady 2017). This was particularly noted with regard to the impact universities can have in challenging established pedagogy and socialisation that do not recognise the nuances of both understanding and practice that are required in order to foster more inclusive educational practices. MaPD thus aimed to support greater equity in education by encouraging its teacher-participants to develop their theoretical knowledge and adopt innovative, inclusive approaches that address the equity issues raised through their Master's level studies. The insights gained through the research team's work with the current student cohort will be developed further in *Promoting Equity*, which will increase the project's impact by raising wider awareness of equity-related concepts and inclusive pedagogical approaches among practitioners and policymakers.

Working with practitioners to develop their conceptual understandings of equity, to facilitate their critical approaches to pedagogy and to foster the implementation of this learning in their pedagogical practice were thus core elements of the project. The role of the teacher-participants who are undertaking or who have undertaken the 'Promoting Equity' modules as part of their Masters studies is therefore central to the research that was carried out at the University of Stirling: it was not only their participation in the course and the experiences and framings of equity that they shared in the course meetings that are of great value to the project, but also their approach to practice in light of this learning and, crucially, the way in which such potential shifts in pedagogy may be sustainable.

This latter element brings into focus another significant element of MaPD: teacher mentoring. As mentioned in the Introduction to this report, those students among the cohort who continue to their second year of the MSc programme have the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills gained in relation to equity, to the subsequent course, which is focused on mentoring. This

focus on the mentoring of colleagues allows for capacity building among teacher-participants so as to support both ITE student and beginning teachers, thereby fostering more sustainable equitable practice. This was particularly important because one of the project's broader aims was to encourage shifts within communities of practice that enable student and early career teachers to become more fluent as regards inclusive practice.

At each stage of the MSc programme, teacher-participants worked collaboratively, sharing experiences and insights with one another and supporting each other's learning development. A collaborative practitioner enquiry was an important element of the project and, more widely, relational networks were considered to be important to many aspects of this project, both within the student cohorts as part of the learning and professional development during their Masters studies and between teacher-participants and the ITE and early career teachers that they later mentor. The support offered by mentoring during teacher training and probationary periods has been recognised as a key aspect of fostering pedagogical practice that is informed by theory, inclusive and open. The importance of wider relational networks, beyond mentoring, has, however, been highlighted by previous research (e.g., DeJong, 2016), which noted that the standard of mentoring experience by many student and beginning teachers does not promote the approaches required in order to establish more equitable practice that supports pupils who may face additional educational barriers.

One of the core elements of MaPD was a focus upon the sustainability of shifts in communities of practice and upon the potential for impact on practice within ITE and for beginning teachers, within and outwith classrooms, through dissemination activities and the book project, which will communicate insights and findings that arise from this research.

The project drew upon four areas of research literature that had been identified as significant: teacher socialisation, critical and productive pedagogies, teacher professional learning and ecological understandings of teacher agency and which collectively form a common conceptual frame of reference across partner institutions. This dovetailed with the conceptual understandings that are promoted by shifting teachers' approaches and allowed for a common language so that both mentors and mentees could work towards shared outcomes related to closing the attainment gap. The research team's findings have been shared with partner universities (at SAC Project Meetings and at the SERA Seminar – see pp.34ff.) and will continue to contribute to the development of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Professional Education programmes at the University of Stirling. The project team also plan to share its findings nationally and internationally, via peer-reviewed publications, at conferences and in the book, *Promoting Equity*, that outlined below on pp.41-42.

Methodological approach

Altered research design due to COVID19

As mentioned in the Introduction, the circumstances associated with the pandemic inevitably altered the Making a Positive Difference project design, due to the impossibility of carrying out empirical research in person, as a result of government and university restrictions, together with the closure of schools.

Initially the research phase of the project was intended to involve face to face interviews with the teacher-participants, from both student cohorts, who had undertaken the Promoting Equity and Mentoring modules at the University of Stirling. The aim was to follow these interviews with classroom observations later in the year, in order to gain an insight into how the teacher-participants' theoretical understandings of equity, as developed through the courses, were translated into practice and how this might, in turn, translate into mentoring and the impact of those understandings and practices within their professional communities.

This research design had to be reimagined so that the planned interviews took place online using digital platforms, thus allowing the Research Assistant to speak with the research participants while holding to physical distancing rules and university protocols at that time. The use of online platforms for the research interviews led to a number of additional methodological concerns and ethical issues, which are addressed below.

The hoped-for classroom observations, on the other hand, which had been designated as Phase Two of the research project, were initially postponed and then had to be jettisoned altogether. It had been hoped that circumstances might, at a later point, allow for these to take place, but it soon become clear that this was unlikely to be the case.

In light of this, and the ensuing adaptations to the project design, the research team decided, as already touched on, to produce a book as a core component of its research output, in order to maximise the impact of the project. A book proposal has been produced with the aim to not only support those teachers who enrolled on the module, but also to facilitate greater awareness among both practitioners and policymakers of what it might be to engage educationally with equity. The book project will be discussed in further detail below.

The role of the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module

As noted previously, the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module is a new offering that was written for MaPD. As part of the MSc in Professional Education and Leadership programme, the module has raised issues connected to pedagogy and inclusion, supporting students to consider their own experiences in the classroom and their own teaching practices in relation to equity. The module guides students through conceptualisations of education and of equity, encouraging them to critically consider established practices and

socialised patterns in teaching, to relate these issues to their own professional experiences and to imagine otherwise, in order to support them in developing more inclusive practices. The course additionally engages a wide range of resources in order to illustrate the aforementioned issues, to highlight relevant theoretical frameworks and to raise questions about how education professionals can create more equitable learning environments. These resources include academic writing, poetry, recorded interviews, podcasts and videos. Feedback received from the teacher-participants suggests that the varied nature of the materials used by teaching staff were appreciated and were considered helpful in supporting the students' learning (see Summary Research Interview Themes, below, pp. 22ff.).

The project's Research Assistant, Dr Róisín McKelvey, attended a number of the module's 2019/20 seminars (the latter two of which were conducted online due to the current circumstances related to COVID19) so as to observe the discussions that unfolded within them. The notes recorded during these meetings, in addition to completed assignments submitted by students from both the 2018/19 and 2019/20 cohorts, form part of the data analysis. These sources of data are also drawn upon, with the students' consent, in the project's book, *Promoting Equity*, while the 2019/20 students have agreed to be a reference group for this aspect of the project, contributing their insights and experiences more directly.

The shift to online interviews – additional considerations

The shift to online interviews had a number of implications *apropos* both the research findings and in terms of ethics, which had to be carefully considered. Aside from the potential for technical issues related to internet connection, audio and visual settings etc., it was necessary to acknowledge that interactions that take place online are mediated through a different space than those carried out in person and that the interactions may be shaped differently as a result. The potential for more stilted communication or for participants being less comfortable is hopefully offset in the case of the 2019/20 student cohort because Dr McKelvey, who conducted the interviews, had established a rapport with them by attending a number of the seminars scheduled as part of the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module. This was not the case, however, with regard to the previous cohort, who completed the course in 2018/19. It was necessary to take this into account when carrying out online interviews with these teacher-participants and the potentially different dynamic in an online interview.

Although certain aspects of the methodology had to be altered, other elements remained unchanged. For example, many of the requirements of the University Ethics Committee that were initially designed for in-person interviews also applied to on-line interviews. Thus, participants still received Participant Information Sheets and were asked to read and sign consent forms: in line with the methodological shifts already outlined, these were returned to the interviewer via email. Unless the participants wished to be credited, their responses were anonymised, alongside any identifiable details such as the school at which they were employed. The interviews were only recorded with the participants' consent; an additional necessity

resulting from the use of online platforms was that the Research Assistant had to be careful to use platforms that did not store meeting recordings on its own server.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature, in order to allow some scope for comparison when analysing the research findings, whilst also providing opportunities for the participants to elaborate upon their own insights and to share their experiences.

The research team hoped to explore a number of key aspects of the teacher-participants' experiences of professional learning in relation to equity through the interview process. The "skeleton structure" (Tomlinson, 1989: 167), designed to address the project team's core research questions and from which the interview schedule was developed, is outlined below. This was used to identify which topics were addressed spontaneously by the participants, as a result of the space afforded them by the semi-structured interview approach, and also as a means to guide the interviewer in raising any issues that were not covered spontaneously, according to the top-down interview schedule, that is included in the following section of this report.

Skeleton structure:

- Students' experiences:

    o of equity issues encountered through their work

    o of the 'Promoting Equity' module(s)

- Students' conceptual understandings of equity and the impact of the 'Promoting Equity' course(s) on these.

- Imaginative projection of potential equitable practices and projects:

    o Respondents' views on instituting change and which measures they might adopt

- Potential barriers or challenges that they anticipate

- The sustainability of shifts in practice

    o Which measures might be taken to change cultures in a lasting way?

    o The prospect of mentoring student and beginning teachers.

Analytical approach

This research utilised at least four sources of data:

- online semi-structured interviews with teacher-participants

- reflective assignments submitted by teacher-participants (both in relation to a critical review of an equity project in their own context, and a mentoring intervention that they had undertaken)

- other assignments produced by teacher-participants, either in poster or other presentational formats, which accompanied written work

- Research Assistant field notes of discussions and observations from seminars attended

A semi-structured interview format was chosen because the research team aimed to study the data sources comparatively in order to draw conclusions about the impact of the 'Promoting Equity' courses and of the professional learning they offer, yet also to provide the participants with space to offer their own insights and experiences. It should of course be acknowledged that, through the use of semi-structured interviews, there is necessarily an interactional element to this particular aspect of the data collection and the researcher (Dr McKelvey) will have played a role in co-constructing or co-participating in the interview process. Even with a semi-structured format, the selection of questions included in the interview schedule will direct, to a certain extent, the course of the discussion. In addition, the way in which the Research Assistant expresses herself during the interaction will have had an influence re. the participant's responses.

Criticisms have been levelled against the use of interviews in data collection on such grounds: "The basic argument against interviews as a method of data collection is that they produce "unnatural" data since the interviewer influences their production (through questions, interruptions, silences, etc.)" (De Fina and Perrino, 2011, p. 5). Notwithstanding such objections (which, it might be noted, imply commitment to a concept of the 'natural' - which has itself been extensively critiqued!), it was deemed important by the project team to gain an insight into the experiences of the teacher-participants – both in terms of the theoretical course content and the realities of practice – and to offer space to each respondent to voice their own thoughts re. all this. In evaluating the University of Stirling modules in question, it is also useful to have some basis for comparison across participant responses, which is why some degree of similarity in the interview schedules was required. A semi-structured rather than structured approach was chosen, however, so as to minimise the impact of the researcher on the interview responses and subsequent findings: while allowing the researcher to obtain necessary information, a semi-structured approach gives space to the participants to offer their own insights and to shape the discussion. While interviews do not take place in a vacuum and

therefore the interviewer has an impact on the interaction, adopting an approach which is less rigidly designed by the interviewer, and which makes more space for the participant's input, helps to reduce this impact as far as possible. In this connection, the approach of 'Hierarchical Focusing' developed by Tomlinson (1989) (see below), hands over the direction of the interview to the respondent, so that the researcher is not structuring proceedings, but following the conversation as this unfolds.

Given that the teacher-participants' understanding of equity issues and their place in practice are significant aspects of this research project, the interview-data-as-topic approach (De Fina & Perrino, 2011) was adopted when drawing on the data collected during the interviews. The responses of the participants were thus considered to illustrate a reality that has been co-constructed with the interviewer and influenced by the interactional elements at play between the participants and the interviewer (De Fina and Perrino, 2011). As a result, interview responses have been discussed in relation to the roles of the interview schedule and the presence of the researcher, rather than viewing them as representative either of how the participants might respond in other contexts (Block, 2000) or of an objective reality that remains uninfluenced by the interview context (De Fina and Perrino, 2011).

The interview data collected was analysed using a symptomatic rather than veridical approach (Kvale, 1996; Block, 2000). As such, rather than being perceived as objective, accurate records recounted to the researcher, the students' interview responses were considered to be "representational" of their realities, as "presentational" of the participants, influenced as they are by their experiences and the context of the interview and the research topic (Block, 2000, p. 758). This has enabled the project team to draw upon the perceptions and experiences of teacher-participants regarding their professional learning on the 'Promoting Equity' courses, any 'imagining otherwise' that may have been inspired by it and their implementation of that learning, including any challenges they may have encountered in doing so: the understandings and experiences of the teacher-participants being central to this research.

The interview schedule has thus been developed, as far as possible, according to 'top down' hierarchical focusing (Tomlinson, 1989) and is as follows:

1. Do you have any initial thoughts you'd like to share about your experience with the course, equity or your teaching practice?

2. Can you give me some background on what led you to enrol on the programme?

3. How have you found the course? Has it been helpful for you, professionally and/or personally?

    a. Is there anything additional you would have found useful?

    b. Is there anything you think could be improved in the course programme?

4. Can you describe your understanding of equity, following your learning on the course?

5. Have you found the insights of the other teachers on the programme useful?

6. Has anything you have learnt on the course surprised you?

7. How have the resources and discussions about equity influenced you?

    a. Either in the way you conceptualise or develop your teaching practice?

8. Have you come across any challenges, either in the course discussions about equity, or in trying to implement what you have learnt on the course?

9. Have you implemented any new practices/altered your existing practice as a result of the course?

    a. If so, would you characterise those practices as successful? Were there any unexpected outcomes or challenges?

    b. If not, are there any practices you are considering adopting?

        i. Or any changes to your teaching practices that you are considering?

10. Have there been any opportunities to discuss your experiences and the ways in which your practice may have been influenced with colleagues who have not taken the course?

    a. If so, what reception did this receive?

    b. If not, is this something you intend to do?

11. Do you feel that the culture and ethos of your school foregrounds and supports equitable practice?

    a. If not, what might improve this?

    b. Do you have any project or support ideas that might encourage more equitable approaches?

12. What are your thoughts on mentoring student and beginning teachers?

    a. Do you feel that the programme is preparing you well for this (or that the material to come is likely to do so)?

    b. What learning are you likely to pass on to student and beginning teachers that you do mentor?

    c. How might you encourage them to implement such learning?

Analysis

Due to the delays and disruption caused by the COVID19 situation, the project team was not able to gather empirical findings, as previously observed. We were, however, able to meet with some of the teacher-participants online for their remaining seminars on the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module, from which some initial observations were drawn. The Research Assistant, Dr McKelvey, organised a series of virtual, online interviews as previously described. Completed assessed work, which includes critical evaluation of equity projects and a review of a mentoring intervention, were additional data sources that Dr McKelvey drew upon for her analysis.

In relation to the aforementioned online seminars, the teacher-participants have engaged enthusiastically with the course material and the equity related issues it raises, showing both a great deal of interest, and a propensity for translating theoretical concepts into the realities of their professional experience. Issues identified in relation to this have been noted by the project team and taken up in the book *Promoting Equity*, since illuminating that process and the relevance of material translations to pedagogical practice will be very useful to other education professionals, grappling with equity and mentoring issues within their own contexts.

The teacher-participant cohorts have shown great skill in working collaboratively to grasp conceptual frameworks and to apply them to practice, discussing the resources used on the course with interest and with a growing confidence in approaching them critically. The purpose of education and the role of educators has tended to be viewed in a relatively holistic way, with a common perception that teachers bear responsibility for more than the academic attainment of their pupils. A "duty of care" was referenced and overall, there was a shared belief that addressing inequity among pupils, as far as possible, is an important aspect of teachers' work. To this extent, all teachers within this cohort were aligned with an 'extended professional' conception of teacher professionalism (Sachs, 2003); significant issues are raised by the potentially unlimited nature of this responsibility, the possible translation of (e.g. structural poverty) issues into pedagogical issues, and the bearing this has on 'education' both as a concept and its disciplinary scope.

The second cohort consisted entirely of primary school teachers, though they teach a variety of ages within that sector and thus bring diverse insights and approaches. There has, for instance, been interesting discussion of the role of creativity and play in teaching and learning and of the relevance of this to equity – including imagining otherwise through the use of play and creative activities. The significance of play to equity was summarised thus: "play offers children a safe space to explore and develop. It also allows teachers to engage with children, to observe them, to understand their needs and backgrounds and try to empower them." The concept of play as a safe space for children was repeatedly highlighted.

The group agreed that the value of play at all stages of education, including secondary education, should be recognised, as it offers pupils space for self-development and allows teachers to support this and to "promote self-differentiated learning". Its value was also raised

in relation to barriers that may create inequity, for instance, by reducing language barriers for and facilitating the engagement of EAL pupils. The concept of "scaffolding" (Foley, 1994) was applied in students' discussions of the importance of giving space to play and they noted that scaffolding is not simply the purview of teachers and can also be done by classmates supporting and learning from one another.[1]

With regard to the sustainability of change and to mentoring, the importance of sharing learning regarding equity with more established colleagues, rather than only or primarily with student or beginning teachers, was raised during discussions. Additionally, the students highlighted the necessity of encouraging pupils themselves to challenge assumptions and imagine otherwise, for themselves and for society. It was commented on by students that the resources they had been exposed to on the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module had highlighted the impact that teachers can have on empowering pupils to imagine otherwise, to bring together the three aspects of agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Biesta and Tedder, 2006) and encourage shifts in thinking. Two examples offered of ways this could be implemented were encouraging support and inclusion for LGBT+ pupils and empowering pupils to make changes, both in attitude and in action, regarding climate change.[2] It was noticeable that teacher-participants had taken up a much broader understanding of equity than that typically referenced in policy, which has a tendency to privilege socio-economic issues.

In relation to current affairs and issues related to social justice, the students agreed that it is necessary, even advisable, to move away from the curriculum if needed in order to address important issues with pupils, and to respectfully question or challenge discriminatory beliefs where they are encountered in the classroom. The students commented on the importance of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and support in doing this, arguing that anxiety related to the reactions of pupils' families can be an obstacle and that the absence of resources and training was one factor in disparities between legislation/policy and practice regarding education on equality and diversity issues. It was additionally noted that allowing pupils to participate in guiding discussion and learning in the classroom is part of the *Curriculum of Excellence* and should be encouraged.

The impact of COVID19

The pandemic had, of course, affected not only the project design but also the students' professional realities. School closures had resulted in a shift to online learning, which raises its own equity considerations, especially in relation to a reduction in contact that has led to pupil welfare concerns among teachers. The project team invited discussion among the cohort of their teaching experiences during lockdown, during which a range of access and equity issues were mentioned, including but not limited to:

- Technical issues affecting communication and the participation of pupils;

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[1] This is one example of the cohort's propensity for translating from theory to practice.
[2] A further example of the application of theory to professional practice.

- Lack of access to required digital platforms or devices;

- Challenges faced by teachers in accessing resources, such as providing complete texts;

- Varied and inconsistent rates of pupil engagement;

- The over-involvement of pupils' families

    o Interrupting pupils' participation

    o Teachers' uncertainty as to whether pupils are completing their own work;

- The risk of instances of cyber-bullying

The cohort also reported that, due to regulations put in place to restrict individual communication with pupils, the shift to online teaching made it difficult to provide personalised teaching or to offer the additional support needed by some members of the class. It was noted that pupils learn in different ways and that teachers are even less able to accommodate this due to the reliance upon online communication and teaching.

There were also concerns expressed about the toll of the abrupt transition on pupils and the way this may pose challenges as pupils return to start the next academic year, particularly in primary schools, as pupils find themselves in new classes and with new teachers. The teacher-participants recommended that a transition period would be beneficial in order to support re-socialisation and re-assert classroom learning and routines. They also raised concerns about the logistical and sanitary issues, were health-related restrictions remain in place, involved in the return to usual classroom teaching, in addition to staffing issues and engagement issues, due to the prolonged disruption of routine and absence from the classroom.

It should also be noted, however, that the teacher-participants did highlight a number of positive aspects of the transition to online learning, which was considered to enable:

- some pupils to blossom in a way that the classroom setting does not;

    o potentially be empowering and confidence boosting for those pupils who are comfortable with technology – potentially more so than other kinds of work;

- pupils to be much more independent in their learning;

- pupils to have agency about when and how they complete their work;

- space for peer feedback;

It was suggested that online platforms for learning could potentially continue to be utilised once pupils returned to the classroom and could help to encourage parental engagement and inter-generational learning in education, and thus greater support for pupils at home: another example of the teacher-participants imagining otherwise.

Conclusion

The experiences reported by the teacher-participants who had participated in the 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module, in addition to their feedback, suggest that professional learning provided by the course is both necessary and of value.

Observations and discussions that have taken place with the 2019/20 cohort suggest that there is indeed significant awareness of equity issues among early career teachers in Scotland, as well as a willingness to further this understanding in order to address these issues as they arise in the classroom and to develop more (sustainable) inclusive practices. The teacher-participants in question have displayed the ability to apply their conceptual learning to their professional practice and to recognise potential links between their respective experiences and insights, drawing connections that allow them to collectively and individually imagine otherwise for their future practice.

The ways in which COVID19 and the related restrictions have altered their teaching practice have prompted awareness of additional equity and welfare issues that may otherwise not have been highlighted by their usual professional environments. It is possible that the necessary shift into a perhaps previously unimagined kind of pedagogical practice has encouraged the teacher-participants to more openly envisage ways in which their practice can be shaped by their equity-related learning during their Master's studies. Ideas for change that might previously have been regarded as inconceivable or, indeed, impossible can now be entertained (Latour, 2020).

Summary of Research Interview Themes

The Research Assistant (RA), Dr McKelvey, carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with teacher-participants, to contribute to the evaluation of how equity imperatives are translated into practice by education professionals and, more broadly, to explore their equity-related experiences in education settings.

The semi-structured interview approach was selected by Dr McKelvey because it facilitated the collection of comparable research data from participants and the identification of common experiences or patterns, while also allowing research participants to offer insights and raise issues that the researchers may not have known to address. Since the interview data contributed to the project team's focus on practice and on practitioners, it was valuable to create space for the voices of teacher-participants, and thus an interview approach that was structured less rigidly was selected.

The RA was known to the research participants prior to carrying out the interviews, due to her engagement in their Promoting Equity course at the University of Stirling. It should therefore be noted that Dr McKelvey had established a prior professional relationship with the participants, which has implications regarding researcher positionality and impact on the data emerging from the interviews. It is nevertheless also notable that this pre-established acquaintance may have encouraged teacher-participants to speak more openly about their experiences during the research interviews.

Due to restrictions introduced as a result of Covid-19, the interviews in question were carried out online rather than in person, using the Microsoft Teams platform through the University of Stirling, as appropriate, given data protection requirements.

Number of interviews: 5

Issues raised

A range of key issues was highlighted by teacher-participants during the interview process. As mentioned previously, this was one of the benefits of the chosen interview approach (semi-structured interviews), which allowed the discussion to follow a similar enough structure that any common themes, differences, or patterns that emerged across interview responses might be comparable, yet also afford teacher-participants to consider their experiences and to introduce topics that the researcher, Dr McKelvey, had not included in the interview schedule.

Teacher-participants commented on issues related both to the 'Promoting Equity' programme that they had followed and to their professional practice. A number of noteworthy issues raised in the course of the interviews will be illustrated below. In some cases, an allusion to a teacher-participant who discussed this issue, or who noted something significant relevant to it, has been included. This is only for reference, for use in this research, and any such notations are of course anonymised.

Promoting Equity course:

Course structure:

- Several teacher-participants highlighted that they felt much freer to engage the 'Promoting Equity' cohort meetings, than during the initial course lectures

  - It was noted that, had a longer period of time been dedicated to the 'Promoting Equity' course, this would have been beneficial. (PB)

- Opportunities to explore topics/theories in greater detail and to engage in related practice-based observations and individual research would have been welcomed. More practice-based connections, in general, would have been helpful. (PB)

  - The use of case studies described was, however, as useful. (PE)

- Drawing further connections between theoretical concepts and seminar discussions, highlighting key points, would have helped to consolidate learning. (PC)

Cohort learning experience:

- While small cohort size was beneficial, a more diverse cohort (primary/secondary; different roles in education) might have allowed for more varied perspectives and deeper discussions. (PB)

  - One teacher-participant stated that a larger cohort might have been beneficial, or desirable to course organisers (PE)

Challenges encountered:

- It was reported that returning to academic reading and writing was challenging (PC, PE)

  - It was suggested that it would have been helpful to have seminar time dedicated to reviewing and discussing previous cohorts' work.

- o PE commented on how helpful the poster presentations were because teacher-participants received useful feedback.

- **The impact of covid-19 on learning:**

    - o Necessary shift to virtual learning: in person meetings were deemed to be preferrable. (PA)

    - o Increased awareness of barriers (e.g. language barriers) and varying levels of access to technology for home learning. (PC)

- Several participants noted that some of the course resources were difficult to access (PA) and that it is important that all resources are readily available online.

- One teacher-participant suggested that more communication and connection with tutors during the essay writing period and the time leading up to the essay deadline would have been helpful.

    - o Noted the possibility of more consistent use of Canvas, in general during the course, but especially at that time.

- Funding for the 'Promoting Equity' modules: partial funding from local authorities made the opportunity more accessible

Professional practice:

Impact of covid-19:

- Digital exclusion: availability of technology is an accessibility and equity issue.

- Varying degrees of parental input and engagement during home learning.

- Concerns about lower quality teaching and resulting decline in pupil progress.

    - o Pressure on education professionals: "near on impossible" to meet pupils' needs.

- **Online learning:**

    - o gave an insight into the realities faced by some families, and an awareness of teacher-participants' own privilege. (PA)

    - o limits relational connection, which restricts education professionals in terms of promoting equity.

- impact on professionals: can be distressing.

- other support programmes that have been developed were restricted, e.g., period poverty schemes and nurture sessions. (PA)

- the sex and relationship education curriculum was disrupted and some older age groups missed out; this required a reorganisation of delivery. (PA)

Communities of practice:

- Even where equity awareness exists, there is reportedly often poor understanding/application of equity and equity-related issues.

  - Even where equity is acknowledged, related discussions often take place in staff meetings that do not include those with significant roles in supporting pupils, e.g., SLAs (PA).

    - Their awareness may therefore be more limited and training/professional development may not be compulsory.

  - Equity is discussed, even during recruitment processes, but it is often poorly understood in practice (PB).

- The prevalence of the banking method (Freire, 1970) raised as an ongoing issue, rather than it being primarily an old-fashioned/historical approach, or one favoured by more senior education professionals. (PB, PD)

Creative education practice – imagining otherwise:

- The value of play in education, throughout school stages, was highlighted. One teacher-participant reported feeling increased confidence in this practice as a result of undertaking the 'Promoting Equity' course (PB).

- There have been efforts by the local authority to shift away from the practice of splitting children into groups based on academic ability, in order to mix groups and to allow children to learn from one another. This approach allows for a focus on teachers as facilitators (rather than on the more traditional banking method (Freire, 1970) (PE).

  - There is greater awareness, too, of wellbeing for education professionals.

- (The wellbeing and the role of education professionals is connected to JI'A's and AJ's own conceptual framework (I'Anson & Jasper, 2017), is an issue that has emerged from the MaPD team's research, in general, and has been particularly illustrated by circumstances related to covid-19.)

Common themes

In the course of the interviews with teacher-participants, Dr McKelvey became aware of a number of key themes that were raised by several of the education professionals who participated in her research. These themes will be explored in greater detail below, but are as follows:

1. The value of broader understandings of communities of practice.

2. The importance of relationship building.

3. The need for multidirectional mentoring/transmission of ideas.

4. The importance of professional learning, learning community and opportunities to access learning spaces outside of the workplace, of which the 'Promoting Equity' course offered by the University of Stirling is an example.

1. Expanded, inclusive understandings of communities of practice

Communities of practice include:

- ITE/ECT colleagues

- Mid-career stage colleagues

- Senior colleagues

- Management

- Families and communities

2. Relationship building

The importance of:

- developing positive connections with families and communities

- o this can have a positive impact on pupils and on equity-related issues (socioeconomic factors, school attendance rates, academic attainment etc.)

- o it was noted that, having completed the 'Promoting Equity' course, events such as parents' evenings could be viewed as opportunities to develop these relationships.

- o Real impact was identified by one teacher-participant as taking equity into communities themselves, which can facilitate generational change. (PA)

- engaging in child-led approaches that empower and give children agency in their own learning.

- o The value of focusing on children's interests, within the parameters of the curriculum, was highlighted as a way in which education professionals can encourage children to engage in their learning. (PC, PD)

- o It was noted that knowing your pupils better and engaging with their interests can improve teaching. (PD)

- o The importance of communicating with children was emphasised, so as to find out how best to help them and how to advocate for them. (PD)

- o (There is a possible link here to imagining otherwise: reimagining relationships and power/agency dynamics in education may improve children's engagement with, and enjoyment of, their learning.)

- working alongside pupils and engaging in learning with them and learning from them. (PB)

- o "If I want to include all learners, I have to let go" (re. previous practice and approaches....)

- o Important to see children as children, as individuals, not just as pupils (re. play)

- engaging parents and giving them a voice in schools. (PB)

- o Parents have shown interest in the learning taking place through the 'Promoting Equity' course. The value of acknowledging teacher-participants' own ongoing learning was emphasised, as this humanises education professionals in the eyes of parents. (PB)

  - o It was noted that it is possible to share ideas with parents and include them in decision-making process, which gives them a sense of agency.

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- This helps to establish a partnership between teachers and parents, to support children.

3. Mentoring and the transmission of ideas

- This should be multidirectional: cohort ECTs, and also: cohort senior colleagues and management. (PD)

  - Additionally: it was recognised that there is value in mentors learning from, and being inspired by, mentees. Mentoring relationships provide an opportunity to share practice, build new relationships and engage in dialogue. (PB)

- Mentoring can also expand awareness among education professionals of challenges that are faced (e.g., funding, accessibility and personal circumstances) by ECTs.

- Teacher-participants' experiences with the 'Promoting Equity' module were confidence-boosting and enabled them to reflect more critically on the curriculum and on practice.

  - this empowered them when engaging with management, by helping them to build the knowledge base and confidence to question senior colleagues/management (re well-being, against banking approach?), and to justify their own (equity-related) practice. (PD)

  - it also encouraged them to value and to trust in their own professional experience and practice, and to learn about themselves as education professionals. (PD)

4. The importance of professional learning, community and spaces

Professional learning:

- Understandings of equity:

  - Equity vs equality was raised multiple times during the interviews.

    - PC referenced the equity/equality drawing and suggested an alternative: three different plants (source of food; bee-friendly flowers; grass), which all require sunshine and water, but may have differing additional needs in different seasons/settings.

    - PC additionally noted that there may yet be other plants, with individual needs, that are not yet known, to highlight that different needs and different barriers may arise over time or may not always be visible.

- o "Different people need different things at different times."

    - PA's 'in a nutshell' understanding/summary of equity.

    - PA has used 'equity' when communicating with families and pupils and has heard pupils use it among themselves.

    - PD: children may hide things they are struggling with and seem as though they are fine on the surface. It is important for education professionals to be aware of hidden/invisible equity issues, and of those that may develop or arise at different times.

        - The role of social capital was acknowledged.

- o PE discussed the importance of understanding what children need to be as good as they want to be and can be, of providing them with the resources and the tools they need in order to try not to feel senses of failure.

    - PE referenced equity as: each child has a sense of "I can do this" and is able to persevere. Noted that education professionals should show children that they can indeed achieve/succeed/flourish.

Learning community:

- The value of the small cohort size on the 'Promoting Equity' course was repeatedly highlighted during the interviews.

- Teacher-participants noted that a 'safe space' was established on the 'Promoting Equity' course, which was welcoming and non-judgemental. (PB, PE)

    - o The cohort was described as collegiate (PD) and it was noted that it provided an environment in which teacher-participants could open up (PE), without fear of being shut down. (PE)

- The cohort was described as a support network; one which was unafraid to challenge one another. (PB)

    - o The cohort was reportedly able to build a network for the future. (PC)

- Teacher-participants valued the differing professional experiences and perspectives shared within the cohort.

- Discussions and the range of perspectives shared by the cohort helped with challenges in returning to academic work. (PE)

- Other teacher-participants asked questions and raised issues that PE may not have thought of, which was noted to be helpful.

- Teacher-participants were able to draw from their particular interests and/or professional experiences when developing their course assignments, e.g., the posters. This was interesting for fellow teacher-participants (PE), in addition to allowing for connections between theory and teacher-participants' professional experiences and practice.

- One teacher-participant (PE) noted that ideas and inspiration could be drawn from fellow teacher-participants' poster presentations and subsequently applied in professional practice.

  - Ensuring the provision of Additional Support for Learning was the example given: PE began using a 'Meeting Learners' Needs' chart, which focuses on literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, rather than on wider learning needs.

  - It was reported that implementation of this practice can be challenging because, without additional support staff, the teacher-participant is alone with children in the classroom and, due to resource constraints, tends to focus on those children with greater needs.

Higher education spaces and resources:

- The value of the diverse range of resources used on the course was emphasised by multiple teacher-participants during the research interviews.

  - The use of visual, as well as written, resources was highlighted. (PE)

  - Teacher-participants reported being challenged by readings, but also finding that the variety of resources included in the course made for more accessible, interesting and engaging content.

  - Resources were described as thought-provoking (PE). It was considered to be less daunting to share thoughts and to ask questions.

- Liz Lochhead's (2017) poem 'The Choosing' was highlighted by several teacher-participants as particularly enjoyable/memorable.

- The readings and resources included in 'Promoting Equity' course teaching were described as relevant. (PE).

  - It was considered possible to relate the readings and other course resources to professional experiences, to practice, and to pupils. This reportedly helped teacher-participants to draw connections between theory and practice. It was appreciated that, when engaging with more challenging texts or conceptual frameworks, the tutors related these to practice: acts of translation. (PD)

  - Some resources were described as surprising and unexpected (e.g., those featuring Swift's (1729) cannibalism satire, and the Jesus Camp (2006) in the US), which widened awareness of different perspectives and provoked critical engagement with teacher-participants' own practice, and how their own practice might be perceived by others. (PE)

  - The resources used on the course were deemed to be useful, were teacher-participants to engage in leadership events regarding equity. (PD)

Noteworthy observations and feedback from teacher-participants

In addition to the aforementioned common themes and issues raised during the course of the research interviews, teacher-participants shared a number of interesting and useful reflections and comments, which are summarised below, concerning the impact of their professional learning on their practice.

Communities of practice and the transmission of ideas:

- Teacher-participants related examples of times when they had shared their learning with colleagues:

  - Referencing theoretical frameworks encountered on the course. (PA)

  - Referencing resources engaged with on the course. (PA)

  - Referencing equity-related learning from the course and passing on equity-related learning and ideas to colleagues. (PE)

- Colleagues had reportedly generally held the idea that undertaking a Higher Education course would be difficult. PE shared some of the resources used on the course with colleagues, which garnered interested and positively surprised responses. PE was encouraged to share learning in staff meetings.

    o Sharing their own course assignments with colleagues. (PC, PE)

        - Including, in one case, with the teacher-participant's headteacher, who then did further reading. (PC)

    o Teacher-participants reported positive engagement from colleagues and headteachers. (PA, PC, PE)

Connections between 'Promoting Equity' course learning in practice – imagining otherwise:

- It was noted that awareness of (in)equity issues increased due to course learning, because teacher-participants were encouraged to consider potential barriers, and actions to lessen those barriers. (PC)

    o Appreciation expressed regarding the gender issues raised by AJ.

- One example of how the course learning facilitated imagining otherwise: shock was expressed that sometimes, it isn't possible (or even helpful) to follow the Curriculum for Excellence, because doing so would not help the child in question to flourish. (PC)

    o PD: Can be helpful for education professionals to use their initiative and step away from the curriculum. It is important that they can justify why they are doing so.

- Critical thinking skills were developed during the course learning. (PA, PC)

- The value of nurturing approaches was referenced by a couple of teacher-participants. (PA, PB)

- The importance of play was discussed, and examples of good practice were referenced:

    o the Therapeutic Play Area (TP). This provides support for children and for parents. All children have access to TP timetabled in, which sets it apart from other initiatives that have focused on those children with greater needs. (PC, PD)

    o 'Under the trees': this provides an opportunity for children who struggle with classroom learning for long periods to engage in lessons outside and to work on other issues, e.g., emotion regulation. (PD)

- o A gardening club for children who are less confident or who struggle with insecurities. (PD)

- PE: 'Excellence and Equity' meetings were introduced at the school in question, which approximately coincided with the beginning of the 'Promoting Equity' course. The 'Meeting Learners' Needs' chart is used to track children's needs, monitor support and evaluate the outcome for the child. This is then carried through to the next term.

  - o PE noted that this process facilitates report writing, parents' meetings and tracking support and outcomes throughout school stages.

  - o PE found the equity course helpful to role as a Probationer Mentor for beginning teachers. Activities include equity-related discussions, preparing beginning teachers for 'Excellence and Equity' meetings and to equip themselves with their 'equitable evidence'.

Conclusion

Overall, some very interesting insights, in addition to useful feedback, emerged from the research interviews. Teacher-participants reflected on their learning experience on the 'Promoting Equity' course and also discussed ways in which this professional learning has influenced their approaches to and experiences of their practice. In particular, they highlighted engagement from their communities of practice – in the inclusive, expansive understanding of these communities that has emerged from the MaPD team's research – and the increased confidence they felt in developing and justifying equity-related approaches. Dr McKelvey was able to identify several common themes that arose from the interview responses (broader understandings of communities of practice; the importance of relationship building, multidirectional mentoring/dissemination of ideas, and professional learning communities, spaces and resources), that have informed the MaPD team's work, going forward.

Outputs 1

SERA Presentation

Stirling Project: *Making a Positive Difference (MaPD)*
John I'Anson, Alison Jasper & Róisín McKelvey

Fostering critical educational spaces as catalysts for translating equity policy and theory, so as to transform communities of practice.

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BE THE DIFFERENCE

Stirling Project: *Making a Positive Difference (MaPD)*

Our Point of Departure:

Findings from previous research on early career phase suggest, re. equity:

- beginning teachers struggle to put theory into practice
- the quality of mentoring support for this is variable
- university spaces, used constructively, could afford more scope for critical challenge and support
- ***Taking an oblique angle***:
- working with mentors to offer new resources for thinking and practicing in relation to equity
- confidence to support colleagues in negotiating equity as an *educational* challenge

UNIVERSITY of STIRLING

BE THE DIFFERENCE

Stirling Project: *Making a Positive Difference (MaPD)*

Our Response:

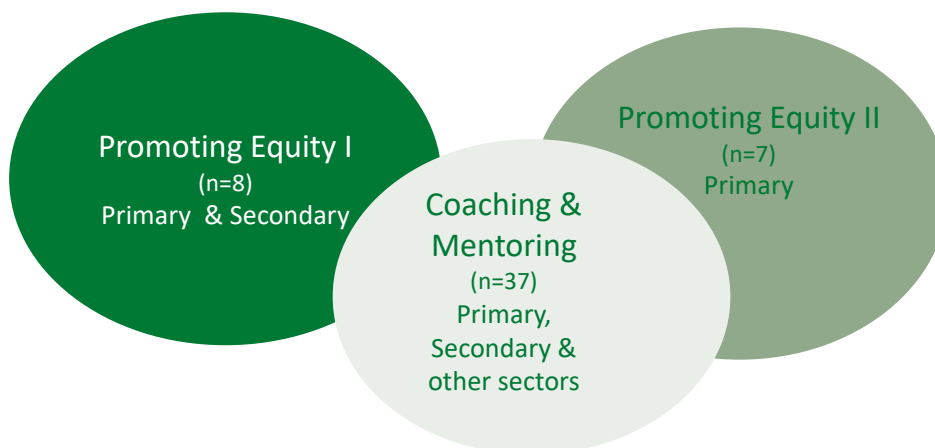***Project has worked with teachers at Master's level...***

- and their communities of practice in mostly challenging contexts

… to create a critical space in relation to equity, so as to:

- challenge, interrupt, and question habitual modes of thinking
- develop knowledge and confidence towards creative reframing and innovating in practice
- provide opportunities for each teacher to carry out a mentoring intervention in their own context

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Stirling Project: *Making a Positive Difference (MaPD)*

Cohorts

Promoting Equity I
(n=8)
Primary & Secondary

Coaching & Mentoring
(n=37)
Primary, Secondary & other sectors

Promoting Equity II
(n=7)
Primary

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Thinking about equity as an *educational* matter of concern

Education as consisting in the interplay of:
- critical
- ethical and
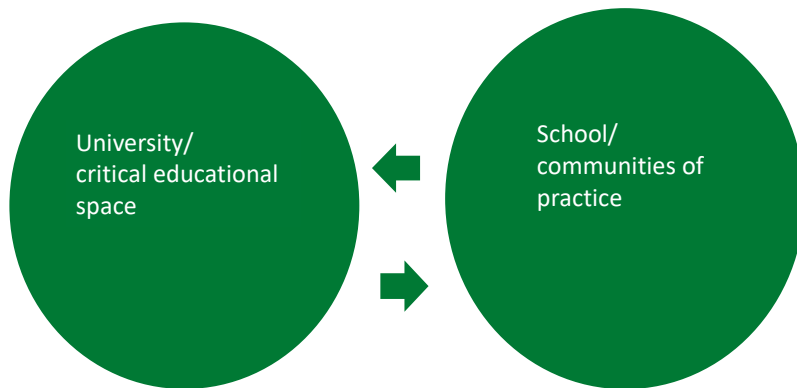- experimental elements

(I'Anson & Jasper 2017, 2021)
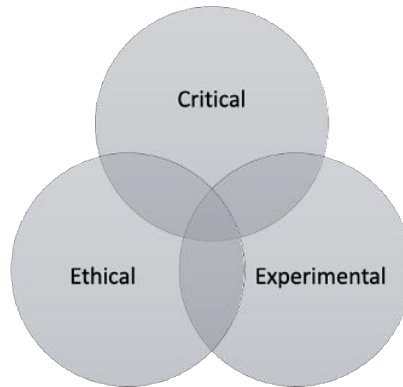
What are the implications for equity?

Critical element(i): *language / discourses of equity*

Equity as (non-specific) responsibility
metaphor of 'gap' closure
implies intervention
already known (mastery)
literal language
reductionistic
focus upon socio-economic attainment

VS.

Equity as Educational
plurality of languages and discourses
inter-disciplinary
questioning metaphors and their effects
how translations worked out *here*
acknowledging
un/knowings-in-practice?

Critical element(ii): *acts of translation*

University/
critical educational
space

School/
communities of
practice

(See: Reeves, 2013
Reeves & I'Anson, 2014
I'Anson & Jasper 2017, chpt. 2
re. spatiality and education)

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Ethical element:

Re-purposing tools:

How 'learning and teaching' assembled

- Behaviourist assumptions inform planning

➢ Equity and rights-informed practice grafted onto a prior, teacher-centric framing

➢ e.g. 'Normal Desirable State' N.D.S. (Brown and Macintyre, 1993)

How equity events might be conceived otherwise

- Metaphors that inform events:

➢ 'Scaffolding' - presupposes an already known structure

➢ nautical metaphors – being at sea – might acknowledge contingencies better?

Broader range of literary tropes, figurations that might enhance practice / challenge assumptions

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Experimental element:

Opportunities to:
- try out initiatives in relation to equity
- evaluate existing projects etc.

Working with mentor/ee/CsofP to identify issues
- exploration of issues encountered in translating theory
- drawing upon wider language
- acknowledging un/knowings-in-practice
- supporting practitioners in their negotiations

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Stirling Project: *Making a Positive Difference (MaPD)*

Impacts

Mentor ⟷ Mentee

Wider communities of practice

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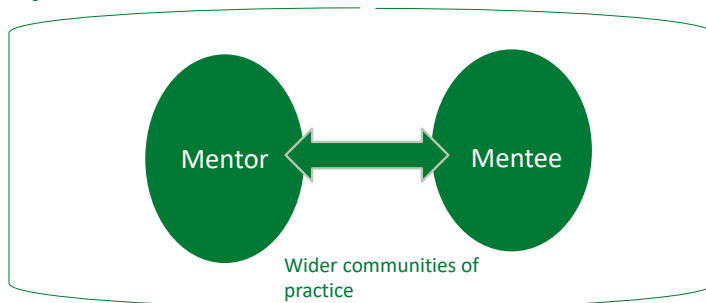
BE THE DIFFERENCE

Stirling Project: *Making a Positive Difference (MaPD)*

Some Key Questions

1. How is equity to be understood?

» language, disciplines, scope?

2. In promoting equity, are we engaging in some form of social engineering or is this a more open-ended *educational* project?

» education as the interplay of critical, ethical and creative/experimental elements

3. What are the conditions necessary for making critical educational spaces?

» spaces as separate from-and-yet-related-to everyday organisational structures

» is mentoring vital for translations to be educational?

4. If so, what are the implications of this?

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Outputs: 2

Book: *Promoting Equity*

A central output from the Making a Positive Difference project will be the publication of the book, *Promoting Equity*, by the research team. Given the potential impact of this project on inclusive teaching practices, it is considered important to support the availability of knowledge pertaining not only to the conceptual learning offered by the equity-related modules included in the MSc in Professional Education and Leadership programme, but also to the application of this learning to pedagogical practice, within communities of practice. As such, the book will encourage wider awareness of the issues addressed through the modules in question.

Promoting Equity discusses equity in the context of education, drawing on the wide range of resources utilised in the University of Stirling's 'Promoting Equity: theory, principles and critique' module. The text is designed as a core text for the aforementioned course, broadly following its outline, highlighting the conceptual approaches to equity that are explored by teacher-participants and the way in which those relate to their professional practice, with a view to developing more equitable practices. The authors' intention is that the book will also be of interest and value to teachers who have not associated with the course in question, to education professionals and to policymakers.

It should be noted that, in order to ensure that it is as useful and as widely relevant a text as possible, one key aspect of the book is its grounding in practice and in the experiences of teachers. As such, *Promoting Equity* draws on the insights of the teacher-participants with whom the project team have been working, highlighting their illustrations of equity-related challenges encountered in their professional practice, their understandings of the theoretical approaches they have explored due to their learning on the MSc programme and their plans for imagining otherwise in the future. The students have responded positively to both the book project itself and to the opportunity to contribute to its development by sharing their experiences. All content that draws on the participation of teacher-participants is of course subject to established ethical considerations.

The insights offered by the teacher-participants additionally inform ongoing critical revisions to the 'Promoting Equity' module content itself, allowing the project team to note any potential areas for future improvement so as to shape the courses in the ways that are most useful in supporting teachers to develop their professional learning and practice with regard to equity.

The project team envisage this text as a resource that will support teachers, beyond those teacher-participants who have been involved in the 'Promoting Equity' modules, as well as policymakers, to challenge existing assumptions and pedagogical frameworks, to imagine otherwise in a way that allows them to develop more inclusive policies and practices and to

build these into their communities of practice, thus fostering sustainable changes that promote a more equitable education system.

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