



COMBATTING MARGINALISATION BY CO-CREATING EDUCATION

Methods, Theories and Practices from the
Perspectives of Young People

EDITED BY

David Thore Gravesen • Kaz Stuart
Mette Bunting • Sidse Hølvig Mikkelsen
Peter Hornbæk Frostholt

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COMBATTING
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the Perspectives of Young People

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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PART 1 BACKGROUND
DISCUSSIONS, THEORETICAL
AND METHODOLOGICAL
ACCOUNTS

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BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK, THE PROJECT AND THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

David Thore Gravesen, Sidse Hølvig Mikkelsen,
and Peter Hornbæk Frostholt

As an example (...), when asked if she had any hobbies, one informant responded smilingly that she loved dogs. Following up on this interest, the conversation led the informant to reveal a tattoo that included the name of a neighbour's now deceased dog. From there, a dialogue developed in which, rather than responding to inquiries, the informant became a storyteller who proceeded to tell of her love for animals and of her loneliness and lack of human contact.

(Bunting & Moshuus, 2017, p. 6)

Our societies are changing. With restructured labour markets, the demand for young people to complete training and education is reinforced. When writing this book and during the international Erasmus+ funded project *Margin-alisation and Co-created Education* (MaCE), that is the foundation of it, we all wished to learn about young people's experiences in the education system, not least those young people who are challenged in one way or another. And even though we all studied educational literature and are aware of research on our respective academic fields, our main ambition was to learn directly from young people how they had experienced ups and downs in their school careers. The MaCE project builds on four cornerstones, which also dictates the order of the following four chapters in Part 1 of this book.

Firstly, it is an innovative, co-created and socio-cultural learning project, shared among scholars and higher education students. Secondly, it is a project that focuses on young people *in* context, rather than young people *as* the context. Thirdly, to understand young people *in* context, we suggest the *Equalities Literacy Framework* that enables students, researchers and practitioners to reflect and act on inequalities in education. Fourthly, the MaCE project builds on qualitative research jointly conducted by students and scholars in the project.

When carrying out the research and interviewing young informants, we looked for stories and the contexts around them. Instead of focussing on statistics, numbers and figures asking 'how many?' or 'how often?', we aimed at questions such as 'what was that like?', 'how did that make you feel?' and 'would you like to tell me more about your experiences with...'. Taking the perspective of the informants and letting them lead the direction of the interviews has been crucial throughout the extensive data collection across the three participating countries. Accordingly, when students or

scholars in the project engaged in conversation with young people, they would always look for – and try to make room for – the informants’ narratives. Instead of posing pre-prepared questions, the interviewers would start the interview sessions with broad questions about day-to-day events, and comments from informants would then lead to more personal and relevant accounts. Through follow-up responses, our ambition was ‘*to allow the informants the space to tell their own stories*’ (Moshuus & Eide, 2016).

This specific interviewing technique, named *The Indirect Approach*, was developed by Norwegian researchers Geir Moshuus and Ketil Eide in the early 2010s (Moshuus & Eide, 2016). When applied during the course of this study, we have had numerous fruitful discussions on the benefits, limitations and ethics of this methodology, just as we did with aspects of all four cornerstones in the project. Throughout the chapters in this book, the reader will learn much more about such discussions and what it means for the analyses and conclusions and how the MaCE project underpins it all.

Using the phrase *Bringing People Together* in the title for this introductory chapter is very intentional. The core idea behind all activities in the project is exactly that. Nationally, the project has brought people together, cross-nationally too. Throughout the three-yearlong research project, more than 120 interviews with young people from various backgrounds and educational settings have been conducted. First and foremost, we all wish to thank the informants who generously shared their narratives with us. It has been the most uplifting, compelling and inspiring experience to listen to your stories, and sometimes haunting too. More than 50 students from different educational programmes related to teaching, pedagogy and youth work in the three countries participated as co-researchers. Some of the students were doing their bachelor programme alongside their affiliation with the project, whereas others

were master students. Some were even professional practitioners who ‘went back’ to school, to participate in the project. Scholars and administrative co-workers also contributed to reaching the objectives in the project. Scholars conducted interviews, discussed with students and circulated findings, whereas administrative co-workers made things run smoothly when questions and issues related to organising and finances surfaced.

The three collaborating universities, University of Cumbria in the United Kingdom, The University College of Southeast Norway and VIA University College in Denmark all played their part in fulfilling the project ambitions. In the first year, we designed the details of the project, discussing literature and preparing for the involvement with co-researching students. In the following two years, we have had two cycles of student participation, each round involving interviewing, transcribing, analysis and dissemination of results. Both scholars and students received training in *The Indirect Approach* and learned about core issues in the socio-cultural learning approach that is underlying the educational part of the project. We also developed a framework entitled *The Equalities Literacy Model*, which enables students, researchers and practitioners to reflect and understand disadvantages and privileges in education and accordingly act to promote and develop equity in education. Alongside all this, we have circulated our findings and results in regular classes in our universities, at practitioners’ seminars within the project and at research conferences around Europe. We created an online handbook for other teachers and researchers to look into, if they want inspiration for similar activities, projects and approaches. We published articles in peer-reviewed research journals and even set up our own online journal, entitled *Youth Voices in Education: Methods, Theory,*

Practice, in which co-researcher students and scholars publish articles based on the project. In there, readers will find both thematic papers about young people's experiences and challenges in and out of schools and methodological papers addressing important questions related to *The Indirect Approach*.

Co-creating with students throughout the project has been the most fruitful experience, and challenging too! Having relied on traditional hierarchies with scholars taking the role of incessant authorities in all stages might have been easier with carefully described plans formulated and followed. However, when taking on the socio-cultural learning approach, things take time to be discussed, reflected on and critiqued, collectively and in the open. Doing so often proved to be challenging, as we were different people, from different disciplines and different countries. Fortunately, all welcomed such challenges and did their best to make ends meet. Accordingly, we had many stimulating sessions with creative and thought-provoking input from both scholars and students. Obviously, some things were taken care of and decided by the scholars, but the core idea of sharing, giving (away) responsibility and thereby reducing the hierarchical distance between scholars and students permeated all phases of the project. This book itself reflects these discussions and features chapters from scholars and students alike.

This book is structured around three parts. Part 1 consists of background discussions and theoretical and methodological accounts, whereas Part 2 is based on empirical findings, narratives and analytical takes, some written by participating students alone or in groups and some co-authored between students and scholars in the project. In Part 3, with the preceding chapters in mind, we look at the implications and potentials for future practice within education and research, before guest author Michelle Fine rounds it all up with

reflections and comments on the book and the ideas behind it. On the following pages, we will shortly introduce each chapter in the three parts.

In Chapter 2, *Socio-cultural Learning: Students as Co-researchers, a Key for Students' Success*, Mette Bunting, Sidse Hølvig Mikkelsen and Paul Cammack clarify the joint student–researcher learning environment developed and applied in the MaCE project. The chapter explains how students from both bachelor and master programmes across the three nationalities were engaged and how they were trained and worked alongside experienced researchers. Building on examples from the design and implementation phases of the MaCE project, the authors illustrate how socio-cultural learning can facilitate mutual engagement and create new understandings of shared experiences between participants.

Chapter 3, *The Context of Early School Leavers*, by Kaz Stuart, Mette Bunting, Sidse Hølvig Mikkelsen and Geir Moshuus, digs deeper into the various labels used to describe young people facing challenges in school. The chapter argues that negative framing of young people as responsible for their own situations and their own faults as individuals is pathologizing and illustrative of both deficit and meritocratic discourse. From the perspectives of educational policy in the three national contexts, critical theory and youth narratives, the authors draw attention to the schools and the crucial role they play, when young people are ‘disenfranchised’ or ‘pushed out’ from classrooms.

In Chapter 4, *Equalities Literacy Framework*, Kaz Stuart and David Thore Gravesen present the framework called ‘Equalities Literacy’ that evolved from the first yearlong action research cycle of the project. The *Equalities Literacy Framework* is a holistic model comprising five elements: lived experience of context, positioning by others, technologies of