

Forms of institutionalized symbolic violence and resistance in the journey of a cohort of adult literacy learners

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Abstract

This paper explores how the public domain of schooling has shaped a cohort of Adult Literacy learners in the North of England. It highlights the important role that education plays in providing cultural and social resources required to organise an upward mobility shift; just as it serves as a site in which the inequalities that already exist are reproduced. The study explores the forms in which Bourdieu's symbolic violence was visited on the cohort and how they resisted. It demonstrates the importance of offering learners, who do not fit with dominant ideologies a voice and a validation of their literacies, leading to the development of knowledge and the creation of a critical space for curriculum development, learner transformation and consciousness-raising.

Keywords: *Adult Literacy, violence, curriculum, consciousness raising, empowerment*

Introduction

Within the discourse on violence in education, much attention has been focused on physical (See e.g. Deuchar, & Martin, 2015), sexual (See e.g. NUS Connect, 2019 and Young et al 2018), and gender-related forms of violence (Parkes, Heslop, Johnson Ross, Westerveld, and Unterhalter, 2016). Very little attention, however, is focused on a rather surreptitious form of violence labelled symbolic violence (Holmes, 2013, Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016, & Bourdieu, 2001a). This study aims to explore this form of violence within British education particularly because many disadvantaged young people are considered marginalised because of this type of violence (Deuchar, & Martin, 2015). Understanding some of the complexities involved in this context would enhance efforts currently being made to address the marginalization of a significant percentage of young people within the society.

The concept of symbolic violence

A poignant insight from Bourdieu's engagement with social class is the prominence given to symbolic relations which was premised on the argument that, in class analysis, both economic and symbolic dimensions are represented (Weininger, 2005, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Differences in status are essentially indicators of lifestyle and manifestations of social class. Perceptions, attitudes and practices within society which are formed and shaped by the power relations structure eventually become 'inscribed onto bodies in the form of dispositions' (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, & Sanghera, 2016, p2) and remain influential even when conditions alter. Furthermore, they can dictate the dominant perception of how events and resources are to be structured within a society (Bourdieu, 2001a). As such, societal actors may come to view the relations between classes 'from the perspective

of the dominant thus making them appear as natural' (Holmes, 2013, Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016, p2 & Bourdieu, 2001a).

Symbolic boundaries between classes are responsible for the emergence of the various modalities through which symbolic power is exercised (Weininger, 2005). Amongst the more important markers of these boundaries are preferences and practices which are clustered and associated with different classes within the social space shared by all classes (Bourdieu, 1998). Symbolic violence occurs when the preferences and practices of one class are applied and imposed on members of other classes (Weininger, 2005), such that the preferences of one social class are ignored while the preferences and practices of another social class are valued and legitimized.

Elements of violence are often open to a process of misrecognition (Lovell, 2007, James, 2015). Misrecognition operates in education 'through an arbitrary curriculum that is "naturalised", often leading to a situation in which social classes and their attendant hierarchy and relationships are presented as a natural structure' (Grenfell & James, 1998, pp. 23–24, cited in James 2015 p100) and is usually located in the sub-conscious but impacts on 'conscious and calculated decisions about how to act' (James, 2015, P101).

Studies have demonstrated how symbolic violence can remove the recipients' agency and voice and be reproduced in 'everyday interactions, social practices, institutional processes and disposition' in the context of gendered violence and homophobia (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016, 1). Such domination-induced violence can be 'multiplied' and can constitute a 'paradigmatic form of symbolic violence' (Weininger, 2005, p 156, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p170). Other studies have explored the notion of inequity, non-inclusive environments and authority (Bujorean, 2016), identity and school choice with a focus on the qualities learners are seen to

possess (Connolly and Healy, 2004), and the relationships to institutionalised violence and its potential for promoting peace.

Resistance

Though symbolic violence often manifests in a seemingly ineluctable form, resistance is possible (Bourdieu, 1991 & Orser, 2007). Using a collective identity to criticise rather than normalise and assimilate symbolic violence can empower those affected (Samuel, 2013). Resistance also occurs when the dominated recognise and utilise the material culture of the dominant to resist (Mullins, 2001). Resistance can be furthered through unofficial strategies that include the dominated group's conscious development of close association with the dominant group, a conscious development of interdependency, the development of own personal value system by the dominated, and a deliberate limiting of intrusion (Moukarbel, 2009).

In education, resistance is enhanced through the ability of the dominated to seize opportunities provided by members of the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1991 & Orser, 2007). Because symbolic violence can be surreptitious, it is almost impossible for the dominated to further their interests unless ambivalent members of the dominant class offer them the required instrument for their transformation. In a paradoxical twist, therefore, 'the instruments that will enable them to break away from the representations generated in the immediate complicity of social and mental structures and which tend to ensure the continued reproduction of the distribution of symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1991, p244), are often provided by members of the dominant class. Teachers, who often belong to the dominant group sometimes 'inhabit a contradictory social space within which they must maintain an ambivalent

relationship to the producers of cultural materials and their products' (Bourdieu 1984, p 316).

A few studies have challenged the claims of Bourdieu that misrecognition has prevented us from 'recognising that all pedagogic actions is objectively symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, Watkins, 2018, p 47). Watkins (2018) projected a re-interpretation of pedagogy as not 'confined to schooling or any other form of institutionalised education' and argues that it must be seen as 'a primary mechanism through which we have come to be' (p 48). This re-interpretation enables us to capture the rather less obvious avenues of symbolic violence such as attitude towards learners, established teaching and learning strategies and curriculum context.

Perceptions of Adult literacy, symbolic violence and our research questions

The prevalence of poor people, people of colour, immigrants, and women in adult literacy classes almost compels subjugation and symbolic violence (D'Amico, 2003). Educators appear to impose class lifestyles on their students, as they are often 'mandated to teach in ways that reinforce, rather than transform, differences of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation that affect the life chances of learners' (p18). The reinforcement of inequalities in the field of adult literacy education is fuelled by the recognition of a dominant discourse that recognises a cognitive form of literacy as 'the literacy' and imposes a set of curricula that draw on the dominant discourse of literacy (Author, 2014). Although many studies in education have recognised the potential and real conflicts that could arise from this situation, the focus has predominantly been on the instruments of imposition and subjugation rather than on the ways in which such impositions manifest on learners. For example, Black & Bee (2017) identify the ruling class agendas of international and national agencies as

instruments of imposition, thus resulting in adult literacy providers failing to meet the adult literacy needs of working-class students (p1).

In spite of the very obvious vulnerability of adult literacy learners, very limited attention is paid to the impact of such imposition and subjugation on these students (James, 2015). More importantly, this situation of imposition is seldom associated with the notion of symbolic violence. As a result, the reinforcement of class-induced literacy curriculum is often under-investigated. When studies have engaged with these issues, there has been ‘great variability in what we might call ‘depth in use’ (James, 2015, p98). In some cases, inequalities inherent in the imposition of adult literacy, its curriculum and the attendant interaction with learners from poor classes are often ‘misrecognised’. Such misrecognition applies to those on whom violence had been visited, perpetrators and sometimes associates of the victims (Lovell, 2007).

Although the aftermath of symbolic violence is often found in adult literacy classes, the origin sometimes is ignored. Some studies have highlighted the nature of education ‘as a concealed power’ (Kupfer, 2015) while others have reiterated the use of educational structures in schools to perpetuate symbolic violence (Bujorean, 2016). What is missed out frequently, however, is the carry-over effect of such violence which means that students on whom violence had been visited arrive at the next stage of their education bearing the scar. It is in this context that the structure of FE teaching and learning becomes important. It brings to the fore the argument that FE-based transformative teaching and learning offers ‘a transformative critical space that

restores students' hope and agency' that can 'subvert the prescriptive, linear spaces of compulsory education'(Author & xxxx, 2018, p 529) .

We suggest that the seeming insensitivity of adult literacy provisions to the plight of students, who have endured symbolic violence is informed by the dominant perceptions of literacy. Street (1995) explored the engagement with the ideological as against autonomous perceptions of literacy. Developing from this base, other studies including Barton and Hamilton (2000), The New London Group (1996) and Author and author (2015) have explored the nature of the social dimension of adult literacy which recognises literacy as a social practice. This contrasts with a perception of literacy as a cognitive skill and which has tended to dominate and inform policy and practice, particularly in the UK. Author & Author (2016) set out how the latter might conflict with the establishment of a democratic learning space which could reduce the incidences of symbolic violence and give voice to the dominated learners. However, because of the dominance of the cognitive perceptions of literacy, and contrary to the reality in some cases, the landscape appears to create the impression that subjugation and symbolic violence persists in many adult literacy provision settings. Nonetheless, FE colleges are often able to rise beyond the dictates of the dominant perception of literacy and in many cases provide opportunities for transformation (Author and XXX 2018).

Research questions

Students from working class backgrounds often end up in FE colleges.

Such students are usually recipients of symbolic violence (Archer et al. 2018). But because symbolic violence is both varied and surreptitious in form, incidences of symbolic violence are often misrecognised and remain unaddressed and unchallenged (James 2015). Addressing and challenging symbolic violence requires the

collaboration of various stakeholders including those negatively affected by it (Moukarbel, 2009 & Mullins, 2001). Therefore, in order to address the problem, the various forms of symbolic violence, the relationship between entrenched structures and the visitation of symbolic violence on various groups, and the forms of successful resistance need to be identified and utilised. It is in this context that this study sets out to answer three research questions.:

1. In what forms do the dominant perceptions of the entrenched and more powerful classes visit symbolic violence on under-privileged learners within the UK school sector?
2. How do the entrenched structures help to visit symbolic violence on learners?
3. What processes could facilitate resistance to symbolic violence?

Methodology

The research group included 16 participants attending a part-time literacy programme in a FE college. Initial contact was during a tutorial session at which students talked about their educational journeys. This inadvertently initiated a process of reflection with the students presenting their experiences (Costley and Fulton, 2019). The researcher invited all the students to participate voluntarily in the research. In recognition of ethical issues around voluntary participation, detailed information about the research, related activities and withdrawal rights (BERA, 2018, & Lavrakas, 2008) was provided. The researchers paid particular attention to ‘socioeconomic circumstances in determining which steps must be put in place to protect the exercise of free will’ (Lavrakas, 2008, p1). To avoid pressure, students were given time to make a decision.

Data collection was through individual semi-structured life-story

interviews which encouraged participants to ‘reflect on their experiences and actions’, to recognise the paradigms – assumptions, frameworks and patterns of thought and behaviour – that shape our thinking and action’ (RDS 2015, p1). Reflections by students constituted one aspect of the research (Fook, 2004), and was initially introduced through life-story interviews (Costley and Fulton, 2019). Further, reflection informed the interview structure, as each preceding one informed the schedule of the successive one. Reflection thus encouraged a form of participant action research (PAR). Apart from PAR’s established democratic, equitable, liberating, and life-enhancing features (Kach & Kralik, 2006), it enabled us to gain our participants’ feelings and views without control or manipulation (MacDonald, 2012), and to find answers to our research questions.

However, there was an issue around researcher positionality and reflexivity in this research. This relates to one researcher, who because of personal experience and her role as a tutor, was seen as an ‘insider’. It was recognised that this researcher’s role and experience could impact on our interviews and the interpretation of data. In line with Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009), we considered reflexivity and positionality in the context of the knowledge that we aimed to produce. This meant that we considered the positionality of the researcher as an essential component of the context of knowledge production. In response, we ensured that we distanced this researcher from the interviews and ensured that our participants were aware of the difference in the researcher’s roles as a researcher and as a tutor.

Further, we recognised potential impact that the experience and role of the researcher could have on the type of knowledge we produce, as knowledge would emerge from our understanding and the interpretation of data. As Alvesson &

Sköldbberg (2009) note, reflexivity generally pays ‘attention to the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes, as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer’ (p8). Empirical data such as the one we aimed to generate in this study are ‘a product of interpretations’ (Corlett & Mavin, 2019, p3). As such, we paid particular attention to the ‘theoretical assumptions’ and ‘pre-understandings’ (P3) that this researcher could bring to our interpretation of data. As a result, we were able to distance these variables from our interpretation when necessary.

As part of our response to the positionality of the researcher, we ensured that the researcher consciously assumed a position of neutrality in the interpretation of some of the contributions of the participants. Further, we included an obligatory process of reflexive introspection (Finlay, 2002) to avoid undue.

Data interpretation and analysis draw on Bourdieu’s work as a Contributory framework for thematic analysis. Narratives from interviews were thoroughly digested, coded and subjected to semantic associations to enable themes to emerge. Codes were allocated drawing on the discourse on symbolic violence represented in the literature. As such, the analysis was essentially deductive, as the existing discourse had already provided an insight into the potential themes anticipated by the researchers (Mortensen, 2019).

Findings and discussions

Symbolic violence in the rejection of participants' capital

The narratives of our participants indicated that the rejection of their symbolic capital was a prime element of symbolic violence. The power of symbolic capital, what is valued and why, offers an insight into the experiences of our participants and how those in a position of power perceive them. Their narratives revealed features of the rejection of symbolic capital which relates to Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a system of dispositions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, Nicolaescu, 2010). It encapsulates the process the objective social structure is subsumed under and absorbed into a set of subjective dispositions, reiterating the call to shift from models based on negotiation to one based on domination (Samuel 2013).

The imposition and domination our participants experienced reflected the dominance of a subjective set of dispositions which meant that their dispositions, and their capital, were ignored, rejected and rebuffed. This is a process of delegitimisation, a by-product of judgement carried out by the dominant class (Davenport 2014). The rejection manifested in various aspects of their initial engagement including choices around the time of lectures. Encapsulating this rejection were comments such as;

'No one thinks you know why you are in school and what you want from school---- only what they think you should want'

'They think you don't know how to dress and want to tell you how to dress' and,

'... You are student and your time and life is same as other students.. but you have more.. like your daughter's got to go to school, you got to

feed em, dress them before. If you don't they send them back from school and you are a bad mother'.

The final comment accentuates the cyclic nature of symbolic violence induced by the rejection of capital. For this participant, her own rejection brings out the element of gender-induced violence (motherhood) and how this could impact on her daughter.

Symbolic violence through labelling

Though labelling has been established as having a negative impact on learners (Howard, 2017, Alvarez 2017), the ultimate impact is the emotional violence it inflicts because it evokes the element of recognitive social justice (Gale and Densmore, 2000). Labelling associates 'other' group of learners with negative attributes and resonates with the notions of stereotypes and stigma (Davenport, 2014). Our participants felt that labelling was used as an instrument for assigning culpability for failure to learn and progress. Thus, they cannot learn because "they are thick", 'cannot hack it', they do not fit the educational system because "they are tatty", 'they are an eyesore' etc. This form of symbolic violence provided justifications for denying them acceptance and respect. The teachers and the notion of respect are tied to public legitimacy, which is largely informed by the dominant group's perceptions of "the other". Teachers are deemed to have the legitimate knowledge that they can pass onto their learners. Learners, who do not have this knowledge, are labelled as not having 'right' knowledge', 'thick' 'stupid', 'rough', 'scruffy' and 'no-hopers'.

It is instructive here how some labels identified by our participants brought into focus the importance of reflexivity. Participants recalled labels often used by their teachers to describe them which they did not understand. One participant noted 'Yer just knew they weren't good words they use for their own'. As one of the

researchers had herself travelled a path similar to our participants, it was easy for her to offer her own interpretation of the terms. However, guided by the understanding of reflexivity as a process that ‘involves questioning our understanding of reality and the nature of knowledge and how alternative paradigms and perspectives can open up new ways of thinking about phenomena’ (Corlett & Marvin, 2019, p3), we used various dictionaries of social terms to identify the meanings associated with these terms. We found that some of the labels, which many had never previously and subsequently heard, all had negative connotations that reflected a perception of the participants as inferior working class people. Such terms included ‘Plebeians’, ‘Hoi polloi’, ‘Riff raff’, ‘Charver’, ‘Scally’ and ‘Prole’. By distancing the researcher from the interpretation of these terms, we were able to avoid bringing our assumptions and pre-understandings into our knowledge production (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

The legitimacy of these labels is strongly linked to what and whose knowledge is important and symbolic power. The acceptance of such inequitable level of legitimacy for this form of violence reflects the ‘accepted nature of interactions within the society’ (Blume, 1996, p.5) and shows how violence can be located within the framework of systemic connectivity amongst individuals, dyadic interactions and subsystems (Blume, 1996, & Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012) .

An interesting subplot emerged from our participants’ view that labelling endured because the self-perception it generates inhibits any thoughts of asking for help. This reflects what the systems theory classify as ‘shared responsibility for the events that inflict violence’ (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012, P.5) They, therefore,

suffered in silence and endured the psychological agony induced by this surreptitious violence.

Self-infliction: Symbolic violence through compliance

Some participants reported that they asked for help but were ignored. Eventually, this led to a form of imposed conformity. A different dimension to this is the concept of ‘debasement of self-worth’ (Davenport, 2014, p 11) which ultimately leads to compliance. Ironically, this means that participants became ‘complicit’ in their teachers’ symbolic violence of ignoring them, by adopting the same behaviour. Our participants noted that before arriving at this point, they were literally stripped of their pride in their own worthiness.

Paradoxically, compliance is as a form of resistance to violence (Muhammad and Gonzalez, 2016). Such resistance is illustrated with the use of poetry as an agency for resistance, opening up ‘space to project their voices.....provides a sense of control in their struggle for identity’ (P. 450).

A participant sums up how the element of compliance-induced violence can emerge;

“At the end I got to the stage in seniors where I was that unhappy with being bullied and if I reacted bad because I wasn’t a well-dressed child at school because I was brought up in a big family I used to be looked down on...”

Another noted;

“When I knew they’d be no help, just a tellin’ off I stopped asking. Year just mess about don’t yer, hoping someone will say pack it in and get yer back working, sort yer out.

Symbolic violence through elicitation of shame and guilt

Symbolic power includes various modes of social/cultural/economic domination in which dominant values of the powerful are imposed on others as norms. These cultural tastes operate within a neoliberal field that privileges certain capitals, over others; a product of the specific class habitus (Skeggs, 1997). For some participants, the awareness that they are being judged and labelled gives rise to feelings of shame and guilt. Arsenio and Gold (2006) showed how inequality and injustice could impact on those affected by symbolic violence including their ‘understanding of morally relevant transgressions’ and how proximal and distal unfairness might influence their social reasoning and behaviour’ (P.388). The feeling of shame, therefore, can be seen as a direct product of their social reasoning. Shame, leading to symbolic violence usually stems from a loss of respect and a feeling of ‘having lost one’s worthiness in the opinion of oneself and /or of society’ (Davenport, 2014, P 3). This appeared to have been the experience of our participants and became embedded in their everyday life in an unending cycle:

‘they called me thick and stupid’ the teachers

‘ because we were poor: we were left to the side.

We were nobodys, the bottom of the barrel’

Symbolic violence through the imposition of an educational model

Recognizing the power of education, and the enactment of the curriculum, to reproduce, rather than challenge social inequality, offers a framework for understanding how the unequal distribution of capital has shaped our participants' educational and personal journey. Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is vital in exposing the transmission of wealth and power and incorporating ideas about how

those in a position of power, who are ‘insiders’ (Puwar 2004), reproduce and maintain their domination. Thus, ‘we are more likely to become aware of the ways in which the dispositions are acquired when there is discordance between what one’s habitus is and what one is required to be’ (Pp 110 – 111).

We contextualised our participants’ narratives against the backdrop of wider socio/economic/political and historical factors (Goodson & Sykes, 2001; Goodson, 1992). Our recognition of critical education offers the opportunity to extend Bourdieu’s concept by including this as a lever for change and the potential for learner empowerment (Author, 2013, p.14). For our participants, the instrument of dominance manifested in the imposed curriculum. As learners, they had their preferences for what they would like to study. However, those preferences were not recognised by the school and their teachers. This lack of acceptance resulted in them **being labelled**. By being ignored, ridiculed and labelled by their teachers and peers, our learners were exposed to symbolic violence. They blamed their “messing about” on being ignored by the teachers, ‘fobbed off as nothings’, as one participant said. Furthermore, our participants’ non-adherence to academic norms recognised by the dominant paradigm, led to them taking the blame and as such internalising the negative emotions.

Systemic violence through being devalued

Learner marginalisation relates to the dynamics of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991) and reinforces the notion of systemic interaction amongst individuals and the acceptance of the prevalent macrosystems (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012). Our participants drew a link between what they considered their ‘poor’ literacy

skills and the perception of self as childlike. The disparities of valuing/de-valuing the speakers' linguistic habitus are manifested in the school curriculum and serve to reproduce the dominant interests of society at both cultural and social levels (Walkerdine et al., 2001, Skeggs, 1997, Horsman 1999, Author 2013, 2014).

Our participants' narratives reflected on how the process of being devalued ultimately became a continuous flow of symbolic violence. There is a huge emotional dimension to this. Every day in school, therefore, was another day to endure huge emotional damage. Epitomising the impact of devaluation are comments such as;

“They'd 'ave yer address in the mark book, sometimes they'd call out yer name and where yer lived. From Holts Estate, I'll 'ave to keep me eye on you the teacher 'ed say. Yer knew then that you were being told yer were bad, the estate had, still has a rotten reputation. I wished they just had me name in that register book and not me address.....”

There is a soulful dimension to this comment which reveals the extent of emotional damage that this participant went through. All of these are manifestations of conscious and unconscious violence which culminate in huge emotional damage. What was particularly striking was the fact that our participants recognised the violence when it was being visited on them and in their own way were moving from the point of exasperation to resistance.

Resistance through compliance

Although using compliance as a strategy for resistance might suggest a form of conflict, the real element of resistance is in the fact that they can make decisions on how to address their predicaments. In our participants' case, this occurred when

they decided that their progress/or lack of it did not matter. Because they had been denied their rights as a different other, and because they had been at the receiving end of symbolic punishment for perceived infringements, our participants took agency and decided on the form of resistance they could offer as illustrated by one participant's comment below. Teachers labelled the participant, a mother of three children in her mid-thirties as in various ways. In retrospect, she felt that this was due to the connotations associated with her family name and the area they lived. However, as she explained, she got to a point where she had to resist;

“At the end I got to the stage in seniors where I was that unhappy with being bullied and if I reacted bad because I wasn't a well-dressed child at school because I was brought up in a big family I used to be looked down on. Obviously I wasn't taking on board what was happening in the class.”

In the excerpt below, one participant described how she resorted to compliance;

Participant: 'I used to get so frustrated'

Interviewer: Yeah

Response: because I couldn't help the way I were.

Interviewer: Umm

Response: I couldn't help that my mother couldn't buy the fashionable clothes.couldn't help being dyslexic, but I didn't know that I was dyslexic at the time

Interviewer: Yeah

Response: I just knew that I were thick, and that's how I put myself down as and even being embarrassed in front of your children.....

Another participant explained how:

When I knew they'd be no help, just a tellin' off I stopped asking. Yer just mess about don't yer, hoping someone will say pack it in and get yer back working, sort yer out. If I could go back now I'd make them teachers come and teach me, rather than just leavin' us to do what we liked

Resistance through defiance

Our participants were aware that they were being viewed negatively and to avoid shame, they resisted the labels. For example, they 'ignored' teachers, 'wagged' school, and pretended they did not care how they were viewed/treated. Such an unexpected form of resistance buttresses the argument of Muhammad and Gonzalez (2016) that unusual strategies such as the acknowledgement of the idea of multiple language and literacies can provide agency in the quest for resistance. Our participants' defiance was constructed around the determination not to be viewed as showing weakness. One participant noted: *'you don't let them see at you urt, yer know'*. Another commented;

'I cried at 'ome, but no teacher is going to see me cry... and I think, we just put their nose out of joint, when we laughed at some of the things they said to us'. 'In the end, they feared us, yer know'.

Evidently, our participants wanted to present a public image that did not reflect that they had been traumatised by the stigma of labelling (See William, 1987). With growing awareness of themselves and how they fitted into the classroom, and in

spite of self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt, they kept a bold front which restricted the violence.

Resistance through ‘self-harm’: truancy.

Another strategy for resistance used by our participants was playing truant at the school where they were ‘*free to plod the estate*’ without teachers telling them they’re ‘*worth nowt*’ and going to ‘*amount to nowt*’ when they leave school. The label of being poor was not neutral. Obviously, this had an impact on how the learners viewed themselves.

Consolidating resistance: From School to College

After joining the college, our participants helped us to track how they have consolidated their resistance and started blossoming in their new environment. For example, one participant narrated how when she arrived at the literacy class in the college, she ‘*struggled to read and write and sat at the back of the class*’. She ‘*avoided eye contact and neither spoke to her tutor nor the other learners*’. However, after joining the research group, she began to ‘*spend more time with her tutor and classmates*’. More importantly, she demonstrated how her resistance had been transformed constructively. Initially, she described why she had come to college:

‘I want to be able to fill in forms on me own and be more confident in me spelling’.

Interestingly, as her confidence increased in both herself and her writing skills, there was a simultaneous shift in aspirations. Discussions took place with her tutor about the pathways she could take following her Level Two programme and made choices that she previously thought were deemed as ‘*not for people from*’ her ‘*background*’. She began to speak about a career rather than a job. The transformation of her aspirations was captured in the following excerpt:

"I want to be a good role model for my children, getting a career can give us all a better future" she said, with a determination and optimism".

A pattern began to emerge which showed how this participant was knocking down the obstacles in her path and was now on her way. She completed a level two course in Literacy and Numeracy, progressed onto an Access to Nursing course, and to university for her Diploma in Nursing. Her transformation and resistance are encapsulated in the participant's writing shared with the research group:

'Do you know three years ago if I had to fill in anything like a form I couldn't, it may as well have been written in another language. In the end I did not even bother looking at any forms that were sent to me. I would just go to my sister and ask her to fill them in for me and I would just sign them..... Through learning to read and write etc, I now see life differently. Now when my children bring homework home I'm right onto it. I sit down with them and we go through their work together. For example, my son Andrew is only eight and he has 20 spellings a week to learn. This week he had words such as exhibition, examination and electrocution. He would have gone to school, had his spelling test. Maybe he got 4 or 5 out of 20, if he was lucky, felt a bit daft in front of the children who had got most them right and slowly but surely before you know it, it's a knock on effect, history is repeating itself. I really feel that in my case because I'm all my children have, if I'd not have returned to education the chances are that my children would have ended up experiencing difficulties in their education.----I just want to say that returning to education for me was one of the most frightening things that I have ever done, but one of the best. There have been times when I have wanted to quit

because I found it too hard and believe me I have cried in frustration. ... my teacher, who is always on my case, only messing! She has been amazing. She is the one who when I've thought "What's the point?" has kept me going and so far she has been right'.

As indicated in this excerpt, the transformation of this participant's aspiration and her life impacted on her children's progression and the transformation in the dynamics of the family. She no longer felt childlike but empowered to support her children. Another participant illustrates this phenomenon:

'As soon as I feel confident enough with my writing I'm doing me level 2 in Care'. The ones who are doing it in the rest home now are treated more professionally somehow. Like they get to help with the medicine round'.

The development of literacy skills, confidence and self-esteem were linked to the learners seeing other possible choices in their lives. For many of the learners, the adult literacy classes were their last hope of education. The journeys undertaken by our participant is reflected in the interview excerpt below:

Response: My aim is to get on the level two NVQ in Care

Interviewer: That would be great. Have you ever considered that you could go further than that?

Response: What, you mean take the level three?

Interviewer: Yes

Response: Not really. You've got to be really bright to do that. No I'll just about manage two.....

However, within a short period, there was a transformation from the belief that this participant could just about '*learn to read and write properly*' to aspiring for and realising her dreams. As participants in the research, we felt that working in a collective was a way for the learners to begin to see themselves differently as individuals, question their positioning in unbalanced power relationships that have marginalised them and their literacy practices, and act to change them. This is particularly important in the context of the seemingly undisclosed harm implied by the use of the word 'bright' which has a negative connotation for those the term is not applied to- it implies that they are not 'bright' (James, 2015). With our participants, it might well be that they accepted the term as one that excludes them in the context of the discourse of their own habitus. It, therefore, becomes even more difficult to be rid of the term and the resultant violence it inflicts. The participant above ultimately progressed through the level two programme and completed the level three in Health and Social Care. It can be argued, therefore, that the cultural capital she developed led to resistance and empowerment for her family and self.

What this paints for us in bold relief is that educational institutions are not neutral in the value placed on the accumulation of capital and its transmission. At the heart of the privileged classification of the dominant classes, cultural capital is the failure to recognise the cultural capitals of other classes (Gale, 2000). We argue further that they are a part of the macrosystem through which behaviours of individuals and institutions are created and reinforced (Blume, 1996, Hyde-Nolan &

Juliao, 2012). Our participants' stories demonstrate the impact of the unequal distribution of cultural, economic and linguistic capital on their schooling. Habitus became a valuable theoretical tool working with the data and structuring the analysis around the accrual of value and symbolic power.

Conclusion

The research questions this study sets out to answer were first: in what forms do the dominant perceptions of the entrenched and more powerful classes visit symbolic violence on under-privileged learners within the UK school sector? Second, how do the entrenched structures, including the various elements of the pedagogy in its form as the entirety of our 'coming to be' help to visit symbolic violence on learners? Finally, what processes could lead to the repudiation and ultimate resistance to symbolic violence?

In response to these questions, the study highlights how the dominant Models/structures of education have been imposed on this group of learners. It further shows how symbolic violence is visited on learners who do not come from the dominant group. More importantly, however, it showed that those affected by symbolic violence can ultimately resist and that they can make progress and achieve, indeed surpass their goals if the educational system was sufficiently flexible. In this context, it highlights the importance of the role of FE colleges and validate the claims of Author and xxxxx (2018) that teaching and learning in FE can be transformative.

In recent British educational history, the ideas of choices and opportunities for all was compounded by New Labour's rhetoric about responsibilities, the coalition's notion of the Big Society and now, the conservative party's imposed notion of

excellence. However, these major policy positions have neglected to address the largely structural explanations of poverty and deprivation and instead place significant emphasis upon the lifestyle, culture and choices of the poor and marginalised (Author, 2013, 14).

Contrary to this deeply reductive approach, critical literacy, the dialogue it provides, and other frameworks such as Bourdieu's *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989) offer outlets which enables us to consider a 're-curricularization' (Author, 2014) and 're-pedagogization' (Street, 1995) in literacy, for example. This offers opportunities for reimagining and exploration of 'hope'. In effect, it has the potential for kick-starting a transformation in how the marginalised, such as our participants, might define themselves regardless of their ethnicity, class, gender, and other markers of identity. What this study has shown is that a pedagogy of social empathy, care and solidarity can be driven by dialogue with students. It also exemplifies what might be gained if educators invite students to take part in a larger community discourse that attempts to solve problems and create alternatives to oppressive situations (Author and Maxwell 2015). This requires a conceptualisation of the theoretical and methodological issues involved in understanding and representing the curriculum based on respect, within which learners can flourish and reach their potential (Author, 2013).

(7951 words including abstract, keywords and references)

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