Researching in solidarity with marginalised groups: A meta-ethnography about research for educational justice and social transformation

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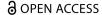Dennis Beach[a,b] 🆔 and María Begoña Vigo-Arrazola[c] 🆔

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ABSTRACT

This article uses meta-ethnography to identify the challenges of working in solidarity with the experiences and interests of marginalised and exploited social groups. It focuses on what the main challenges seem to be, and on how to overcome them in struggles to change education in just directions by means of educational research. It is therefore a paper of interest from a methodological and a research political perspective relating to how critical researchers challenge the status quo and undermine the dominant hegemony in education and education policy in their research. A clear message from the analysis concerns the importance of understanding of the ontological class position of research for change and what to do in research in the interests of justice based on this understanding. Another message relates to the subjective and objective sides of transformative action, and a third a two directional threat towards it.

Introduction

Ingold (2017) described ethnography as a contextually sensitive, nuanced, richly de-tailed written, film, or other graphic media account of life as it is lived and experienced that tries to be as faithful as possible to the events and experiences it depicts (Ingold 2017). The present article makes extensive use of ethnographic research. Using meta-ethnography, its aim is to synthesize ideas from ethnographic investigations relating to struggles for educational justice in largely Western capitalist countries. It takes a research position like that of Harris et al. (2015), who pointed out that researching for education justice in these countries requires an activist position. On the one hand it needs to address how institutional systems, relations and structures contribute to maintaining the status quo. On the other it needs to generate ways of acting on this knowledge to help to overcome situations of oppression, marginalization, and exploitation (Earick, 2018).

Gramsci (1971) described this type of research as a counter-hegemonic act of organic intellectuals who work differently (and have a different research identity and commitment) to other intellectuals. Connected to a marginalised or exploited social class or group fighting to improve its conditions, their research identity forms when they align their research interests with the

interests and empowerment struggles of these groups (Gramsci, 1971; Guajardo et al., 2017). Their commitment is to generate connections between self and society and undermine processes of leadership that contribute to establishing or stabilising forms of domination (Apple, 2013). Doing research to overcome oppression and enhance justice is a methodology therefore of engaged scholars in other words, whose aim is to challenge the status quo and the fragmentation of knowledge that opposes collective struggles. Disengaged scholars do not do this. They distance themselves from such action (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021). Using Noblit and Hare (1988) meta-ethnography we attempt in this article to generate knowledge about doing engaged research. We do so by identifying, analytically exploring, and synthesising examples of it in relation to three key questions. The three questions are:

- How do researchers connect their work to the interests of justice in education and society for oppressed and exploited groups?
- How do they engage in research with these groups in their communities to help them to identify and meet their different challenges and
- What do they do to identify and overcome the limits and hinders to research so it may benefit these people?

The questions are important. Research for social justice in education needs clarity not only about what a socially just education system *might look like* and what its key challenges are (Francis et al., 2017; Herr, 2017). It needs clarity also in terms of what socially just education research actually *does look like* and how it meets challenges to identify and overcome educational injustice and inequity (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022; Roman, 2009; Smyth et al., 2014). As Du Bois cited in Apple (2013) wrote, identifying strategies for overcoming difficulties advances a vision for reorienting dominant knowledge as a dual task. It involves recovering history and restoring agency on the one hand and making new history and agency in a collective interest on the other, to replace those of the dominant class white patriarchy (Harris et al., 2015; Ulichny, 1997; Woodson 1933/2010). Nguyen and Huynh (2023) research in Vietnam may be an example. It challenged conventional hegemonic points of suture in the exercise of power over research and created changed relationships toward modes of research production as the first of several steps in a micro-revolutionary community practice.

Meta-ethnography as the chosen methodology

As a meta-ethnography, the article's main research data comprises published ethnographic work on struggles to overcome marginalization and injustice in education systems. These articles are read analytically from the perspective of an anthropological ambition. Ingold (2017) describes this ambition as one of exploring the conditions and possibilities of a full human life for all through an open-ended, comparative, and critical inquiry (Ingold 2017, 21–22). In the present article it concerns the ambitions and actualities of ethnographic educational research for investigating and developing education justice and transformation in western capitalist education systems.

The analysis begins with an exploration of some our own work, which can of course be a problem if this focus restricts the scope of the investigation or permits a strong researcher bias in terms of the investigation results. However, beginning "at home" is in keeping with the founding descriptions of meta-ethnography made by Noblit and Hare (1988). These descriptions clarify the research intentions, which are to develop an empirically grounded analytical narrative connected to the main research interest and research questions, rather than simply searching for, and including, as much research by as many different researchers as possible and to aggregate their results (Uny et al., 2017). The interest is strongly analytical and intentionally discovery oriented and potentially critical in other words (Noblit & Hare, 1988). It starts with known examples

but includes further research later in the investigation. It does so specifically to try to challenge and refine emerging concepts and ideas and to extend the range and scope of the developing narrative, by using refutational and reciprocal synthesis (Uny et al., 2017). This does not fully eliminate the risks of positionality bias (Noblit & Hare, 1988). What it does allow is the comparison of different assumptions and the development and integration of concepts in dialogue between one's own work and that of others, to expand the range and generalizability potential of the investigation.

Noblit and Hare described seven phases in their original meta-ethnographic work (1988). These were firstly, (1) getting started by identifying and establishing a research question or interest that has been studied ethnographically at multiple levels and in context, (2) searching for and selecting relevant primary studies, (3) reading the studies intensely and comparatively, (4) identifying and analyzing their key concepts and uses and (5), deciding how the studies relate to each other by cross-translation through transferring ideas and concepts between the individual investigations and exploring their fit. The next step is (6), synthesizing an account of the fit that works across and makes sense of any discovered patterns before then expanding the analysis to also include other research. The final phase involves (7), closing the process by expressing narrative synthesis that provides answers to the research questions and is possible to test against the original studies and in new investigations.

Our meta-ethnography involved making two linked literature searches to complete the seven stages. The first aimed to identify an initial group of studies based on familiarity with the field and the research question. The second used these studies to identify sets of keywords to combine into search-strings for Web of Science, Scopus, JSTOR and the Taylor and Francis, Sage, and Elsevier journal search engines, to generate a further (comparative) sample. This sample contained other researchers' published materials. We checked their references for further potential studies, examined citation alerts from WOS and Scopus, and downloaded the list of publications into Endnote bibliographic software for screening against inclusion criteria.

The selection criteria used for the first sample was our knowledge about relevant articles based on our familiarity with the field. The articles largely comprised our own work related to the article's research questions, work by close colleagues, and works they or we had cited extensively in the past. The key words formed the selection criteria for the second sample, along with language and type of publication. For the analysis of the texts in the first sample, we extracted abstracts and conclusions electronically from the individual items and entered them into a computer file for line-by-line coding and comparative analysis of concepts and themes using analytic induction and Blumer's (1969) techniques of exploration and inspection. The process involved an intense scrutiny of the collection of ethnographies by using both deductive (a priori) and inductive (developed during the analysis) coding strategies, as well as guided memoing and analytic questioning (Bingham, 2023). It involved viewing each analytical moment and each theme and concept in each item in the sample from different angles, asking different questions of it, and returning to then scrutinise the total sample from the standpoint of these questions (Blumer, 1969, p. 44). We then checked the emerging narrative synthesis from this analysis. First with the coded themes, concepts, main arguments, and ideas in the individual studies separately, and with the same features of the articles in the second sample.

Table 1 shows details of the research corpus on which we drove the first round of analysis, and identified, checked, and developed concepts and themes to form an initial result's narrative. Table 2 presents the ethnographic research by other researchers used for comparative development and reciprocal and refutational synthesis. The two tables largely comprise double peer reviewed journal articles in education research.

The articles in the two tables derive mainly from journals dealing with the sociology and politics of education, and research methods. We chose them because of their focus on ways of engaging in research for education justice and social transformation, and for having been exposed to double-blind peer-review processes. Analysing them helped us to craft the results from the

Table 1. The primary research corpus.

Beach (2017a). Personalisation and the education commodity: A meta-ethnographic analysis. *Ethnography and Education, 12*(2), 148–164. Analyzes research on education equity and identified tensions between personalization and privatisation in relation to pressures of commodification and struggles to overcome the difficulties of social reproduction.

Beach (2017b). Whose justice is this! Capitalism, class and education, justice and inclusion in the Nordic countries. *Educational Review, 69*(5), 620–637. Analyses research as necessarily not only contributing to the development of knowledge, but also transforming situations of inequality. Uncovers grounds to criticize the turn in recent years to market politics as a means of appeasement, which has worsened the situation of education injustice and added to existing inequalities.

Beach (2020) Maybe one in a hundred or one in a thousand in the neoliberal, new-managerial university! Aesthetics of experience and the question of transgressive critical thinking. *Ethnography and Education, 15*(3), 363–376. Examines transgression as an act of challenging boundaries that separate apparently distinct oppositional categories objects. Discloses and analyses how aiming to carry the onus of full inclusion without simultaneously challenging institutional hegemony will probably have, at best, a null impact toward a vision for equity and may unwittingly reinforce practices that support exclusion and inequity instead of contributing to challenging and transforming them.

Beach, D., & Sernhede, S. (2011). From learning to labour to learning for marginality: School segregation and marginalisation in Swedish suburbs. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 32*, 257–274. Describes and analyses how education is described as an experience and possibility 'from below', in schools in segregated and territorially stigmatized suburbs. Shows an experience of schooling for surviving the social and economic consequences of curtailed citizenship that does not offer possibilities of social integration and transformation

Beach, D., & Sernhede, O. (2012). Learning processes and social mobilization in a Swedish metropolitan hip-hop collective. *Urban Education, 47*(5), 939–958. Explores the link between urban segregation, social deprivation, migration, and education through youth experiences of educational inequality in economically challenged residential areas. Identifies a strong potential for creativity that is ignored, devalued, and even symbolically violated in the education system.

weBeach, D., & Vigo-Arrazola. (2020). Community and the education market: A cross-national comparative analysis of ethnographies of education inclusion and involvement in rural schools in Spain and Sweden. *Journal of Rural Studies, 77*, 199–207. Describes research that reveals which versions of reality sustain oppressive systems, which have the potential to challenge them and to further human rights in efforts to correct power imbalances in relation to the distribution of culturally valued and socially valuable education access in rural areas.

Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola. (2024). Investigating the education of preservice teachers for inclusive education: meta-ethnography. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 47*(1), 178–195. Describes and analyses how preservice teachers' attitudes or perceptions towards inclusive education can be developed and shows the importance of recognizing the value of practical experiences, reflecting with others, and researching and transforming situations of inclusive education as essential activities in inclusive education.

Vigo-Arrazola, B. (2020). Research feedback as a strategy for educational transformation. In G.W. Noblit (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. Oxford University Press. From a critical education perspective, research feedback sets out to engage schools and their communities as co-researchers and reflective agents capable of understanding and changing education and its social relations. Change is encouraged both within the framework of the investigation and with respect to broader social relations. The article explolores challenges and describes successful practices.

Vigo-Arrazola, B., & Beach, D. (2021). Promoting professional growth to build a socially just school through participation in ethnographic research. *Professional Development in Education, 47*(1), 115–127. Used participant observations, interviews, informal conversations, document analysis, virtual and meta- ethnography to identify potentially common themes and ideas concerning how interaction between researchers and participants may have influenced research and research contexts when generating useful knowledge for leadership and professional development for educational change and social justice.

Vigo-Arrazola, B., & Dieste-Gracia, B. (2017). Contradicciones en la educación inclusiva a través de un estudio multiescalar [Contradictions in inclusive education through a multi-scalar study]. *Aula Abierta, 46*, 25–32. Using qualitative synthesis aims to generate and communicate knowledge about how ethnographers of education can engage in research to fulfil commitments connected to social justice and transformation.

Vigo-Arrazola, B., & Dieste-Gracia, B. (2020). Identifying characteristics of parental involvement: aesthetic experiences and micro-politics of resistance in different schools through ethnographic investigations. *Ethnography and Education, 15*(3), 300–315. Explored and analysed how parental involvement developed in schools in different ways in relation to local contextual conditions and the salient characteristics of the geographic spaces the schools belonged to. Identified and important role for practical aesthetic knowledge to produce multiple strategies of action.

investigation in terms of consistencies and differences regarding how researchers have described their intentions and engagement when researching for education justice and social transformation and what seems to lead to a positive outcome according to the collection of ethnographic research accounts.

Results

The results are in two parts. One of them is more connected than the other to identifying challenges of promoting social justice. The other is more connected than the first to practices and

Table 2. Comparison data formed by other('s) research.

Agee (2002). "Winks upon winks": Multiple lenses on settings in qualitative educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 15*(5), 569–585.

Anderson, G.L. (2017). Can participatory action research (PAR) democratize research, knowledge, and schooling? Experiences from the global South and North, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*(5), 427–431.

Charteris, J., Jones, M., Nye, A. & Reyes, V. (2017). A heterotopology of the academy: mapping assemblages as possibilised heterotopias. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*(4), 340–353.

Crozier, G., Davies, J., & Szymanski, K. (2009). Education, identity and Roma families: Teachers' perspectives and engagement with INSETRom training. *Intercultural Education, 20*(6), 537–548.

Deckman, S.L. & Ohito, E. O. (2020). Stirring vulnerability, (un)certainty, and (dis)trust in humanizing research: duoethnographically re-membering unsettling racialized encounters in social justice teacher education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 33*(10), 1058–1076.

Earick, M.E. (2018). We are not social justice equals: the need for white scholars to understand their whiteness. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 31*(8), 800–820.

Elfreich & Dennis (2022). Methodologies of possibility: feminist ethics as justice-oriented research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 35*(10), 1067–1084.

Elliott (2006). Educational research and outsider-insider relations. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 1*(2), 155–166.

Gutierrez, R. R. & Lipman, P. (2016) Toward social movement activist research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 29*(10), 1241–1254.

Guajardo, M. A., Guajardo, F. J., & Locke, L. (2017). An introduction to ecologies of engaged scholarship: stories from activist-academics. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*(1), 1–5.

Herr (2017). Insiders doing PAR with youth in their schools: negotiating professional boundaries and healing justice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*(5), 450–463.

Kress, T. M. (2011). Stepping out of the academic brew: using critical research to break down hierarchies of knowledge production. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 24*(3), 267–283.

Lather (1997). *Troubling The Angels: Women Living With Hiv/aids*. Routledge.

Lundberg (2015). *On Cultural Racism and School Learning: An Ethnographic Study*. (Göteborg Studies in Educational Science). Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothenburgensis.

Martin, A.D., & Kamberelis, G. (2013). Mapping not tracing: qualitative educational research with political teeth. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 26*(6), 668–679.

Miller, P., Pavlakis, A., Samartino, L., & Bourgeois, A. (2015). Brokering educational opportunity for homeless students and their families. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 28*(6), 730–749.

Milligan (2016). Insider-outsider-inbetweener? Researcher positioning, participative methods and cross-cultural educational research. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 46*(2), 235–250.

Montgomery, L. M., & Canaan, J.E. (2006). Conceptualizing higher education students as social actors in a globalizing world: a special issue. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 17*(6), 739–748.

Nguyen, C. D., & Huynh, T. N. (2023). Teacher agency in culturally responsive teaching: learning to teach ethnic minority students in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. *Educational Review, 75*(4), 719–743.

Robinson, J., & Smyth, J. (2016). "Sent out" and Stepping Back In: Stories from young people "placed at risk." *Ethnography and Education, 11*(2), 222–236.

Roman, L.G. (2009). The Unruly Salon: unfasten your seatbelts, take no prisoners, make no apologies! *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(1), 1–16.

Symeou, L. (2006). Teacher-parent cooperation: strategies to engage parents in their children's school lives. *Journal of School Public Relations, 27*, 502–527.

Torres, M. N., & Hurtado-Vivas, R. (2011). Playing fair with latino parents as parents, not teachers: beyond family literacy. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 10*(3), 223–244.

Trondman, M., Taha, R., & Lund, A. (2012). For Aïsha: On Identity as Potentiality. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 19*(4), 533–543.

Ulichny (1997). When critical ethnography and action collide. *Qualitative Inquiry, 3*, 139–168.

William-White, L., Sagir, A., Flores, N., Jung, G., Ramirez, A., Osalbo, J., & Doan, HoAn (2012). Arugula, pine nuts, and hegemony: seven women's choreopoetic reflection on the absence of cultural relevance in educational discourse. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(2), 135–149.

changes needed in research to meet the identified challenges. They are respectively, *Complications and challenges when researching for overcoming injustice,* and *Successful actions in research for change against dominant class hegemony.*

Complications and challenges when researching for overcoming injustice

Linked to the Marxist idea of research as a socially just ethical *praxis* (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022), the first part of the first result is that research that aims for participant involvement and transformed social relations in research, is not always successful (Milligan, 2016). Elliott (2006)

signalled this already over three decades ago and provided reasons for why. The most common was that researchers would often act as experts who did research *on others* (or on their behalf), and who they therefore represented. However, by doing this, they also prevented others from accessing and employing their full capacities in relation to research development (Anderson, 2017; Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021; Roman, 2009). Researchers kept the right to account for developments in the world for themselves (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022). They, perhaps inadvertently, established alienated relations of research production that imposed repressed class positions on others. They did research on or for, rather than with others and kept access to important knowledge and tools for developing and testing ideas to themselves, thus opposing the actual purposes for which transformational research is undertaken (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021). As Elfreich and Dennis (2022) and Milligan (2016) point out, there is a fundamental contradiction of public intellectual aims to change existing power relations in research and society in just directions (Vigo-Arrazola, 2020; Martin & Kamberelis, 2013) and a need therefore of a micro-political de-territorialisation and transformation of relations of research production (Milligan, 2016; William-White et al., 2012).

A free text project led by teachers and parents that developed from interaction between researchers, teachers, and parents during research by Vigo-Arrazola and Dieste-Gracia (2017) provides an example of deterritorialization (see also Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2020). There were two stages. The first involved teachers, pupils and their families coming together to actively join up facts and problems as joint co-researchers in the research process (Milligan, 2016). The second involved mapping the research process and its effects using detailed notes researchers and others had made about changes to research practices, how people reacted to them, and how different ways of organising research either matched or conflicted with progressive change (Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2020). Some mapped well whilst others were quite conservative and potentially contradictory (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2022). Elfreich and Dennis (2022), Martin and Kamberelis (2013) and Milligan (2016) have also presented and discussed the challenges they met in their work in this way. They refer to practical things like where conversations and interactions took place, such as in the university or at school, and what kind of language researchers used.

University locations tended to enforce formal divisions of labour and exclusionary language, whilst informality and some attempted border crossing could take place away from this institution (Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2020). Exclusionary language was a problem not an intention. The intention was to generate conversations for developing and using analytical concepts, but the right balance of accessible vocabulary was essential. The right balance could lead to transitions like those described in Williams' concept of the long revolution (1961) according to the researchers, where teachers and parents acting together could take greater control of research and make it their own, using researchers to support them in these ambitions (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021). If researchers controlled the research and its development too forcefully, patterns of involvement and influence risked changing more slowly in the interests of the community and the empowerment of its members or not at all (Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2020).

This is a point made also by William-White et al. (2012) about the challenges of overcoming previous notions held by staff and parents about academics coming from an ivory tower, separated from surrounding communities. Noteworthy however in Vigo-Arrazola and Dieste-Gracia (2020) was also how researchers had seen the challenge of needing to be more intimately knowledgeable about communities and needing to research in a common interest with them, rather than researching only in their own personal (or their research group or discipline's) academic interests (Anderson, 2017; Milligan, 2016; Gutierrez & Lipman, 2016).

Milligan's (2016) notion of 'inbetweener' researcher when communities work collaboratively with and as researchers to find solutions to their problems may fit in here (Vigo-Arrazola, 2020). Because as well as providing some sense of empowerment, inbetweener research can help to assure cultural relevance for the research (Milligan, 2016). Moreover, it has a clear participatory

research philosophy as an ethical as well as a methodological foundation for the research, which it treats as something owned and driven by (not imposed on) community members. There is a balance again. This time between a vanguardist role in relation to social transformation and allowing people to govern their work and intentions based only on prevailing personal ideologies of practice (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021; Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2020). Elfreich and Dennis (2022) and Martin and Kamberelis (2013) describe this as "stepping back" to create a space of possibility for an increased and necessary awareness of how ways to do research can have different effects on empowerment (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021; Milligan, 2016). Like Greene (2005) and Madison (2020), they describe supporting rather than instigating commitments for social transformation as a goal, and actively making social and intellectual spaces available in research that can provide support against setbacks (Charteris et al., 2017; Robinson & Smyth, 2016; William-White et al., 2012).

There are two commonly discussed kinds of set-back. Taking a position of authority when producing critical research is one. It does not bring about empowerment, it opposes it (Milligan, 2016; Kress, 2011). However, whilst research involves creating rapport and developing trust, this is neither just to generate data that serves researchers' own analytical goals nor to sooth the potential ire of community members and make friends (Madison, 2020, p. 84-85). It is for developing an agenda for change from a community perspective by promoting critical dialogue that resists *both* a researcher-knows-best perspective *and* surrendering control of the research solely to arbitrary ideology and randomness.

Set-backs are almost inevitable at some point, however. People (including researchers) are always informed and influenced by prior knowledge and experience in their choice of actions, which will influence the unfolding work. However, they are not trapped by this knowledge, and this is important. Understanding and working from the idea that prior experiences influence but do not paralyse future understandings is as important as making critical examinations of broader social relations of opposition to change, when developing agency for change (Deckman & Ohito, 2020; Madison, 2020). And without agency for change, the de-territorialisation of research assemblages and the creation of a more equal balance of recognition and power-distribution for generating research to serve communities, their members, and their needs, values, and epistemologies is impossible (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022).

Apple (2013), Beach and Vigo-Arrazola (2020), and Smyth et al. (2014) make this recognition too. They describe understanding prior experiences and knowledge as influencing (but not paralysing) future possibilities for critical action and understanding, as essential for overcoming socio-historical status relations that risk reinforcing the premise of cultural deprivation theories. This is in one way a simple question of having a positive outlook or perspective (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2020, 2021). Without it, researchers will always risk being described as possibly dominating and silencing participants' realities (Apple, 2013; Beach, 2017a, 2017b; Harris et al., 2015).

Vigo-Arrazola and Dieste-Gracia (2020) work highlighted the importance of opposing these hegemonic tendencies that demand and depend on the fragmentation of knowledge and notions of researcher dependency in research for social transformation. They described the importance of forming new (essentially bottom-up) alliances to do so, and disassembling the conventional boundaries of traditional research. Actively taking sides with communities against domination and marginalisation and standing up for their rights to self-determination is essential in research for social transformation (Harris et al., 2015). Recognising that growing up under conditions of poverty or disability will always in some way influence people's acquisition of important bodies of knowledge, dispositions, and skills, but does not stop them from being able to make these acquisitions, is the essential challenge here (Beach, 2017b, 2020; Madison, 2020; William-White et al., 2012). It is a well-known one (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021). Yet researchers have often adopted positions that describe taking sides as a problem, and becoming committed to helping to actively solve other people's daily challenges is always someone else's business (Anderson, 2017; Guajardo et al., 2017).

Researching is the job of academic researchers from this perspective, not direct political action. Yet this clear division of labour is part of the problem when shifting from community-*based* to community-*driven* scholarship and the co-creation of knowledge (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022). It is presented and described also by Milligan (2016) and Gutierrez and Lipman (2016) in relation to activist participant research. On the one hand its challenge is one of generating the deserving trust researchers need to be social justice role-models when they embed their research in schools and communities. On the other it is doing this without setting borders that fragment the production of knowledge and marginalise community members as research informants only (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022; Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021).

Successful actions in research for change against dominant class hegemony

Vigo-Arrazola and Dieste-Gracia (2020) describe how to accomplish research disassembly to support community driven research as an ethical and methodologically sound way to navigate toward transformative action (Guajardo et al., 2017; Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola, 2024; Vigo-Arrazola, 2020). Milligan (2016) and Elfreich and Dennis (2022) put things similarly. Yet as Beach (2017b) and Beach and Sernhede (2011, 2012) note, it is not only the obvious divisions of labour in research that can trouble this kind of change (Beach, 2017b; Trondman et al., 2012). Notions of national differences, language, ethnicity, culture, gender, and age as boundaries embedded in dominant hegemony, can also interact with/in the research process as hinders that contribute to the fragmentation of knowledge and restrict full developmental opportunities for all (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022; William-White et al., 2012).

Based on research by Beach and Sernhede (2011, 2012), Beach (2017b) discussed how to meet this challenge by recognising the aims of critical anthropology as discussed in Ingold (2017, 21-22). That is, as an open-ended, critical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of quality human life and respect for all (Beach, 2017b, 2020). Discussed briefly in Beach and Sernhede (2011), the researchers began to solve this challenge by one of them moving to live in one of the territorially stigmatised communities in the research. To white middle-class outsiders these communities can seem to be dangerous and difficult places in which to establish two-way trust and mutual respect, given common understandings and a media focus on them as rife with criminality and deprivation. However, in lived reality the community is not like this at all to those who live there (Beach, 2017a, 2017b, 2020; Beach & Sernhede, 2011, 2012). Rather, as Lundberg (2015) and Trondman et al. (2012) have discussed, affective historical features and memories tied to hegemonic concepts of class, race, and place, spread through the media, create this impression. It is a product of power and domination, and it blocks tendencies to believe in progressive change without first changing the people themselves (Beach, 2017a, 2020).

Kincheloe (2011) also described similar effects of power as those Beach and Sernhede (2011, 2012) sought to overcome. As Kincheloe put it, the effects of power blur the lines between knowledge and reality by forcing epistemological hegemonic constructs onto ontological conditions in ways that obstruct attempts to forge progressive perspectives, beliefs, and knowledge of the kind that can lead to challenges toward domination. Instead of daring to see and understand lived conditions as they are, through the effects of power, hegemonic reality (i.e. the corpus of ideas, beliefs, and values of the US power-elite) takes on a politically desired form that prevents individuals from freely expressing themselves (Kincheloe, 2008, 2011). To overcome this, coming close to people to bring about a head on confrontation between hegemonic and lived reality is imperative. It is a way to overcome the expected reality mediated in the dominant class interest (Beach, 2020). This is also what Beach (2017b) discussed as the aim when he went to live in the suburban spaces enjoyed by the local communities his research subjects lived in.

At the base of this commitment there was a recognition that identities are liquid, in flux, dependent on context, and difficult to define without the effects of hegemony intervening in their construction (William-White et al., 2012) and that people and lives in the territorially

stigmatised suburbs are almost certainly not how they seem to be from the outside (Beach, 2017a, 2017b). However, prior knowledge was also important. Having his closest friends in these communities in two different countries he knew they were not as they were portrayed (Beach & Sernhede, 2011, 2012). In real life people have 'liquid identities' (Milligan, 2016) that only freeze as fixed positions through the effects of hegemony (Beach, 2017a). It is important to overcome hegemony if research is to generate appropriate questions and better products that can challenge the master narratives of history (Agee, 2002; Lundberg, 2015; Kincheloe, 2008, 2011).

Perceptions of people and places seen from the outside (rather than lived from within) depend often on filtered reifications that both provide and feed on stereotypes and feelings about permanence and totality (Beach, 2017b; Beach & Sernhede, 2011, 2012). Being with people in their space, living life as far as possible close to their terms, can challenge this and in doing so it can help the research to attain a heightened awareness of what living with stigma, repression and enforced multidimensional poverty under white patriarchal capitalism really means to, in, and for socially stigmatised, politically repressed and symbolically exploited, marginalised groups (Beach & Sernhede, 2011, 2012; Trondman et al., 2012). It helps us to see, live, feel and talk, write and think about things differently, and this is essential for driving forth any significant change (Lundberg, 2015).

Like the rest of us, people from territorially stigmatised suburbs refer to their fellow locals as brothers, sisters, cousins, friends, and neighbours, not as immigrants, coloured, ethnic, marginalised others. And being with and among them as friends and neighbours, and calling them and being called brother, breaks down any sense in othering between the self and this community (Beach, 2020; Beach & Sernhede, 2011, 2012). It also helps us to challenge symbolic violence toward them too. An easy example here is how national educational policy highlights language difficulties and cultural diversity as problems in these areas, whilst life shows clearly that individuals in these areas generally speak far more (rather than fewer) languages on average (and largely communicatively better) than people in other areas do. The lack of language skills is not the problem (Beach, 2017b). Quite the opposite, onto-epistemologically the mix of languages and cultures formed a creative broth where new hybrid forms of creativity emerged and grew (Beach & Sernhede, 2012) and living among people in territorially stigmatised suburbs showed this (Beach, 2017b). There was repression, but people were not trapped and held back by the inherent inferiorities of their dispositions and circumstances (Beach, 2017a). Instead, they were at least as creative and multi-talented as the rest of us, if not more so (Beach, 2017b).

The problem was hegemony and power not the researched and at times it could affect research negatively if it failed to explore the actual possibilities and experiences lived by individuals in their communities on their own terms (Beach, 2020). Symbolic violence, cultural silencing, historical injustice, displacement, and oppression figured in local narratives about common challenges to justice, equality, and a positive subject identity inside official institutions (Beach & Sernhede, 2012). Yet research organised in line with the dominant class hegemony held that marginalised people had to change their class-cultural values and onto-epistemologies to become part of society, while the warped culturally aggressive values of the dominant class and its mechanisms of exclusion, oppression and marginalisation remained the same (Beach, 2017a, 2020).

Overcoming these oppressive features of power and domination involves exposing the inherent able-ist, misogynistic class- and race bias that undergirds hegemonic research and informs education policy according to Kincheloe (2011) and Gutierrez and Lipman (2016). However, it also demands the formation of alliances for research for change and the development of appropriate ways to develop voice and connect contexts and resources (Greene, 2005; Madison, 2020). Avoiding common traps of class, gender, or racial erasure through cultural silencing is centrally important too, as is confronting the world head on and refusing to sacrifice an authentic critical realist position simply to achieve academic notoriety and success (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2020, 2021).

Successful researchers working for social transformation and education justice did not seek venerability (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021, 2022). The sought community and worked to create shared spaces of representation and participation with others, in which to generate collective

story telling with a purpose to challenge the common injustice of cultural silencing. Organised as and within networks of narrativity this gave voice to experiences of oppression and symbolic violence through contributions from different participants from multiple perspectives. It was a way to generate dialogue and action aimed at attaining a more justly participative society. There is a form of transformation for justice here (Vigo-Arrazol and Beach, 2021, 2022). However, when retold through research publications using tools and figures of narratology from critical and revolutionary theory, there may also be a potential for a wider political mobilisation and impact using democratic methods of participatory organization and communication and various forms of media (Bennet and Segerberg, 2012; Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2020).

Discussion

Based on meta-ethnography as outlined initially by Noblit and Hare (1988), in the present article we have analytically explored and attempted to derive a qualitative research synthesis about how ethnographic researchers do research for education justice. Harris et al.'s writing (2015) about this research in western capitalist states as always necessarily needing to involve efforts to produce social transformation formed a starting point. This is largely due to the massive documented, inequalities and injustices that exist within and between national education systems concerning education access and outcomes related to place of domicile, and economic and cultural capital, race, class, and gender (Beach, 2020; Harris et al., 2015). We started by analysing some our own selected publications, before then expanding the analysis to also include other research. Tables 1 and 2 present the two samples this has involved, and we will now try to highlight and discuss some condensed key points and arguments from the analysis to close our narrative synthesis.

Our intention with this approach to the discussion is to illustrate the main suggestions from the results relating to successful research, taking as our reference point research conducted in countries where education systems and politics build on, reinforce, mediate, and reproduce, capitalist ideology. There are several of them. The first is that researchers working for education justice feel that research for education justice and social transformation needs little motivation. The idea of a role for education for developing an egalitarian and just society appears in multiple educational policies and programs worldwide, and in major national and international policy documents (Milligan, 2016; Pérez-Castejón & Vigo-Arrazola, 2024). Connected to this is the second finding, which is that because researchers for justice see justice research as so appropriate and obvious, consequently there is no need to challenge it or to waste time on defending it (Milligan, 2016). Their effort is one on an offensive not a defensive trajectory (Gutierrez & Lipman, 2016; William-White et al., 2012) and it often revolves around the importance of "being there" to witness and experience education in terms of its specifically local socio-spatial relations and conditions, and to confront the effects of hegemony on common sense (Beach, 2017a; Beach & Sernhede, 2011, 2012). Identifying and opening-up spaces for collaborative critical analysis and alternative practices as effectively (and with as much cultural sensitivity) as possible is important and the dominant hegemony will often construct psychological barriers to this (Lather, 1997). There is a feature of public intellectualism here, as discussed by Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971) and Woodson and du Bois (Apple, 2013). Gramsci was primarily a radical writer, socialist activist, cultural commentator, and revolutionary organiser. His view of research for change was in terms of:

- A community-driven and social justice-oriented action.
- Grounded in a collaborative boundary-blurring co-creation of long term sustainable inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge for unveiling the structural relations undergirding the status quo, and devising ways to change them.
- Based on a firm belief in the realism of change as a vision, and in action, from within a combined politics of mutual recognition and ethics of respect.

Smyth et al. (2014) and William-White et al. (2012) relate to these actions as forms of research that require more from researchers than simply bearing witness or giving testimony to the failure of schools and democracies to support justice and equality for all (Roman, 2009). As discussed in Beach and Vigo-Arrazola (2021). Although bearing witness and giving testimony are important, alone they are also insufficient for grappling with the practical problems of overcoming education injustice and its damaging effects on people, their lives, ambitions, knowledge, ideals, and interests (Herr, 2017; Kress, 2011; Robinson & Smyth, 2016). Torres and Hurtado-Vivas (2011) and Ulichny (1997) make similar points. In terms of method (Lather, 1997), they demand being present and willing to engage in jointly designing and conducting research for significant sustainable social change by:

- Promoting the broadest collective reflection and involvement of people as intellectuals in the unfolding of local education history while/by
- Breaking and discarding the role of the outstanding intellectual ground-floor leader illuminating and guiding others about the need of (and sustainable ways toward) research goals, such as social transformation

These are points raised about critical research for social transformation also by Apple (2013), Guajardo et al. (2017) and Kress (2011) as being the essence of critical research (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021; Smyth et al., 2014). Elfreich and Dennis (2022) describe them as ethical and methodological, as they involve not only doing research on the causes, ontology and effects of poverty, marginalization, and oppression, but also trying to find ways of creating conditions for a deliberate reflexive engagement with/in interactive communities that are working against these injustices (Kress, 2011; Smyth et al., 2014). This may mean surrendering certain researcher privileges they add (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2022; Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2020), including even whether to live in the wealthier parts of our communities or together with those with whom we aim to develop our research (Beach, 2017b).

As described in Vigo-Arrazola (2020) and Vigo-Arrazola and Dieste-Gracia (2017, 2020) this organic intellectual research commitment and practice is of course very different research to that of traditional researchers, whose aim is to observe, analyse, and describe the ideals of behaviour for change of an objectified class (Deckman & Ohito, 2020). In fact, this kind of objectivity is a problem rather than a solution, as it is a largely conservative practice, where researchers support and exploit inequity and injustice (perhaps even for their own career gains) rather than challenging it (Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021, 2022; Herr, 2017; Martin & Kamberelis, 2013). Researching for educational justice and social transformation requires researchers to overcome the division of labour that has developed in expert societies between research and practice, and the obstacles it creates (Anderson, 2017).

Smyth et al. (2014) and William-White et al. (2012) identify several points to consider in connection to this kind of research, which they identify as firstly needing to acknowledge that traditionally researchers have benefitted (and still do benefit) from this division of labour and privileges, before then acting swiftly toward destabilizing and challenging their foundations (Earick, 2018; Harris et al., 2015; Herr, 2017; Kress, 2011). As also Apple (2013), Elfreich and Dennis (2022) and earlier even Gramsci (1971) stated, examining, uncovering, challenging, and overcoming the commonly held beliefs and truths at play in *both* the suturing of *and* challenges toward hegemony are important here (Elliot, 1988; Madison, 2020 and Smyth et al., 2014). The point is to:

- First transcend and then eliminate the traditional barriers between researchers and the broader population (Deckman & Ohito, 2020; Guajardo et al., 2017) and the power structures and ideologies that support and normalize them (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; William-White et al., 2012) and to

- Find better ways of educating researchers as counter-hegemonic political actors who can operate effectively against the interests, power, alliances, and ideology of the dominant and repressive political and economic class (Deckman & Ohito, 2020; Harris et al., 2015; Montgomery & Canaan, 2006).

Questions of class position and alliance are significant but often ignored features here according to Beach and Vigo-Arrazola (2021). Using Gramsci (1971), they identified the importance of the kinds of relationships researchers formed with communities as vital. One of them, a venerability relation, occurred when the inherited power of the dominant hegemonic concept of scientist obstructed the formation of a symmetry of power in research as a collective act for social change (Anderson, 2017; Guajardo et al., 2017; Milligan, 2016; Smyth et al., 2014). The other followed the characteristics of research based on deep objectivity. It took a more organic relationship to and place within a community (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021).

Robinson and Smyth (2016, p. 331) put things similarly when identifying the tensions that oppose long-term strategies for sustainable progressive transformational learning (Elfreich & Dennis, 2022; Deckman & Ohito, 2020). Like Montgomery and Canaan (2006) they recognised how treating people with dignity and respect as knowers and potential co-producers of knowledge was essential, to enable people (together with researchers, and as researchers of their own lives and conditions) to dig more deeply into and develop powerful community knowledge for themselves (Crozier et al., 2009; Guajardo et al., 2017; Kincheloe, 2011). Justice and social transformation require the work of a broad population that can collectively identify the restraints of (and break free from) the oppressive characteristics of cultural, material, and political domination, exploitation, and marginalisation. It is not only an ethical but also a methodological imperative (Smyth et al., 2014).

Apple (2013) referred to Williams (1961) mode of 'long revolution' in this way. Long revolution has a complex architecture. It includes and requires the growth of a popular press and an extension of the reading public, but also the emergence of an academic class that thrives through struggling with others against exploitation and oppression. Their aim was to contribute to new and transformative social institutions and forms of citizenship (Roman, 2009; Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021, 2022) in an interplay for justice as a researcher with/in the public sphere (Apple, 2013; Vigo-Arrazola & Beach, 2021, 2022) against the political and practical discourses that hinder progress towards full and equal participation of all in education systems and society (Pillow, 2003).

Elfreich and Dennis (2022) and Gutierrez and Lipman (2016) identify these patterns and requirements too, when they describe the methodological possibilities, ethics, and dilemmas of activist scholarship as a form of praxis. As they noted, in the struggle for education justice researchers are not free from the social order or state control in their attempts to expose, challenge and replace the class- and racism inherent in schools and their societies (Francis et al., 2017; Roman, 2009; Ulichny, 1997; William-White et al., 2012). Instead, they recognise their restraints, the ideologies and practices that suture them, and the means of the potential undoing of their goals, which they also try to oppose (Beach & Vigo-Arrazola, 2021).

Conclusion

The research has used an analytic process of meta-ethnographic translational synthesis to systematically compare different primary ethnographic studies as an initial data (Table 1) to generate a meta-synthesis of ideas of practice. It has shown several things of importance when taking sides in research in solidarity with the interests of marginalised groups. Transcending the limitations of the dominant white patriarchal capitalistic definitions of culture rooted in onto-epistemologies and marginalising discourses that reify essentialised cultural identities is one demand (Greene, 2005). Participating actively with/in communities is another, pursuing a culturally sensitive transformational research practice is a third. Work by Harris et al. (2015), Beach and

Vigo-Arrazola (2021), Elfreich and Dennis (2022), Greene (2005), Madison (2020) and Smyth et al. (2014) describe some of the characteristics identified through the meta-ethnography about this type of research.

When summarising these characteristics collectively, we have presented threats to transformative action coming from two directions and with both a subjective and an objective side to them. On the subjective side is a requirement of having a clear understanding of who we are when we do research, what our values are, and what our ontological class position is, which gives a foundation (principles) for choosing what we should do in the interests of justice and why, as agents of change rather than servants of the dominant class. On the objective side, the requirement is knowing what we need to overcome to attain these aims, and how to best go about this within current conditions of global hegemonic capitalist planetary domination and exploitation. Kincheloe (2008) identifies this as knowing what to do in research to overcome unconscious, unexamined assumptions, and to avoid perpetuating an unjust status quo at a transformative intersection of epistemology, when attempting to move research praxis away from depictions of reality alone, toward useful action in efforts to address inequality and human suffering (Agee, 2002; Guajardo et al., 2017; Kincheloe, 2008, 2011). Threats to transformative action come from two directions. First from the risk of adopting a permanent structural form, so that we can no-longer speak of action with an end. The other is by becoming arbitrary.

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