



A sympathetic synthesis of
Amelia Hempel-Jorgensen's publications

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Amelia Hempel Jorgensen 1974-2023



Foreword

Amelia Hempel Jorgensen joined the Open University in 2014 as a Research Associate in the Faculty of Education and Language Studies. Interviewed by Professors Anna Craft and Teresa Cremin, her commitment to researching and redressing inequality in education was evident from the outset. She was promoted two years later to the position of Research Fellow (2016-2022). Previously Amelia had studied at Universities in Denmark and Australia and gained her PhD at the Institute of Education, London. Both personally and professionally, she was committed to social justice in literacy education; much of her work explored intersectional social identities, drawing attention to the relationship between ethnicity, social class and gender, and educational inequalities.

Amelia worked on multiple research projects whilst at the OU. For example, she was Principal Investigator on the British Academy funded project '*Understanding Boys' (Dis)engagement with Reading for Pleasure*', with Professors Teresa Cremin and Liz Chamberlain and Dr Diane Harris (University of Manchester) (2015-2017). The resultant paper was the most downloaded article from UKLA's journal *Literacy* in 2018. She also led research into *Hackney Learning Trust's Reading Programme* (2018-2020) and the *Learner Agency in Urban Primary Schools in Disadvantaged Areas*, funded by the Society for Educational Studies (2014-2015).

Additionally, Amelia was involved in the establishment of the Literacy and Social Justice Centre (LSJC) at the OU in 2019 and gave an initial seminar on her work. Later in 2022, with Professor Alice Bradbury from UCL, she guest edited a Special Issue of *Education 3-13* on *Reimagining Education after Covid*. This dovetailed with her study to understand how changes in school practices during the Covid-19 pandemic may have changed social relationships in the classroom, and in turn, impacted on students' wellbeing. In sum, Amelia's work focused on educational inequality in terms of how pedagogical practices can contribute to creating inequalities, but also how pedagogies can be more socially just and contribute to ameliorating inequality.

In order to ensure the legacy of Amelia's work, as co-directors of the LSJC we invited Dr Alison Twiner, with whom Amelia worked while at the OU, to offer a sympathetic synthesis of her publications. In the last two years of her life, Amelia was sadly unwell, nonetheless, she was still working with Teresa Cremin and Petra Vackova on papers problematising responsibility for reading for pleasure and intersectionality and reading. It is hoped that these too will be published and added to her body of work. Here, we celebrate Amelia's academic contribution. Her personal influence on our community, her intelligence, kindness and generosity are much missed.

Professor Teresa Cremin and Dr Helen Hendry
Co-directors of the Literacy and Social Justice Centre

Introduction

To open a synthesis of Amelia's work and contribution, and in seeking to do this justice, I felt it appropriate to draw on words Amelia wrote herself, in her author biography for a journal article published in 2015, outlining:

'Amelia's research focuses on re-conceptualising more socially just pedagogies in primary education. Her current research concerns the role of learner agency and is about to start new research exploring the role of mobile digital technologies in developing and theorising more socially just pedagogies' (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015a, p. 146)

This offers a window onto the intersecting areas of society and education in which Amelia worked to expose and unpack barriers, with the intention not necessarily of criticism, but of constructing means, rationale and examples of more equitable and empowering experiences of primary education.

Approach to this synthesis

From reading across Amelia's articles and outputs, guided by Braun and Clarke's reflective thematic analysis (2020), I sought to identify pertinent concepts, markers, challenges and methodological aspects. I identified and applied codes, grouped into themes, both inductively and deductively, based on existing reading and experience of Amelia's work, and previous conversations with her and colleagues; combined with re-reading familiar items and sources new to me.

Concepts were considered pertinent in the sense of reported significance in the work, for the associated learners and teachers as well as more widely – sometimes this reflected these elements appearing repeatedly across sources, though this was not a quantitative judgement; sometimes it related to a point of departure or insight, that could hold wider significance if explored further. Either way, in keeping with the approach of reflexive thematic analysis, themes were created to represent something meaningful in the body of work (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022), where ‘meaningful’ was based on my interpretation. Thus, pertinence is judged subjectively, with efforts to make this perceived importance visible to readers through transparent reporting and quoting extracts from Amelia’s body of work.

Including multiple extracts within this occasional paper was also important in attempts to preserve and convey Amelia’s voice together with the themes noticed within her work, as well as the voices of teachers and learners she sought to give platform through her writing. I note in all cases that this is my re-voicing, through my interpretation of the material, rather than a direct representation of the original voices – Amelia’s, reported teachers’ or learners’. It is important also to acknowledge that I was intentionally engaging in a sympathetic synthesis of a colleague’s and friend’s work, aiming to identify (what I perceived to be) key threads of significant intent and impact, and drawing attention to springboard threads that others may continue to pursue.

From re-reading across Amelia’s publications and highlighting concepts and quotes that stood out to me for different reasons as identified above, I considered that pertinent content was represented by six themes, containing 25 codes and three subcodes, as illustrated in the thematic overview below.

<p>Philosophical and theoretical influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intersectionality as lens for research to explore social (in)justice • Sociocultural theory of learner agency • Types of pedagogic approach • RfP as specific pedagogy 	<p>Choices and influences of methodological approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Interviews and focus groups • Observations and focal learners • Theming of data • Ethnography; attention in larger -scale projects • Ethical implications of research in this area 	<p>Intentions through the work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confronting stereotypes and imposed/fixed positioning • Supporting learner access and agency • Empowering teachers toward creative, productive, possibility or transformational pedagogies
<p>Markers of disadvantage, stereotypes and access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free School Meals as marker • Ethnicity as marker • Social class (and low income) as marker • Gender (male/female) as marker • Addressing combination of markers 	<p>Learners’ identity– constructed, positioned and resisted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positional identity • Labelling – ideal, norm, good, bad, deficit, struggling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By teacher (perception and positioning) • By learner about self (internalising) • About peers 	<p>Actions and behaviours that build and challenge identity and disadvantage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyment (will) • Attitude (will) • Attainment (skill) • Proficiency (skill) • Use and control of talk in settings (will -skill?)

Figure 1 Thematic overview: Themes & codes identified across Amelia’s publications

Within this are three main ‘framing’ themes, on the top row – philosophical and theoretical influence; methodological approach; and intentions through the work – and three main ‘conceptual’ or ‘functional’ themes, on the second row – markers of disadvantage; actions and behaviours that build and challenge identity and disadvantage; and learners’ identity as constructed, positioned, resisted. Broadly speaking, the framing themes represent the lenses through which, and the aims for which, the conceptual themes are explored. I briefly

review two of the framing themes: philosophical and theoretical influence, to ground the work Amelia was promoting; and intentions through the work, to identify the intended theoretical and practical implications and recommendations she sought to convey. I largely do not cover the methodological approaches theme, other than through the code and explicit coverage of ethical implications of research in this area, as this has importance for the framing, reflective and prospective impact of the work. I cover all three conceptual themes.

Unpacking contributions

Philosophical and theoretical influence (framing theme)

In her body of work, Amelia explicitly utilised intersectionality as a lens and tool for research exploring social (in)justice – in identifying what the focus or foci of the work is, and crucially in evidencing why this work and attention is needed. Seeking to draw in Amelia’s own research-informed conceptualisation of social justice, in her 2015 paper on learner agency and social justice, Amelia contextualised that:

‘Social justice is defined in terms of equal access for all learners to benefit socially and economically from education as a positional good (Reay 2012; Lingard 2005). Moreover, it includes equal access to experiencing the pleasure and enjoyment of learning in coming to understand something that is difficult yet worthwhile, for example, “discover[ing] what it is to generate intellectual insights or what it is to read critically” (Griffiths 2012, 664).’ (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015b, p. 2)

It is important to highlight that the ‘equal access’ denotes access to the *benefits* of education for social and economic aims, to *pleasurable experiences* and *worthwhile understandings*, not to countable things – whereby this equality would undoubtedly look different for different people, and does not assume a one-size-fits-all.

In addressing the employment of intersectionality to explore social justice, for instance, in her 2021 report for the British Academy, Amelia articulated its specific and wider relevance:

‘The paper thus provides a theoretical framework and methodology for researching the effects of intersectional identity discourses on children’s reader subjectivities which may be transferable to other curriculum domains’
(Hempel-Jorgensen, 2021, p. 21)

As perhaps one of the ideal benefits of education, Amelia emphasised a ‘sociocultural theory of learner agency’ (2015b), including pupils’ perception of their own agency, and their acting on the basis of believing they have agency – drawing on the work of Blair (2009). In much but not all of her work, independently and with colleagues, this included a focus specifically on practices, behaviours, judgements and identities related to reading.

Agency in this frame suggests a capacity to fight against systemic and social factors that act as barriers, or identity markers that are perceived as synonymous with or to reinforce disadvantage. Amelia sought to understand the mechanisms of such perception, as well as to identify and promote pedagogies that actively sought to counter any assumed disadvantage.

Markers of disadvantage, stereotypes and access (conceptual theme)

A pertinent thread running across Amelia's work focused on learners considered in some way 'disadvantaged'. She utilised free-school-meal (FSM) eligibility as an indicator, acknowledging this as a 'crude proxy for poverty' drawing on Hobbs and Vignoles (2010), alongside known inhibitors to learning opportunities including ethnicity and social class (drawing on Francis et al 2013; Rollock et al 2015 – referenced in Hempel-Jorgensen 2015c). But the agenda of Amelia's research was active, and so she used this detailed attention to highlight the very real impacts of such markers, and what teachers and schools (can) do to compound multiple potential or perceived indicators of disadvantage.

In considering the impacts of social class, Amelia highlighted how working class and low-income status were linked (acknowledging that they are not interchangeable, but that they often co-relate), stereotypically and statistically, to lower proficiency and enjoyment of reading. For the purpose of her work, 'Social class was determined on the basis of highest parental occupation using the Goldthorpe– Hope scale (Goldthorpe & Hope, 1974).' (2015a, p. 138).

An additional potential marker of disadvantage, stereotype and differential access addressed in Amelia's work is that of ethnicity and race. She particularly explored the intersection of non-White British, with working class and/or low income, male children, in terms of lower reading proficiency and lower expressed (or acted on/evident) enjoyment of reading. Her action in highlighting this intersectional pattern was as an opportunity to expose and counter perceived racism or

differences of interpretation. In the extract below we see fieldnotes retelling how a pupil's comment taken up as collective query by peers, was reportedly shut down defensively and completely by the teacher, othering the inquisitor as deficient:

'In a numeracy lesson the teacher attempts to illustrate that a boy is being hypocritical about something. She says, "that's like the pot calling the kettle black." Another boy exclaims "that's racist!" which is echoed by a small number of other boys. Other boys look at each other seeming highly interested in this exchange. The teacher immediately launches into a monologue. She explains in a defensive tone that "it is not racist" and that "it is ok to use the word 'black' because in this context it is not racist". She says to the boys' section of the class in general that they "need to learn and understand the nuances of the English language" and that she "would expect this type of comment from KS1 children, not KS2" and "they should know better" (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015c, p. 28)

It is appreciated that the teacher may have felt accused, and perhaps guilty realising the connotation and unintended power of her phrase, and teachers make in-the-moment decisions and responses constantly. However, in choosing to publish this extract – and in my re-inclusion of it here – Amelia identified how this exchange could have been turned into a real opportunity to unpack meanings and to draw teacher and learners into a joint discussion of labelling and identity, and that in fact such negative incorporation of the word 'black' could indeed be deemed racist. Such re-presentation, in

revisiting the intentions of Amelia's work, challenges us all to consider the meaning and consequence of our words and actions, intended and unintended, and to listen to the perhaps contrasting and unexpected voices of others.

As a further potential marker of disadvantage Amelia explored in her work, mentioned briefly already due to the undeniable intersectional links, is that of 'gender'. In this she framed gender as socially constructed 'from a post structural perspective in which gender identity is an ongoing project and not fixed, stable or binary as in a humanist conceptualisation (Cherland, 2008)', but acknowledging 'the dominant gender discourse is arguably based on a binary and biological understanding of gender where "boys" and "girls" are seen as distinct natural categories each with their own set of innate, abiding characteristics' (2021, p. 6). In utilising this frame, Amelia was able to draw out the consequences for what are seen socially and culturally as things that 'boys' do, and things that 'girls' do. This was relevant in her work to what this means for gendered assumptions about reading behaviours and likes, to the instantiations of stereotypical gendered perceptions that serve to reinforce inequalities in different ways, whilst dispelling a simple conceptualisation of a 'gender reading gap' (2021 British Academy report).

Addressing briefly some of the combinations of these markers of disadvantage, which I return to later in terms of identity, Amelia drew on Iverson and Duveen's (2006) competence pedagogy to unpack the notion of an 'ideal pupil' through research-oriented immersion in a 'contemporary, mixed socio-economic, child-centred classroom':

‘The ideal pupil’s central characteristics were perceived ‘intelligence’ and ‘good humour’, which were closely associated with middle-class boys. Middle-class and working-class girls were positioned against a female ideal pupil, who would take on a supporting role by creating a facilitating environment for boys’ learning. While middle-class girls were moderately successful in approximating these characteristics, working-class girls were positioned at the bottom of the class hierarchy.’
(Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015a, p. 132)

I now unpack how some of these markers played out in terms of learners’ identities.

Learners’ identity – constructed, positioned, resisted
(conceptual theme)

It is no coincidence that Amelia’s work focused on markers of disadvantage alongside opportunities for, barriers to and enactments of identity formation. She particularly drew attention to instantiations of ‘positional identity’ (drawing on Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Reay, 2012) and how learners are often categorised (by others, often teachers) – as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ learners, ‘proficient’ or ‘struggling’ readers – and how patterns of positional identity reflect starkly gendered, ethnic and class-based stereotypes. She explored who does the positioning (for instance the teacher and/or learners), how learners understand this positioning in relation to peers as an ‘ideal’ or not pupil, and what scope there is to change any enacted or imposed positioning. As indicated above, and through transparent data analysis, she exemplified how conceptions of the ‘good’, ‘ideal’ or ‘normal’ learner tended to be based on the actions, characteristics and

behaviours of a middle class, white, male pupil, with the education system built around this perception and so anything 'other' than this considered 'deficit' (Lupton & Hempel-Jorgensen, 2012, drawing on Reay). Following this thread, she illustrated how some learners seemingly seek to position themselves as readers they think teachers or researchers want to see (even, for instance, if evidence suggests they do not enjoy reading):

'Children seemed to be aware that reading was valued by their teachers and therefore may have been attempting to position themselves as readers to the researchers. Yet when they talked about specific texts it became apparent that they only engaged with a narrow range of texts inside school (compared with outside school) and that their engagement was minimal' (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018, p. 9)

In seeking to unpack how learners' identities are influenced, Amelia explored prevalent pedagogies in the classrooms she visited. She particularly considered how 'pedagogical approaches are labelled as socially just because they aim to disrupt practices which contribute to producing educational and wider social inequalities' (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015b, p. 2), and in the same source as well as in her previous work (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015a), how these relate to notions, perceptions, enactments of the 'ideal pupil' (drawing on (Becker, 1952; Benyon, 1985; Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009). In this she considered how labelling and blame occur and become embedded (drawing on Laws and Davies 2000), exposing and exploring the underpinnings and instantiations of this, in attempts to disrupt its unequally harmful implications. The

extended extract below seeks to exemplify this, including quotes from participants in the research and members of the classroom communities:

'Labelling occurred alongside blaming and was, for example, re-enforced by differential rewards of which pupils were acutely aware. 'Good' children, primarily those in the two higher attainment groups, were rewarded by being allowed to bring toys into the class. The 'naughty people' were rewarded, when they had not misbehaved, with stickers and money (for the collective benefit of the class), which was further reenforced by pupils acting as behaviour monitors.

"If we want to give, like, the bad people stickers when they're being good, we're allowed." (Boy, Aspen)

"You can say, Miss Grey, I think so and so should get a sticker because they've been really good and haven't been naughty most of the time." (Boy, Aspen)

Here it can be seen that children could be labelled, in either positive or negative terms, so that others could see that they were a 'good' or a 'bad' pupil, which is a crucial step in the process of creating the concept of the ideal (Laws and Davies 2000; Youdell 2006). Furthermore, the process was powerful because pupils and teachers were both actively engaged in labelling. Therefore, it was the culture of the classroom in which both teachers and pupils actively constructed what was good behaviour (Renold 2005)' (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009, p. 444)

We see therefore the light she shone on just how internalised such labelling can become and can imagine the detrimental and unequal consequences of these seemingly normalised practices. This arguably speaks to one of the interpreted intentions of Amelia's work, to expose and confront stereotypes of imposed or fixed positionings and identities.

Also exploring framings of identity specifically in the context of Reading for Pleasure (RfP), as she unpacked with colleagues, Amelia focused on those positioned as 'struggling readers'. She summarised how in the study, 'descriptions of a "struggling reader" by teachers drew on an understanding of reading as a technically "correct" performance' (Hempel-Jorgensen, et al., 2018). The authors continued, in terms of the identity effects of this arguably-negative label, that:

'This understanding of reading as proficiency was internalised by children. For example, during their group interview, the focus boys in School B described the 'good readers' in their class as being "...very clear, like they don't stammer or get nervous sometimes."

In marked contrast, the School D teacher, although acknowledging reading as related to proficiency, also saw it as related to understanding meaning, engaging with "the underlying messages of a text/story" and children creating their own interpretations of these. She stated the importance of children "finding something to read that [they] really like" to encourage RfP, "asking questions about [texts]" (not related to proficiency) and children "initiating" discussions and conversations about them. This teacher perceived "struggling" readers not only in

terms of reading proficiency, but also in relation to meaning-making.’ (Hempel-Jorgensen, et al., 2018, p. 5)

Linking back to the above comments about opening spaces for talk and for meaning making that invite students and encourage learner initiation and agency, and through this revoicing of the students and teachers, we see how a reading identity in the context of RfP can be turned into a space for engagement, exploration and identity-creation, rather than locking down or fixed proficiency-oriented identities.

Actions and behaviours that build and challenge identity and disadvantage

As well as identity, such considerations also relate to the actions and behaviours that enact or challenge identity, and markers of identity that tend to relate to disadvantage. As in the above discussions of ‘struggling’, ‘good’, ‘bad’, or ‘ideal’ learners’, Amelia and colleagues unpacked the importance and discourse of ‘ability’ (preferring the term ‘attainment’). Through her research she argued and illustrated how low reading attainment (measured formally) and low enjoyment of reading (through learners’ self-perceptions) frequently served to reinforce each other – and were exacerbated by dominant stereotypes already outlined related to gender, class and ethnicity, which perpetually then reinforce that this is the norm. She sought to identify, evidence and confront stereotypical, perceived or fixed intersections of gender, class, ethnicity and attainment – against a deficit lens and assumption of especially ‘struggling boy readers/non-readers’, which was generally related to an enactment of skill, rather than to a will or desire to read, that became internalised by children (Hempel-Jorgensen, et al., 2018). She also explored

how stereotype-challenging role modelling from teachers could serve to create a more positive frame in the context of and to influence children's reading likes and behaviours, through detailed case study examples of 'Reading Teachers' (Hempel-Jorgensen, Brassington & Dixon, 2023).

Amelia explored actions and behaviours in a broader sense, beyond a focus on reading, and in earlier work arguing against an educational journey being predominantly focused on attainment, through the intersectional lens as a means to explore social injustice. In this she stated following:

'... Griffiths' (2012) definition of social justice in which education is understood as both a positional good, and in terms of learners' experiences of schooling... It is therefore imperative that socially just pedagogies not only aim to raise the attainment of disadvantaged learners as measured in tests but also focus on learners' experiences of education.' (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015a, p. 132)

Some space has already been given to talk in the classroom, but it deserves further unpacking in terms of actions and behaviours and viewing education as an experience.

In her 2015 report to the Society for Educational Studies, Amelia explored in detail the use and control of talk in classrooms, by teachers and learners, and the potential impacts of this on learners' perceived agency. She reported the interview comments of one child about the opportunities they felt they had to contribute to class discussion, and what 'happened' to their talk if they did contribute:

'the thing I don't like most about like the teachers is just that they don't like, at first they don't give us enough time to speak and things like that and then they basically they're like interrupting us just before we can finish our sentence' (child, Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015c, p. 20)

From the same study and report, Amelia presented fieldnotes of a teacher's post-lesson interactions as the teacher sought to support a child who was finding a maths task difficult, utilising a range of their own and the child's actions to engage them in the activity and offer access to the learning experience:

'At the end of the lesson the teacher stays behind with one of the boys who is struggling. She demonstrates how ratios can be scaled up and down using plastic blocks. She says to the boy "you know this – we need to use the information we already have to judge whether it is right or not". The boy seems upset and edges away from the teacher. The teacher says, "sit down" in a friendly tone and says, "it's sometimes difficult to understand maths with words and that's why we use blocks." The boy eventually understands and writes in his learning log.' (fieldnote, Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015c, p. 51)

Whilst not representing a child verbally contributing to discussion and their learning, the above example illustrates Amelia drawing out how teachers can respond to learners' differential needs to extend access and engagement and ultimately understanding. It also shows that children's participation in their own learning can be valuable in a range of ways and modes, and the value of breaking down traditional barriers to make space for meaningful learning. Though these

offer momentary insights and examples, through this report and work Amelia emphasised and summarised the benefits of allowing:

‘Opportunities for high quality talk with the teacher and peers where relationships are positive and which engender meaning-making; autonomy in managing and carrying out learning tasks; intellectual and emotional engagement with learning activities and topics; being allowed to take initiatives and make original contributions to learning activities which are valued; and the extent to which children’s ethnic, social class and gender identities are validated and accepted’ (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015c, p. 11)

With the imperative of improving experiences central to Amelia’s work, it is no surprise but certainly important that she reflected on the ethical implications of her work and approach.

Ethical implications (within framing theme of methodological approach)

Through her work and writing Amelia commented on being mindful of ethical implications of researching this area, particularly in terms of her interactions with learners. For instance, in writing and in conducting the classroom-based studies, she reflected on her researcher positionality and perceptions of power differentials, critical in studies of disadvantage. In seeking to address this, she noted framing herself explicitly with learners as an ‘outsider’ in the setting: as different to teacher, not giving instructions to learners, but asking and observing. Specifically in terms of methodology, she commented on her decision to interview children in friendship

groups, with the intention of ‘redressing power imbalance as children were more able to shape the interview through discussion with each other (Hennessy & Heary, 2005)’ (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015a, p. 138).

It is notable in the examples given in previous sections that one student commented to Amelia as researcher on what they did not like of their teacher’s practice, in terms of opportunities to contribute verbally – a comment we can perhaps believe they would not have raised to their teacher directly. In contrast, other learners seemingly still replicated what they perhaps thought a generalised adult might want to hear in terms of attitudes to and practices of reading. These considerations of power and status are thus critical in conducting and reporting such work.

Amelia also reflected on the fact that with her colleagues involved in this line of work, they represented a predominantly (if not solely) white, middle-class, female group of researchers. (I realise that I too fall into this category.) She acknowledged that in exploring issues and impacts of perceptions related to race and class, this rather homogenous and arguably advantaged grouping and source of attention may have been experienced awkwardly or invasively by the participating learners and may also be received awkwardly by individuals and groups whose voices Amelia was seeking to foreground. This openness is important in this work, and in itself of course does not solve the problem. Amelia took seriously the responsibility that voices and actions of those with privilege should not remain silent or passive, though the challenges remain of how to ethically, meaningfully and authentically

expose and challenge intersectional disadvantage, whilst also recommending and building better ways forward.

Intentions through the work – and threads to take forward

Amelia's work sought to identify and understand some of the complex interweaving of markers of disadvantage, that position learners as in some way lesser, and that perpetuate reduced access to education as an engaging and rewarding experience – but she knew that just understanding some of these issues and pathways was not enough. In seeking to challenge the practices and perceptions that sustain these patterns, she worked to articulate possibilities for change, to reduce inequities and the long-term harm embedded, replicated and internalised through them – as particularly evidenced in the detailed case studies of Reading Teachers in the 2023 book chapter authored with two practicing teachers.

Whilst some of this incentive included critical observation of practice and thus of practitioners, she sought to work with teachers to identify patterns that disrupt dominant and harmful stereotypes, and to enable positive change, in concluding in her 2015 report on learner agency and urban primary schools:

'... teachers are able to employ pedagogical practices to enable children's learner agency in contexts characterised by relatively high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. The pressures caused by such disadvantage therefore do not necessarily lead to employing highly performative pedagogical practices. This arguably suggests that school leaders and teachers may have sufficient agency to make a significant difference to children's capacity to learn

effectively through engaging in meaning-making and knowledge construction' (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015c, p. 10)

In some of her work, she championed the practices of teachers who were making space to support learner agency in this way, through illustrating teachers' modelling of reading choices, and by demonstrating behaviours that counter stereotypes. She showcased work of teachers that actively listened to pupils' reasons for reading choices and used this as a stimulus to alter or enhance access in the setting. She also espoused the value of learners seeing peer role models that disrupt the stereotypes, such as where children saw non-White British, working-class, low-income boys who enjoy reading, or are seen and acknowledged by peers and practitioners as 'good' readers (Hempel-Jorgensen, Brassington & Dixon, 2023).

From this point of understanding, she sought to catalyse difference and action. She reinforced the need also to include parents in a 'triangle of trust' with teachers and learners – addressing power relations and multi-directional communication practices. She articulated the need to include mental health as a consideration of school engagement and experience. She also recommended that settings and practices consider how they can be more open to ways for students to be agentic, creative and playful in how they learn, to support learner (and teacher) agency, and toward more socially just pedagogy. An intersectional lens on such a complex web of influencing factors is therefore appropriate, to unpack disadvantage and barriers to access, and to identify ways forward that offer genuine opportunities for all learners to '*experience the pleasure and enjoyment of learning*' (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015b, p. 2).

Conclusions

In reviewing Amelia's body of work, which I have sought to do through this synthesis, I have offered my view of what is pertinent. Others will undoubtedly identify other themes and points of interest – some of which may be sparked or questioned through this review, in terms of what I have not focused on, or the way in which I have done so. This diversity of interpretation is important, and invited, in sustaining the threads of Amelia's efforts and attention. From this synthesis, and in looking ahead to what it means and what is still needed, there is much that we can learn from individually and collectively, and much work yet to be done.

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