

Institution: University of Hull		
Unit of Assessment: Education (UoA23)		
Title of case study: Using Emancipatory, Participatory Action Research (EmPAR) to improve the educational and social experience of young people in care		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 – present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Lisa Jones	Senior Lecturer in Education	Aug. 2013 - present
Dr Gill Hughes	Lecturer in Education	Sept. 1997 - present
Dr Max Hope	Lecturer in Education	Jan. 2011 - Sept. 2020
Dr Tricia Shaw	Senior Lecturer in Education	Nov. 2010 – present
Dr Ally Dunhill	Senior Lecturer in Education	Mar. 2008 - May 2018
Dr Kiki Messiou	Senior Lecturer in Education	Aug. 2007 – Oct. 2012
Dr Charlie Cooper	Lecturer in Youth Work	Jan. 2002 – July 2016
Dr Rebecca Adderley	Lecturer in Education	Sept. 2014 – July 2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2017 – present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Researchers at the University of Hull have developed a unique Emancipatory Participatory Action Research (EmPAR) approach and have applied this to their work with disadvantaged children and young people in the care system. Research findings - including the development of an innovative co-produced film - have transformed both policy and practice across a range of educational settings and children's services at a local, national and global level. Young people involved have 1) gained new skills 2) increased their confidence and self-esteem, and 3) brought about change on behalf of tens of thousands of young people like them. This has been achieved through foregrounding young people's voices to challenge negative perceptions, alongside the development of enhanced support available in schools, virtual schools, teacher education and other social care services. An independent film production company has also benefitted economically through new contracts and through an enhanced national/international reputation.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Since 2012, there has been a sustained programme of innovative educational research termed Emancipatory Participatory Action Research (EmPAR). It focuses on honing and developing the utilisation of participatory research approaches to enable the voices of children, young people and community groups. The goal is to enable those facing disadvantage to be heard, so as to bring about meaningful changes, for instance in educational policy and practice. The key insights from this body of research identified the importance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building trusting/collaborative relationships with an ongoing duty of care [3.1; 3.2]. ● Recognising that the knowledge from lived experiences is an asset [3.1; 3.2]. ● Countering tokenistic consultation, co-option or extraction of information [3.1; 3.2]. ● Using innovative, creative engagement tools [3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5]. ● Facilitating participation in decision-making processes, shifting power imbalances and changing culture and practices [3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5] ● Promoting co-constructed knowledge and co-production of change [3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5]. ● Valuing long-term relationships to maintain/build connections and see the partnership through to social action [3.1; 3.2]. <p>The EmPAR methodology builds upon participatory action research (PAR) and emancipatory action research (EAR), with its open and direct commitment to social change. EmPAR involves a collaborative approach where change often occurs incrementally through an iterative process of research and collective action, through which research and impact are intimately connected. As experts in their lived experience, the non-academics in the research are active participants rather than passive recipients, driving the process of emancipation.</p>		

The UoA has applied the innovative EmPAR methodology to seven collaborative action research projects thus far and continues to do so. This case study focusses on one of these projects - **Just Like Our Lives** (JLOL) (April 2017 to present) - led by Jones with Dr Dean (fixed-term Post-Doctoral researcher) and involving Shaw, Hope and Dunhill. JLOL is a research collaboration with young people from the East Riding Children in Care Council (CiCC) and East Riding Virtual School (also known as the Vulnerable Children Education Team - VCET). A Virtual School is the local authority mechanism that supports and promotes the educational progress of Children & Young People Looked-After (CYPLA) so that they achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers. Researchers worked closely with CYPLA – those in the care of their local authority, living with foster parents, in residential children's homes, schools or secure units, widely considered as marginalised and facing high levels of social and educational disadvantage. As at 31st March 2020, there were 80,080 CYPLA in the UK (Department for Education). The original aim of the research was to foreground the voices of the young people to elicit new insights about how Virtual Schools could better support them.

JLOL developed novel, inclusive, empathetic and creative ways of working, aiming to achieve transformative and emancipatory change for the individuals involved and for young people across the UK. Through the iterative application of EmPAR in JLOL, the key findings [3.1] were:

- Young people expressed that common practices including removal from school lessons for meetings with social workers and other seemingly supportive interventions served to mark them as 'different' to their peers when they felt the majority of the issues they faced were the same as for any other young person.
- This demarcation as 'different' often positioned them as 'other' in the context of their schooling, which inhibited their sense of belonging in school and significantly affected the way they were viewed by peers, subsequently increasing levels of subjection to bullying.
- The young people and support workers felt many teachers/professionals held preconceptions that characterise and stereotype the young people in terms of deficiencies and failures.
- The young people identified the need for better teacher training to address these issues.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Jones, L., Dean, C., Dunhill, A., Hope, M.A. and Shaw, P.A. (2020) 'We are the same as everyone else just with a different and unique backstory': identity, belonging and Othering within education for young people who are 'looked after'. *Children and Society*, 34(6), 492-506.

3.2 Hughes G. and Cooper C. (2015) Critical Pedagogy and the Risks Associated with Performing Lifeworlds. In: Evans R., Holt L., Skelton T. (eds) *Methodological Approaches. Geographies of Children and Young People*, vol 2. Singapore: Springer.

3.3 Adderley, R.J., Hope, M.A., Hughes, G., Jones, L., Messiou, K., and Shaw, P.A. (2015) Exploring inclusive practices in primary schools: focusing on children's voices. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 30(1), 106-121.

3.4 Messiou, K. and Hope, M. (2015) The danger of subverting students' views in schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(10), 1009-1021.

3.5 Messiou, K. Ainscow, M., Echeita, G., Goldrick, S., Hope, M., Paes, I., Sandoval, M., Simon, C. and Vitorino, T. (2015) Learning from differences: a strategy for teacher development in respect to student diversity. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 27(1), 45-61.

3.6 Grant: *Responding to diversity by engaging with students' voices: a strategy for teacher development* – PI K. **Messiou**, CI M. **Hope** et al.; EU Comenius Multilateral Projects/Lifelong Learning Programme; 2011 to 2014; Total grant €173,927.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The key beneficiaries are young people, virtual schools, schools, teachers, teacher educators, trainee teachers, local authority children's services (policy and practice) and an arts company.

For the young people involved as collaborators – gained new skills, increased their confidence and self-esteem, and experienced life-changing opportunities to have their voices heard, which influenced positive change for themselves and other CYPLA.

27 young people who were in the care of the local authority in the East Riding of Yorkshire participated in the action research from May 2017 to Jan. 2020. The collaborative research identified the need for better training for teachers so, utilising a further iteration of EmPAR, the



young people identified the need for and desire to create a film (Feb. 2019). The project then partnered with award-winning production company My Pockets Arts to create an animated film (completed Oct. 2019) and the young people developed associated materials to accompany it for training teachers and other professionals working in children's services [5.1]. The young people narrated the film using a poem created directly from their stories and experiences (from the research findings and further

workshops), and were fully involved in the planning and design of the animation. They also learnt about the digital animation process, acquiring new skills; and they gained confidence about claiming their right to be heard and for them and other CYPLA to be treated fairly [5.2].

Understanding and valuing the contribution they could make was really important to the young people. Three of them commented: *"Proud that we can learn from the mistakes made and hopeful that in the future kids can go to school without worrying about these things"*; *"I feel it will be beneficial to young people in care as it can help alter the way they are treated and stuff"* and *"I feel like it could make a difference and allow children/young people to feel safe and protected at school"* [5.2]. Reflecting on whether engagement with the project had had a personal impact on them, the young people's responses included: *"It felt like a safe place where I could speak about things that have happened to me"*; ***"It's made me more confident at school cause I know I'm not alone anymore"*** and *"I want to learn to animate more"* [5.2]. Staff who worked closely with the young people commented on the growth in confidence. The Virtual School Headteacher stated: *"It was clear to see the confidence that participating in the project has given the young people especially in realising how important it is for their voices to be heard.... from my perspective [it] appears to have had a positive impact in raising their self-esteem"* [5.3].

For practitioners such as teachers and trainee teachers - new skills, knowledge and confidence about how best to support CYPLA to optimise their educational outcomes.

The animated film and associated materials have been made freely available online [5.1] for both initial teacher education (in HEIs) and continuing professional development (CPD) in schools. On 21st Nov. 2019, all secondary school heads/leadership teams across the entire East Riding local authority watched the film (**18 schools with a total of 19,820 students**). In the words of the Virtual Headteacher, this is about *"changing cultures and ... hearts and minds"* of school leaders in implementing appropriate support mechanisms for CYPLA: *"We have therefore incorporated the animation into our strategy to work closely with school leadership teams as a means to enable the voice of the children and young people to be heard and to raise understanding and empathy for the challenges they are facing and have to overcome to go into school each day"* [5.3].

This had a significant impact. For example, after seeing the film, the Director of Education in a multi-academy trust (MAT) with five secondary schools, two primaries and one all-through school across the East Riding, Hull and a neighbouring local authority (with 7811 learners and almost 1000 staff), incorporated it into training for all support staff across all of their schools in Jan. 2020 [5.4]. Approximately **500 staff in a variety of roles viewed the film** as part of their CPD focused on the well-being of learners, to demonstrate *"that positive adult and learner relationships are key"* [5.4]. The Director of Education confirms that staff feedback indicated the film was *"enlightening, impactful and that it created a strong emotional response in many staff"* and *"prompted staff to volunteer to develop to their own skills and wanting to do better to support the wellbeing of all of our children and young people."* After witnessing the success of the film and staff responses, the MAT told us: ***"...we are embedding using the film into future induction training for new staff members through the Designated Teacher inputs"*** [5.4]. The MAT is also incorporating the film and its messages into its Early Career Framework training [5.4].

In Nov. 2019, the materials designed by the young people were successfully piloted in higher education at a 2-hour teacher-training session at the University of Hull. **98% of the 47 trainee teachers receiving the training reported feeling more aware of, and more confident about,**

dealing with the issues involved in supporting CYPLA. This was indicated via self-scoring confidence levels before and after the session on a five-point Likert scale from 1 'Not at all confident' to 5 'Very confident', with **96% of participants moving up at least one scale as a result of the training and 34% moving up two or more** [5.5]. Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the training. One said "*Listening to the video of what the children think and feel really helped change my views/thinking about teaching them*", and many participants anticipated changes to future teaching practice, for example: "*[I will] be more aware of the child's concerns and ensuring that they have the support they need without feeling that they are 'different'.*" [5.5]. The teacher trainer piloting the materials said "*The resources and session-outline offered to me were really helpful in enabling me to deliver an effective and informative session to my students*". She has now adopted the materials into her training with new cohorts from Nov. 2020 [5.5]. Four workshops aimed at extending the impact across the north of England (Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds and Hull) for schools/children's workforce professionals - building on the pilot and led directly by the young people - were planned for May-July 2020 but postponed due to Covid19.

For East Riding Virtual School, other Virtual Schools and local authorities - new evidence-based practices to improve support for CYPLA to optimise social/educational outcomes.

Drawing on the findings of the research and its recommendations, East Riding Virtual School strategically reviewed its processes and service provision, culminating in a comprehensive Action Plan [5.6]. As the Virtual Headteacher explains: "*In September 2017, the project team presented the findings from the research in a final report that was written specifically to assist us through its inclusion of practical recommendations for developing our practices within the VCET. After receiving the report, the VCET developed a comprehensive five page Action Plan in November 2017 that directly responded to each of the report's nine recommendations by translating these into time-specific objectives and actions with clear time scales/milestones and appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The focus of these included but was not limited to reviewing our Personal Education Plans (PEPs), developing our approach to reducing bullying and looking at the need for more training for schools/teachers. All the objectives and activities in the plan were implemented and followed up and as a team we achieved all those changes we set out to make*" [5.3].

An important change occurring as a direct result of the research was to review the timings of CYPLA's statutory meetings for Personal Education Plans (PEPs), and more systematically include the voice of the young people. The PEP process was changed in direct response to the concerns CYPLA raised in the research around the negative impact of existing practices on a) education; b) privacy; c) demarcation as 'different' from peers [5.3]. The Virtual Headteacher directly attributes the change of practice to the research [5.3] which was noted by Ofsted in its inspection of Children's Social Care Services in 2019: "*Personal education plans (PEPs) have improved considerably since the last inspection...The PEPs reflect the voice of the child*" [5.7].

The film has also been integrated into Designated Teacher Training within the Virtual School [5.3] and a range of other children's services in the East Riding. As the Director of Children, Families and Schools explains: "***Just Like Our Lives and its underpinning message has had a significant impact across a range of services. The film has been shown to school governors and elected members as well as new social workers in their induction. It has been integrated into the local authority's training for foster carers and training for independent visitors extending the reach of the impact well beyond education and the Virtual School. Our social workers have also incorporated the film into sessions they have delivered for social work students at the University. It has been widely shared beyond the local authority at regional and national events and training, for instance in relation to national training for pathway teams supporting care leavers, in a session attended by the Children's Commissioner. The film and its impact has also inspired us to consider how else we can utilise similar approaches in other areas...***" [5.8]. The local authority has also committed to utilising similar creative methods with the same film maker "*Further projects would be undertaken with My Pockets considering topics such as domestic violence or the reunification of children with families*". [5.6].

The Dec. 2019 Ofsted Inspection [5.7] identified the support offered to young people in care as an area of strength in the Council's provision, including the way in which their voices are well represented throughout. It identified the CiCC's involvement in the film as a specific example of

this good practice in supporting the young people's voice. The key research finding that the young people did not want to be treated differently was specifically noted. The Ofsted report [5.7] notes: **"The group has made an excellent animated video that depicts how it feels to be in care, and this has been widely distributed to other local authorities, schools, social media platforms and the children's commissioner's website. The children were well supported to describe their feelings in poetry, and they featured as animated characters in the video. The video includes a powerful message about their wish not to be singled out and treated differently, especially in school, and celebrates their uniqueness rather than their difference."** [5.7 (section 34. page 9)].

For My Pockets Arts – enhanced national and international reputation, recognition and new work opportunities/additional contracts.

Involvement in the project directly led to new contracts and new partnerships (for example, delivering a project for a national charity based in Liverpool, a London-based adoption agency and a project in the North East) for the film making company, My Pockets Arts. The co-owner confirms [5.9]: *"two of these projects involved us pitching against London based agencies. 'Just Like Our Lives' was a key factor in being asked to pitch in the first place and to our winning the work. These new projects have supported My Pockets but also our wider team that includes freelance musicians and puppet makers who are all from Yorkshire. So far the total value of work gained as a direct consequence of making 'Just Like Our Lives' is £[REDACTED]".* The film has also been **shortlisted for five global awards** (e.g. Positively Different, Minneapolis St Paul International - also see below), and, as the owner says: *"This has really helped promote our company and the work we do to new audiences both nationally and internationally...[and] has helped both in terms of creative recognition and in terms of illustrating the role we can offer as part of collaborative work/research ventures"* [5.9].

For the wider community - raised awareness of the unique challenges faced by CYPLA.

The *Just Like Our Lives* animated film has been instrumental in raising awareness and understanding about the challenges faced by CYPLA, nationally and internationally, to a broad audience. The film has been **viewed over 2700 times** on YouTube [5.1] and shared through social media including a dedicated Twitter account [5.10]. Through these channels, it has received praise from key policy figures, charities, Virtual Schools and the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (NAVSH) [5.10]. For instance, Ofsted's Specialist Chief Adviser (Children in Care) shared the video on Twitter with the message *"This is a brilliant, sharp and touching short film from the East Riding Children in Care Council – congratulations to all involved in its creation! Please take a few minutes of your time to watch it"* [5.10]. In 2020, **the film was shortlisted as a finalist in the AHRC's prestigious Research in Film Awards (RIFA)** and also shortlisted from **1265 entries (from 110 countries) as one of the 15 finalists** in the 'animation' category of the inaugural **World Health Organization's Health for All Film Festival** [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 The *Just Like Our Lives* animated film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Al3vtGKcqhg> and associated training materials for teachers/other practitioners <https://www.justlikeourlives.com/>
- 5.2 Evidence from the young people involved in *Just Like Our Lives* about the impact for them.
- 5.3 Testimonial from East Riding Virtual School Headteacher.
- 5.4 Testimonial from Director of Education, Multi Academy Trust.
- 5.5 Feedback from trainee teachers and the teacher educator participating in the pilot training.
- 5.6 East Riding Virtual School's Action Plan (Nov. 2017) and minutes from its Governance Panel (Nov. 2019 – page 4).
- 5.7 Ofsted report for Inspection of Children's Social Care Services at East Riding of Yorkshire Council (Dec 2019).
- 5.8 Testimonial from East Riding Director of Children's Services.
- 5.9 Testimonial from owner of My Pockets Arts.
- 5.10 Evidence of national and international engagement with and recognition of the project/film, including *Just Like Our Lives* Twitter account <https://twitter.com/JustLikeOurLiv2> & shortlisting for national and international festivals and awards including AHRC's RIFA and WHO's *Health for All*.