# centre of **excellence** for **equity** in higher **education**

**Reframing Equity in HE
Professor Penny Jane Burke
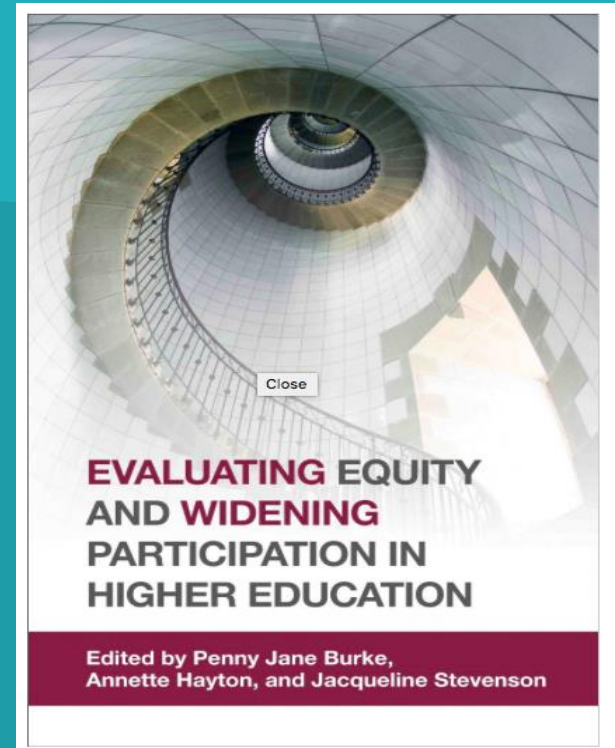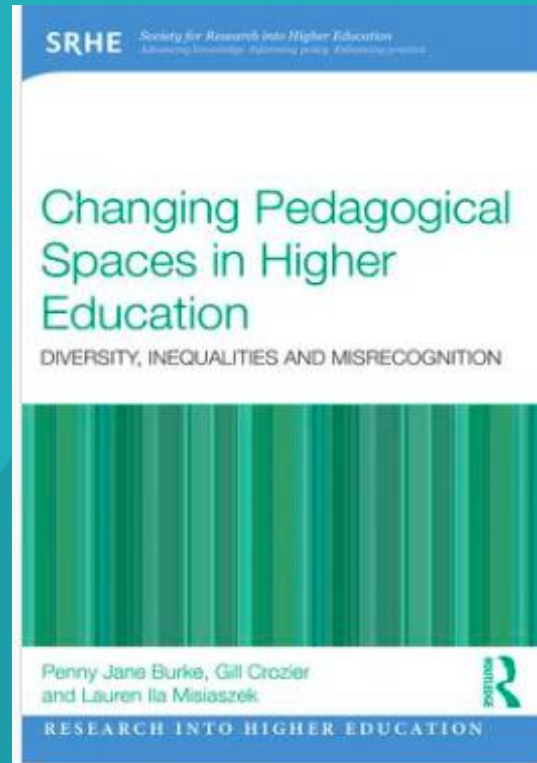Global Innovation Chair of Equity
Director, CEEHE**

# AIMS



- To situate my work and perspectives – **auto/biography of the question**

- To consider – and interrogate – what **EQUITY means** in the context of HE

- To explore this in relation to **social justice** theoretical insights

- To consider these insights in relation to constructions of capability & our practices

- To suggest **PPOEMs** as a way forward to approach equity differently – not as an instrumental 'how to' but by **opening up critical time, space and resources to do justice** to the complexity of equity

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# The auto/biography of the question – reflexivity & situating the gaze



The Right to Higher Education
BEYOND WIDENING PARTICIPATION
PENNY JANE BURKE



SRHE — Society for Research into Higher Education
Changing Pedagogical Spaces in Higher Education
DIVERSITY, INEQUALITIES AND MISRECOGNITION
Penny Jane Burke, Gill Crozier and Lauren Ila Misiaszek
RESEARCH INTO HIGHER EDUCATION



EVALUATING EQUITY AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION
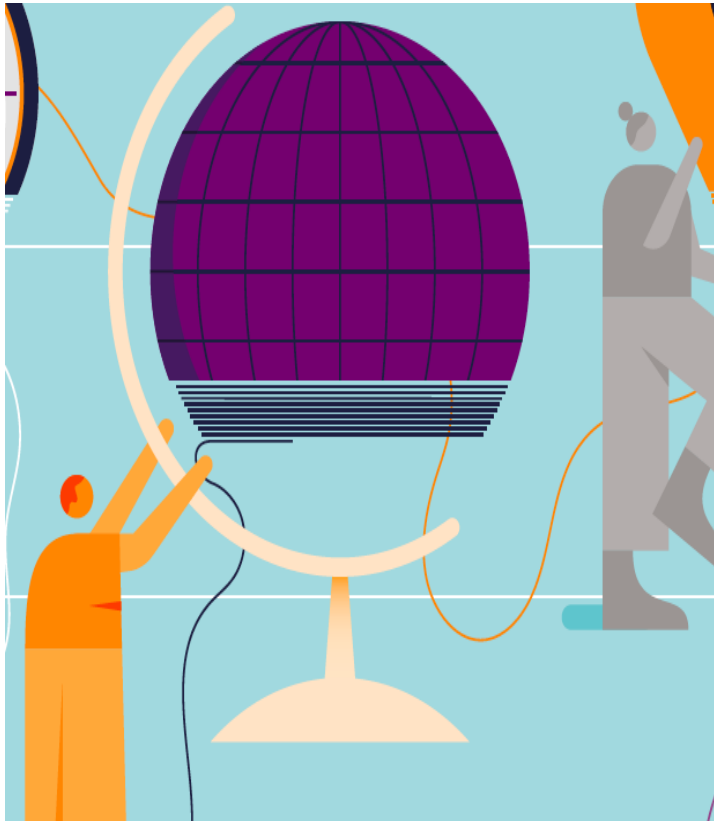Edited by Penny Jane Burke, Annette Hayton, and Jacqueline Stevenson

## Equity *in & through* higher education

- Concerns to create greater equity in education are often projected *outside* **of higher education core practices (e.g. research & teaching)**.

- Yet **educational practices, relations & spaces are central** to developing equitable education.

- **Leadership in HE is essential** to equity agenda.

- The complexity of inequality requires **much more than individualised strategies**

- PJ Burke & G Whitty (2018):

**"We argue that equity must become a central dimension of teacher education to challenge the complex ways that insidious inequalities are reproduced in and through educational frameworks and practices".**

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# What is EQUITY?

- concerned with the **historical and persistent under-representation** of particular social groups.

- **challenging inequalities** across educational contexts (reproduction through institutional structures, practices, discourses, cultures, systems)

- **access** (to educational resources, opportunities, practices, knowledge, representation)

- **widening participation** – requiring attention to what we mean by *participation*

- **social justice** – understanding how inequalities in education are interconnected with wider social inequalities

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## Equality & Equity

- Equality emphasizes **treating people the same** –
  - e.g. women should have the same rights as men
  - Strategies might include **redistributing** resources to those who have not had access previously to level the playing field
  - Making sure there are mechanisms in place to stop people from unfairly exploiting their social privilege (e.g. privileged families gaining access to resources intended for widening participation)
  - Making sure that there is equality of outcomes as well as equality of opportunity

- Equity emphasizes the **recognition of difference**
  - **recognition** of the ways histories of institutionalized value have marginalized the values, cultures & knowledges of Other groups
  - Strategies might include developing selection approaches that **recognize** different forms of experience, value & knowledge
  - This includes **representation** of the different perspectives, values & perspectives that have been historically marginalized

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# Deficit imaginaries through individualising equity

- *lack of aspiration* – misunderstands the complex ways that aspirations are formed in context and through recognition & identity formations

- *lack of potential cap/ability* – often constructed as innate – the assumption that a person naturally 'has' potential or ability (and this can be measured & observed)

- *lack of cultural or social capital* – disconnects the important insight of 'capital'(cultural, social, economic, symbolic) from field (schooling, higher education) and habitus (the ways structures are internalised in the body and self)

- *lack of confidence* – highly subjective notion that is judged through gendered and classed lens – how a confident person should be/act/do

- *lack of resilience* – focuses on particular notions of resilience and ignores others – relocates problem with individual and not structures that undermine resilience

- *and on & on….*

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**Transparency does not equate to fairness**

- Notions of "fair access" often **conflates 'transparency' and 'fairness'**

- assumes that *clear information leads to fair access* (BUT e.g. hot & cold knowledge, info might be clear but not communicating an expectation or criterion that is inherently fair)
  - creating transparent sets of criteria & procedures is *erroneously assumed to lead to fair decisions* in selection, assessment & judgement processes
  - e.g. - selection interviews - the panel might create an interview instrument that ensures the same questions are asked of each and every candidate aiming to achieve fairness

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## Remedial approaches – problematic implications…

- Remedial approaches: additional support outside of a student' s main program of study (e.g. study skills, time management & counselling)

- Such approaches are helpful but *limited in scope* - tend to reduce *complex processes* (e.g. critical thinking, analysis, interpretation, problem solving, synthesising, developing an argument, locating work in a wider field…) to sets of techniques or skills – removing knowledge practices and positions from view

-  tends to reduce key academic practices as decontextualized sets of mechanical & generic skills rather than embedded in particular *disciplinary communities of practice (e.g. arts, sciences, maths, social sciences, etc)*

- **Often leads to the perpetuation of inequality and misrecognition**

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NALN Research Report

Penny Jane Burke and
Jackie McManus

**Exclusion and
Misrecognition
in Art and Design
Higher Education
Admissions**

# ART FOR A FEW

## Case study of "Nina"

- Nina a Black British female candidate applying for a BA Fashion – from LSES background – meets all entry criteria (good qualifications & strong portfolio of work)
- Complex multi-level selection process
- When asked interview question: "What influences your work", she answers "hip hop"
- She is rejected immediately following interview
- Next candidate is White British male from affluent background who answers influence question with a range of contemporary artists
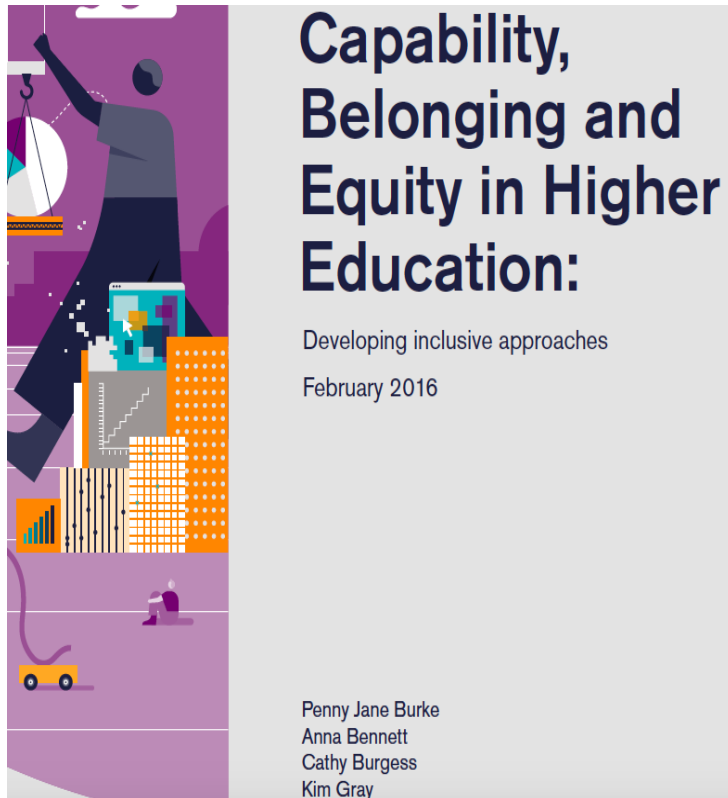- He is accepted despite having much poorer qualifications than Nina including having failed secondary school art

## Processes of Misrecognition

- **Nina not recognized as a strong candidate because she cited a form of fashion seen as invalid in the Art & Design CoP.**

- **Nina from local community who didn't want to leave home – seen as signifier of immaturity**

- **The ways she dressed were criticized as lacking fashion flair**

- **The male, middle-class, white-English candidate embodied the value & practices of the community of practice (CoP) – recognized as a strong candidate (well-dressed, cited all the 'right' references in his interview…) despite his profile.**

The admissions tutors' judgments shaped by implicit, taken-for-granted values & perspectives of **what counts as legitimate forms of experience and knowledge within the CoP of Fashion**.
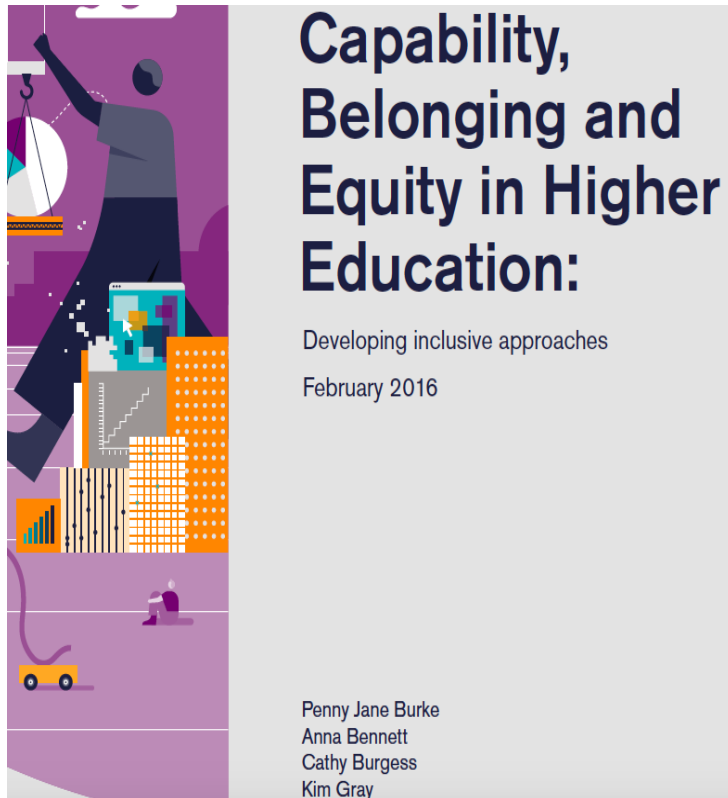
**Demonstrates how CoPs can perpetuates exclusions** that are historical and culturally embedded –the shared understanding within the CoP works to **conceal discriminatory and exclusive practices– reproducing *MISRECOGNITION***

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# Overview of project



**Capability, Belonging and Equity in Higher Education:**

Developing inclusive approaches

February 2016

Penny Jane Burke
Anna Bennett
Cathy Burgess
Kim Gray

- Mixed methods project (funded by NCSEHE & CEEHE).

- Draws on data from a 2014 pilot study: examined students' **beliefs** about their ability, intelligence & levels of confidence in these attributes;

- 772 first year undergraduate students took part in a survey.

- Focus groups and interviews with 41 students and 19 university lecturers.

- The project examined how capability is constructed & with what effects for in/equity: particular attention paid to the symbolic & emotional level of identity-formation, experience and confidence.

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# Survey results



Capability,
Belonging and
Equity in Higher
Education:

Developing inclusive approaches

February 2016

Penny Jane Burke
Anna Bennett
Cathy Burgess
Kim Gray

- Students with a higher ATAR were **more confident** about their capability and less likely to question their intelligence;

- Approximately a third of students surveyed in the last weeks of their first year of study **did not feel confident** about their academic capability;

- Mature students from Enabling tended to have **greater levels of confidence** about their intellectual ability;

- Males were more likely to feel **confident about their intelligence and capability** than females.

## Accounts from interviews with staff

- Yeah, and some of our students with maths particularly have a very great high level of maths anxiety from previous bad experiences at school, and that's where we have to be very careful with them so that some will improve with a lot of encouragement, and hard work (Maths)

- It's a strong thing, and I would say it takes a good half a semester to get them to feel confident over that fear of failure, and it's building that relationship with the students and providing that supportive environment, and so then they get to the point where they go and trust. (Chemistry)

- From my experience in teaching; fear of failure, fear of making mistakes and maybe a fear that they don't have the intelligence to do what they want to do, they don't have the self-belief that they can learn something new that can be a benefit to them (Chemistry)
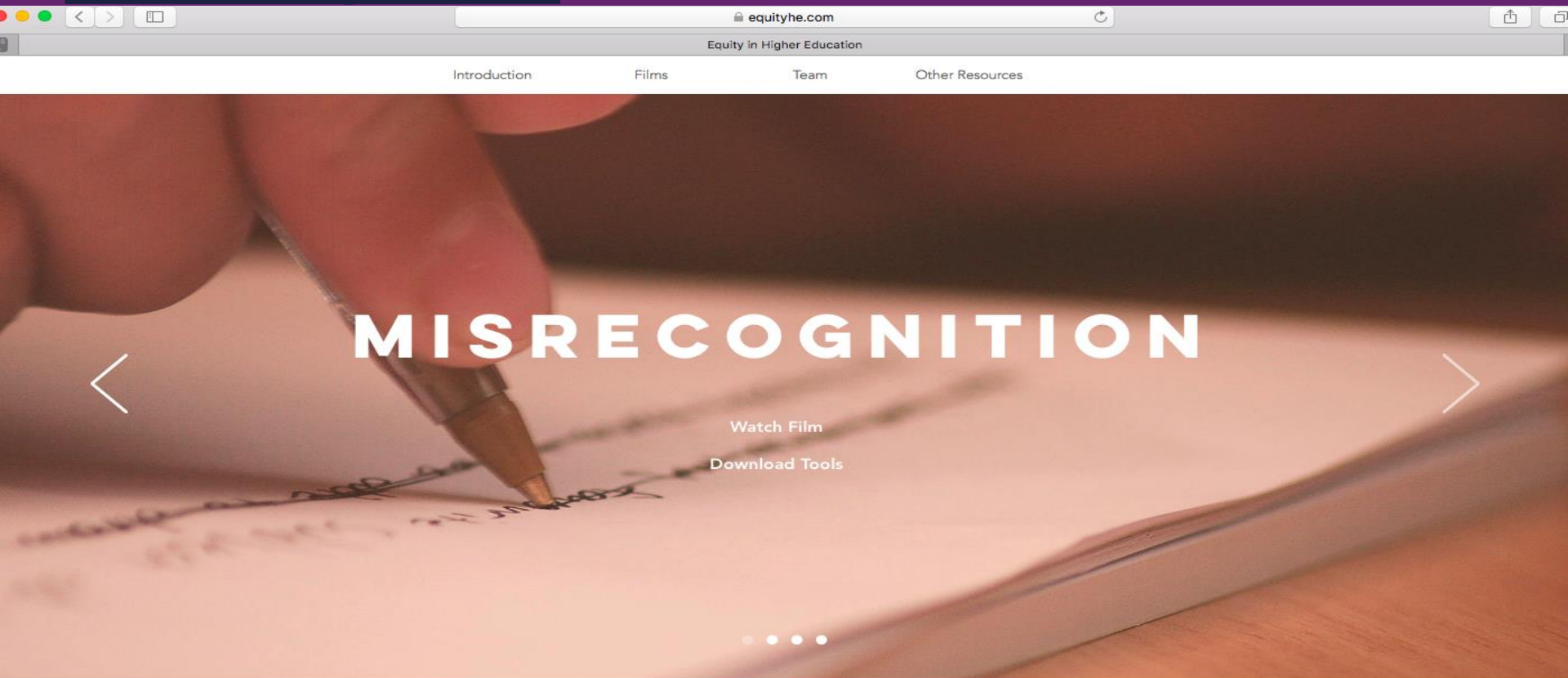
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# Misrecognition

**Discussion point**

- **How is potential and ability understood within your community of practice?**

- **How is it judged and assessed?**

- **How might value judgements about potential and ability play out in your community of practice?**

- **How might the methods of assessment used be exclusive to some groups?**

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# Reframing Equity through PPOEMs – Praxis-based PedagOgical Ethically-oriented Methodologies

- **Multidimensional concerns**:
  - Redistribution
  - Recognition
  - Representation

- **Identity, Diversity & Inequality**
  - Becoming a university student is tied to identity formation
  - tied to subjective and emotional experience – *deeply relational*
  - Tied to complex power relations at macro- and micro- levels
  - Feelings of (not) belonging – structural inequalities/misrecognition becomes internalized in sense of self

- **Critical pedagogies**
  - Education – has both *reproductive* and *transformative* power
  - Pedagogical relations central to knowledge, power and identity nexus (who is seen to know, who has authority, processes of legitimizing different bodies)
  - Shifting power through (deeply) inclusive processes

- **Praxis-based frameworks**
  - Action/reflection must be in ongoing dialogue to create transformational processes (praxis)
  - E.g. Research-informed policy & practice
  - Praxis & reflexivity key tools for equity
  - Time, space & resources required across all dimensions (leadership, teaching, curriculum, outreach…)

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**Developing excellence for equity through excellent teaching**

- equity depends on **high quality teaching** that is sensitive to student diversity & difference

- Such pedagogical approaches require expertise in teaching and learning to nurture and **develop a sense of capability and belonging**

- requires leadership at institutional level -- provide **high quality Professional Development**
  - takes teaching expertise as seriously as research expertise –
  - brings these together so that pedagogical research enhances equity in teaching and learning practices

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# Equity in curriculum: Epistemic Access



- International research has exposed problematic nature of moves towards **utilitarian, generic and/or work-based curricula – access to what & for whom?**

- Rather – a need to make **accessible** that knowledge that carries social esteem and power to under-represented groups

- should simultaneously open up possibilities for **developing spaces that fully recognize the importance of those forms of knowledge that have been excluded** from mainstream HE curricula.

- **Discussion point: What are the challenges of this? What are the opportunities?**

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## Quality and Equity

- Equity is NOT about lowering standards

- It is about **redistributing high quality educational resources and opportunities**

- However a narrow focus on measurement of ability tends to **measure privilege rather than potential**

- discourses of excellence associated with struggles for prestige -- the race to be ranked as "world-class."

- **This does not translate to quality!**

- **This often undermines equity!**

- **Excellence and equity as held together so that:**
  - **all students have high quality educational opportunities**
  - **Excellence is judged in relation to institutional commitment to equity (is something really excellent if it is inequitable? And is it equitable if it is low quality?)**

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## some reflections for high quality leadership

- Equity in HE must to be **embedded institutionally** with **clear principles and guidelines** to avoid unwittingly reproducing inequality

- Only **transformative strategies** can move beyond superficial remedies and address the underlying sources of inequality (Whitty et al 1998; Burke, 2012).

- requires **critical reflexivity** & **praxis-based** (reflection/action nexus) approaches

- Drawing together the **multiple aspects of equity & social justice** is challenging to both individual practitioners but also to broader questions about what counts as 'quality' & 'excellence'

- work across **different** pedagogical & research communities to **draw together knowledge, wisdom & insight** from different contexts and perspectives of equity work

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# PPOEMs

- **re-search praxis** that open up critical reflection/action to collaboratively, reciprocally and ethically generate meaning(s)

- Emphasis on **multi-dimensional reframing of equity** as a project of Social Justice Praxis

- Creating **Communities of Praxis**

- **Disrupting individualising approaches** that perpetuate inequalities through deficit imaginaries

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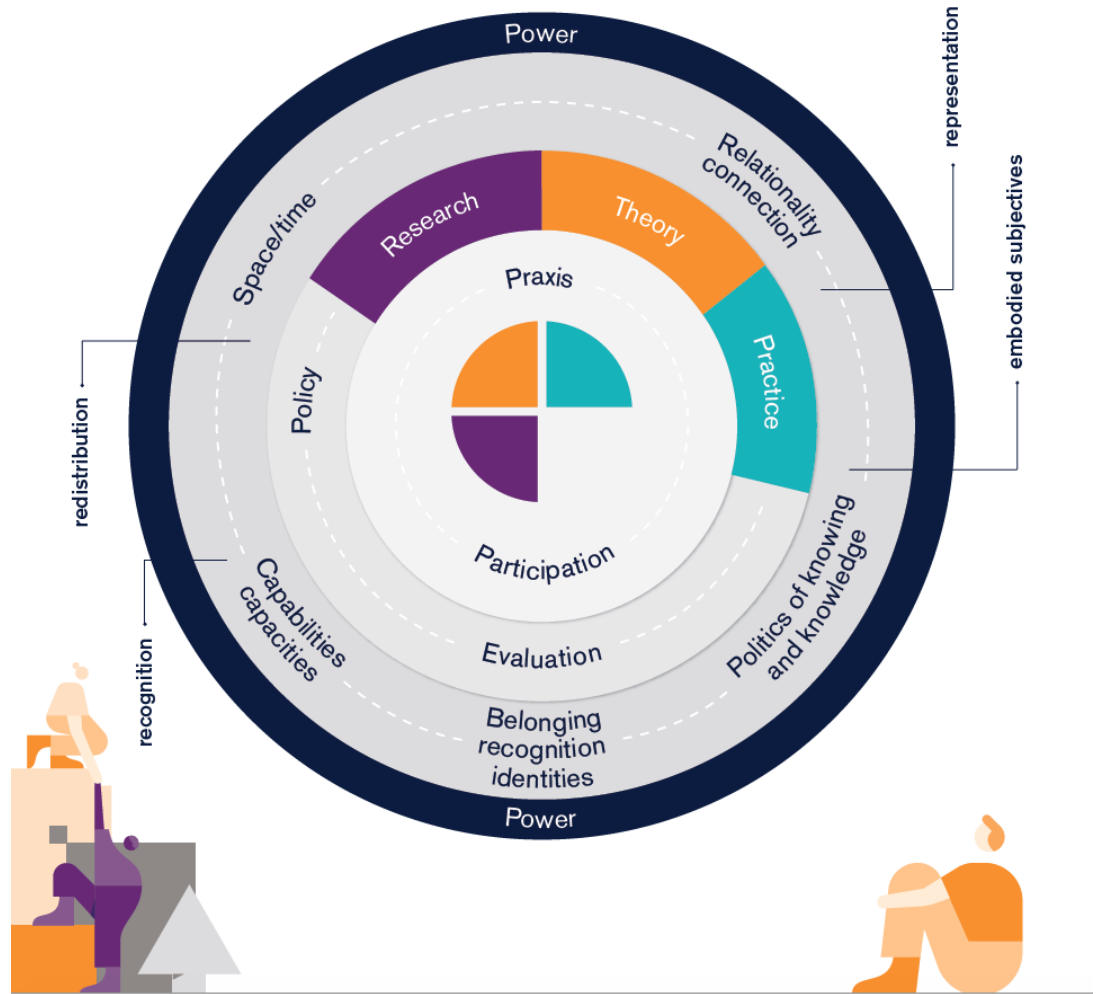
## We are all re-searchers



- **We are all re-searchers – we search for meaning through our human capacity to reflect and this shapes our doing in the world.** It is the way that we imagine a problem that constructs the way we approach the problem. That premise can create possibility – open up creativity – but often it can also do the opposite – close down possibility – reduce or misframe the questions we ask and the solutions we identify. This is because our **personal imagination is always profoundly shaped by wider social and institutional discourses** (Burke, 2018). So **reflexivity is crucial.**

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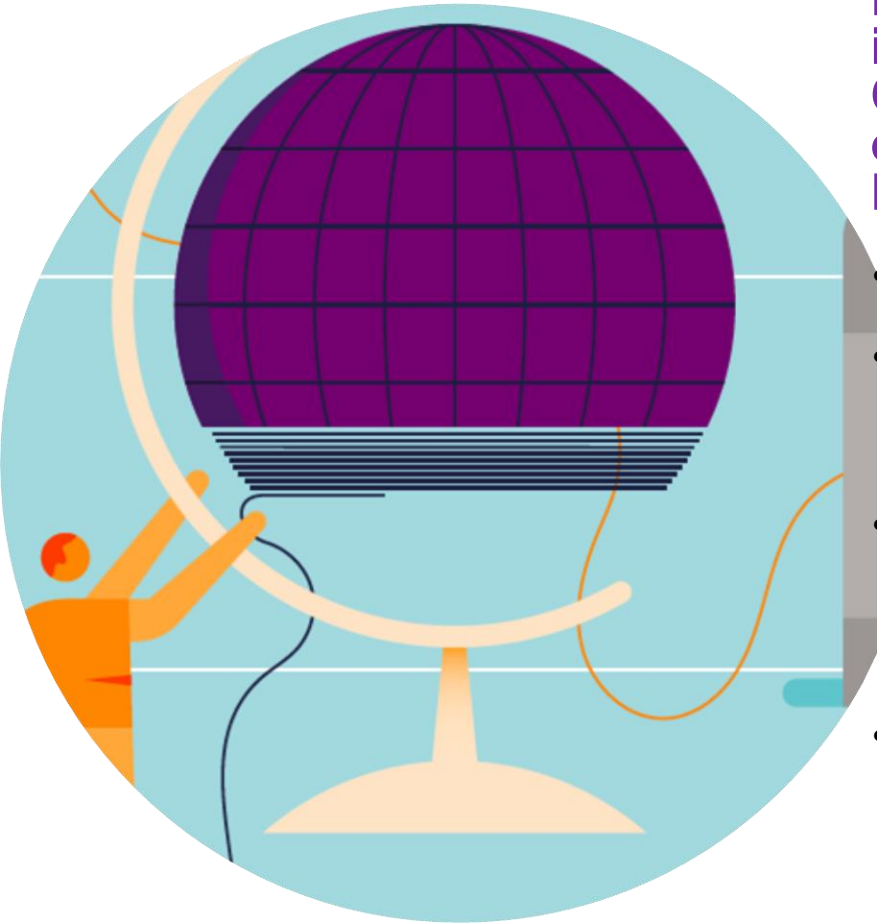**excellence**
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**PPOEMs**

- Starting point is that both 'pedagogy' and 'methodology' is broader and deeper that usually considered

- **Pedagogical** – learning is part of our everyday lived and relational experience in which meaning, knowing and experience is formed – thus all encounters are pedagogical

- **Methodological** – our doing and being in the world – and the way we shape meaning is always premised in a set of values and assumptions about knowing and knowledge – these need to be made explicit to generate deeper, more purposeful, ethical and meaningful ways of doing and being – our re-search practices

- The concealing or reducing of pedagogy and methodology has **profound ethical implications for social in/justice** – it hides the reproductive nature of inequalities through our taken-for-granted practices

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# PPOEMs for CPD

**Equity requires that individuals & institutions have access to high quality CPD to engage complex multidimensions of social injustice in relation to practice. Requires:**
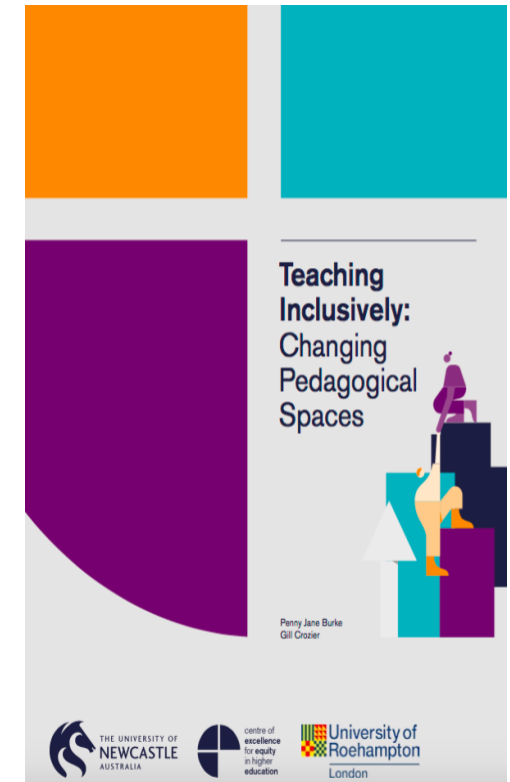
- attention to **redistribution** of resources

- **recognition** of knowledges, identities and experiences historically delegitimatized or cast in ugly light of deficit imaginaries

- political **reframing** of equity through **representation** of voices, perspectives & experiences otherwise silenced, made invisible or marginalized.

- shift away from individualism & methods to methodologies that bring people together across '**communities of praxis**' to make a difference.

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## PPOEMs for High quality CPD –
## Example: Excellence in Teaching for Equity in HE

- developed to redress the misframing of equity as a remedial project located outside of the core work of education

- to create critical time, space & conceptual resources – deep & sustained CPD engage participants in complexity of making sense of and generating inclusive pedagogies

- misframing –situating equity work outside of teaching conceals that inequalities are reproduced through pedagogical relations, practices & identities

- opens up reflexive spaces of ethical praxis through PPOEMs, deepening participants' engagement with equity as teachers-researchers-practitioners-activists

- Generating collaborative **communities of praxis --** institutional, community-based and personal transformation facilitated through processes of peer exchange to co-produce meaning and practice.



Teaching Inclusively: Changing Pedagogical Spaces

Penny Jane Burke
Gill Crozier

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University of Roehampton
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# Reflections & reframing of equity

- Institutional support be provided to university leaders, academics & administrators in developing equitable higher education – this is not an individual responsibility – must be embedded

- Raise the awareness of university leaders, teachers and policy-makers about what equity means and the complexities in developing it.

- Appropriate resources, time & continuing professional development required to support university leaders/researchers/teachers/administrators to develop equitable HE

- Proactively challenge stereotypes about the 'types' of students who are capable of university study.

- Opportunities, resources, support, high quality education -- available to students from diverse & under-represented backgrounds.

- Attention needs to be on generating educational structures, cultures and practices that are underpinned by strong principles of equity and inclusion for both staff and students.

- **A praxis-based framework is required (Burke, 2002; 2012) – which bring research and practice together in ongoing dialogue**

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## Critical reflection on your context & practices

- Considering a **multidimensional** approach to equity, what are the **challenges & opportunities** for creating more equitable approaches within your context? Perhaps focus on one or two aspects:
  a) Admissions, recruitment & selection
  b) Leadership
  c) Teaching & learning
  d) Curriculum
  e) Assessment

- Considering PPOEMs as an alternative framework, what **structures & practices** might be put into place to **overcome individualized approaches & deficit imaginaries** and to **move towards developing Communities of Praxis**?

- Be prepared to feedback 2 – 3 key points from your discussion groups

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# Thank you

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