



McKinney, S. (2022) The view from Scotland. SERA's Poverty and Education Network. *Research Intelligence*, 150, pp. 40-41.

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Deposited on 24 February 2022

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SERA Poverty and Education Network

By Stephen J McKinney,

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The Poverty and Education Network of the Scottish Educational Research Association was established in 2014. SERA networks have a national/international outlook that facilitates a dialogue and collaboration between academics from different universities and practitioners in a given field of educational research. One of the main aims of the Poverty and Education network is to highlight new issues and new research in the impact of poverty on education. A significant number of children and young people suffer from the effects of poverty and deprivation on a regular basis and, while this is a societal problem, child poverty has detrimental effects on engagement with school and the opportunities that are available for achievement and attainment. The network has been represented at all of the SERA conferences since 2014 and organised two highly successful online events in March 2021.

This short article presents an update on some of the new research being conducted by some of the leading members of the network. There is, of course, other important research being conducted in this field in Scotland by other colleagues. We acknowledge the recent seminal research by Morag Treanor, Joan Mowat, Edward Sosu and Sue Ellis and Chris Chapman. The research in this article addresses current issues such as: literacy development, food insecurity, school uniforms, equity in music education, building social and cultural capital, the preparation of teachers and digital poverty.

The current work of Alastair Wilson and Katie Hunter of the University of Strathclyde is based around literacy development in children and ways to expand young people's access to cultural and social capital. The overall aim is to develop community led change that can recognise and challenge some of the aspects of educational inequality. They have also been working with Lio Moscardini and Angela Jaap of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. This research collaboration has been focussed on inequality in access to music education - examining the ways in which access to music education is becoming limited to those pupils who have access to both the necessary finances and the different forms of social and cultural capital that are valued by schools. The work aims to spotlight ways in which music education can be more equitable.

Rachel Shanks at the University of Aberdeen has been researching the school uniform policies of all the state funded secondary schools in Scotland (n=357). Dr Shanks has focused on the cost and affordability of the uniforms as 66% require a blazer and 20% have an exclusive supplier arrangement. In November 2020 Dr Shanks issued a policy briefing on the affordability of secondary school uniforms and met with several MSPs and Scottish Government officers to discuss her recommendations. The recommendation to introduce statutory guidance on school uniform with affordability as the top priority has garnered cross-party support including in a recent debate in the Scottish Parliament on the Private Member's Motion 'Alleviating Poverty Associated with the Purchase of School Uniforms in Scotland'. The introduction of statutory guidance on school uniform has been included in the Scottish Government's policy programme with a commitment on the use of generic items of uniform and reducing costs for families. Rachel continues to research the affordability of school uniform looking at the levels of support provided by local authorities and the establishment and growth in school uniform banks.

Kevin Lowden and Stuart Hall from the Robert Owen Centre, University of Glasgow are engaged in a number of projects. They are evaluating a community engagement initiative for Glasgow Science Centre (funded by the Wellcome Foundation). This involves work to build social and cultural capital using STEM among communities who have traditionally not engaged with the science centre. Many of these communities are characterised by higher levels of poverty and deprivation. They are also Supporting a large Collaborative Action Research educational project in Dundee City involving all educational establishments: *EDLM (Every Dundee Learner Matters) initiative*. Establishments work together to identify pupils and issues of concern, often related to the poverty related achievement gap, to develop interventions to tackle the issues and gauge the progress made.

John McKendrick of Caledonian University, Glasgow has focussed on food security for children in Scottish schools. The report *Pass Go for Grab-N-Go?* is an Evaluation of the Pilot Grab-N-Go Breakfast Cart Provision in Three Schools in East Renfrewshire. While this was led by Professor McKendrick, this report was co-authored by *Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU)* Work Placement students. It draws from fieldwork observation, surveys of pupils and teachers, and group interviews with secondary school pupils. The second project we wish to highlight is *Tackling Food Security in Scottish Schools: Case Studies of Strengthening Free School Meal Provision*. The Poverty and Inequality Commission invited

SPIRU to undertake research to understand the role of free-school meals as an anti-poverty action in Scotland. This report shares promising practice and learning from ten schools (primary and secondary) across Scotland. John is also running an International Webinar series on school meals and administering a survey on secondary school pupils in Scotland and school meals.

The research team at the University of Aberdeen includes: Archie Graham, Lindsay MacDougall, Kirsten Darling-McQuistan, Peter Mtika, Dean Robson and Kevin Stelfox. They have been reporting on findings from various stages of a large 3 year project, supported by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education. The aim is to research teacher education pedagogies and induction strategies to better prepare early career teachers to make a positive difference for SIMD 1-40 communities. In Scotland, areas of social and economic deprivation are identified using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (Scottish Government, 2016). This work contributes to an expanding body of work on the Scottish inclusive practice project (Florian and Rouse, 2009), with a view to further understanding the preparation of new teachers to enact inclusive pedagogy.

Stephen McKinney has been researching the ways in which Catholic schools have responded to digital poverty and food insecurity under the lockdowns imposed by Covid-19. This contributes to the body of work he has produced on the critical application of the preferential option for the poor to Catholic schools. He has also been conducting a study on the effects of Covid-19 and the impact on Children's human rights, especially children who already suffered from disadvantage.

Further Reading:

SERA Researching Education Bulletin, Poverty Network Special, Issue no 10, Spring 2021.

Open Access: <https://www.sera.ac.uk/publications/researching-education-bulletin/>

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