# Charlotte Haines Lyon

# Part Time PhD Student,

# Faculty of Education and Theology, York St John University

# Researcher influence in the context of collaborative and political research

My critical participatory action research project involves working with parents in a primary school to develop and run a Community Philosophy group (Sapere, online). A key purpose of the research is to investigate how Community Philosophy can be used as a tool to engage parents critically regarding issues surrounding parental engagement and its impact on closing the gap in children’s achievement.

## Context

Parenting is increasingly held as an answer to closing the gap in achievement between disadvantaged children and their peers. Rhetoric regarding “closing the gap” contains demands that aspirations, social capital and even year on year income must be raised ([Milburn, 2014](#_ENREF_2); [OFSTED, 2013](#_ENREF_3); [Wilshaw](#_ENREF_5) 2013). Scant attention is paid by such rhetoric to the structural problems and social nature of poverty and inequality ([Perry and Francis, 2010](#_ENREF_4)).

This project is overtly political, in that it places the collective voices of parents at the centre of the research and critiques the individualisation and responsibilisation of parents. The original aim was to encourage parents to question the government rhetoric regarding closing the gap and parental engagement as well as barriers they may be experiencing to further engagement.

In this paper I will consider dilemmas posed by the political nature of my research. I will reflect on the preliminary fieldwork and how a reflexivity exercise highlighted further dilemmas. This has resulted in reframing the research aim with regard to my positioning of participants and the impact on them.

**References**

Milburn, A. (2014) *State of the Nation 2014*. London: Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

OFSTED. (2013) *Unseen Children: Access and Achievement 20 Years On*. London: OFSTED.

Perry, E. and Francis, B. (2010) *The Social Class Gap for Educational Achievement: A Review of the Literature*. London: RSA Projects.

SAPERE (2013) *Community Philosophy.* Available online at: <http://www.sapere.org.uk/Default.aspx?tabid=102>.

Wilshaw, M. (2013) *Unseen Children - HMCI Speech*. Available at: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131216154121/https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/unseen-children-hmci-speech](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131216154121/https%3A//www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/unseen-children-hmci-speech).