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# Inclusion, Exclusion and Marginalisation

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*ABSTRACT: This paper considers issues relating to the marginalisation and inclusion of pupils in a secondary school. It takes the perspective of a teacher researcher examining her everyday teaching in such a school. It has a particular focus on some black boys learning French. The paper critically examines the social norms that a) define the relations between teachers and pupils within classroom situations, b) guide the researcher's relationship to the researched. It draws on recent psychoanalytical theory in providing an account of how children in school construct their own identity with particular reference to ethnicity and gender.*

## Introduction

The paper examines school interactions and the power relations these suggest. It offers a perspective on how children understand their positions as social beings and how they construct identity with particular reference to ethnicity and gender. It considers how individuals are constructed as “other” within the social setting. A key aspect of the paper considers how black boys are positioned within the school's depiction of its own educational objectives and in relation to government guidance relating to the teaching of pupils from ethnic groups. It also considers how the boys understand themselves in relation to their perception of this framework. And how a teacher located within such a school can undertake practitioner research and position herself in relation to the situation she is examining.

The study has been undertaken in a large inner-city secondary school by the lead author. It is a school with a mixed intake in terms of social background and ethnicity; more than half of the pupils are non-white. The National Curriculum and associated policy have shaped the curriculum content and thus the educational choices available. The current climate of target-setting and so-called raising of achievement has resulted in school development being understood more in terms of examination results; especially A-C pass rates within the GCSE. A recent development has been the Excellence in Cities programme, which has forced a further emphasis towards the “gifted and talented” pupils. This paper seeks to provide insight into the ways in which a teacher might, within the constraints of this broader political arena, promote inclusivity of those pupils whose difficulties within the education system often seem to cause disaffection and underachievement.

The research generally has lent on recent work by post-structuralist writers examining the question of human agency and identity within a world where guiding structures are seen as weakening (Laclau, Jameson, Lyotard). A particular aspect of this to be addressed in this paper relates to advances in psychoanalytical research in seeking to locate a model for the evolving identity of individuals. It follows the psychoanalytical theory of Lacan (e.g. 1977) and his ideas

on subjectivity. In his writings, Lacan describes the human subject as always incomplete where identifications of oneself are captured in a supposed image of oneself (*ibid.*). Here the individual is forever trying to complete the picture she has of herself in relation to the world around her and the others who also inhabit it. She responds to the fantasy she has of the Other and the fantasy she imagines the Other having of her. The identity thus created evolves through a series of interpretations through interactions with others. The study will aim to develop an understanding of how black teenage boys construct their identity and how others construct it within the context of an inner-city secondary school. The study also draws on the accounts of Žižek (e.g. 1999) and his Lacanian analysis of the ideological fantasies of wholeness and exclusion that make up human society. Using these notions of enquiry, and exploring the political significance of these, the paper will attempt to link these psychoanalytical and philosophical concepts to the social phenomena encountered in a secondary school.

It is this theoretical backdrop that has informed the recent work of the second author (e.g. Brown and Jones, in press). This work has centred on the ways in which the identity of the researcher is constructed within practitioner research enterprises. A particular feature of this work is the way in which the researcher reflexively understands his or her self as an actor within the research and how this self-understanding evolves during the research process. That is, in the context of practitioner research, what version of herself does the researcher offer to the reader and what suppositions and fantasies are constructed around the researcher and the context within which the research is grounded? This present study follows on from this work and develops those aspects relating to the theory of psychoanalysis and how this might guide practical teacher research approaches. For the practitioner described here, the task will be to investigate the boys' positioning as depicted in the data whilst at the same time acknowledging the teacher-researcher's own positioning as implicit in her analysis. The teacher-researcher's subjectivity and individual perspective is an essential part of the account offered. This account might be seen as being the result of the researcher persistently asking herself the question "where am I coming from in asking the questions in the way that I am?" As such, it documents how the teacher-researcher began to examine the way in which she becomes aware of the psychoanalytical relationship between herself and the object she is researching. The particular theme being pursued in this case considers how a teacher understands the nature of the research she is doing and how this positions the black pupils she teaches as research objects in relation to the emancipatory perspective she is assuming as a teacher researcher.

## Method

For the purposes of this paper the action of the teacher researcher is seen as an essential part of the situation being described and thus the teacher narrative becomes an integral part of the research itself. Writing thus becomes both a method of recording and a framework for developing professional practice (Brown and Jones, op cit). The researcher is located within the research but also attempts to move outside the context of the research to become at the same time observer and observed. In practical terms this entailed making transcripts of interactions between children and the teacher and children with each other. The criteria for selection of data was that the interactions challenged the researcher's own understanding and assumptions. A journal was kept in which to log events arising in the school that related to the study. This procedure was used to record the development of the researcher as a practitioner over the period of study, as

part of a continuous process of self-interrogation and reflexive inquiry. The practitioner moved from description to analysis and so to deeper understanding and enhanced teacher practice, specifically, to promote a more inclusive education for those pupils experiencing marginalisation within the education system. This in turn moved to a focus on the developing identity of the researcher herself as evidenced in the writing of the accounts offered and examined the fantasy she built into her construction of the research. The research plan incorporated the possibility of radically changing how she understood the research rationale. The resulting paper offered here illustrates the way in which the teacher/researcher herself is aware of the psychoanalytical relationship between her and the object of what she is researching. It also captures where she is now and looks back in building an evolving sense of self in relation to the enquiry. The constructions offered are inevitably limited but, nevertheless, guide the practitioner's aspirations and the way she holds on to these.

The paper commences by offering an extract from a DfEE document relating to Social Inclusion. This is followed immediately by two journal extracts generated within the study. This is followed by a discussion of how issues of identity might be understood between the sites of teacher, pupil, school and government. Enter Jacques Lacan and his present day successor Slavoj Zizek who assist in relating the discussion to a psychoanalytical model. A further section addresses the couple researcher and researched. The writing is to some extent shared by both authors but is based to a large degree around the lead author's journal entries. Thus "I" always refers to the lead author in both "journal writing" and "writing for journal" modes. The following sections are primarily written by Janice, with some joint editing intended to convert research diary material in to a form suitable for inclusion in this journal article. The joint voice will return in the final section.

## Data

The DfEE have published this circular which sets out its policy to schools on social inclusion.

*Circular 10/99 Social Inclusion: Pupil Support  
(Extract from chapter 3)*

*Minority ethnic children*

**3.6** Rates of exclusion among Black-Caribbean pupils, especially boys, are significantly higher than those of other pupils. Governing bodies and head teachers should monitor the use of sanctions against pupils of ethnic minority background and reassure themselves that the school's behaviour policy against racial prejudice and harassment is being fully enforced. Where there is unjustified over-representation of Black-Caribbean pupils, a strategy should be implemented to address this. Staff need to take particular care if there is a possibility that an incident was provoked by racial harassment. Teachers also need to ensure that they avoid any risk of stereotyping and that they are alert to cultural differences in manner and demeanour. Good connections between schools and community groups can help in this process.

**3.7** Some minority ethnic groups attain extremely good results at school. But others do not.

Schools should be aware that so-called 'colour-blind' policies can lead to the persistence of inequalities between ethnic groups. Successful initiatives designed to address under-achievement include:

- ethnic monitoring of achievement;
- community mentoring schemes;
- high quality home-school liaison work;
- the development of a Black perspective in the school curriculum;
- focus on minority pupil achievers; and  
effective links between mainstream and supplementary schools.

*Example 1: Journal entry*

What's in a name? I've been thinking over for some time why I was so disturbed when I overheard this conversation between a teacher and a black boy recently:

Teacher: Stand outside the room until you learn some manners.

Marlon: This nigger's going nowhere. This nigger's got manners.

Teacher: Don't you use that language with me. I haven't called you any name.

Marlon: This nigger's going nowhere man. You've got no manners.

This interchange continued and became more heated. Marlon continued to repeat his theme with variations becoming more and more distanced from the teacher, stepping back, looking down and to the side, and eventually kicking the wall. The teacher became angrier at the use of the term 'nigger' perceiving it as an accusation of racist abuse. At this point I intervened since the teacher was in my department and I asked the boy to come with me. The teacher perceived this as support and thanked me. The boy at first turned his anger towards me, but I quietly said, 'Come on, Marlon, come and work with me.'

*Example 2: Journal entry*

We were having a discussion about young people and sport in our year 10 GCSE French class. The subject moved on to Mike Tyson and his controversial visit to Manchester. I had a my personal understanding which I brought to the debate that the black boxer was a bad role model for the young black boys I teach and that he should not become a hero for them. I was interested in the understandings my pupils brought to the discussion.

As the group is a top set most of my pupils are white middle-class articulate teenagers with strong political views. A large group of girls berated the boxer as a convicted rapist. I privately endorsed this view and was comfortable with their assertion. The white boys agreed on the whole with the girls but seemed to take a more pragmatic notion that he had "paid for his crime" and that that was not the real issue. They felt that fairness was at stake

and that the rules had been bent because Tyson represented profit in this context. Again I was comfortable with this position, as I understood their perspective and I tacitly endorsed it with smiles and nods of encouragement. This debate was in French and so my approval was twofold in that I was feeling self-congratulatory about the fact that I had created this atmosphere of mature debate in a foreign language.

Omar is the only black boy in the group. He is African and has a strong sense of political black culture. He was unhappy with our analysis. His French is not as fluent as the others in the group and he was looking frustrated. He could follow the argument but could not articulate his objections. He was shaking his head and he asked if he might speak in English. I said no at first, but his distress was so evident when he said ‘but I can’t say what I really want to express here in French’: this appeal was so personal that in the end I gave in.

He said ‘white people in this country only hate Mike Tyson because they can’t stand to see a black man make so much money’. The other pupils all denied this loudly and declared their actual reasons, as stated earlier. He shook his head vehemently and said ‘that’s what you say, and that’s what you think you think, but what you really can’t stand is a black man up there’.

He was alone in his opinion but he stuck to it. There was no animosity in the group and even though he was outnumbered he spoke out. The other pupils were animated in defending their position but he was quite clear in his view of the event and did not budge from it. I remained outside for a while and then asked him if he thought Tyson was a good role model for the black boys he would visit in Moss Side. I asked if he would like to see him too. He said ‘he ain’t no role model for me, I don’t want to fight.’

Later we were watching ‘Les Miserables’ on Friday and in it there is a scene where a white French boxer is fighting a black boxer in the snow. The scene struck me as particularly poignant since all the spectators in the film were white and all of my pupils viewing the film except for Omar were white also.

### Society/individual – School/black boy

My first response to reading the DfEE extract was from the title itself “social inclusion” which for me constructs a social norm within which it is desirable to be included. There is a great universal “We” which ethnic minorities are excluded from. This is a better and more desirable level of reality to which access is denied. And so here we are offering our excluded neighbour “support”. The headteacher is expected then to put in place measures, from identifying specific problems of black pupils to policing the institution to avoid racial harassment or stereotyping: (“monitor”, “behaviour policy”, “reassure themselves”, “fully enforced”, “strategy”, “implemented”).

The Bible teaches us to love our neighbour. A disciple asked Jesus: ‘Who is my neighbour?’ and so Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. This interests me simply because the Samaritans were themselves a much despised and socially excluded group, and the story tells us that it was this representative of an ethnic minority group in fact who set the example of biblical good

practice. The victim in this story is empowered. This document, conversely, constructs a powerless victim whom we must patronise and draw into our universal “good”.

The problem of constructing the black child as a victim here is that this child is then perceived to have a lack or a problem to overcome: (“ethnic monitoring of achievement”, “community mentoring schemes”, “focus on minority pupil achievers”.) The problem is never located within the universal “We” from which this circular springs. And so because the problem is located outside of us, it is not uncomfortable. The black child joins the other disadvantaged groups in society such as the homeless, disabled, mentally ill, homosexual, female.... These groups all have a lack located firmly in their social identity and our own liberal white educated identity remains in tact, and caring. Those less caring amongst our community must however be policed by laws ensuring that the disadvantaged groups are not harassed. Thus: “the development of a Black perspective in the school curriculum;” and the promotion of a multiculturalist position.

In the school we take pride in its multi-cultural composition. We celebrate difference and positively promote the notion that “it’s OK to be different” and yet we are all one happy community, all “one under the skin” as it were. There are however limits to this that make me feel a little uneasy, as any real challenge to the norm is perceived as potentially disturbing and unsettling. We have, it seems, a hierarchy of acceptable differences and unacceptable ones. A Muslim girl may cover her head but we are less happy with piercings or tattoos, which denote no specific religious group but are seen as simply transgressive. By law homosexuality may not be “promoted”. And I daily witness black boys in conflict with school discipline; the visible evidence of this is a line of black boys outside the deputy’s office at dinner time. And in fact I am unhappy with the notion that we are all the same, since the Muslim girl with her head covered is clearly positioned for me in this context as Other.

In building our community we feel readily able to embrace visible Otherness given our premise of inclusion. There is a risk in this however that it reinforces a sense of a norm that results in fixing the Other firmly in their place. I am uncertain too about our tolerance of the Other when it suits us and not when it shocks us. For example, the covered head represents for me, as a western woman, an unacceptable positioning of the female within this different culture as yet again Other, but I feel a pressure from my western liberal standpoint to accept it because I wish to avoid a eurocentric bias. How far would my liberal attitude take me? In the case of clitoridectomy, for example, surely I must retreat back towards Europe in horror. So I meet an ideological deadlock here and I need to find a way to resolve it.

The term ‘nigger’ is a term that constructs the symbolic identity of blacks as Other and as such has been a term of abuse and oppression. It traditionally constructs the position of power with the white oppressor. In the first piece of data the black child seizes the power by claiming this term for his own. The teacher has not, would never use such a term. But the boy is saying in fact that this is how you have constructed my identity in this context. He is confronted with a choice in the situation between accepting the construct of his identity as “having no manners” and being the Other, the symptom, or not existing at all. He rejects the imposition of this symbolic identity and displaces it, and makes it work for him. He deliberately uses a term of abuse and claims it for his own, recontextualises it and thus seizes the power in the conflict. He will not be the victim; he will in turn oppress. He repeats the word like a mantra; in the way that human rights activists have often used set phrases or chants to add impetus to a political

movement. His physical distancing from the teacher again demonstrates his lack of engagement in the teacher's agenda and the wish to make that agenda his own. Marlon at only 13 years old is making a political stand. The child rejects the notion of "we are all different but the same" here. The way he uses language constructs a politicisation of the school context.

If I refer back to the DfEE circular I referred to earlier, there are a variety of official names and terms used to officially denote black children. These are:

Minority ethnic children  
Black-Caribbean pupils  
pupils of ethnic minority background  
community groups  
minority ethnic groups  
Black perspective  
minority pupil achievers

Key words seem to include "minority", "ethnic", "black", "Caribbean", and "community". (The term "nigger" unsurprisingly does not appear here.) The terms used construct an intellectualisation, a formalisation and a sanitation of the issue of "the black pupil" in schools. They may attempt a neutral positioning by referring to geographic or religious/cultural background (ethnic, Caribbean). Of course such a neutral position is impossible and what is in fact constructed is the multicultural project I referred to recently. They also effect an emotional distancing, as none of these terms are disturbing. The use of "black" is a relatively recent term, since twenty years ago "coloured" might have been considered a favoured euphemism. Now "coloured" is a more offensive term indicating white middle-class squeamishness. Interestingly it is a term I have recently overheard black girls using for themselves; "coloured girls" constructs a sexiness which I have witnessed some pupils using playfully: "Gairy only likes coloured girls Miss". To return to the Social Inclusion extract, the circular would have had quite a different impact, however, if we insert Marlon's term 'nigger' throughout. I am not suggesting of course that this would be appropriate, since the whole point of my argument relies on the fact that Marlon himself seizes the word and makes it his own. It cannot be our word now in this context. No more than this document can have any real political meaning for Marlon.

### *Enter Lacan and Zizek*

A key assertion in this paper is that the researcher's identity is a function of the research process and of the educational enterprises it is seen as serving. That is, this identity changes through the research process, resulting in evolving understandings of the researcher, the researched, and of the educational objectives the research process is seen as serving. A particular analogy is drawn with work in contemporary psychoanalytic theory. In this analogy the practitioner researcher is seen as a psychoanalyst's client who lies back on a couch and talks of her life, her motivations, fears and aspirations. And in pinpointing these motivations, fears and aspirations, in words spoken to the psychoanalyst, they somehow become more real and tangible. As such they emerge as guiding principles for how the client lives her life thereafter. The words and the way they are put together become part of her. The story that the client tells of her life shapes her actual experience by providing a framework against which she understands what she is doing. Nevertheless, this reification of lived experience can deceive as well as enlighten. Some versions



of self are more comfortable than others, and a client may choose a version that she feels she can work with. Meanwhile society itself has an image of how it conducts itself and promotes particular understandings of normality. Such socially derived understandings provide a backdrop to individuals making sense of their own lives within this frame. Such themes have been central in the Freudian inspired work of Lacan and Zizek.

We shall touch on some notions derived from the work of Lacan and Zizek in revisiting each of the three examples introduced in the last section.

Example One: Lacan makes important distinctions between what he calls the “imaginary”, “symbolic” and the “Real”. Crudely the imaginary might be seen as the baby’s identification with the Mother, an egocentric attitude in which the world is centred on oneself as an individual. The symbolic relates to attraction to and immersion in the “Law of the Father”; that which a post-structuralist might call interpellation in discourses. We immerse ourselves in our society by speaking the same language as everyone else and thus become guided by the ways of that society. The Real meanwhile might be seen loosely as the stage on which the imaginary and symbolic are enacted. The terms defy clear depiction. For fuller discussion see, for examples, Lacan (1977 pp. 292-325) or Zizek (1989, pp. 87-131). Both authors discuss these terms throughout their substantial works. By way of an example of the Real, Zizek (1991, pp. 13-14) refers to a science fiction novel by Robert Heinlein, *The unpleasant profession of Jonathon Hoag*. A couple are told that they must not open their car window whilst the universe is being repaired. But because they are stopped by a patrolman they have to lower the side window:

She complied, then gave a sharp intake of breath and swallowed a scream. He did not scream but he wanted to.

Outside the open window was no sunlight, no cops, no kids – nothing. Nothing but a grey and formless mist, pulsing slowly as with inchoate life. They could see nothing of the city through it, not because it was too dense but because it was – empty. No sound came out of it; no movement showed in it.

Zizek argues that this “grey and formless mist” represents the Lacanian Real, that which precedes symbolic structuring. For me the term “nigger” similarly serves as the tool in my context, like the unwinding of the window in the novel, which serves to unveil the Real. If a name is part of the symbolic network which constitutes our construction of everyday reality, then language can be seen as an important key to unlocking meanings, unveiling disturbing realities and also as instrumental in empowering individuals. Marlon is making visible the veiled Real of the horror we repress and symbolically position outside ourselves in the black boy. He lifts the veil of political correctness to make visible that Real.

To return to Christianity, since our western liberalism borrows much from Christian ethics of “loving thy neighbour”, for example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan we are asked to identify, as I said earlier, with a victim of racial harassment. Christians in fact are presented with Jesus who in fact is also a victim; God made man and who is ultimately sacrificed for our sin. Following the Lacanian perspective, sin represents here the Real of our desire. Sacrifice is necessary in order to preserve our identity. If God is the Ideal, that cannot be sacrificed, so He had to become human, like us, but not us. Is Jesus the ultimate scapegoat that we need? Perhaps

the true hero of the story was Judas since he in fact was the essential catalyst for the sacrifice and, whilst Jesus joined his Heavenly Father and had a religion named after him, Judas suffered eternal exclusion and condemnation. So the Christian story in fact veils the true scapegoat and leaves our fundamental identity intact. We are offered a visible sacrifice with a happy solution, whilst the true horror, represented by Judas, is not tackled or resolved.

If we are asked to identify with the symptom here, then, with Christ on the cross, with the suffering, the poor and the excluded how is it that western Christian liberalism does not seriously challenge social injustice? I turn to Zizek . (1999, p. 229.) :

The artifice by means of which Christianity became the ruling ideology was to combine this radical excremental identification with full endorsement of the existing hierarchical social order: ‘rich and poor, honest men and sinners, masters and slaves, men and women, neighbours and foreigners, we are all united in Christ

So in fact whilst we are involved in promoting compassion we simultaneously confirm the position of the powerful within the social structure. The fundamental polarities are not destabilised but strengthened.

Example Two: Following the Lacanian notion of looking at a dream or fantasy for the unnecessary detail, which will reveal the meaning behind the fantasy, I am struck initially with the question “why snow?” The Christian ideas of white, purity, innocence, Christmas which snow conjures up for me cannot be accidental in this scene, in stark contrast to the black fighter in the ring. The historical setting was the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war. Might the black fighter represent the evils of war and violence in this scene also? It made me think about the notion of “the gaze”, which I have been reading about recently in Zizek’s “The Sublime Object of Ideology”. Omar is clearly aware of himself, as “black boy”, subject of the white gaze. He perceives “evil in the eye of the beholder”, the real evil of which is in the gaze of the white moral majority which perceives transgression in all male blacks as evil. It is a point made by Zizek (*op cit.*, p. 187) that

one of the key components of racism: the Other (Jew, Arab, Negro) is always presumed to have access to some specific enjoyment, and that is what really bothers us.

Doesn’t this echo Omar’s assertion that what we really can’t stand is a black man making money? The sexual nature of his crime and his physical strength can perhaps add to this argument. His construction of the Tyson event is that of the boxer as object of the predominant white moral gaze. Tyson is constructed for Omar, and so Omar constructs black males, and himself, similarly, as Other. And it is not enough for Omar to understand our justification for our position of why we disapprove of Tyson, since we could presumably always justify that position.

Let us examine anti-Semitism. It is not enough to say that we must liberate ourselves of so-called “anti-Semitic prejudices” and learn to see Jews as they really are – in this way we will certainly remain victims of these so-called prejudices. We must confront ourselves with how the ideological figure of the “Jew” is invested with our unconscious desire, with how we have constructed this figure to escape a certain deadlock of our desire. (*op cit.*, p. 48)

This notion can be related to our attitude towards black males. The real answer to this issue is not “black men are not all really like that”. Rather, the idea we have of black males has nothing to do with black males; the ideological figure of a black male is a way to “stitch up the inconsistency of our own ideological system”. We externalise the guilt we feel in the shortcomings of society, our own desire, with all its antagonisms and tensions, and this is then located in the scapegoat, in this context the black male.

### Researcher/Researched

My own project sets out to be “emancipatory” but as the initiator of the research I am automatically positioning myself as more powerful and more knowing than the object of my research and this subordinates the pupils in my accounts. I am not giving validity to their experiences or their aspirations for themselves.

But when I stride across the yard to rustle them all in, narrowing my eyes like Miss Jean Brody, who do I think is watching me? (May 8<sup>th</sup>)

Today I caught myself twice glaring at pupils who had crossed me. One girl had truanted my lesson on Friday and as I passed her on the corridor, I glared at her until she eventually looked down sheepishly. Another boy incurred my wrath last week by ripping pages out of a Spanish dictionary. As I entered his classroom, I glared at him until he too looked away, clearly upset. (May 8<sup>th</sup>)

This raises the issue for me that whatever I may do in my classroom, I have to also accept that things happen outside which I can only influence in a limited way. (May 9<sup>th</sup>)

I was approaching my classroom door to take my year 7 class when I heard a rush away from the door to their seats and someone saying, ‘It’s England, quick!’. I know that I love the feeling of power it gave me (May 15<sup>th</sup>)

I did not feel at all powerful now; I felt like a little child in front of a difficult audience. I felt like an awkward teenager myself. (May 15<sup>th</sup>)

I make decisions, I observe colleagues and scrutinise their work, I interview candidates for jobs, I have even had to “reprimand” colleagues when necessary.... (May 15<sup>th</sup>)

I began to get annoyed, not least of all because he was not fitting into my positive framework of him. ... I eventually raised my voice with him and was far sterner. I threatened him with not joining in with the display work and he said he didn’t care and he didn’t want to be in set one anyway. (May 16<sup>th</sup>)

I need to stand outside of my created world and walk into the world of the boys’ understanding. Instead of dragging them into my research project, I need to step through the curtain into the Real in order to discover whether emancipation is possible in this research. (May 16<sup>th</sup>)

I am still concerned with the question of how to empower the boys and myself in this situation of the school context so that we are not puppets within the text but individuals that might have more control over our destinies. (May 16<sup>th</sup>)

I want to enable us to break free of the limitations imposed by the school context as well as my own narrative (May 16th)

At a research discussion group meeting, I offered the notion that emancipation might be seen as oppression. A visiting student cited an example from Brazil where a local native Indian student rejected the so-called emancipation of liberal teaching in favour of the more traditional “real thing” that might in fact offer access to academia and social advancement for that student. In my accounts, I have presented myself in a way that suggests I have an ethical or moral position to uphold. The very nature of my project, as setting out to change my pupils’ lives for the better, is indeed a kind of middle class educated arrogance in the “I know what’s good for you” style of totalitarian governments or multinational companies which I claim to despise. This notion of aggression comes as a surprise to me. But if I examine my motives carefully, following the writings of Lacan, (1977, p. 13), I have to acknowledge that “aggressive motives lie hidden in all philanthropic activity.”

In what Lacan terms “the mirror stage” when the baby human subject lacks motor control she identifies with the image outside herself that represents the control she lacks. “The human subject fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself.” (*op cit.* p. 19) The Real in this context is the lack of control that is not represented or captured in this image. This alienation creates a tension that makes her desire what she imagines the other, the ideal ego, desires. This is the beginning of a kind of aggression, wanting what I think the other wants, jealousy, competitiveness, and resentment.

At the symbolic stage, language is assimilated and the social rules and expectations of others become significant, but there is still always a lack in understanding at this level, that which resists symbolisation and again represents the lack of power or control, or the Real. This is the level of the superego, the ego-ideal, where the subject (e.g the teacher) is driven by the perceived desire of the Other (whether this be government guidelines or school self-image or a disenfranchised child). This is the level where guilt and morality drive the subject. It is at this level that the subject needs to feel good about herself and her actions

Aggression in this context might be understood to be a struggle by the subject for control beyond both the imaginary and symbolic order. In my case then, at the imaginary level, in my own struggle for control, might I be seeing in my research object the image of myself and in attempting to “liberate” these pupils am I in fact trying to free myself? My “aggressivity” in this project towards the object of my research is in fact “self-aggressivity”, as in the famous case of Aimee where a woman tried to kill an actress with whom she identified and so in fact was striking herself (Leader & Groves, 1995). Again at the symbolic level am I driven in fact by that “senseless oppression of the superego” (Lacan, (*op cit.* p. 22)) in my desire to do the right thing. My need to change the lives of my pupils might in fact be read now as a passionate need for me to feel good about myself, to appease the will of the Other, as I perceive it.

At the level of the Real, what is it that I can't see in the image, what is it that I lack in my image of myself - and what is it that is missing and has no meaning in the language I use? The whole point is that this is unknowable and what is more interesting and revealing is in fact the veil, which hides the Real, not, what lies behind it. What do I use to restore my self-image and make myself feel complete and in control? What do I use to attempt to provide meaning and sense to the world? These are the veils I use to hide the Real.

In my attempt to make sense of my situation I use reason, my knowledge of time, my notion of progression in my project, the systematic research methodology. I refer to the big Other of the government, OFSTED, the school context in my attempt to shift the lack of the Real and to scapegoat it. This restores my self-image because although I feel I lack control in the situation, I have located the reason for this elsewhere, in the school, the government etc, and I also provide myself with an emancipatory quest against my oppressor which makes me feel better about myself.

### **Concluding thoughts on practitioner research**

In an interesting TV interview recently the director Quentin Tarantino defended the extensive use of the term nigger (by black cast members) in his film Jackie Brown. The black director Spike Lee who had objected to this had attacked the film. Tarantino argued that in the black community where he made the film the term was used frequently and he felt that it would be inappropriate to tone down this language in his film. Who would he be seeking to please and why? In some ways such use of this term is akin to the gay community turning on its head, and using for themselves, the formerly offensive term "queer". This seems to be an effective form of resistance to the hostile labelling applied by those who suppose the fantasy of their own normality.

But as practitioner researcher's, the value of our work to others depends on resonance. Such resonance is a function of shared understandings of the world around us. To some extent we have to be "normal" for the research to work. But how do we decide to delineate the normality to which we choose to conform. How do we define our community? Given the "the hidden exercise of force" (Ricoeur, 1981) and inequalities embedded in the language we use as a society, such normalities cannot be seen as neutral. The work of Lacan and Zizek examines how we understand ourselves as individuals in relation to these social bonds. The individual's relationships to these bonds however are always supposed and asserted rather than actual. The relationships are based on assumptions about oneself and how one fits in, or would like to fit in. We tell stories that stress particular aspects of the world we see. But these stories are necessarily incomplete, sweeping under the carpet the bits that do not fit neatly within the account we wish to provide. Brown and Jones (op cit.) have followed Ricoeur in suggesting that we have particular preferred ways of constructing stories (for example the "victory narrative" form of much practitioner research). Such styles of story telling are culturally derived with their own assumptions of togetherness and apartness, inclusion and exclusion, and marginalisation.

What we have sought to demonstrate in this paper is the scope of possibility for the teacher-

researcher's own self understanding and how this shapes the stories she tells. Such self-understanding is continuously on the move and such movement is a condition of life. But this self-understanding is implicit in how we understand the world in which we exist and our relation to it. To understand the world around we need also to understand the motives that have taken us to our chosen research perspective. So many of these motives are a function of how we see our professional role and how the research perspective is related to this. For example, to suppose that one is a "critical educator" guided by "emancipatory" aspirations brings with it an understanding of self in a professional role, a desire to fulfil personal need and a depiction of broader society. Any attempt to be on the side of the black boys conflicts with our inevitable agency in social environments that seem to marginalise these boys? In this sort of scenario teacher research becomes a problematisation of self in relation to the supposed research. This envisaged task necessarily categorises the world before it. Thus research also needs to become an on-going disruption of our immersion in the discourses which serve to maintain the status quo of supposed social roles within this world.

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