

# Revisiting emancipatory teacher research: a psychoanalytic perspective

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This paper addresses the issue of how human beings construct themselves as subjects and the parameters within which this is achieved. We question models in which idealism shapes the trajectory of identity formation and consider how identity might be seen alternatively as a somewhat awkward amalgam of identifications with diverse discursive domains. The particular focus is on teachers conducting 'emancipatory' practitioner research and on how the researcher understands his/her interface with the situation he/she is researching. We survey a range of theoretical models as offered by some leading writers, with particular reference to Jacques Lacan, and consider each in relation to how the teacher researcher might be understood. We provide as an example an account of one teacher researcher examining issues of ethnicity and gender in her secondary school French classes.

## Constructing the subject

The psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud has been extremely important in its impact on how we understand human identity. Giddens (for example, Giddens, 1999), has argued that Freud's work is especially relevant in contemporary society where we have increasingly less anchorage in established traditions guiding human action. Freud's conception of psychoanalytic sessions, however, is predicated on finding a supposed cure such as 'by helping the subject to overcome the distortions that are the source of self-misunderstanding' (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 265). This might be seen as being achieved through the production of narrative in which the subject re-writes the story line of his/her life. Such an approach pre-dates more recent work in the field of education in which narrative approaches are pursued in relation to teacher enquiry (for example, Weber, 1993; Beattie, 1995; Olson, 1995; Rushton, 2001; Johnson, 2002).

Meanwhile, much practitioner research in education is predicated on an emancipatory model derived from the work of Jurgen Habermas, in which the teacher researcher is understood as being an agent of change for the better (for example, Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Lather, 1991; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; Brown & Jones, 2001). As we shall see Habermas' approach (for example, Habermas, 1972) is underpinned

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by a Freudian notion of cure. This paper seeks an alternative approach inspired by the work of Jacques Lacan, who pursues the work of Freud in a rather different way. Within a Freudian psychoanalytic model, any narrative creation by the participants entails a complex mediation of diverse demands leading to an end point at which resolution is achieved. There are, however, alternative ways of conceptualizing psychoanalysis in which we might avoid singular conceptions of how things might proceed. An approach, more akin to the work of Lacan, might see the psychoanalytic process as the construction of a 'reflective/ constructive narrative layer that feeds whilst growing alongside the life it seeks to portray' (Brown & Jones, 2001, p. 69). It is this latter approach that we seek to explore in this paper through re-conceptualizing the process through which emancipation is understood.

We commence with a discussion first introduced by the Slovenian commentator Slavoj Žižek in which he argues that an oft-supposed opposition between Habermas and Foucault masks a more profound opposition between Althusser and Lacan. We then examine how such an approach might manifest itself in the context of a specific practitioner research enquiry.

#### **Four models of human identity**

In his work on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek discusses four alternative conceptions of the human subject as represented in the work of four leading writers from the second half of the twentieth century: Habermas, Foucault, Althusser and Lacan. In relation to these four writers Žižek asks how humans are constructed as subjects. That is, through which route are humans seen as storying themselves, their situation, and their motivations? And which parameters are understood to be guiding this story telling? We pursue this route in developing an understanding of how Lacan constructs the human subject in contrast to these other writers. We thus pursue how Lacan's approach offers a new way of conceiving the process of practitioner research in which the identity of the researcher is seen as more fluid.

As indicated, Žižek begins by suggesting that a well-known debate between Habermas and Foucault (for example, Habermas, 1987, pp. 238–293; Foucault, 1998, pp. 440–448) shields a more fundamental opposition between Althusser and Lacan. The core issue as Žižek sees it relates to how supposed imperfections in present human practices provide motivations in shaping future practice. Žižek refers to these imperfections as 'antagonisms' in the sense that life as it is actually being lived is at some distance from the supposed model of how it might be lived, or how we would like it or imagine it to be. This failure of fit results in dissatisfactions that are seen as being in need of being overcome. We shall consider the nature of these antagonisms as they arise in the four alternative conceptions of human identity.

It was Freud who influenced Habermas in his understanding of how language sometimes has an uneasy relationship with the reality it seeks to portray. As Habermas puts it:

Freud dealt with the occurrence of systematically deformed communication in order to define the scope of specifically incomprehensible acts and utterances. He always

envisaged the dream as the standard example of such phenomena, the later including everything from harmless, everyday pseudo-communication and Freudian slips to pathological manifestations of neurosis, psychosis, and psychosomatic disturbance. In his essays on cultural theory, Freud broadened the range of phenomena that could be conceived as being part of systematically distorted communication. He employed the insights gained from clinical phenomena as the key to the pseudo-normality, that is to the hidden pathology, of collective behaviour and entire social systems. (1976, p. 349)

Habermas' own work focuses especially on how systematically distorted communication arises in social systems. A central premise of this work is that we must adopt a critical attitude to the language that we use in describing our professional practice. We must be sensitive to how certain styles of speech display the 'hidden exercise of force' (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 78). That is, how language usage is a reflection of the society that generates it and thus how this usage reflects the power relations and inequalities endemic in that society.

Habermas is generally regarded as a contemporary Enlightenment philosopher in so far as his work is governed by a notion of rationality, with rational humans thinking their way out of difficulties. Here we have a conception of human behaviour understood in relation to certain universal principles (e.g. moral perspectives, the existence of God) that can be called upon in the event of some supposed divergence from rational behaviour. Habermas aims for unconstrained language but sets out by supposing that in most societies language has become distorted as a result of the interplay of alternative forms of political power. Habermas seeks 'Ideal' communication free of any ideological distortion. His reflecting rational subject has a conception of the universal principles at work and a conception of how antagonisms can be overcome. The human subject is thus trying to find ways of making things better from some supposed deficit position. A caricature often made of Habermas is that this points to a supposed emancipatory interest whereby these antagonisms are confronted and action is designed to remove them.

That is, in such an account of the human subject the professional task may be seen in terms of an emancipatory quest towards achieving a social consensus in which oppressive political force is undermined. Nudging towards a Marxian account of social totality, the individual quest was to find ways of reconciling personal aspirations with the demands expressed in the social space.

Foucault meanwhile, although generally supportive of Habermas, rejects the idea of human activity being governed by universal principles and specifically rejects Habermas' notion of communication based around these.

The idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints seems utopian to me. This is precisely a failure to see that power relations are not something that is bad in itself, that we have to break free of. I do not think a society can live without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible. (Foucault, 1997, p. 298)

For Foucault (1998, p. 448), 'no given form of rationality is actually reason'. Habermas, discussing Foucault's work after the latter's death, sums up this move by Foucault. Habermas (1987, p. 241) suggests that with the publication of the *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault elected to:

abstain from dealing with texts through commentary and give up all hermeneutics, no matter how deeply it may penetrate below the surface of the text. He no longer (as he did in *Madness and Civilisation*) sought madness itself behind the discourse about madness ...

As such there are no universal rules to be located beneath the surface of human activity. Each individual then is responsible for his/her own self-mastery without reference to universal rules. The individual must harmonize any perceived antagonisms to create a 'balanced' person (Žizek, 1989, p. 2).

The basis of the debate between these two writers, then, is that Habermas appeals to a set of universal principles while Foucault rejects this. Both, however, resort to some sort of aspiration to makes things better. For Habermas a better life is achieved through more rationality and living according to some agreed moral code. For Foucault (1997, p. 225), meanwhile, human beings strive 'to transform themselves in order to attain prized states, whether of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality'. They aim for a better more balanced life through personally resolving individual need with external demand with 'as little domination as possible' (Foucault, 1997, p. 298).

Žizek intercepts this supposed possibility of achieving an ideal and the supposition that this can shape current practice. As such he offers an alternative to the debate between Habermas and Foucault with their respective approaches to reconciliation. Žizek's analysis has followed Laclau and Mouffe (2001) in the conception of hegemony offered in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, first published in the mid-1980s, with a new edition appearing recently. In this they situated their analysis in a post-Marxian arena in which there are too many versions of life for there to be one centralized rational structure as implied in Habermas' work. It was a book that sought to re-evaluate Marxism at a time when so many of the empirical components of traditional Marxism were dissolving in a sea of historical change. It was no longer possible to identify with Marxism as it had previously been understood because the unifying concepts that had held it together no longer stood up to empirical analysis. Plurality had usurped any conception of unity. There seemed to be an increasing acceptance that capitalism had conquered through globalization. Marxism needed to redefine its project if it were to retain any sort of relevance in a new social order. It was no longer possible to aspire to identity within a unified structure. The best that could be achieved was identifications with subsections of any supposed structure. Commonsense needed to be draped over a more complex composite of rationalizations. Žizek, following Lacan, argues that certain 'quilting points' become operational in pinning down systems of rationalization. For example, the overarching principal of 'class struggle' governed Marx and all subprojects were shaped in relation to that basic premise. In contemporary educational analysis, for example, a notion such as 'raising standards' assumes a similar sort of anchorage for administra-

tions defending their policies. Policies are often presented in the form of answers to the question of how you raise standards. Meanwhile assertions of ‘professionalism’ might anchor the rationalizations of teachers unions seeking to hold on to something by that name. In the new discursive order ‘skills’ as a notion also gained newfound prominence in specifying educational objectives. Meanwhile educational research was advised to be ‘interventionist’ and, most importantly, ‘evidence based’.

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) discuss how individual identities are functions of how societies describe themselves as sets of social relations. See also Butler *et al.* (2000). Such social relations, it is purported, always evade any final capturing; the description always misses something and as Lacan would later say it is this missing aspect that creates the desire that motivates our conceptions of who we are in life. The composite of such descriptions, however, is based on conceptions coming from multiple directions without any universal governing principles. Thus, for a teacher negotiating his/her way to being a teacher there are multiple stories of what it is to be a teacher to be negotiated—stories that do not lend themselves to final resolution in relation to each other. Conceptions may be both idealistic and unachievable in themselves and impossible to reconcile with other conceptions. For example, in a recent study by one of the present authors, initial training students on primary education courses encountered a broad range of demands in relation to the mathematics teaching component of their professional task. These demands on trainees included, for example; meeting school requirements, meeting university requirements, being popular with children, pleasing parents, building and enjoyable conception of mathematics, performing adequately on the Numeracy Skills Test (for pre-service primary teachers), achieving personal aspirations, following the National Numeracy Strategy adequately, performing adequately during government school and university inspections, minimizing teacher and pupil anxieties relating to mathematics, and, not least, teaching up to nine other curriculum subjects. The teacher, however, may nevertheless feel obliged to attempt a reconciliation of these demands and to provide an account shaped around supposed successes or failures. Žizek argues that the difficulties of achieving this sort of reconciliation are problematized further in the works Althusser and Lacan.

Žizek (1989) suggests that the neo-Marxian perspective of Althusser rejects the endpoint implied by Habermas and Foucault. Žizek points out that Althusser sees the Habermasian ‘End of ideology’ as an ideology par excellence. For Althusser, mastery is not an option—we never get to an End. He suggests that the alienation implied in Habermas is not ideological. Rather, the subject himself/herself is constituted through a mis-recognition of alignment with some supposed ideological force; that is, the subject recognizes himself/herself in the calling up of ideological motivation. Ideology shapes (interpellates) the subject, it does not distort a pre-existing subject. A particular example that Althusser (1971) offered was indeed the schooling process. He described schools as an instrument within the ‘ideological state apparatus’; hegemonic devices through which the preferred ways of the state are disseminated with general consent. For example, for many pupils and their parents, progression through school is an ideological motivation to which they are readily called up. But whether interpellation is about being called up or volunteering this

supposed interpellation can be delusional through its failure to embrace the whole picture. Discourses do not manage to mop up everything. Lacan, as we shall now see, attends to the effects of the non-symbolizable aspects.

Like Habermas the substantial work of Lacan has focused on applying Freudian analysis to contemporary society. But unlike Habermas and his insistence on aiming for some consensual ideal, Lacan follows Althusser in rejecting a trajectory shaped around the notion of an endpoint to the process. Lacan, we believe, assists us in examining our own language with view to locating how our desires, our fears, our hidden motivations govern our professional practice. And how our social action might be seen as a function of the social discourses that guide our everyday practice. He suggests that we must not (or that we cannot) obliterate the distance between life and its supposed symbolization, since this very gap creates desire. For Lacan, then, individual identity is not just about mis-recognition of participation in some social programme as Althusser suggests. Rather, human identity is a function of mis-recognition of oneself in a more fundamental way. The stuff of personal construction is an attempt to reconcile one's view of oneself with the views one supposes others have of one. This inevitably points to a gap between how one is and how one might be. A teacher, for example, may need to believe that he/she is making things better for his/her pupils for him/her to be able to function in their professional role. It is this personal need in determining professional identity that predominates over any actual externally imposed performative criteria, or any actual alignment with a collectively defined ideological programme. The teacher may not need, however, to reach a final resolution of such dilemmas and may continue to work with many such notions variously activated according to demands made in different professional contexts. Lacan (1977) talks of a fundamental mis-recognition in personal identity construction, where the self with which one identifies is an image that in turn conceals a fragmented self where alternative discourses feeding through the subject's practice fail to meet and be reconciled with each other. Lacan places particular emphasis on the child's early encounters with a mirror in which he/she recognizes themselves in an image:

We have only to understand the mirror stage as *an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image. (Lacan, 1977, p. 2; Lacan's emphasis)

Lacan sees the human subject as caught in a never-ending attempt to capture an understanding of his/her self in relation to the world in which he/she lives. The metaphor of the client attending a psychoanalytical session is used to point to an understanding reached through a process of talking about oneself in relation to this world. Successive sessions and the perspectives they produce are taken into the world to try out for size. In this sense, teachers sharing reflections as part of a process of professional development are renewing their self-identity through analysis. In the writings of Lacan the human subject is always seen as incomplete, never quite getting to a final resolution. As an individual I am forever trying to complete the picture I have of myself in relation to the world around me and in relation to the others who also inhabit it. I respond both to the fantasy I have of the Other and to

the fantasy I imagine the Other having of me. Lacanian analysis distinguishes between the 'I' that looks and the 'I' that is seen, including the 'I' seen by me. In the context of practitioner research, what version of myself do I suppose? What fantasies do I have about myself, the place I work, the people I work with and the broader social context within which this takes place? What story do I tell to justify my actions? How do I frame my plans and intentions? How do I understand and depict the discourses that interpellate me? And how do I experience changes in myself? Žizek's (1989, pp. 87–129) discussion of Lacan suggests that I notice what I do in so far as my actions inhabit my fantasy frame of who I am, but that the observations are haunted by the aspects that I choose not to see. At the same time I have to reconcile this with the image others seem to have of me and also how the tasks I face seem to be framed for me by others. I am trapped in having to constantly ask the question: Why am I what you (the big Other) are saying that I am? (Žizek, 1989, p. 113).

This brief account of Lacan will now assist us as we turn to a consideration of how teacher conceptions of self underpin practitioner research enterprises. In particular, we focus on how humans construct themselves as subjects in the research environment.

### **Researching disaffection in the classroom**

The study was undertaken in a large inner-city secondary (age 11–16) school. The second author of this paper is a senior teacher in the school and the study was the basis of her practitioner research-oriented Ph.D. (England, 2003). Thus the research process was inseparable from personal work on the part of the teacher in seeking to develop her professional practice. However, the project also sought to focus on the consequences for other potential beneficiaries such as the pupils being taught (see Lather, 1991). Methodologically, the enquiry attempted to reconcile qualitative practitioner research with a critical understanding of education in the style of Brown and Jones (2001) to examine the impact of social and cultural processes on the self-identity of a specific group of black boys (see Connolly, 1998; Sewell, 1997, 1998). The action of the teacher researcher was an essential part of the situation being described and the teacher narrative was an integral part of the research itself (for example, Weber, 1993; Olson, 1995). Writing thus became both a method of recording and a way of developing professional practice. The researcher was located within the research but also attempted 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 criterion for selection of data was that the interactions challenged the researcher's own understanding and assumptions. A journal was kept to log events arising in the school that related to the study. This recorded 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 (Elliott, 1993). Everyday classroom events were regularly recorded and impressions noted that seemed relevant to the concerns surrounding the research interest. Initial analysis

was then made based on the reading and the researcher's current understanding and interpretation of the data. In the later stages of the project, this analysis impacted on teaching strategies and classroom interactions. The practitioner moved from description to analysis and so to deeper understanding and enhanced teacher practice. It focused on the developing identity of the researcher herself as evidenced in the autobiographical writing of the accounts offered, and examined the fantasy she built into her construction of the research (see MacLure, 1993; Hey, 2000). It illustrated the way in which the teacher/researcher herself was aware of the psychoanalytical relationship between her and the object of what she was researching (see Hollway & Jefferson, 2001). It attempted to capture where she was at different points in the enquiry towards building an evolving sense of self in relation to the enquiry. The constructions offered were inevitably always inadequate but nevertheless guided the practitioner's aspirations and the way she held on to them.

It is in this respect that the study was premised on the researcher's psychoanalytic construction of self through the reflective research material that she offered. This material, however, was built through the researcher's fantasies and about herself the world in which she is operating. It is through this process that the researcher's subjectivity emerges. This aspect of the work distinguishes it from earlier traditions of enquiry such as ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Mehan & Wood, 1975), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1938) or frame analysis (Goffman, 1975). With particular reference to Garfinkel, it was Habermas (1984, pp. 124–130) who pointed out that ethnomethodology sits uneasily between 'the processal and merely particular character of the everyday practice interpretively generated by participants' and 'the methodological consequences from the fact that the social scientist has in principle the status of a participant'. Having, in their analysis, rejected the notion of a 'disinterested observer', ethnomethodologists, Habermas argued, still face a task of reflectively grasping the implications of the investigator's participation. In Lacan's work, however, the participant is not a pre-constituted rationally centred subject that Habermas himself prefers. For Lacan the subject is an effect of the discourses in which he/she participates. But unlike the interpellated subject of poststructuralist accounts, interpellation can fail and the non-symbolizable and the non-rationale aspects intervene (see Atkinson, forthcoming). The Lacanian notion of the 'real' locates these aspects. The real represents all abstract impossibilities to which the human aspires and can never reach; God, freedom, free choice, true love, happiness. Although these perfect aspirations do not exist in reality, their lack is experienced and their properties described.

The project focused on 11-year-old black boys in a top set Year 7 French group to find ways of increasing their motivation and to consider possible improvements to teacher practice. A particular theme related to the apparent dissonance between the boys' own self-image and the image the school had of them as pupils (England & Brown, 2001; cf. Connolly, 1998). The project was designed to ensure that they remained in that top set, rather than conform to the apparent trend of black boys becoming 'disaffected' and 'falling down the sets' as they progressed through school (see Pilkington, 1999). The project sought to achieve this through better understanding how oppressive teacher–pupil relationships might be disrupted in the



interventionist research process itself (see Davies & Hunt, 1994; Davies, 1996; Connolly & Troyna, 1998).

We commence with a short extract of data comprising a dialogue between the teacher researcher and one of her pupils. This is followed by some more extensive extracts from the researcher's reflective diary. We seek to show how the teacher's conception of herself evolved in response to challenges she encountered in carrying out the research.

- Winston: Everyone else was talking but you only see me. Because I'm bigger and my voice is deeper you only see and hear me. You never tell them.  
Researcher: But you were talking when you shouldn't have been, weren't you?  
Winston: That's not the point. You don't listen.  
Researcher: I am listening to you. I'm thinking about what you just said. Will you think about what I said too?

The above data is revealing for several reasons. It disturbs me that Winston feels I'm picking on him unfairly. I find this disturbing because I feel that this is in conflict with the aims of my research and the way I see myself as a practitioner. I had felt justified in asking him not to keep talking over everyone. He, on the other hand, is unaware of my research narrative and constructs me as one of the many teachers who pick on him unfairly. I am uncomfortable with this construction. He understands and makes sense of this situation in terms of his physical presence. He refers to his size and his deep voice. He is aware of himself as the object of my gaze and constructs this unfavourably.

I feel that there is a misunderstanding here, what Habermas might call 'distorted communication'. Winston is in fact the object of my gaze, but I do not view him unfavourably. I had felt that I had expressed a lot of positive feedback to him in my lessons. I had not in fact seriously reprimanded him for being late or for talking. I had underplayed it in fact in order to draw him into the language lesson rather than exclude him and alienate him from the learning. I had considered this to be a very positive way of accepting who he is and how he behaves by using it rather than working against it. His assertion was not unjustified, however, although he must be unaware of its extent and implications. I am aware of him physically—though not just his size and deep voice but, by extension his very 'blackness' of which these are perhaps unspoken elements. When I look at him do I see a black male first and then the boy second? This has disturbing implications. The very emancipation I seek with pupils such as Winston constructs such pupils as 'black males' firstly and as such is oppressive towards them as individuals. Is he aware of this without understanding why? In this way, as far as he is concerned, my objectifying gaze is not distinguishable from the establishment's possibly racist objectifying gaze. This creates a further tension within my research project.

Thus far, the interaction with the boy is being depicted as a case of 'distorted communication' that might then point to a task of 'curing' this distortion. Perhaps this might entail the teacher in finding ways of overcoming the apparent misconceptions of the boy and his supposed misunderstanding of the teacher's intentions. At this point, however, the teacher enters into what she sees as a new level of reflection in which she seeks to probe alternative interpretations of her own text.

So there is clearly dissonance and tension emerging in my data about how I am constructed by the boy, how I construct him and how he feels I construct him. At the second level, we have positioned each other within our individual accounts of what is

happening in my classroom. The problem with this, however, is that it only takes me so far. It offers insights but at the same time possibly prohibits action for me as an emancipator. It allows me a deeper understanding of how identity is constructed through our developing perspectives, but it doesn't seem to allow agency or intention. In order to move forward, I need to find a way around these tensions, which might immobilise my agency.

At this point the teacher has recognized that the storyline of her original perceptions has trapped her into assessing the situation in relation to particular strategies. It is this storyline that needs to be challenged and the way in which it constructs her as a particular sort of researcher. The teacher sees herself entering a third level of analysis.

It will be via these very tensions that at the third level I am able to move forward. I am beginning to feel uneasy about the relationship researcher/ research object. The very fact that he has become the object of this study is because he is black. And what right do I have to examine him under a glass in this way as if he were an insect? ...

My main interest in all of this lies in the emergent understanding from this data that the identity of the human subject is constituted by an awareness of the gaze of the Other. I see myself through the eyes of the Other, as I imagine that to be. So when Winston describes himself as black, he is seeing himself through what he imagines are my eyes. There is no essential black boy 'pulling the strings' as I described earlier, but can he choose how to dance according to the audience? Does he in fact paint himself black for me?

If Winston sees himself through what he imagines are my eyes, he also identifies with a collectivity. He is not a lone individual as object of my gaze, but belongs to a group, black teenage male. And my gaze as he imagines it represents in turn the gaze of a group within which he positions me, the white bourgeois majority. Our identities are constructed mutually in relation to the groups we represent and consequently our relationship is not personal but representative of where we are located in relation to each other by each other. The gaze he is as yet unaware of is that of the researcher, however, and this is beginning to worry me.

This departure by the teacher questions the premises upon which the supposed emancipatory project might have been pursued. Rather, she begins to question her own depiction of the exchange and consider how and why she is framed the particular story at the outset. The teacher now takes us through the successive phases of her analysis with reference to Lacan's model.

At the first level of data analysis I was the teacher researcher acting with the intention of improving the educational provision for black boys in languages lessons ... The 'ideal ego', or the image I assume, for me here is that of a teacher with intention of improving the situation I find myself in.

At the second level, I move away from this state to the alienation of my identity from this initial construction. I am now more concerned with looking at the way we view ourselves being viewed, and at this level my relation with myself is constructed from the outside. I learn who I am because others tell me and now the 'ego ideal' is the symbolic point, which positions me in relation to those who view me. (This difference can be understood better by the analogy of driving a car fast. It might be because you assume the identity of a racing driver. But at the second level, who do you think is watching you?)

At the third level, I become frustrated by the mis-match in my attempts at agency, my misunderstandings and mis-interpretations and the gap between what I intended to do and how this was understood. It represents the margin of desire—of what I do not understand. My wish to act with intention is equivalent to the Lacanian drive, my stated aim for an improvement in the situation corresponds to the Lacanian desire and my frustration at my seeming inability to act represents the horror of my failing story frame. I feel immobilised and impotent. It represents what is missing for me in the project so far. The response to this is my fantasy or the role I construct for my identity as an emancipator. This identity ties up the previous two, but enables me to move forwards in my project as I accept the previous constructions as necessarily imperfect and incomplete but nevertheless adopt a temporary role in order to act and regain a more assertive attitude in my research project. It is the move away from a 'because' motive to an 'in order to' motive (Schutz, 1962). I want to make things happen. This involves risk and fear. That is where, as a researcher, I am confronted with the gap in my story frame and this corresponds with the Lacanian notion of *Jouissance*. This is not to be understood as enjoyment or pleasure, but it is more like the thrill of horror of the unknown. This is the stage I am at now, but I am naturally unsure where it will lead. The parts of the understanding I can hang on to here are ways in which the imaginary and the symbolic frameworks construct identity for the boys and myself.

So the researcher moves into a new phase of understanding herself in relation to her ideological construction of the world she inhabits. The fantasy of self and the fantasy of world that governed the creation of her subjectivity have shifted such that the conception of research task has been redefined, situated as it is between those two fantasies.

### **Concluding thoughts**

The shifts depicted are not so much in moving towards the perceived solution, but rather in successively reframing the parameters in which the research situation is being understood. This results in new understandings both of the researcher and of the research situation that she is examining. Indeed the association between researcher and researched becomes more fluid. The researcher is re-examining the storyline of her life with the view to becoming sensitized to alternative persona that she may adopt and the relationships to the world these alternatives open up.

The suggestion here is that we create an image of ourselves that we can feel comfortable with. The aspirational critical educator might, for example, ask what personal needs are being soothed by alliance with critical education objectives. In producing reflective writing as part of a research process we provide an account of our past that makes sense of our current actions. Alternative accounts may be generated and considered. This can lead to attempts at building a firmer understanding of how such accounts are related to the events that they seek to depict. In some sense this might be seen as moving to a fuller account of the individual's teaching practices and the rationale behind them. But in a more important sense this leads to recognition that there is no final story; rather, we have stories that help us for the present, as we make sense of the past, as we nudge to the future. The analogy of a psychoanalytic session we offer here does not take us to a supposed end point where the client feels at peace with the world. For the researcher in this instant the

task is to find ways of constantly redefining the way in which the teacher works with her pupils. The original premise supposed the existence of an ideality to which one might aspire. The shaping of the research around this ideality was unsustainable. The research frame defines social relations yet the ongoing research reveals alternative ways of understanding these relations with implications for how researcher, researched and the research are understood. It is through this route that Lacan and Zizek offer a departure from Habermas and his particular route from Freud. While Habermas like Freud aspires to some sort of cure, Lacan's account is perhaps more pessimistic. Or rather for Lacan psychoanalytic work is more of an ongoing and permanent aspect of self-realizing. The gap is never closed. This process comprises an ongoing redefinition of self and of the world that shapes itself around that self. In this account human identity is never fixed and furthermore you are never able to say what you want to say because the words are not your own. This drives the subject to keep on talking, to offer yet more accounts, to re-frame his/her intentions again and again successively, always anticipating the true version of his/her life but never quite getting there. And it is in this re-writing that his/her identity evolves through the narratives that he/she offers.

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