

Tony Brown, Dennis Atkinson & Janice England



Regulatory Discourses in Education

A Lacanian perspective

Peter Lang

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Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <<http://dnb.ddb.de>>.

British Library and Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:

A catalogue record for this book is available from The British Library, Great Britain, and from The Library of Congress, USA

Cover illustration: © by Dennis Atkinson

Cover design: Thomas Jaberg, Peter Lang AG

ISBN 3-03910-527-2 (paperback)

ISBN 978-3-0353-0325-4 (eBook)

© Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, Bern 2006
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Printed in Germany

Contents

Acknowledgements		7
Part One	Introduction	9
Chapter One	Psychoanalysis and Education	11
Chapter Two	Constructing the Human Subject	27
Chapter Three	Understanding the Pedagogical Object	43
Part Two	Identity Formation in Initial Teacher Education	59
Chapter Four	How Student Teachers Form their Identities in Initial Teacher Education	61
Chapter Five	Ideal Identities and Fragile States: Marginalised Discourses in the Preparation of New Teachers	83
Chapter Six	The Gaze of the Mirror	105
Chapter Seven	How Real is the Imaginary?	121
Chapter Eight	The Truth of Initial Training Experience in Mathematics for Primary Teachers	143
Part Three	Conceptualising Practitioner Research	157
Chapter Nine	African Tales (with Krista Bradford and Sharon Cargill)	165
Chapter Ten	Narrative and Researcher Identity in Practitioner Research	193

Chapter Eleven	The Broken Mirror: Haunting the Delusions of Reflection	203
Chapter Twelve	Emancipatory Aggression	213
Chapter Thirteen	Inclusion, Exclusion and Marginalisation	229
Part Four	Conclusion	241
Chapter Fourteen	The Insistence of the Letter: The Portrayal of Self to the Other	243
Bibliography		265
Index		277

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank some journals that have kindly granted permission to reproduce extracts from earlier work: the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, the *British Educational Research Journal*, *For the Learning of Mathematics*, *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education* and *Educational Action Research*. Chapter Eight comprises material from a book by Tony Brown and Olwen McNamara, entitled *New teacher identity and regulative government: the discursive formation of primary mathematics teacher education*. We would like to thank Springer of Dordrecht and New York who granted permission to use this material.

Thanks also to Pauline Brooke for secretarial support.

Dennis and Tony would like to make a special mention of Bill Brookes who supervised their doctorates some twenty years ago and was responsible for triggering so many of the themes explored in these pages. This book is dedicated to him.

Part One

Introduction

Chapter One

Psychoanalysis and Education

Pathology acquaints us with a great many conditions in which the boundary between the ego and the external world becomes uncertain or the borderlines are actually wrongly drawn. There are cases in which parts of a person's body, indeed parts of his mental life – perceptions, thoughts, feelings – seem alien, divorced from the ego, and others in which he attributes to the external world what has clearly arisen in the ego and ought to be recognised by it. Hence, even the sense of self is subject to disturbances, and the limits of the self are not constant (Freud, 2002, p. 5).

In recent years psychoanalysis has begun to provide a vibrant theoretical resource for educational researchers to shed new light on practices of teaching and learning and also to form a critique of educational policies. This has been made possible through the ways in which psychoanalytical discourses understand the individual as both a conscious, rational subject and as an unconscious subject whose desires and fantasies form a significant aspect of being. And, importantly, the individual is an entity that is defined relationally, whose speech predicates a position and someone else who is listening. When these ideas of the subject are applied to processes of teaching and learning then the ways in which we understand these processes are expanded and this can have significant impact on how teachers might respond to learners or how, for example, teachers and learners are conceived within curriculum discourses. Freud makes the obvious point: 'an adult's sense of self cannot have been the same from the beginning. It must have undergone a process of development' (ibid). From being a baby inseparable from its mother, the child is increasingly drawn to the demands of the outside world. Teachers mediate some of this transition as the child's personal objects progressively get reprocessed as external social objects and demarcate the divide between self and outside world. Yet this teacher mediation is itself governed by the parameters shaping the teacher's understanding of her task. Teachers work within various frameworks

that they more or less readily embrace. Yet these frameworks impact on the way in which children's objects (and their senses of self built out of these) achieve recognition and are thus nurtured or rejected. Such a sense of evolution and repartitioning of the objects, at the interface of the individual's sense of self and her sense of the world, also has deep significance for the ways in which we might understand the objects of educational research and with how the researcher comes into being amidst these objects.

Since Freud's death in 1939 his influence has grown and impacted on a variety of domains, from public relations to social engineering, from assisting individuals to regulating them. Freud's impact on some later thinkers has been substantial. Most notably, Lacan emerged in France in the 1950s and 1960s as a successor to Freud. Lacan read Freud closely but brought many contemporary theoretical resources to this reading, such as the linguistics of Saussure. More recently, the Slovenian commentator Slavoj Žižek has presented himself on the scene as a possible successor to Lacan. Žižek, however, has followed his own path in which he reads Lacan against the German Idealist philosopher, Hegel and underplays Lacan's own faithfulness to Freud. His main preoccupation has been with how psychoanalysis might shed light on the formations of ideologies and thus on the ideological subject. The careers of Freud, Lacan and Žižek, however, have all been characterised by intellectual struggles that have seen them reinvent themselves a number of times and reinterpret their source material within these successive personas. As a consequence there almost seems to be a school of Freud for each aspect and phase of Freud's professional life. For example, Lacan offers a distinct alternative to the path followed by Freud's daughter Anna and her involvement in the American ego psychology school. These inconsistencies have also resulted in numerous accusations being made, with Lacan and Žižek sometimes being seen as guilty in providing partial or incorrect readings of their respective predecessors. These intellectual shifts, however, can also be read as displaying a healthy attitude towards change and reinvention.

The purpose of this book is to celebrate this healthy attitude to change and personal reinvention as evident in psychoanalytic thinking. By reading Lacan, often through the work of Žižek and others, we show how psychoanalytic thinking can help us to develop new ways of understanding educational practices by analysing actual events, practices and policies that occur in school classrooms, teacher education and higher degree studies including educational research.

Psychoanalysis is not entirely new to education, although Lacan has been more influential in the fields of cultural theory, literary studies, critical theory, philosophy, gender studies and film theory. Deborah Britzman (1998, 2003) has used the work of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein to investigate problematical and ambivalent aspects of teaching. Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984), Shoshona Felman (1987) and others have taken the work of Lacan to explore issues of pedagogy and learning. The authors in a book edited by Sharon Todd (1997) have discussed the place of desire and fantasy in teaching and learning. Other authors broaching this territory include Appel (1996), Jagodzinski (1996) and Pitt (1998). Much of this writing tends to function at a theoretical and discursive level that does not engage 'directly' with actual educational events or policies but rather focuses primarily upon using psychoanalytic discourses to broaden and critique theoretical and normative conceptualisations of pedagogy, teaching and learning. The writings of other contemporary theorists have more often informed work in the field of educational research to be discussed here: action research has relied upon the work of Gadamer (Elliott, 1993) and Habermas (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) whilst Stronach and MacLure (1997) use Derrida. Foucault has also generated a heavy industry in educational research in relation to issues of power, normalisation and subjectivity, whilst Bourdieu's writings on habitus and field, including the notions of cultural and symbolic capital as well as symbolic violence, have stimulated a rich seam of research in the field of education. The work of Lacan, however, contains a series of important statements about language, identity and subjectivity that are directly relevant for educational theory and practice, yet it remains largely unexplored in relation to practical examples from these domains.

This book will provide an accessible introduction, description and analysis of these aspects of Lacan's work. This will be supported by drawing on the work of Žižek and Butler as well as others whose application of psychoanalytical and critical theory to the field of ideology and subjectivity has significant implications for understanding subjectivity in educational contexts. A central focus of the book will be upon regulative discourses and practices in education and it will show how Lacanian theory can help to develop a greater understanding of how such discourses and practices are instrumental in forming teacher and researcher subjectivities. Such regulative practices include: the school curriculum, teacher training, assessment, social inclusion and multiculturalism. This book will argue that regulatory practices and discourses are manifested in the form of particular research methodologies that arise, for example, in the field of action research in education. It will show that the notions of reflective, reflexive and critical practice, which ostensibly aim at emancipatory outcomes, each impose a regulatory framework in which particular subjectivities emerge. A key idea that marks the distinctive difference between established fields of action research and one that is informed by a Lacanian perspective is that former established research strategies in the end place their trust in language and rationality to effect change. In doing so they exclude important ontological domains that are non-rational and subject to extra-linguistic forces which are central to subjectivity and resistance. It is by adding this particular focus and exploring its effects that a Lacanian approach to action research can add substantially to our developing understanding of practice and subjectivity in education.

Dennis and Tony have followed parallel professional paths over a twenty-year period, with Dennis focusing on art and Tony on mathematics. Both completed doctorates at Southampton University in the late eighties under the supervision of Bill Brookes. It was Bill who introduced both to hermeneutics and this theoretical perspective continues to anchor their work as it has evolved through successive post-structural and psychoanalytic emphases. So often the theoretical lenses have proved equally valid in both school subjects despite being seen through understandings of the human subject that have also evolved through time. In some sense this book is intended to work

through some of the issues that hold pedagogical content and human subjects in relation to each other. The site of this enquiry is in teacher education contexts but in examining those contexts we have not restricted ourselves to issues relating merely to curriculum subjects but also more generally to explore the difficult task of learning to teach. The most extensive ‘working through’ in fact is offered by Janice who explored the inter-subjective aspects of this style of analysis in the context of her teaching French in an inner city school, as part of her own doctoral study completed in 2003. The core issue that permeates all of the work, however, is how the teacher is related to the teaching situation. That is, how do we understand the teacher, their relationship to the subject they teach and to the children they work with? And how do teachers variously resist or attach themselves to the discourses that shape their professional lives?

Book Outline

The introductory section of the book extends into two more chapters. These provide the opportunity for us to set out our stall with regard to some of the theoretical contexts to which we are attending. Two particular foci are on how we theorise the human subject and the pedagogical material being addressed in the educational enterprises with which we are concerned.

In Part Two we focus on initial teacher education. We observe student teachers learning to shape their practice in ways that permit them entry into the profession. The discourses and practices of teaching to which they aspire are largely externally defined, such as government training policies that establish standards for qualified teacher status. However, although we recognise that the ability to meet these standards is an important aspect of teacher training, we argue that learning to teach involves much more than fluency with the standards discourse. A series of interviews with student teachers reveal experiences of learning to teach that are deeply significant for them but which are not considered in any depth within official training practices and discourses. The current professional standards in the UK

include a section on 'Professional Values and Practice' and earlier versions included sections on 'developing effective relations with members of staff'. However, the kind of issues raised by student teachers relating to this aspect of learning to teach often seem to be located elsewhere. Many students discuss difficulties that arise from the fact that the training and advice provided by school tutors sometimes conflict with those provided by university tutors. Students also discuss difficulties experienced when having to work with different teachers in the school context. They describe their anxieties over the subject content of lessons and the approach to teaching (and learning) to which they are expected to subscribe in their teaching practice schools. Interviews also reveal early experiences of teaching and show how students begin to acquire understandings of themselves as pedagogic agents.

We discuss the content of these interviews in order to theorise how these significant experiences are central to student teachers' emerging understandings of themselves and how they begin to be positioned, and to position themselves, as new teachers. We suggest that for many student teachers the ability to *manage* these professional 'conflicts' is a highly significant aspect of learning to teach. We argue that within these early professional engagements with their tutors, student teachers become positioned and regulated as teachers but that also through emerging strategies of resistance they are able to rework their subjectivities and understandings of themselves. With reference to the work of Lacan, Žižek, Butler and Foucault we describe how student teachers' subjectivities are formed through processes of lack, desire and fantasy and that these processes play a crucial role in building student-teacher identities. Such processes indicate that learning to teach involves powerful non-rational forces that affect teachers' understandings of themselves and their practice. Consequently, we argue that the advocacy for 'reflective practice' in teacher education, although highly desirable, often fails to embrace or focus upon aspects of learning to teach that are deeply significant for student teachers in their daily contexts of practice. This is because processes of lack, desire and fantasy that influence perceptions and reflections of teaching practice are difficult to pin down within

rational discourse and yet they are significant factors in the professional learning process.

We also consider actual events in classrooms where students begin their teaching practice and where they often experience difficulties in developing effective classroom management skills. We analyse these difficulties and the way in which students discuss them through Lacanian concepts that help to shed light upon the way in which students position themselves in discourse in relation to their practice. For example, in their struggles to achieve 'classroom discipline' many students become exasperated with this 'lack' in their ability to manage and supervise their pupils. This lack is often manifested in a discourse of blame; either their tutors or the training course has not equipped them with effective management skills. We show how Lacanian theory concerned with desire and fantasy might help the trainer (and the student teacher) to understand and come to terms with these difficulties and take a more considered perspective on themselves and their practice.

Issues of desire and fantasy are also explored within specific subject teaching contexts where regulative discourses play a significant part in shaping both teacher and learner identities. We consider particular aspects of learning to teach art and design that raise difficulties for many student teachers. We focus particularly upon the discursive practice of assessment in this field. We provide a series of descriptions of pedagogical contexts of assessment into which student teachers are inserted and in which they learn about assessment. We argue from a Foucauldian position that through insertion into such discursive practices student teachers begin to build understandings of themselves. We show how such discourses enable the student teacher to regulate and position pupils' artwork so forging their understanding of pupils' abilities. Equally such discourses regulate and position their practice as teachers. We show therefore that through assessment discourses student teachers are able to construct and legitimate themselves as teachers, art practice as a particular kind of practice and pupils as particular kinds of learners. Assessment of student teacher performance is interrogated through Lacan's theory of discourse. Here the student teacher is shown to achieve his or her identification as a pedagogised subject through the specific knowledge discourses of

teacher training that establish particular ideological constructions of teaching. We refer to Butler's (1997) fusion of psychoanalytic discourse and Foucault's work on power to indicate how professional norms, manifested in the form of assessment discourses, become dissimulated within the psyche to produce passionate attachments to specific socio-psychic identifications through which pedagogised identities emerge and become regulated. This enables us to acknowledge but also move beyond a Foucauldian analysis, in order to consider the socio-psychic dimensions of assessment and to read this crucial aspect of teaching in terms of a series of fantasies of knowledge and fantasies of practice.

On the terrain of meaning, Lacan placed great importance upon the action of the signifier and the relations between signifiers, rather than the relation between a signifier and a corresponding signified. For him, 'a signifier represents the subject for another signifier', and with this in mind our interrogation of assessment discourses shows how within such discourses student teachers and teacher trainers achieve their pedagogised identities not according to a relation in which the discourse identifies some 'natural' quality 'in' these subjects but according to the symbolic network of assessment knowledge. In other words the assessment discourse does not represent directly a natural ability in the student teacher for the trainer but primarily for other signifiers that constitute the symbolic network of assessment knowledge in which the assessment data has to be inserted in order to establish meaning. Thus the student teacher's understanding of herself as a teacher is formed according to the signifiers of assessment discourse, for her the discourse constitutes herself-as-teacher not according to prior signifieds but according to the signifiers that compose assessment knowledge. So the real destination of the signifiers of assessment discourse is not the student teacher or the teacher trainer but the Lacanian big Other, that is to say the symbolic order of professional assessment knowledge.

Our exploration of the construction of teacher subjectivities is further developed through an examination of fantasies of learning and teaching and their underpinning discursive norms that establish a desire for specific forms of subjection that might be conceived as

sublime objects of ideology. A particular manifestation of this desire is investigated in the context of the French educational system.

Part Two concludes with a discussion of how student primary teachers learn to accommodate mathematics teaching as part of their job description. Mathematics is a subject that seemingly causes emotional turmoil for so many student teachers in their own schooling. We examine the strategies new primary teachers employ to cope with this demand and suggest that they rewrite the landscape of their professional environment to privilege the importance of the skills they perceive themselves to possess (e.g. sensitivity, empathy) whilst at the same time borrowing language from the official discourse to describe their actions.

In Part Three we focus on teachers who are more established in their career. These teachers have chosen to follow a university higher degree with a view to developing their practice with more self-direction than that permitted within initial teacher education. We examine how the teachers understand their own professional development and how through university course structures they seek to activate that development. The courses we consider emphasise a practitioner research approach in which reflective personal analysis shapes the developmental trajectory. It is the product of such reflective analysis that provides the data for our own discussion. We centre our concern on how reflective writing produced by teachers reflexively presents a picture of those teachers. In pursuing a Lacanian perspective on such work we inspect how these self-images produced within the writing activate specific conceptions of professional trajectories that feed whilst growing alongside the lived experience they seek to portray and activate.

The mechanics of the research process we describe entail teachers re-inspecting earlier writing. By distancing themselves from this writing the analysis they carry out inserts a space between the original writer's intention and the subsequent (sceptical) interpretations of that writing. This interpretive strategy further examines the potential status of writings when they are combined with other writings by the author from various periods

Žižek employs Lacanian analysis in inspecting how the individual expresses herself through the ideological frameworks

available to her and how these frameworks might be disrupted to produce alternative results. In a similar way the practitioner research process draws on certain techniques from Lacanian psychoanalysis, mirroring some aspects of a Lacanian psychoanalytical process. Guided by such perspectives the researcher might be assisted in reframing accounts of practice to resist reflective research reports being mere repetitions of actions within that practice rooted in habitual discursive styles. Here the assistance takes the form of the researcher (or colleague or tutors) providing an analytical function of inspecting, comparing and critiquing the various frames through which the researcher reports her findings. Through this lens we consider ways in which teachers might stick their heads above the parapet and speak more firmly in voices that might be claimed as their own. Nevertheless, the notion of such ownership brings its own problems. Given the complex nature of teaching and its depiction in socially derived discourses there are difficulties inherent in offering a singular view of one's own participation.

A specific theme that underpins all of the examples discussed relates to how cultural differences between the teacher and her pupils might be negotiated. This theme provides an exemplar of how practitioner research issues can be examined through a Lacanian lens. The common element of the studies is that in each the teacher herself inspects her racialised self and questions how understandings of this predicate specific teacher/pupil dynamics. The practitioner orientations of the research projects address issues of how such racialised conceptions of self might evolve in tandem with developing teacher practice. The discussion of teacher work will be two tiered.

First, we consider practitioner research being conducted by teachers working towards Masters degrees. The particular examples discussed here are drawn from a course aimed at British volunteer workers in Africa. We offer two accounts of teachers based in Uganda located respectively in a school and a college of education. As practitioners working outside of their home culture issues of professional purpose needed to be resolved in careful relation to their cultural agency. This is inspected through a psychoanalytic frame insofar as the writing produced is read as having some association with identity claims by the authors but where these claims are read

sceptically as postures assumed in the course of the research process. We show how the research process enabled the two teachers in mediating the multiple influences on their practice. In the first we show how the pedagogical content itself can be seen as a function of the inter-subjective negotiations. In the second we focus more closely on the teacher's own sense of her evolving professional self as she engages ever deeper into her new professional situation.

In the second tier we focus on an extended account of a PhD carried out by one of the present authors. Here a Lacanian lens is applied to an analysis of black youths learning French in a British school. Through examples of writing from the research project, we examine how she used this approach to better understand how she and the students that she taught repositioned themselves through the research process. This comprised a re-conceptualisation of the familiar cyclical hermeneutic action research methodology in which the formations of both researcher and researched were seen as coalescing as a function of the narrative product of the research enquiry. This is explored with reference to a key theme of the project related to the marginalisation and inclusion of pupils in a secondary school from the perspective of a teacher researcher examining her everyday teaching in such a school. This provides an account of how children in school understood themselves with particular reference to ethnicity and gender. This leads to a critical examination of the social norms that define the relations between teachers and pupils within classroom situations, and guide the researcher's relationship to the researched.

The chapters are organised as follows:

Chapter Two provides further introduction to the theoretical field and in particular addresses the issue of how human beings build an understanding of themselves and the parameters within which this is achieved. We question models predicated on aiming for an ideal and consider how 'identity' as a notion might be seen alternatively as a somewhat awkward amalgam of identifications within diverse discursive domains. The particular focus is on teachers conducting practitioner research targeted at educational improvement and on how the researcher understands her interface with the situation she is researching. We survey a range of theoretical models as offered by

some leading writers (Habermas, Foucault, Althusser, Butler), with particular reference to Lacan, and consider each in relation to how the teacher researcher might be understood. Some key Lacanian terms are also introduced.

Chapter Three shifts the focus on to the pedagogical content. By comparing the way in which art and mathematics are seen as producing objects for study we examine how this production predicates particular conceptions of the learner and of the learner's task. By comparing two alternative versions of the ego introduced by Freud we pursue an understanding of the learner as produced in the web of relations defining teachers, students and pedagogical material.

Part Two commences with *Chapter Four* that investigates the forming of student teacher identities in initial teacher education. By analysing student narratives of school experiences the chapter argues that although reflective, reflexive and critical discourses are helpful interrogatory tools, they presuppose a prior subjectivity that fails to acknowledge the idea that it is through such discursive practices that subjectivity emerges. Such discourses also suggest an emancipatory project grounded in rationality. The chapter demonstrates that these reflective discourses fail to take into account non-symbolisable and non-rational aspects of experiencing that have powerful ontological effects on subjectivity and identity. Such aspects are structured in student narratives through fantasy, which allows students to understand their experiences as consistent and meaningful.

Chapter Five provides interview data from a small research project in which student teachers discuss particular experiences of learning to teach that are highly significant for them but which remain largely unrecognised in more official training discourses. These experiences relate to difficulties in developing effective professional relations with school and HEI tutors and the struggles to acquire appropriate management strategies to overcome them. The study considers reasons for such difficulties and in doing so provides a theoretical analysis grounded in the work of Butler, Žižek and Lacan. The student teacher's struggles of learning to teach and the trainer's task of providing professional support and guidelines are considered respectively through the difference between the terms *experiencing*

and *experience*, the former hinting at complex and frequently unstable ontological processes and the latter acting as a signifying form in which the former becomes a retroactive and idealised reduction.

Chapter Six considers assessment discourses in initial teacher training through the lens of Lacan's theory of discourse and Butler's notion of passionate attachments. The chapter interrogates how student teacher identities are produced through assessment discourses. It argues that assessment discourse does not reveal a 'natural ability' to teach (or lack of it), but that such ability is constructed and understood within the parameters of particular discursive formations of teaching structured around key signifiers that articulate the pedagogised subject.

Chapter Seven develops our exploration of subjectivity in educational concepts by theorising educational practices through Lacan's triadic framework of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. The key focus here is to consider the Real effect of the imaginary identifications that produce and regulate subjectivity.

Chapter Eight focuses on a study of mathematics within pre-service training for primary teachers. It reports on how mathematics is a subject that fills many trainee teachers with horror in their own schooling. Yet, for trainees in the study university experience soon persuades them that 'maths isn't just scary numbers' and as their training course progresses such anxieties seem less pervasive, almost to the point of being de-problematished once the trainee has reached qualified teacher status. How has this been achieved? Despite a history of ambivalence towards the subject of mathematics they do not continue to present themselves as mathematical failures. Rather, they offer an account that omits issues that the trainee would rather not confront. They tell a story in which qualities, that they see themselves possessing, have a positive role to play. This chapter documents how initial training students effect this transition. It concludes that such trainees 'story' themselves so as to sideline mathematics but to present their perceived qualities of themselves in a positive light. It also shows how such students appropriate official discourses to describe their own practices.

Part Three commences with *Chapter Nine*. By looking at some studies carried out by teachers we consider how some reflective writing produced within the context of a practitioner research oriented masters degree was crafted towards providing accounts of the researcher's professional identity and rationalisations for actions carried out in the professional field. The chapter centres on two British teachers working in Uganda. Here the teachers face a task of translating their professional experience, as developed within a British context, into a country where very different understandings of education prevail. The transitions that need to be made become the focus of the two studies conducted. In particular, the process of moving to a professional identity commensurate with the specific professional circumstances being presented, forces a change of professional practices but also a re-conceptualisation of self in a more fundamental way.

Chapter Ten shows how Lacanian ideas can be employed in the business of reflective practitioner research in education. It commences with a discussion of a doctoral study that is the focus of the following chapters. This chapter introduces, through examples of writing from the research project, how a teacher-researcher uses this approach in developing her professional functioning.

In *Chapter Eleven* we take a guided tour through some of the data generated within the doctoral study. We focus on how the human subject works with an image of self, an image of the world he or she occupies and the matter that is left out of these two images. This, once again, is discussed in relation to the Lacanian triad, the *Imaginary*, the *Symbolic* and the *Real*. We consider how they might shape researcher conceptions of the research space. The data extracts comprise the teacher examining teacher-pupil relations.

Chapter Twelve focuses on how a teacher seeks to break away from liberatory conceptions of educational research. In particular, the teacher examines her own agency and how it functions in an attempt to mediate between the diverse aspirations expressed within the school ethos and by black male pupils. A particular theme relates to Freud's assumption that pressures to civilise compromise the aspirations of individuals and we pursue Lacan's assertion that 'aggressive motives lie hidden in all philanthropic activity.'

Chapter Thirteen is concerned more directly with issues of marginalisation and inclusion as they impact on the boys in the study. We consider how the identities of researcher and her research subjects are derived through the research process with a particular emphasis on how we see racial identity being constructed. We discuss some extracts from a government document relating to Social Inclusion as a starting point in understanding how conceptions of racial identity are officially constructed. This leads to a discussion of how issues of identity might be understood between the sites of teacher, pupil, school and government.

In Part Four which comprises *Chapter Fourteen* we conclude by revisiting and enlarging on the way in which the figure of the teacher is constructed in earlier chapters; how subjectivity is a function of the network of social discursive relations; how teacher subjectivity derives from the teacher education processes and from the content being taught; and how teacher identity and reflective research are shaped towards the supposed demands of an actual or fantasised audience. We then turn our attention to issues of research and with how research output separates itself from the life it supposedly represents to operate more independently. It is suggested that the output becomes privileged over the supposed life and that it is such output that becomes instrumental in shaping the actions of those in the research space. In a distanced inspection of the researcher's own reflection the researcher herself is seen as examining how the failure of fit between reflected and actual life provides scaffolding for professional renewal. It is suggested that by interrogating the reflective outpourings of the researcher it may be possible to detect blockages, insincerities, repetitions that lock the researcher in to habitual actions, actions that might be seen anew and refreshed for more creative actions.

Chapter Two

Constructing the Human Subject

Freud's work, it has been argued, is especially relevant in contemporary society where we have increasingly less anchorage in established traditions guiding human action (Giddens, 1999). Freud's conception of psychoanalytic sessions, however, was predicated on finding a supposed cure, 'by helping the subject to overcome the distortions that are the source of self-misunderstanding' (Ricoeur, 1981). This might be seen as being achieved through the production of narrative in which the subject re-writes the story line of his or her life. Such an approach pre-dates more recent work in the field of education in which narrative approaches have been pursued in relation to teacher enquiry (e.g. Weber, 1993; Beattie, 1995; Olson, 1995; Convery, 1999; Rushton, 2000; Johnson, 2002). Meanwhile much research in education is predicated on an emancipatory model derived from the work of Jurgen Habermas, in which the researcher is understood as being an agent of change for the better (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Lather, 1991; Zuber-Skerrit, 1996; Brown and Jones, 2001). As we shall see Habermas' approach (1972) is underpinned by a Freudian notion of cure.

Here we take an alternative approach inspired by 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 some resolution is achieved. There are, however, alternative ways of conceptualising 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. For Lacan the task of psychoanalysis is to locate the truth of desire and is explicitly not about how the manifestation of this desire might be corrected. It is this approach that we seek to explore through

re-conceptualising the process through which emancipation is understood. Žižek, meanwhile, pursues this analysis into a more politico-social arena through exploring how such desire is produced through ideological identifications.

Žižek (1989) begins his most significant book by suggesting that a well-known debate between Habermas and Foucault (Habermas, 1987; Foucault, 1998) shields a more fundamental opposition between 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 the other writers. A core issue for Žižek relates to how supposed imperfections in present human practices provide motivations in shaping future practice. Žižek (following Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) 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 dissatisfaction, a lack that is seen as being in need of being overcome. We shall consider the nature of these antagonisms as they arise in four alternative conceptions of human identity. This discussion contextualises the discussion that follows shaped primarily around the work of Lacan. We will additionally introduce Judith Butler whose major contribution to this debate will also inform this book.

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 (1976, p. 349) 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 latter 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