Mentoring as a process of doing, undoing and redoing: a feminist study of teachers’ professional identities.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the mentoring of trainee teachers during the acquisition of a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The research data was gathered during a five year institutional ethnography, and presents a feminist mentor’s view of the ontological shifts that occurred during a series of mentoring relationships. In this instance, the paper highlights the experience of working with two trainee teachers, Tim and Jay to focus on the ways that discourse surrounding teachers’ professional competence, was used to mediate the articulation of teaching as a masculinist cultural project.

Adopting a poststructuralist feminist position, the intention is to present the ways that discourse is used to form, deform and reform the mentor and trainee’s sense of ‘professionalism’ and ‘identity’. However, both these concepts are taken to be problematic; the paper argues that ‘professionalism’ is both a gendered and political category and that developing a teacher ‘identity’ is simultaneously enduring and fragile, personal and political. The aim is to look closely at the development of the mentoring relationship during initial teacher training and argue that it is possible to identify instances when the discourse ‘bring into being what it names’ (Butler, 1993).

The paper takes as its starting point, the idea that discourse surrounding teacher competence, presents teaching as a masculinist cultural project. This refers to an articulation of patterns of thought and evaluation derived from hegemonic masculinity. Teaching is seen to be structured and organized around hierarchical oppositions between mind and body, reason and emotion. This paper exposes some of the gendered tensions within mentoring when trainees mediate and justify teacher professionalism as a masculinist cultural project when they are working with a feminist mentor. It concludes by examining the gendered tensions between teaching A level Sociology as an instrumental process and teaching Sociology within a social justice agenda where social inequality and difference are articulated through feminist pedagogy.

Background to data collection

The conception of mentoring as a process of doing, undoing and redoing is inspired by the work of artist and sculptor Louise Bourgeois, whose inaugural installation (2000) of three steel towers entitled ‘I do, I undo and I redo’ in the Tate Modern Art Gallery, became a provocation for my research on the identity-work undertaken by teachers. Spiral staircases coiled around central columns and led to supporting platforms which were surrounded by oval mirrors. Visitors were invited to climb the towers of rollercoaster height and position themselves under the massive and terrifying mirrors in a sky-high theatre of self-regard and
public scrutiny. Further levels of complexity lay within each tower as models of mother and child were encased in bell jars and secreted within the walls.

I was entranced by the installation. I read the work as a representation of the intimate, the social, and the structural features of reflective and reflexive selves. The unyielding steel structures, the multiple gaze, the climbing and the element of performance on top of the towers connected with the ways in which I wanted to explore the identity work undertaken by teachers in ‘everyday life’. The research that informs this paper provides an account of teachers’ professional identities that is analogous to Bourgeois’ sculpture: complex, layered in its delicacy and violence, confusing in its contradictions and illuminating in yielding new ways of doing, undoing and redoing teacher ‘professionalism’.

The five year ethnographic research (2000-2005) was undertaken from the position of a classroom practitioner; an ‘advanced skills’, ‘feminist’ teacher and mentor who had actively ‘done’, ‘undone’ and ‘redone’ various versions of teacher ‘professionalism’ through a career trajectory spanning thirty years. Data was collected in the form of ‘Interviews’, dialogic ‘Tutorial Transcripts’ and ‘Reflective Journal’ writing.

Ontological security and vulnerabilities are loaded into the social and personal construct of being a ‘teacher’ and it is in the embryonic stages of accumulating, accommodating and resisting a ‘professional’ identity that the research is located. Its roots are in the emotionally engaged space of a feminist teacher, mentoring trainee teachers during a period of ‘Initial Teacher Training’ (ITT) gaining a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) as Social Science, (or more specifically, A level Sociology teachers). Although the research project looked at the mentoring of nine trainees, by one mentor, this paper highlights the tensions between mediating and justifying teaching as a masculinist and feminist cultural project, during the school placement of two male trainees, Tim and Jay.

**Teaching as a masculinist cultural project**

A fundamental question that permeates the work of feminists in education is to address the issue of why women are disproportionately represented in lower paid and lower status positions across a range of sectors within Education. This has often been explained in terms of the ‘gender codes’ that permeate the teaching profession. (Connell, 1990, Bolton, 2004, Dillabough, 1999). Davies, (1996) points out that teaching, broadly defined as ‘women’s work’, is classified and controlled by the ‘masculinist cultural project.’

In current discourse of the GTC and DFSC surrounding teacher professionalism the notion of ‘rational man’ is clearly represented. Discourse in this context is taken to be, text that presents an argument or hegemonic position that implicitly defends a particular set of assumptions. For example, the discourse from the TDA in the form of QTS Standards demands that the modern teacher is instrumental, emotionally detached, codified into ‘taking account’, (S3.3.6) ‘setting targets’, (S3.1.1) responsible for ‘monitoring and evaluating’, (S3.2.1). Such language consolidates the notion of teachers’ ‘professional’ identities as a form of agency closely tied to masculinity. Where we find evidence of a liberal discourse of ‘equal opportunities’ this is codified as ‘recognising and responding’ (S3.3.14) to difference and diversity which masks the legitimisation and the facilitation of social ‘otherness’ and inequality.
The accepted construct of what it is to be a ‘professional’ has been shaped in ways that rely on cultural conceptions of masculinity; individualistic, competitive, predictable, denying qualities culturally assigned to masculinity in terms of being expressive, involved and informal. Dillabough, (1999) claims the state has also embarked on the process of making teachers’ ‘professionalism’ synonymous with a masculinist cultural project presenting an exaggerated emphasis on rationality, objectivity and control. There is a central paradox in this ‘professionalisation’ process. The accepted masculine codes of knowledge that make up the ‘competent’ and ‘professional’ teacher, contradict the profession’s fundamental reliance on feminine codes of knowledge such as nurturing, caring etc. The masculinised ‘professional project’ resolves this paradox by attempting to shape the feminine code into a masculine ‘professional’ code of values and conduct feeding into a regulated curriculum and accountability model. But in doing so, caring labour – mostly (but not exclusively) performed by women - is marginalized and the work that they do to support children and colleagues is devalued, ignored and unsupported. As Dillabough points out:

Since knowledge about teaching appears to be tied to very particular gender codes and categories, the reproduction of masculine ideals through the concept of ‘teacher professionalism’ leads to the devaluation of those gender codes which are typically associated with the ‘feminine.’ (Dillabough, 1999, p.379)

The devaluation of the caring elements of teachers’ work according to feminine codes of practice is reflected in the way that the caring work which cannot be shaped into the rational form has been recently delegated to the ‘para-professionals’ or Learning Support Assistants. At one and the same time, teaching is undergoing a process of professionalisation and de-professionalisation as its practices are split into the masculine/public (professional work) and the feminine/private (support work). In effect, teaching, broadly defined as ‘women’s work’, continues to be classified and controlled through the ‘masculinist cultural project’.

Whilst recognizing that teacher ‘professionalism’ is itself a contested area the irony is that without the attachment to the rational, objective, goal centred masculine model of ‘professionalism’, teaching is likely to remain a ‘semi-profession’ and women teachers will be consigned to the role of surrogate mother rather than active ‘professional’ educator.

Woods and Jeffrey, (2002) argue that the sense of vocationalism attached to teaching is being set to one side as the new masculine codes of caring, restrict opportunities for teachers to create and sustain the emotional practices of teaching that represent, for many teachers, the core of their identity as a ‘caring professionals’. In what Woods and Jeffrey describe as an ‘assault on child-centred philosophy’ and a ‘diminution of elementary, trust’ we can see that:

This attack strikes at the heart of teachers’ humanism. The marketisation and managerialization of schooling, the subject orientation of the new prescribed National Curriculum, and new forms of assessment and inspection inform the new order. These developments are accompanied by government and inspectorial pressure on teachers to abandon child centredness and adopt a more traditional approach to their classroom teaching. (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002 pp.93-4)

As a means of understanding the ongoing, and changing, process of defining teacher
‘professionalisation’, the notion of ‘gender codes’ is a potentially effective concept (Davies, 1996, Dillabough, 1999). Its strength as a conceptual device is its ability to highlight the dominance of masculine forms of knowledge and the resultant devaluation of the gender codes, which are typically associated with the feminine. Using this device it can be seen how the recently introduced masculinised code of values and conduct to which teachers are held accountable have been realized in discourse and documentation released by the GTC, and the competencies framework set up through the DCSF and TDA to allocate performance related pay. The change of emphasis displays caring as a rational activity integrated with standards of competency and a clear means to end relationship, which devalue caring as an interpersonal relationship and denies its importance in the management of the classroom. In doing so it further marginalises the caring work done by teachers, focusing as it does on only those aspects of teaching that create an immediate and tangible outcome.

Bolton, 2004 suggests, that as a conceptual device, the notion of ‘gender codes’, does have a fundamental weakness in that it polarizes divisions between masculine and feminine knowledge into separate symbolic spheres that seem to re-present and re-produce divided dispositions. The realities of everyday lived experiences are often more complex:

This weakness can be overcome if gender as an active and continuing process is acknowledged. Though individuals ‘do’ gender and draw on symbolic representations of femininity, it is a situated ‘doing’ accomplished through the lived experiences of women and men within interactional and institutional arenas…However it is necessary to note that masculine and feminine gender codes do not speak with the same authority…The masculine codes of control, discipline and rationality, which results in a goal oriented, systematic approach to teaching, are emphasized and brought to the fore of contemporary teaching practice rather than the feminine code of caring motivated by the desire and need to connect to another human being. (Bolton, 2004, p.322)

Poststructural feminism is useful for extending our view of gender as an active and continuing process, mediated through language and discourse to legitimate certain forms of teacher professionalism.

This paper is positioned within a poststructural feminist paradigm, it foregrounds theoretical concerns surrounding gender and ‘professional’ identity; it uses an alternative conceptual framework for assessing the gendered nature of identity formation proposed by Dillabough (1999). This moves away from an instrumental assessment of teachers’ professional identities towards a social and political analysis of their constitution.

Power is conceptualised in poststructural theory, as movement, force and counter-force, where knowing subjects recognise and analyse those forces and generate counter forces. We can do this in discourse, in structure and in ways of being embodied, simultaneously in discursive practice. I am interested in the power of constitutive forces and the ‘transgressive possibilities’ to be found in oneself as the embodied subject in text and in the practice of others. The aim of the research was to focus on my practice of mentoring in order to excavate how one’s ‘professional’ self and one’s identity is constituted. As Davies succinctly summarises:
As human subjects we are always circumscribed by particular situations, by the discourses at play, by the subject positions we may or may not take up, by the inscriptions on our bodies, our emotions, of attitudes, of commitments, of understandings. To turn practice against those inscriptions is complex work. We are always vulnerable to the constitutive normalising work that it counterposes – that normalising work coming from ourselves as well as from others. (Davies, 2004 p.74)

In accounting for mentoring as a process of doing, undoing and redoing I am eager to separate out the constitutive elements of ‘professionalisation’. Whilst not denying the legacies of social class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, I was interested in critiquing the notion of the self as reflexive project. We are engaged in making ourselves from multiple possibilities. Since there are multiple ways to reflect upon the discourses around which the self is constituted, the reflection opens up varied possibilities for resistance to those discourses and opportunities for change. Finding the gaps and tensions in existing dominant discourses, and subjecting them to critique, transforms the codes themselves by making them more visible and open to scrutiny.

**Patrolling the borders of teacher ‘professionalism’ through mentoring**

Although the research on mentoring in this paper is located within the ‘messiness’ of poststructural preoccupations, other approaches have taken a more instrumental view of mentoring. The dictionary definition of ‘mentor’ describes ‘an experienced and trusted adviser: an experienced person in an institution who trains and counsels new employees or students: The origin of term is Greek, from Mentor, the name of the adviser to the young Telemachus in Homer’s Odyssey’. (Concise Oxford Dictionary) There is a wide range of literature in mentoring and ITT; some key texts like Campbell and Kane, (1998), Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting and Whitty, (2000) track the development of ITT partnerships between HEI and schools since mentoring has become the cornerstone of ITT. Other texts consider the role of mentoring in specific detail producing practical guides Field and Field, (1994), Wilkin, (1995), Stephens (1996) and the implications of mentoring in relation to the growth of professional knowledge, Furlong and Maynard, (1995).

The literature surrounding mentoring as a structured activity is extensive, since the discourse of mentoring has been expropriated by a variety of social agencies in a variety of settings, from professional acculturation to social inclusion. However, in a more critical, feminist engagement with the concept, Colley (2003) challenging the prevailing hegemony of the mentoring role as ‘virtuous’, brings into question a set of contradictions at the centre of mentoring. Her thesis identifies the need to scrutinise the dyadic, one-to-one relationship at the heart of mentoring and look at how it works in practice. She examines the way in which mentoring is not only mediated at the micro level of identity formations, but also works at the macro level to preserve the status quo of the state. In so doing mentoring contributes to impeding the development of teachers’ gendered, activist, ‘professional’ identities that has the potential to address issues within the social justice agenda.

An examination of how mentors and trainee teachers negotiate the Standards within ITT in its present form, positions mentor and trainee within particular set of relationships. Both are involved in a process that negotiates the micro-politics of gendered social relations amongst other power matrices of race and social class. The project of realising a professional identity mediated and justified through the discourse of ‘professionalism’ and ‘standards’
becomes related to a masculinised hegemonic norm and becomes a process fraught with tensions. The gendered expectations of mentors and others may serve to regulate identity work to positions of subordination, marginalisation, complicity or resistance to masculine and heteronormative hegemony. Connell, (1995) suggests the ‘Gender Order’ which resides at the centre of these practices is drawn upon and reproduced in maintaining boundaries of social difference. Wright and King, (1990) claim that in the immediate instance of teacher training in placement schools, the development of a ‘professional’ identity appears to be at the cost of personal and ‘professional’ narratives that are often constrained by cultures of hegemonic masculinity and femininity.

Whilst not overlooking the variable positioning of mentors and trainees and the ‘myriad of power relations at the micro level of actual practice’, Sawicki, (1991) argues that individuals place themselves, (or are placed by others) according to their autobiographies, class, ethnic and ability profiles. They do not fit into prevailing discourses neatly. As Rich, (2001) identifies, ‘Their positions are mediated and inflected by a set of local, structural and institutional factors … within these complex dynamics, their actions and reactions to these discourses potentially reproduce or transform these socio educational contexts.’ (p.21)

In the final section I draw on ‘ethnographic encounters’, or relationships that were made during the process of mentoring. Here we are able to witness cultural reproduction and transformation in socio educational contexts within gendered social relations and the tensions that arise when technicist and aspirational discourses are called on to mediate and justify teachers’ professional identities.

**Ethnographic Encounters**

‘May the force be with you: appropriating the ‘power’ of the QTS Standards’

Paradoxically, tensions within the mentoring relationship often arose when teacher identities were mediated and justified in strict accordance with the ‘professional’ discourse of QTS Standards. Ironically, those trainees who mediated ‘professionalism’ in technicist and instrumental ways, often overlooked the social justice agenda enshrined in the A Level Specifications for Sociology. This tension was never more evident than in the relationship that I developed with Tim.

The intervening years since Tim had studied Sociology at university had been characterised by his employment in management and sales. Tim stated that he wanted to become a teacher because he intended to ‘cash in’ on his degree qualifications. Working with Tim, gave an insight into the ways in which QTS standards shaped his identity as ‘teacher’ in distinctly masculine terms. However, his mediation of ‘professionalism’ became ‘manifest’ in both a literal sense, and literary form of written text. Tim’s Records of Review appropriated QTS Standards and he inscribed particular forms of domination and subordination in his interpretation of ‘effectiveness’. Tim was fully engaged with hegemonic masculinity as he reveals in his Record of Review:

*I have developed into a confident and authoritative figure. I have been exposed to a variety of classes from the quiet and studious to the disruptive special needs. I take control of my environment during my lesson and make sure that pupils feel my teacher presence as ‘Sir’*

(Record of Review: Tim, 1999)
This entry puzzled me in two ways: firstly, as a raw assertion of ‘power’ and secondly, as an appropriation of the institutional pro-forma to legitimate his claim. The first drew connections with Connell’s (1995) work on hegemonic masculinity and the second linked with Smith’s (1990) work on active text that becomes subject to institutional process. Smith sees this as, ‘a process of conversion from one kind of account to another’ (p.152). In accounting for the spaces between the gendered accounts of the rational teacher and the emotionally engaged teacher, we can see the process of conversion:

It is a process of conversion of one kind of account into another, producing a special relation between the two such that the institutional account, that is the sequence of action described in properly mandated form, embeds and subsumes the observational mode. (Smith, 1990 p. 152)

Ever mindful of understanding gendered social relations within the mentoring relationship, I was keen to look at masculinities and femininities as performative categories within the teaching space. Drawing on Connell’s (1995) work on gender, (which sees bodies as ‘both objects and agents of practice’), I was keen to identify how the practices of male and female bodies were an active and integral part of social action and the construction of gender in the classroom.

In making links between discourse, emotion and gender, Perriton, (1999) identifies ‘emotional discourses’ as ways of talking about emotions that do not aim to produce theories on emotion, but nevertheless reproduce certain ideas about emotions and construct representations of women, their bodies and feelings when teaching. Drawing on the work of poststructuralist feminists, Perriton argues that the problematic role of women’s bodies as educators results from women being unable to control what their bodies are seen to symbolise. Women teachers are a ‘semiotic item’ that is purchased and consumed, in particular it is the woman as carer and nurturer that is being appropriated, and women teachers are not seen to embody power and authority.

Perriton draws on a model of bodily determination that may challenge any attempt by women teachers to believe in self determination or social agency. Put simply, women’s teaching bodies are not their own; whilst male bodies assume a sexual presence which is normalized or contributing to charisma and presence, women find that body size or shape for example, becomes an element that undermines rather than reinforces their authority. Perriton’s view raises questions about the resistance and subversion of gendered norms of embodiment. The ethnography highlights the potential for gender and sexuality to become a form of power brokerage within the classroom, although ways of articulating these notions remained undeveloped and very difficult to ‘excavate’.

Tim was effectively calling upon a distinct form of hegemonic masculinity that claimed and maintained dominance through control of institutional structures. He made confident assumptions about his planning and class management in his reviews but these did not correlate with my observational notes. He avoided monitoring and assessment because he claimed that his judgments could not be seen as ‘professional’ until he received payment for marking (mock) examination scripts. (!) In maintaining positions of dominance and subordination, through ‘bureaucratic rationality’, heterosexual masculinity positioned other masculinities and femininities in marginalised spaces. My work with Tim was a frustrating
encounter with ‘performative gender’. The embodiment of hegemonic masculinity became a contested category within the mentoring relationship and the teaching space.

I soon developed a perception of ‘Sir’ as a trainee who had ‘mastered’ the mannerisms of teacher through ‘hegemonic masculinity’ using a variety of vocal tones to effectively ‘command’ silence and attention. However, as the Reflective Journal privately records, ‘Tim is ‘full of sound and fury signifying nothing.’ I could not ‘see’ that he connected with students beyond calling for attention. Collaborative teaching was a difficult transaction. Tim showed signs of boredom, impatience and disengagement with the concept of teaching together. Preparing the written plan was straightforward; we agreed on clearly defined objectives and areas of responsibility for specific activities. Performing together in the space became problematic; he became visibly irritated or disengaged if I intercepted to clarify points or instructions. I was acutely aware of the ‘delicate balance’ of this strategy, interceding only at the point of students’ observable confusion, (shrugs, wrinkled brows, screwed up noses etc.) or disengagement (heads on the desks, displacement activities etc). However, Tim’s weak subject knowledge hampered his performance within the space, his ‘script’ soon dried up as he found it difficult to ask students questions or deal with common mistakes and misconceptions. In evaluating the lessons he often referred to students’ ‘arrogance’ in questioning ideas and their unreasonably ‘high expectations’ of what sociology lessons should be. He defended their boredom as inevitable because they ‘had to learn’ and he struggled to transpose sociological principles into meaningful analogies.

His repeated request was ‘to be left alone to get on with it’. It was his aim to evidence the QTS Standards and ‘move on’. Our somewhat acrimonious relationship culminated in a terse exchange of views in his final tutorial which I recorded in the Reflective Journal.

Today I expressed my concerns that Tim had made little progress in ‘connecting’ with students at an interpersonal level. He had demonstrated poor subject knowledge and showed little interest in contemporary culture or current affairs. In short I had been unconvinced that he valued Sociology as an academic discipline or had any genuine enthusiasm for the subject. Tim exploded with rage… he challenged my judgment and finally shouted ‘I do not understand what you mean by making connections. I am training to teach. I am not training to become a Jedi Knight!’ ‘I am not Luke Skywalker; you are not Yoda’.

I was staggered by the perspicacity of the metaphor and I agreed that his use of imagery was in fact pertinent even though we disagreed on the fundamental premise. To me teaching 

was like becoming a Jedi Knight, of sorts; it relied on intangibles, charisma, enthusiasm, connections, emotions, empathy, intellectual challenges and the like. Teaching was ‘powerful and ‘empowering’ indeed, ‘the force’ did go with you’. (Reflective Journal: May 2000)

Issues arose between my evaluation of Tim’s competence and the Professional Mentor’s assessment. He explained the differences in our perceptions as resulting from a ‘personality clash’ between myself and Tim. I asked the HEI to arbitrate and my assessment of his (in)ability to ‘teach’ was verified. However, Tim was recommended for QTS because he had complied with the standards during his first placement. My evaluation had been invalidated by non-specialist judgement.
What seems evident from the snapshot of data is the variety and ‘power’ of discourse to legitimate masculinist versions of teacher ‘professionality’ at the expense of feminist or humanist accounts of teacher engagement in the classroom. The QTS Standards remain the dominant discourse because it defines and codifies teachers work and in so doing it forms and deforms their capacity to pursue an inclusive and emancipatory form of active ‘professionalism’. Paradoxically the QTS Standards are challenged through the discourse of subject knowledge in the case of Sociology. What was shown though the work with Tim were components of teaching that were affected by ‘masculine occupation’ of space and an appropriation of QTS standards to gain legitimation. Tim successfully refutes the significance and force of connectivity in his scorn of the ‘intangible’, whilst in my role of mentor, the image of Yoda persists as an enduring symbol of teaching as an emotionally engaged project.

‘A toss-up between teaching and the SAS’

Tall and imposing, with shaven head and a demeanour that said, ‘Don’t mess with me’, Jay was a trainee teacher and keen martial arts enthusiast who continued to work as part-time security officer during the PGCE. Affectionately called ‘The Bouncer’ by students, Jay was a trainee who provided an interesting challenge to the cultural stereotypes of ‘what teachers look like’. When I asked Jay why he wanted to teach, he replied, ‘It was a toss-up between teaching and the SAS’. However, despite the ‘testosterone-effect’, it was Jay’s rejection of teaching as a masculinist cultural project, his creativity and vulnerability that made him interesting to work with.

On first sight, Jay embodied a striking representation of masculine power as a physical presence; he was practiced in adopting a fixed stance in the space, where eye contact and the ‘sound of silence’ were used as class management techniques. Jay was always quick to reinforce aspects of his masculinity and working-class identities, by referring to mates, ‘bouncing’ and other physically demanding work done on building sites, when he gave examples to explain sociological concepts.

Our mentoring partnerships in a ‘new’ teaching space were significantly different from my previous work with trainees. An exciting range of technological equipment (electronic whiteboard, internet, full screen video access) became available and increased the range of resources we could use to teach Sociology. Jay was secure in his sociological knowledge, and much of our time was spent in exploring theoretical perspectives of interpretivist sociology and postmodernity. Compare Jay’s confidence with Jim’s previous assertions:

Already having a 2:1 degree in Sociology has given me a good knowledge of the various concepts that are contained within the sociology discipline. This placement has given me a good understating of the OCR examination syllabus…being able to cope securely with questions pupils raise is important… I believe I have coped extremely well when students have asked me to explain things in different ways …evidence for this can be found in various lesson observations which state that I am quite capable of dealing with a variety of topics which students raise. (Record of Review: Jay, 2001)

Jay’s sense of authority seemed rooted in his mastery of subject knowledge, not young people. Although Jay’s overt ‘display’ of hegemonic masculinity was an embodied and situated presence, this was a more trusting mentoring relationship. Jay and I collaborated
closely in the planning and delivery of Sociology lessons. His use of visual imagery and film to connect with the more abstract qualities of sociological theory was inspired. Jay was quick to exploit the potential for linking the work of Dominic Strinati on post modernism, to elements of ‘The Matrix’. He connected Irving Goffman’s work on the ‘presentation of self’ to ‘collage’ and elements of ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.’ Given his enthusiasm and ‘close reading’ of film and text, Jay was instrumental in utilising an interesting range of resources to connect young people with sociological concepts. My contribution was to extend the intellectual challenge for the students and structure the written tasks to fit in with modes of assessment that were recognisably ‘A’ Level skills and focused on critical engagement with aspects of social inequality and difference.

Perhaps the most significant development in the relationship with Jay emerged from our work with photographs. During the HEI OfSTED inspection I was asked by the PGCE Course Tutor to ‘model best practice’ during a tutorial with Jay. Jay was given the task to capture aspects of what teacher professionalism on camera and the photographs became the focus of the tutorial. Ever-watchful of surveillance ‘tactics’ I was mindful that the HMI would have a clear and specific agenda, s/he would want to witness that I was drawing on Jay’s classroom experience and relating these to QTS Standards.

Jay’s ‘performance’ in the tutorial was confident and articulate; he was able to use the photographs to discuss a range of personal and autobiographical reference points to frame the discussion. This use of photographs as a ‘key’ to unlocking autobiographical details in order to connect autobiography and ‘professionalism’ was fascinating. The painting by Edvard Munch, ‘The Scream’ was Jay’s starting point in discussing the frustrations and difficulties he experienced in planning and preparing lessons. Other photographs of ‘lunchboxes’ led to discussions of Jay’s work/life balance, physical fitness and presentation of masculinity within the space. His images of classroom displays led to talk about learning styles and the use of visual imagery in working with theoretical content. It also led us onto the teaching of sensitive issues surrounding sexuality, sexual violence and AIDS within a ‘safe’ classroom climate. The depth and breadth of the topics we discussed was impressive and I was conscious of grafting aspects of ‘standards’ onto our conversation, consistently drawing on Jay’s classroom practice in order to contextualise the theoretical considerations in which we became engrossed.

The HMI’s verdict on our performance as trainee and mentor in tutorial mode endorsed the depth and quality of our reflexivity. Jay talked about our mentoring collaboration as being more ‘humanist’ than the relationship he developed with previous mentors and the university tutor:

I like the way we work together, it is more humanistic somehow. I feel as if this is a personal approach that recognises me as an individual. Taking the photographs and talking about them was a really good task because it made me think about what kind of things influenced who I was when I was standing in front of the students. (Tutorial transcript: Jay, 2001)

Such a view endorses the poststructural view that acquiring language, (both visual and lexical in this instance), goes hand-in-hand with initiation into those discourses which constitute the social world. Thus in articulating ‘professionalism’, Jay was able to gain access to what it means to be a person and a ‘professional’ within each of the discourses made available to him. As he rehearses his ‘performances’, he becomes the kind of speaker...
who is implicated in, and makes sense of, the potential range of ‘professional’ identities. However, as the TDA and GTC have been relentless in restructuring teachers’ work and pursuing a single version of ‘Teacher Professionalism’; many of these developments have been increasingly shaped through text as a site of action, and in accommodating these, Jay has had a restricted choice of presenting himself in more ‘humanist’ ways.

**Conclusions**

The social category of white middle class male has cast teaching as a ‘masculinist cultural project’ and has been organised so that it seems natural, taken for granted and useful in the performance of a ‘professional’ identity. The GTC Codes of Values and Practice renders inequalities invisible and there is little space within the masculinised model of ‘teacher’ to overtly address issues of annihilating gender. The language of the third person, ‘they’, or ‘all teachers’ in effect symbolically annihilates gender; the language of inclusivity becomes potentially socially exclusive to pro/feminist teachers. The study has been an attempt to unravel the ‘doing’, ‘undoing’ and ‘re-doing’ of mentoring and of hegemonic assumptions concerning teacher ‘professionalism’ and gender inequity.

I have argued that post structural feminism has been a useful portal through which to extend the view of teachers’ work. The ‘work’ of mentoring, for example, can be complex and transformative in recognising, valuing and providing for diversity, so that it is possible to move towards a ‘professionalism’ that is broader, more flexible and more democratically inclusive. The identity-work that takes place as part of the process of mediating and justifying ‘professional’ actions and rationale is demanding because it requires mentor and trainee to engage in active and transformative politics. In developing ‘professional’ identities it is important to excavate the ‘why’ of teaching, as well as the ‘what’ of teaching. For example: Why are particular ‘knowledges’ being validated in the curriculum and what are the social consequences for these dominant forms of knowledge? Much of the present discourse has reduced ‘professional’ competency to the ‘how’ of teaching, where preoccupation with performance is foremost. Here, teachers are encouraged to become over-reliant on ‘performing the scripts’ of policy and national curriculum instead of being actively and creatively engaged in ‘enabling improvisations’ that could respond to diversity and difference.

The paper has been preoccupied with deconstructing the normative masculine subject, which is valorised within a range of professional and cultural text against which others are ‘measured’ in an audited, ‘man’agerialist culture. The research has deliberately moved away from a staged and structured view of developing professional competence and identities as disembodied, instrumental and rational. The study has been deliberately located in a pro-feminist conceptualisation of teachers as un-essentialised, shifting in response to various contexts

In an attempt to consider male and female teachers’ ‘professional’ identities as politicised identities and not simply as a ‘rational entity’, it was possible to excavate complex, subjective embedded positions in the tensions between the desire for political agency and the necessity of gaining qualified teacher status.

The micro-politics of teaching and the political agency of teachers were in the forefront of developing a series of ‘professional’ relationships. The participants were people with a past and a present and aspirations for a future. The study shows that contextualising teaching and ‘professionalism’ within and without the structure of a marketised education system was
challenging. The propensity of trainees to conceptualise ‘professionalism’ beyond an instrumental view of ‘becoming qualified’ was difficult to predict and often resulted in fractured relationships, however, interrupting the reproductive process of teaching will always be a difficult task. The aim of the study has been to reconstruct the experience of teachers and extend the representation of teachers’ work as a political activity within the micro-politics of teaching and as such represents, an interruption to the dominant discourse surrounding mentoring and initial teacher training.

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This paper is in a draft stage; please do not quote without the author’s permission.

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Notes:

The use of terminology that relegates teacher education to ‘training’ and beginning teachers as ‘trainees’ is recognised as problematic, but nevertheless sustained throughout the thesis, in recognition of the prevailing discourse that was prevalent during the ethnography

**Discourse and Discursive text:**
Discursive text is taken to have dual meaning: firstly, as discourse-laden text, seen to be institutional in form and occurring as part of the organizational fabric. Secondly, discursive text is seen to present an argument or hegemonic position that implicitly defends a particular set of assumptions.
A useful definition:

> Discourse is, most simply and generally language in action. In its strong, contemporary sense... it asserts the priority of socially formed practices of language over individuals who necessarily operate in and through them. A discourse is a more or less systematic set of forms, topics and procedures that regulates both the object of utterance – what is seen and spoken of – and its subjects – the identities that we assume, consciously or not, in practising it. (Mulhern, 2000 p.81)

**Teaching as a masculinist cultural project:**
This refers to the articulation of patterns of thought and evaluation derived from hegemonic masculinity. Teaching is seen to be structured and organized around hierarchical oppositions between mind and body, reason and emotion.

**Professional’ identities:**
‘Professional’ is an extremely contentious construct which remains problematic concept within the text. It refers to the interplay between a socially constructed version of teachers’ ‘professionalism’ and the ways in which the values of individual teachers are used to ‘make sense’, or ‘make real’ the rhetoric, as embodied and embedded practitioners actively engaged in the teaching process. I deliberately use the plural to indicate that identity is viewed as both a stable and fluid, dynamic category which is consistently done, undone and redone in its response to incessant changes in social policy and the ensuing restructuring of teachers’ work.

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