'I don't think that does leave you, because it's about where you come from': Exploring Class in the Classroom

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Abstract

This article examines a teacher identity through the context of class background and habitus. It considers the significance of class transition, probing how a teacher's working-class history informs and helps define the emergence and consolidation of a teacher identity – to shape what is called here a particular 'teacherly self.' It explores some of the difficulties the working-class actor may experience on entering a largely middle-class profession. This transitional experience has generally gone by the term upward mobility, but the word mobility, with its largely favourable connotations of positive movement, is substituted for the notion of transition, which suggests a more complex and complicated process. The article shows how a working-class background informs class practice; in particular, how a class structure of feeling shapes attitudes and approaches to working-class pupils and their needs. By using oral history methods and aspects of narrative theory, the article seeks to underline how the continued significance of class finds complex expression in British culture.

Introduction

1.1 This essay emerges from a wider project concerned with examining the relationship between work, identity and social action in three occupational groups, part of the ESRC funded Identities programme.[1] Using historical and comparative analysis the project investigated the experiences of three cohorts of workers from banking, railway work and teaching with regard to intergenerational changes and gender differences within and between workers, and their relationship to identity formation, reproduction and change. A total of 120 work-life histories were collected across the sectors, with a geographical split between the north-west of England and the south-east. A central concern of the project was to explore the meaning and importance of work in people's lives, and how work itself is bound up with and in turn helps shape social action. My intention in this article is to examine some of these issues through the lens of social

class, tracing the significance of social class to work identity, in this instance the work identity of teachers. First a few words are needed on social class and on how it is employed here.

Class in the Classroom

2.1 Class is a complex relation. In recent times, within the academic field and beyond, the usefulness of class, both as a sociological category and as lived experience, has been called into question (see, for instance, Beck, 1991; Giddens, 1991). As a consequence of this a distinct shift has occurred which can be characterised as a turn away from class to a concern with "new social movements," summed up as a move towards identity politics. Identity politics, arguably, emerged even earlier in the 1960s, and was partly evident in the studies of subcultures, at least in a British context, from the turn of the 1970s (Hall et al., 1976). Current manifestations strive to replace a politics of class, with its traditional emphasis on questions of economic redistribution, for a politics that turns primarily on questions of culture, ones bound up with an insistence on "difference," which foregrounds demands for cultural recognition. In this context commentators have pointed to the emergence of new social movements as sites of resistance to a range of injustices based upon "race," sexuality, or gender for instance. Though this is certainly an important, and necessary, development, others witness a tendency within such arguments to displace, reject, or simply ignore, the continued importance of class altogether (for commentary see Kirk 2003; Skeggs, 2004). Consequently, identity politics itself has recently been the subject of searching critiques, and what we may be witnessing at this particular juncture is a return to questions of class after a long absence and neglect (see McGuigan, 1996; Fraser, 1997 for commentary on these developments; also Reay, 1998; Sayer, 2005; Kirk, 2007 for the continued importance of class). One central impulse driving this is a new focus on what might be termed the subjective dimensions of working-class life as it is made manifest in a range of ways.

2.2 This essay explores the importance of class, though in the context of what I term "class transition." It probes how a teacher's working-class background informs and helps define the emergence and consolidation of a teacher identity – a particular "teacherly self." Such transitional experience has generally gone by the term upward mobility, but the word mobility, with its largely favourable connotations of positive movement, I substitute with the notion of transition, which suggests a more complex and complicated process. The experience of moving from one class to another – usually thought of as travelling from lower class origins to a higher class location, though, of course, the reverse does occur – and the attendant dilemmas this can create in terms of identity and belonging, is a topic not wholly new to academic study. It is evident – or at least it was – in such fields, for instance, as Cultural Studies. Richard Hoggart's seminal study *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) pivoted upon this very problematic, in fact. In that book, Hoggart observed that 'almost every working-class boy who has gone through the process of further education … finds himself chafing against his environment during his adolescence. He is at the friction point of two cultures … '(Hoggart, 1957, p. 292). It is this 'friction point' that can make the transition so difficult and fraught at a number of levels. Negotiating 'the friction point of two cultures' constitutes an important focus here, as we will see below.

2.3 Education is regarded generally by society as the primary conveyor belt on which class transition can take place. People "get on" through education. Historically, for instance, the winning of a scholarship to enter grammar schools has often been the route for working-class children to begin their "transition" to a different social position among the middle class. And yet the conveyor belt analogy proves as inadequate as the notion of upward mobility, once more suggesting a relatively unproblematic forward movement, or momentum. A kind of linearity is the dominant image evoked here, and this profoundly distorts the lived experience of class transition. A long established alternative metaphor is the image of climbing the (social) ladder, a conception Raymond Williams took to task long ago in *Culture and Society* (1958). In this metaphorical construct one rises, if a little precariously at times, upwards in the single-minded pursuit of advancement. For Williams, this represents 'the perfect symbol of the bourgeois idea of society' – climbing the ladder is a solo pursuit in the quest for individual advancement (1958, 331). And while the prospect of individual advancement is not objectionable in itself, it is only the sign of a divided society, not the answer to it. And he suggests that the 'ladder idea has produced a real conflict of values within the working class itself', with regard to what he perceives to be its more collectivist ethos; and is further objectionable in that 'it

weakens the principle of common betterment, which ought to be an absolute value … and sweetens the poison of hierarchy' (1958, 331). Williams felt that those put on the ladder, whether they accept or reject the outcomes of such provisions, will, nevertheless find themselves – as Hoggart suggested – necessarily negotiating the predicament of transition.

2.4 Thus the conception of a simple shift from one social position to another is problematic, whether couched in terms of a ladder, or in the more abstract notion of mobility. Both sociologically, and probably psychologically, this is no straightforward process. This is the essential significance of Hoggart's and Williams's observations, if not spelt out directly in these terms. Consequently, it is appropriate to view class experience and positioning as a structure of feeling as well as, but not simply as, an economic location in the means of production – a set of lived experiences grounded dialogically within social and historical contexts, and as such producing social and cultural formations and alignments of an enduring kind.

2.5 Andrew Sayer (2005) has recently taken up Pierre Bourdieu's definition of class to explore similar concerns. He points out that the various capitals Bourdieu identifies (cultural, economic, social) signify class difference, so that the demarcations of variable capitals is a 'dialectic of competition, distinction and differentiation which is central to symbolic domination' (Sayer, 2005, p. 80). Thus 'economically, members of different occupations such as accountants and teachers are only indirectly dependent through the division of labour, but symbolically they not only have different amounts of economic, cultural and educational capital but actively distinguish their own valuations of these and other goods from those of other groups' (Sayer, 2005, p. 80-1). These are, for Bourdieu, crucial ways in which class is constituted – a "soft" domination which nevertheless instates hegemonic relationships between groups. Consequently, 'through … processes of competition, objective classes as Bourdieu defined them, differentiate themselves from others' (Sayer, 2005, p. 81), and as this differentiation is in part formative of class identity and status it is a differentiation that comes with a set of practices that might be alien to, or be withheld from, those desiring to acquire them. We could argue, then, that the process of class transition requires the acquisition of appropriate cultural or economic capital, those goods which will facilitate one's elevation to a different, higher, class position. Yet for those seeking such a course this can become a process laden with practical, material and psychological hurdles. At the same time, this differentiation could be employed as a means to resist aspects of incorporation into the dominant field one has entered through processes of educational accreditation; fields where the actors concerned feel alienated, or in which practices occur which actors feel are morally objectionable. Here, complex modes of acceptance and refusal occur, operating at both a conscious and unconscious level. This seems central to understanding some of the dilemmas of class transition, and is important for signifying the ways such movements through the terrain of social class can have important and radical consequences too.

2.6 Much of this has to do with feelings – feeling part of a social group, or not; or belonging to a cultural formation whose identity is stigmatised in a range of ways and a multiplicity of contexts. Modes of exclusion mark working-class experience when working-class subjects find themselves positioned in environments alien to them. In this context, both McGuire and Burn have explored the 'trauma of attempting to keep a cultural identity in a [education] system that still views working-class accent as a signifier of shame' (Burn, 2000: 86; Maguire, 1998). Trauma may seem a strong term to use in this instance, yet class experience can be coded quite legitimately through such language.

2.7 Writing about the place of the working-class teacher within education, Burn highlights the position of one of her respondents – her feelings of isolation, of not belonging in the profession, of being 'out of place': ' I'm always having to compete against … [silence] other people's perception of me … My accent, the things that I say … you know … working-class phrases … "know what I mean" … makes me automatically feel … inferior' (Burn, 2000: 87). The silences embedded here within the transcribed utterance are symptomatic of that feeling of inferiority that comes with a class position stigmatised by dominant others and symbolised more generally through cultural signifiers such as language and demeanour – or to use Bourdieu's term, *disposition*. This is confirmed in a later remark by this respondent, when she argues: 'It becomes part of your character, that you're always trying to prove yourself … otherwise nobody believes that I have a valid reason to be in the position I'm in' (Burn, 2000: 89). This teacher's acquired cultural capital in the shape of

higher education qualifications, which should set her on a parity of esteem with her colleagues, are somehow diluted when in the possession of someone from a lower social class. In an arena dominated by middle-class people, the working-class teacher can experience herself as an anomaly. The middle-class gaze – "their perceptions of me", or what they *see* – can be a sign of what Diane Reay has called class contempt (1998). This can work in reverse too, in certain contexts, when the middle-class actor becomes the object of the working-class gaze – though when out of place in such contexts the middle-class person is often seen as "slumming it."

2.8 A feeling of shame is not uncommon where perceived class difference and inequality is felt. Andrew Sayer, discussing the moral significance of class, calls this the 'deeply embodied nature' of shame, the product of class relations. It is the type of shame, he argues, that 'is peculiarly resistant to demonstration of its lack of warrant, so that it is common for those members of subordinated groups who are upwardly mobile to continue to feel that they are not good enough, and that one day they will be "found out"' (Sayer, 2005, 165). Burn's respondent above articulates this view succinctly.

2.9 The ramifications of this sense of exclusion carry considerable weight. With "image" and "presentation" often central in the education field today, schools strive to cultivate the "right" aura to attract the "right" pupils and being working class – and not attempting to hide it – articulates a possible non-conformity regarded as detrimental to a school's projected image. This applies both to teachers and pupils of working-class origin. Maguire suggests that 'the commodification of education also has had repercussions for teacher education and teacher employment. In these marketised times, the quality of teachers, their credentials, as well as other aspects of their cultural capital (their embodied appearance and voice) all confer increased status and prestige on individual institutions' (Maguire, 1997).

2.10 In a later article about class and the classroom, Maguire points out how the recent politics of education has contributed to the 'taming of teachers' (2005; see Ball in Dillon and Maguire, 2001). This "taming" is partly to do with reducing teacher autonomy in the classroom, hence the introduction of a National Curriculum in the late 1980s. Increasingly, the teacher is little more than a 'deliverer of policy constructed by the state', and this is achieved by mounting 'specification and regulation of their work', which marks out the 'reformed teacher' (428). Regular inspections operate as surveillance and disciplinary factors in this process. But, as Maguire goes on to state, this view offers 'no recognition of the subjectivities of teachers and the processes through which they struggle over, contest and subvert aspects of policy in their classroom practice. There is no recognition either of the way in which the classed subjectivities of the teacher might come to play a part in any struggle or contestation' (Maguire, 2005: 428).

2.11 For Maguire some teachers 'who come from working-class backgrounds, may feel propelled to work in urban schools because of stereotyping and prejudice that they may have encountered while they were at school, college or even in their teacher training' (2005, 431). This may be a form of risk-reduction, according to Maguire, avoiding 'working in a school where they feel uncomfortable …' though 'on the other hand, they may be choosing to work with children who they see as like themselves' (431). This, then, comes down, perhaps, to a sense of duty, a notion of commitment – a powerful motivating force which thoroughly compromises the instrumentalist ideology imposed on the current education system. Another way of conceptualising this is through Raymond Williams's notion of structure of feeling, as I have already suggested. I shall return to this below when considering the working-class teacher who is the focus of this study.

2.12 Thinking about this in terms of class transition, then, one commentator asks 'whether the acquisition of cultural capital can totally change one's habitus to the extent that the remnants of one's working-class habitus are so insignificant that correspondence with the subjective identity of the professional/managerial class is totally secured' (Hatton, 1999, in Maguire, 2005: 438). Yet, economic positioning (what is perceived as becoming part of a professional middle class) may not correspond quite so straightforwardly with subjective class identification (see Maguire, 2005: 205), so that teachers from working-class backgrounds, when making the transition from one class to another, may not in the process alter in any meaningful sense their values and identity. Perhaps another way of putting this would be that the deep seated habitus derived

from culture and upbringing harbours profound structures of feeling which interact dialogically and in complex ways with subsequent experience, shaping and defining the working-class subject's alignments and affiliations to a particular formation and way of being. This slightly modifies ways of thinking about habitus, and it follows Sayer (2005). The internalised structure of the habitus, for Bourdieu, acts as a classifying mechanism for making sense of the world – embedded are dispositions generating in the subject an almost spontaneous response to the world they inhabit: a kind of 'feel for the game', or a 'design for life'. The notion of subconscious, bodily learning which makes up the habitus attunes individuals to the circumstances of their existence, and this is seen to imply a pessimistic conception of human subjectivity, 'a model of a perfectly malleable human, a model which makes it impossible to understand how anyone could react against and resist at least some parts of their habitat' (Sayer, 2005: 31). Sayer rejects this view, suggesting that the habitus is also constituted through a level of rational, conscious monitoring based on ethical considerations, so that 'embodiment and rationality are not as opposed as generally assumed' (28). A reflexive element characteristic of individuals' actions stands as a key component of the habitus, a feature that Bourdieu under-valued and one that Sayer wants to rescue by placing a sharper emphasis on conscious reflection, on how individuals continually interpret and understand their world. This is where structure of feeling plays a crucial mediating role in my discussion, incorporating in its conceptualisation those almost unconscious, or spontaneous, feelings or *affects* with the cognitive, or reflexive, dimension Sayer flags up in his argument. Indeed, as Williams puts it, what structure of feeling articulates is 'not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelated continuity' (Williams, 1977, p. 132).

2.13 As we detect from both Maguire's and Burn's work, in the classroom class matters. It can seriously impact on how dominant others think of you as a teacher, how one regards oneself and how one engages with pupils in and out the classroom. Yet it need not matter in the generally negative sense articulated by Maguire and Burn. It can be a resource, too, through which to act positively, representing a set of practices through which one articulates both alignment and affiliation to others in the constitution of the "teacherly self."

Class transitions

3.1 Below I focus upon one mid-career teacher working in the secondary sector, in an inner city location in northern England. This is one of over thirty work-life histories conducted with teachers across the primary and secondary sectors, and across a range of age and gender groups. These work-life histories have been analysed through perspectives drawn from oral history and narrative theory. Oral testimony is important for unearthing historical knowledge, or consciousness, and this proposition is clearly reflected in what follows. It has been suggested that it is possible to detect wider social forces operating within oral testimony, where a respondent speaks through the interviewer to a larger community, to its history, its social relationships and to his/her own social-historical consciousness (Grele, 1997: 45). In terms of language and social interaction, this proposition further illuminates Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of dialogics as constitutive of culture itself (see Bakhtin, 1981; for further discussion see Kirk, 2007). This view sees the utterance/testimony as at once both an expression of an individual consciousness and the articulation of a collective history or experience. To fully grasp this means an attention to language as practical consciousness, whereby the utterance is always dialogically angled towards some other, articulating social relations and interaction across a range of modalities. I suggest that this foregrounds the value of oral testimony as method – constituting a type of speech genre (see Volosinov, 1973; Bakhtin, 1982), expressive of structures of feeling whereby any single utterance is the product of, and is embedded in, the collective life of society.

3.2 This formulation in part justifies my decision to focus only on a single interview to develop the argument presented here. On this I take my cue, also, from Maguire. In her work she addresses very similar concerns to the ones outlined in this piece, and she defends her use of the single interview by arguing that it is not in the end about claiming generalisability – though in many of the teacher interviews we conducted the question of class was very much to the fore, in relation to both pupils and the teachers themselves. Instead, she insists, 'it is to start to explore class issues in schooling from the perspective of a teacher who identifies as working class. (Maguire, 2005: 429).

3.3 Dave, the working-class teacher who is the focus here, is a Head of Department at a school in the North-West of England, in an inner-city area characterised by various levels of social deprivation. I spoke with him on a number of occasions during my time researching at the school. But our lengthiest conversation was during an extended lunch break, and it was then that we spoke about why he came into teaching. I wanted to know why he worked at The Grange[2].

3.4 First I ask him if there is there a tradition of teaching in the family.

> **Dave**: No, not at all, I'm the first person in my side of the family to go to university, but it's interesting that my dad came from a large family. It was very much a kind of born in the war and then post war, and my dad passed Eleven Plus but financially he couldn't go, but the two youngest boys also passed the Eleven Plus, but could go. My brother was a fitter, now he's in planning, he's gone the other way after a accident and now he's got his MBA and things like that, but now there's a lot of fitters, there's a lot of engineers in the family and … there is that idea of training and qualification, but there's not necessarily that kind of, certainly not in terms of going for an English degree and reading poetry and watching a play, but equally my mum and dad, although they didn't use a library, they made sure I had every, you know, everyone registered at a library. So I could have everyone's tickets, and when I was going to university and I had my booklist. We don't understand any of this, but there's a blank cheque, we've phoned the book shop, go and get your books, so there was that support, but not necessarily not as if I'd gone to engineering school, they'd have understood that, but they did give the support, you know, my dad thinking about his younger brothers and stuff like that, so education was valued.

3.5 Testimony here turns upon understandings of family history, the place of occupation and the influence of working-class culture. The geographical space from where Dave and his family originate is characterised by a long industrial history, built on the textiles and heavy engineering, too. It is significant in the context of this article as it is the formative background which influences Dave's present understanding of his place and purpose in the classroom, as will become clearer later on. His early trajectory takes him out of his working-class habitus, but not necessarily its structures of feeling, as we will see. Reflecting back, as the following comments indicate – which is a fundamental part of the process of *composure* characteristic of oral history testimony – signals a seeking out of "resolution," a tendency in oral testimony to search for 'composure, an alignment of our past, present and future lives' (Thompson, 1998: 245; also Kirk, 2007). Such resolutions are important, even if they may be only temporary, shifting, ones, as the nature of remembering may involve revisiting and revising in the construction of the past. He goes on:

> **Dave**: I felt … I wasn't aware that they valued education as an end in itself. Later, as I grew older and relationships changed I realised that they did value it as an end in itself, but I wasn't aware of it because I was too young, I was too immature. I thought they'd have been happy if I had stayed at home and got that engineering apprenticeship or got that, you know, start as an office boy and work up, but I was wrong about that, you know, many years later, I talked about it with my dad and he was like, no, you know, we were always so proud of you, you know, maybe we didn't know the words … but that's something that only came out later.

3.6 Emerging here is a desire to blur any perceived, or socially fixed, evaluative boundaries between the skilled working class and middle-class professions. We could argue that in Dave's case going to university constituted a kind of apprenticeship, even if it points towards a different trajectory and outcome, one traditionally reflecting a different social class orientation. Yet, Dave appears to define a sort of equivalence here, and it is not implausible to think about the route taken as part of a different tradition, that of working-class self-education, a kind of auto-didacticism, not uncommon within the history and formation of working-class culture over many decades (see Rose, 2001). Seen in this light, how far this takes the working-class actor beyond a particular and formative structure of feeling is open to question. As he points out, "there is that idea of training and qualification [in the family], but there's not necessarily that kind of, certainly not in terms of going for an English degree and reading poetry and watching a play, but equally my mum and dad,

although they didn't use a library, they made sure, you know, everyone registered at a library …" There is an expressed desire to maintain that link, so that the testimony embeds the personal narrative both within the sphere of the familial and in wider class experience and practice.

Managing "friction points"

4.1 Yet, as we see below, Dave's narrative positions him both inside and outside his working-class culture from the start, articulating a range of cultural and political influences ranging from Jean Paul Sartre to Joy Division, from the Anarchist's Handbook to Northern labour clubs. Textuality has some play here – the books and music – appropriated to constitute an identity that both resists and complements that which derives from his class habitus, most clearly signified by reference to labour clubs and rugby league. In some respects this signals the way that habitus, as Sayer argued earlier, in not something lived in a wholly spontaneous fashion (doing "what comes naturally").

> **JK**: Where did the early love of literature come from, then, do you think?
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> **Dave**: Well, it was really weird, I mean, my mum left school at 14, but I could read and write when I started school, and it was my mum who taught me, so from there I suppose, and I remember, I think I was about ten or eleven and I said, I want books. Then music took over and I was into bands like Joy Division and New Order and I got reading Woodcock and the Anarchist's Handbook and stuff like that, just because one led to another, so culturally, it was a good time to be a working class intellectual, if you know what I mean. There was a political history, trade unions, that kind of ideological history and sociology. I did sociology and politics at A Level as well as literature, but it was tied into bands, you know, and again it's about looking miserable, wearing your overcoat with a you know, Jean Paul Sartre and a Walkman playing, Joy Division's second album, so it all went side by side … I looked to Manchester … Manchester record labels and styles and stuff like that, so from the age of 14 I can remember coming book and record hunting in Manchester, so the things went side by side for me and one thing fed into the other … And I didn't want to be suited and booted in an office, you know, looking at a computer screen, so it was weighing that up, and then trying to get past that I actually enjoy this [teaching], I enjoy this, this is my room, this is my curriculum, it's up to me, you know, so it was that independence, but also being that part of something that, bottom line, was valuable. I'm teaching kids to read and write and speak and listen and think.

4.2 Learning, popular (and elements of high) culture, and a class experience intersect in what is, here, a verbal performance of some dexterity. Located somewhere around the cusp of the 1980s, this testimony articulates a cultural history which acts as marker in a personal and class collective narrative.

> **JK**: So, how and where did you begin your teaching career?
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> **Dave**: My first experience was at a place in Leeds, and I thought, I can't believe I'm actually enjoying this, I seem to be all right at it, and I found my feet, and I came up to Manchester for the day, and it just felt like being at home, it was like, right, this is like the school I went to, you know, so it was just yeah, this is why I'm here, so that is what got me, you know, to Manchester and teaching.
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> **JK**: So, how did it feel then, being there in front of class?
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> **Dave**: But then it was like, here you go, here's your timetable, there's the key, all right, you've got year eight, year nine, year ten, they won't give me a year eleven and the lower sixth level, brilliant, shut the door, it's my world, and it was all about me and these kids, and although it was a grammar school, the only two other schools in the area were private schools, you know, so you know there were [council] estates around us, so there was some absolute wonderful kids, sons and daughters of surgeons and staff from the hospital, lecturers, equally, there was some tough working class white kids who weren't super urbanified, if you know

what I mean, and again, I recognised, you know, I recognise you when I was your age, you know, I'd have been in your gang, I'd have come with you guys, you know what. I just felt at home.

4.3 Represented as a moment of revelation – a kind of epiphany – the utterance is nevertheless articulated and worked through both a personal and social history. His present self remains an extension of his past self, a structure of feeling expressed through a type of recognition and alignment, seeing the working-class kids and thinking, "I recognise you when I was your age, you know, I'd have been in your gang, I'd have come with you guys, you know what." Thus he remarks "it just felt like being at home, it was like, right, this is like the school I went to, you know, so it was just yeah, this is why I'm here…" coding the experience mostly succinctly in the evocative metaphor of "feeling at home".

4.4 My argument here, as I suggested earlier, is that the working-class upbringing that Maguire's and Burn's respondents experienced negatively when positioned within an unfamiliar and alien class habitus (teacher as part of the professional middle class) constitutes for Dave, conversely, a positive resource, a means of making sense and of communicating, but also a way of shaping his particular commitments to his work and the constituency he works with. From this early experience in a relatively affluent, though socially mixed, area he moves onto a more definitively inner-city location. In part, this is to relocate to a different city, but it goes beyond that purpose, too. He goes on:

> **Dave**: It was more a homecoming, I felt at home, you know, even though I was very different than most of the staff and if I'm honest, I had a much more comfortable upbringing than any of the kids there, because although it was working class, it was the good stuff of working class. It was the sixties, it was the peace dividend, and that's how I was brought up, you know, we had woods and we had parks and we had whole generations growing up together from really similar … I mean where I grew up it's just all Catholics, when I say really similar, you know, we were together from six months old, in one way or another, from nurseries and play schemes and all the way up to sixth form and I noticed that wasn't there, it was much more fractured …
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> **JK**: So it's sort of a working class background, but rougher, tougher?
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> **Dave**: It's a sub working class, because they're not working, but it's only there but for the grace of God, and this is '91 [1991] this, but all I saw was … there's not even a pub, let alone a youth club, there was nothing, you know, this was an estate where someone's front room is the only shop on the estate. I've been aware that I was in the middle of it, and I was one of the people who were supposed to be changing it, or at least teaching … and I think that has driven me.

4.5 The expression "sub working class" may contain echoes of the concept of underclass, popular in dominant discourse to describe, variously, the unemployed, lone mothers, or those on welfare benefits. However, I would suggest in this case the connotations of the prefix "sub" are different, as they turn not on some pathologising impulse characteristic of underclass discourse (they are bad because they are bad), but refers to a sub-cultural formation whose status derives from their exclusion from the workplace, the result of radical socio-economic changes, and the concomitant effects of this is in all aspects of their lives.

4.6 Thus, historical and cultural context is vital to how Dave positions himself. What we get a glimpse of in the utterance reveals, in a snap-shot, a key dimension of British post-war history and its impact on working-class cultures and formations. There is a historical consciousness at work in this testimony. What he refers to as the "peace dividend" signifies the post-war welfare state and some of the real benefits acquired by the working-class at this time: state schooling being one, but a national health service and full employment, also. Alongside this, we can count strong trade union representation and, in many cases, and for the first time, a sense of a more inclusive citizenship derived from a greater level of social and civic participation in national life than hitherto experienced, evidenced through practices of both production and consumption. Mike Savage has described this development and its importance for understandings of class and culture by

claiming that 'notions of individuality, autonomy and mastery were tied in the British case to the image of the adult male worker who had learnt his trade, and thereby was beholden to no-one', whereas in recent years this 'has been sundered with profound social and cultural implications' (Savage, 2001: 153). Of course, Savage, as does Dave, references here the turn of the 1980s, and the ideological hegemony of a renewed neo-liberalism, which led to waves of de-industrialisation in western economies leading to community and class fragmentation – effects still being felt today.

4.7 What Volosinov (1973) called the utterance context is paramount, then, in this understanding, in the actual *composure* of Dave's narrative, a concept I referred to earlier in the article. And there are two contexts (at least) operating in the piece. The context of the interview, and the wider historical context itself: that of a perceived positive past, alongside a more complicated and difficult present. If there is an element of nostalgia colouring the testimony, it should be seen as nostalgia as critique (on this concept, see Kirk, 2003, 2007). Nostalgic memory is not "error" or false consciousness (this is not to say it can't be those things), but represents what Raphael Samuel described as 'an active shaping force' for making sense, so that 'it is dynamic … dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some negative other to it' (Samuel, 1994, ix-x).

Structures of feeling

5.1 Complex alignments, or solidarities, mark Dave's testimony. This is evident in the following:

> **JK**: You used the term a bit earlier, a kind of working-class intellectual. Do you still regard yourself as working class?
>
> **Dave**: I do, yeah, people think teachers are middle class, and I can understand where that comes from, just thinking about my colleagues. I've been lucky that some of my best friends in teaching have been working class, and I've also been lucky here, you know, B's got no airs and graces, we've got M, we do have a working-class team here. Because that gives a lot of kids role models, because it's like, whoa, whoa, you're only doing what I did, you know. I reject that, teachers are middle class, we work for a living, you know, I'm afraid I'm a member of the union, like I'm afraid I was a member of the baker's union when I was baking, but again, I don't romanticise that. But I would defend my right to define myself as working class, you know, because I don't think that does leave you, because it's not just about where you come from, it's about how you see the world around you and the connections that you make … but I do think that it's important to have more working-class teachers.

5.2 Here lies a reason why the alienation of working-class teachers described by Maguire and Burns fails to apply to Dave – Dave refers to "a working-class team here," a formation collectively working for certain ends. Arguably, this might confirm Maguire's view that working-class teachers choose inner-city schools to work with pupils like themselves. In Dave's case, however, it appears that such a choice did not derive from a sense of alienation experienced at more "middle-class" schools; instead it is framed as a consciously made choice, a commitment based on a set of beliefs and a historical alignment which is formative and shapes practice. Andrew Sayer views commitment as something that emerges 'through continued immersion in relationships and activities, and through embodiment' (2005, 40). This can be juxtaposed to preferences, where 'we are generally willing to substitute something else for what we prefer … commitments can't be sold or swapped for something else … I am committed to certain people, ideas and causes and can't be bought off, for they are ends in themselves, not merely means to other ends' (41). Ball, 2001 (in Day et al., 2006) has explored teacher identity through the prism of two analytical concepts he calls situated and substantive identity. Dave's testimony in some key senses corresponds to this definition if we regard a situational identity as a malleable, more contingent self, and the substantial identity as a kind of "master-narrative" of the self. This is shaped, in Dave's terms, by a working-class habitus and structure of feeling informing action.

5.3 Dave identifies a nucleus of working-class teachers within the school not only offering mutual support to each other, but providing a particular way of approaching the pupils. Role models is the term used, though I

would suggest that this is differently orientated to the way role models are conceived currently within neo-liberal discourse. Here, an appropriate role model is generally regarded as a successful middle-class professional, a star performer in sport, someone "who has made it". And we are back to the ladder analogy again, in this conception, even if, as is generally the case, the person in question was already, by birth, well positioned on its rungs. For Dave, and his colleagues, there is no alienating distance from the pupils they seek to influence, and this is confirmed when he insists that "we're lucky at this school that there's a lot of working-class teachers and there's a lot of working class, because that gives a lot of kids role models, because it's like, whoa, whoa, *you're only doing what I did, you know*". (italics mine).

5.4 He tells me, "I would defend my right to define myself as working class, you know, because I don't think that does leave you, because it's not just about where you come from, it's about how you see the world around you and the connections that you make." Relating to how we conceive the notion of structure of feeling, there is then another way of conceiving this narrative, based on an understanding of oral testimony's deep ideological structures. Allesandro Portelli has mapped out something along these very lines where he describes oral narratives of working lives under the headings of institutional, collective and personal. Characterising narratives in this way highlights ideological orientations based on socio-historical conditions and contexts, and a range of gender and generational experiences. Thus a narrative characterised as institutional is shaped by a prevailing set of experiences around union involvement, party political action and ideological struggle. Personal narratives focus on the family and on the home, the life-cycle of births, marriages, jobs, children, and deaths; and personal involvement with the two levels. Collective narratives place a greater emphasis on neighbourhood, the workplace and on the significance of community in shaping self. There might be a focus on 'rituals and collective participation '(Portelli, 1997: 70). Clearly there can be cross-overs within these constructions. The deep form of Dave's testimony incorporates both institutional and collective characteristics marked by a working-class habitus, something further underlined in a later comment:

> Dave: I would never not be in a union and I would never not abide by … I would have to leave the union if I didn't agree with the decision, but not by attacking the union, and I think that is something that, although mum and dad were not radical, it was just the, no you don't, it's the union, it's all you've got. And I remember a time when I was very young, and there was a strike at the factory, the engineers were on strike, my mum worked there, because the engineers were on strike, no one was working. There was no strike pay, because my mum was just laid off, there was no money, and I found out years later we came that close to being evicted, that we were on school meals and we didn't know we were on school meals. I just thought we were spending time at my Aunt's house, but that's because my dad was working as a cab driver and my mum was working in a bar to try and you know, make ends meet, and you just do it. They were on the picket line every day and we don't know. It comes from that, without it being big, without it being banners and you know, waving cards, but it's something root and branch, it's part of your make-up. Of course I'm in a union, why wouldn't I be, kind of thing.

Being part of a trade union, here, is a political act as well as an individual choice, and that impulse derives primarily from family and class tradition.

5.5 Memory work is a defining feature of oral history narratives. Dave's response above is an intricate weave of past and present. Portelli tells us that what is important about memory is that it is not passive, not a mere 'depository of facts,' but should be regarded as 'an active process in the creation of meanings' (Portelli, 1998: 52). It is also a process in the constitution of the self. Thus Fentress and Wickham argue that 'the way memories of the past are generated and understood by given social groups [and individuals within social groups] is a direct guide to how they understand their position in the present'; and they go on to insist 'that one can, in fact, barely separate social memory from an analysis of the social at all, and that, conversely, any analysis of social identity and consciousness, could become an analysis of perceptions of the past' (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: 126). Composure as storytelling – as Thompson defines it, the reconciling of past and present, in the endeavour to find, and articulate, a narrative that "fits" – once again becomes

significant in the narrative account, and Dave's testimony strongly confirms Fentress and Wickham's view. People do not simply recall in some spontaneous fashion the events of a life lived but are shaping and *composing* remembrance, reviewing it, constructing it in the light of subsequent experience; experience lived dialogically at the level of self, and always in some sense articulated in the mix of the wider collective alignments, positionings and social relations.

5.6 If we consider such utterances as part of Ball's 'substantive' self, we understand the importance of class in this testimony. It is formative in Dave's commitment to the school and the pupils. Impatient of middle-class teachers who think that pupils should be more like them, he goes on:

> **Dave**: I say, well, change your job, because you're taking the money that we could be spending on somebody who would love to teach here with these kids, you've got to have your eyes wide open, you can't sentimentalise, which a lot, you know, I've seen a lot of middle-class, well-meaning students come in, I want to make a difference in the inner-city, I say, well stop using words like inner city …

5.7 Towards the close of our talk he tells me:

> It's what you need to get the kid to do so they'll be safe enough as a young adult to not make the mistakes. You've got to cherish them and you've got to hold onto them, you know, sometimes that's all you can do, but you know that each day they'll get one day older and one day wiser. You can't change the kids by wanting them to change, you've got to show them, because you might be the only person in their life who's ever said this, you know.

5.8 We hear a deep emotional commitment here powerfully informed by a structure of feeling with deep roots in the social interactions of community, class and culture. Dave's testimony reflects, to a significant extent, Diane Reay's view that ' if you have grown up working class you know that the solution to class inequalities does not lie in making the working classes middle class but in working at dismantling and sharing out the economic, social and cultural capital which go with a middle class status (1997, 23). Dave fully accepts that he cannot render his working-class pupils middle class and he has no intention of trying. The complex solidarities expressed, built around enduring class alignments, instead call for a different approach, one that seeks to understand them on their own terms, and by doing so help them make something of what makes them.

Conclusion

6.1 This article began with a consideration of the place of social class in the understanding of identity practices in contemporary times. It suggested that recent, renewed interest in class, and in working-class subjectivity, had been invigorated by a productive focus on the subjective *affects* of class feeling and belonging; a focus that did not ignore the economics of class in terms of inequality, but enriched understandings of class experience as it is lived in all its complexity in the everyday. Structure of feeling was used as a key conceptual tool here for analysing the articulation of class, and for examining working-class identity. More specifically, a concern with understanding the complexity of class transitions – the "border crossing" of the working-class actor into the middle-class profession – exposed the related anxieties of such movements, as well as the potentially radical and productive interventions such trajectories might enable. It was suggested that the real advantage of appropriating the concept structure of feeling rested with its capacity, in a analytical sense, to combine the cognitive processes of thought and feeling, thereby offering considerable insights into the way class is 'lived on the pulse.' The article suggested that structure of feeling could operate alongside notions of habitus as an important mediating concept.

6.2 Exploring the place of a working-class upbringing in shaping teacher identity – or what was coded as the making of the "teacherly self" – involved examining structures of feeling as they emerged in and through oral testimony. Practical consciousness here is made discursive, and the idea of composure, drawn from Alistair Thompson's work on oral testimony, constituted a useful metaphor in the argument for how people see their own lives and give them shape and meaning to themselves and for, or in response to, others. This

underlines the essentially dialogic nature of testimony – indeed, of language and communicative interaction itself – where, embedded within such utterances, emerges evidence of social relationships of conflict and affiliation, alienation and solidarity, expressed through the idea of evaluative accents. Moreover, in the actual context and conduct of the interview situation itself it is possible to identify another important conceptual term of some relevance to the preceding discussion: Bakhtin's notion of 'answerability'. This is a moment of encounter between speakers and listeners, disclosing a range of mutual and/or conflicting alignments whereby truth might be seen to speak to power – something to be understood as an instance where a respondent becomes conscious of speaking for more than themselves. This, I argue, is a central component of Dave's testimony: a testimony that reveals how the effects, and *affects*, of class transition are articulated through structures of feeling that reveal the importance and relevance of class in the classroom.

Notes

[1] The project, "Does Work Still Shape Social Identities and Action" (RES148-25-0038), is being carried out at the Working Lives Research Institute, London Metropolitan University. It is part of the ESRC Identities programme.

[2] I have altered the name of the teacher, the school, and other identifying factors.

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