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STRUCTURES OF RECOGNITION: A DIALOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN A SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITY ACCESS PROGRAMME[1]

Lisa Whittaker
University of Stirling

ABSTRACT. Mead (1934) states the way we see ourselves and construct our identity is influenced by our interactions with those around us. These people will form our internal dialogue or our dialogical self (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon 1992). The theory of the dialogical self was used to explore the identities of one group of young people described by the media as 'Scotland's Shame' (The Herald, 2007). The Scottish Government have defined unemployed young people as a 'problem' and stated that tackling this problem is a national priority. They have labelled this group as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training - The NEET Strategy 2006). This paper presents the results of one analysis conducted on part of a wider data set. Eight boys aged 16-18 and their youth support worker took part in discussion groups while waiting to sit a health & safety test at a local college. A dialogical analysis illustrates the way in which this group of young people seeks positive recognition and their reactions when this is denied. This research has highlighted the importance of recognition and the need to further explore this notion for this group of young people.

Keywords: dialogical self, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), recognition

The Social Nature of the Self

Mead (1934) has stressed the importance of everyday social interactions in identity development. His most widely known concept is "the generalised other" which he theorised that the self can only be developed when the individual adopts the stance of the other toward himself or herself (p. 106). While Mead (1934) speaks of "the generalised other" which is described as the attitude of a social group or community, we can also take the position of the individuals with interact with. Therefore, through our interactions with others we think about ourselves from a variety of different viewpoints and this has been identified as "the key mechanism of identity formation" (Kinney, 1993). Mead (1934, p. 140) has described the self as "essentially a social structure" which "arises in social experience". Hence, the social nature of the self indicates the way in which our perceptions of ourselves may change from one social situation to the next. Mead's (1934) theory of the relational self argued that one's sense of self is mutually interdependent with one's sense of other. What we think that others think of us has a great influence on the way we perceive ourselves and in turn shapes our thoughts, decisions and behaviours.

AUTHORS' NOTE. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the author at Room 3b144c, Psychology, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA Scotland, UK. Email: sw25@stir.ac.uk.

[1] This paper discusses research which is part of a wider project exploring the identities of adolescents Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Therefore, while the data and analysis are original, the theory sections have previously been published in Whittaker (2008).

While identities are constructed verbally through our interactions with others Mead (1934) also discussed the conversations we have internally:

> One starts to say something [...] but when he starts to say it he realises it is cruel. The effect on himself of what he is saying checks him; there is here a conversation of gestures between the individual and himself (Mead, 1934, p. 141).

As can be seen in the above example, Mead (1934) describes an attempt not to offend or hurt another person. This running dialogue or commentary in our minds in which we, in a sense, have a conversation with ourselves and imaginary others help us regulate our behaviour and how we feel we appear to others. This notion has become known as the dialogical self.

The Dialogical Self

Barresi (2002) explains how Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992) brought together James' (1980) theory of the self and Bakhtin's (1973) theory of the polyphonic novel and formed the theory of the dialogical self. One of the main assumptions of the concept of the dialogical self is the existence of a relationship between self and other (Hermans and Kempen 1993). As Hermans et al (1992, p. 29) state "the dialogical self, in contrast with the individual self, is based on the assumption that there are many different *I* positions that can be occupied by the same person". Each *I* position may represent each of the social roles we occupy and each of these forms different voice within our heads. This can be linked back to Mead's (1934) earlier work when he described our internal conversations and the way we take the perspective of others to gain information about ourselves. These others form the voices in our dialogical selves.

Hermans et al (1992) describe how Bakhtin's notions of the dialogical self can be traced back to his thesis based on Dostoevsky. Bakhtin argued that every word, as soon as it enters in a dialogical relationship is "double-voiced" (p. 42). It is the voice of the speaker directed toward the object of speech but it is also directed toward another person. He further stated that "dialogue is at the heart of every form of thought" (p. 43). Thinking of the development of the self in this way led Bakhtin to conclude that "the self is not a given but an emergent" (p. 44). The way we think of ourselves emerges from our dialogue and interactions with those around us. There are many types of possible dialogical relationships. Wertsch (1991) stated that an individual speaker is not simply talking as an individual but that in his or her utterances the voices of groups and institutions are heard (p. 76). This has become known as ventriloquation, a term which Bakhtin (1973) defined as "the process in which one voice speaks through another voice" (p. 78). Hence, our dialogue is multi-voiced and Barresi (2002) concludes that the self and other are always essentially in dialogue. We can also observe a dialogical relationship when a person speaks about another person or impersonates them. However, not all dialogues are explicit and more subtle instances can be seen, for example, when a

person says "you should not commit crimes". Here there is no explicit mention of quoting of another but it is clear that the person is referring to the voice of another. This illustrates that a dialogical position of another can be imagined without being directly quoted or impersonated.

Hermans & Kempen (1993) describe how our dialogical selves develop throughout our lives. The dialogical self appears very early on in children's role play and games, for example, a child may act like an adult, police man or villain. Role reversal usually appears between 2-3 years (p. 69). Later in life the dialogical self is apparent in our ability to rehearse scenarios in our heads, however, "the young child is not able to think "silently" in words, as most adults do" (p. 64). This ability develops as we get older and means that most of us can relate to many different situations, even if they are new. During the period of adolescence we encounter many new situations. Our interactions with others increase and become more and more diverse as we move into new social contexts and this has an impact on our identity development and dialogical self. It is this complex transitional period that is this focus of the current research.

Adolescence

Developmental literature describes adolescence as a distinctive life stage, characterised by biological, cognitive and social transitions (Steinberg, 1993). Adolescence has been of interest to psychologists for decades, beginning with the work of G. Stanley Hall in 1904. Topics of study include adolescent development, peer culture, education, status attainment and delinquency. However, in a time when "many young people experience the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood much earlier" (Lawrence & Dodds, 2007, p. 404) it is important that we understand as much as possible about this complex life stage. The preceding discussion has highlighted the very social nature of our identity development and it is necessary to understand how young people see themselves and others.

In relation to the dialogical self, when facing major transitions and decisions a young person may have a number of conflicting voices within their heads. They may think of themselves as a son or daughter hearing the expectations of their parents, when in school; they may see themselves as a pupil and hear the opinions of their teachers. They may also want to fit in with their peer group and friends or distinguish themselves from siblings. There are also expectations from wider society especially in relation to young people especially when they reach school leaving age, legally 16 in Britain. Society expects young people to be engaged in some sort of employment or training once they leave school. As Hodgkinson (2004, p. 12) states we live in a "work- obsessed world", we look down upon people who do not work and use labels such as 'spongers' and 'free-loaders'. It is perhaps for this reason that our education system is geared towards making people as employable as possible and we recognise people in terms of academic achievements. However, there are some young people who do not make a

successful transition from school into further training or work and this group have been targeted by the Scottish Government.

NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

The Scottish Government have defined this group of young people as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training – The NEET Strategy, 2006). The Scottish Government states that it is their objective to eradicate the problem of NEET the length and breadth of Scotland. They have identified 35,000 young people in Scotland between the ages of 15 and 19 who are NEET. The label is very negative and defines young people by what they are not. Furthermore, by defining young people in terms of their employment status we may overlook other issues which they need support and help with such as homelessness, abuse and criminal behaviour. Research to date has focussed on quantifying numbers of young people who fall into this category (for example Bynner & Parsons, 2002). It is argued that we need to move from quantifying the numbers of NEET young people to exploring the dynamics of their identities.

Recognition

The notion of recognition has been studied by a number of different authors and is often described using various different terms (for example; reputation (Fraser, 2000), adolescent prestige and self-esteem (Giordano, 1995) and social comparison (Turner, 1985)). Bourdieu (1984) describes recognition in terms of symbolic capital. He describes young people's social world as a "microcosm within wider society" and his notion of symbolic capital "offers a common denominator between the microcosmic world of young people in transition and the macrocosmic world of 'mainstream' society" (1984:114). As with identity, recognition is a social concept; we receive or are denied recognition from those around us (Honneth, 1996). There are several ways in which recognition can be categorised and collectively known as structures of recognition (Gillespie, Cornish, Aveling & Zittoun, 2008).

There are several structures of formal and informal recognition which occur in everyday life. Formal structures include grades in school, promotions and pay rises in the work place, medals given to war veterans, sports trophies and many others. There are also more informal means of recognition in the form of verbal praise or simply knowing that someone trusts and believes in you. However, within the education system young people who do not excel academically are at risk of receiving little positive recognition from those around them. This is problematic given that research has shown "that recognition for positive behaviour is related to adolescent's self-perception" (Cheng, Siu & Leung, 2006, p. 468). The idea that we feel good about ourselves when others recognise that we have done something good may seem obvious but very little research has focussed on the impact of recognition on our identity construction. Given the high numbers of young people failing to make a successful transition from school, the

importance of recognition in the way young people see themselves and the lack of research exploring the impact of recognition on adolescent identity development; this research will explore the ways in which young people view themselves and others and make sense of their lives against a background of social change and stigma.

Furthermore, the emphasis on positive recognition solely for academic achievement is problematic for young people who do not achieve good grades. As Zittoun (2004, p. 154) highlights "a young person who has been defined in exclusively negative terms at school may wish to be judged by others on something other than school-related skills". Negative experiences at school can have a profound effect upon a young person's self-perception. Further, failing to make a successful transition from school can lead to a young person remaining in a position where there are few opportunities to gain positive recognition. This has led authors to call for a move away from an emphasis on academic achievement. Cheng, Siu & Leung (2006, p. 468) assert that "apart from emphasising academic achievement, there is an explicit need in our secondary schools to promote the recognition of students' constructive behaviours and its positive consequences".

Research Questions

The current research is part of a wider research project (see also Whittaker, 2008) which aims to add to the existing knowledge base by answer the following questions: (1) How do young people who are defined as NEET or at risk of becoming NEET see themselves? (2) How are their identities constructed as they make transitions from council run access programmes to un/employment or further training? (3) Who are the significant voices in the heads of young people who are defined as NEET or at risk of becoming NEET? (4) What do these significant others, which will be identified in question 3, say about young people? (4) Recognition. What part does recognition play in the identities of these young people? This research has used the theory of the dialogical self to explore the identities of a specific group of young people. Methods involved participant observation, interviews and naturalistic discussion groups. The data generated was subjected to an in-depth dialogical analysis to gain an insight into the way young people see themselves.

This paper will present a section of data collected from a group of eight adolescent boys. Therefore this paper will address questions: 3) Who are the significant voices in the minds of these young people? and (4) Recognition. What part does recognition play in the identities of these young people?

Methodology

In order to fully explore the experiences of young people it is important to interact with them in familiar environments and contexts. (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). The researcher spent time getting to know each group of young people while they

participated on local council run programmes. It is argued that to understand specific dialogical relationships and understanding is needed of the wider context, in this case this included the structure and purpose of the local council programmes, group dynamics and the young people's backgrounds. To gain an insight into how young people's identities are constructed and produced through their dialogue the ideal setting would be to involve them in discussions with their friends or peer group.

Discussion groups give young people a natural and informal setting which provides a good opportunity for them to discuss topics and issues relevant to them. Moreover, as this research is concerned with a dialogical analysis it is crucial that young people are given the opportunity to talk as freely as possible in order to explore who the significant others in their lives are. Confining young people to written methods such as questionnaires would eliminate the researchers' ability to observe peer groups interacting. Discussion groups allow significant others to be identified in the dialogue young people use, for example, when they impersonate another person.

Through participant observation the use of researcher's field notes will also add to the understanding of the discussion groups and interactions. As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995, p. 28) discuss field notes are useful to note "the perspectives and concerns embedded and expressed in naturally occurring interaction". Field notes ensure that any relevant non verbal communication can be noted as well as the atmosphere in discussions which may not be picked up from transcripts of dialogue alone. Further, field notes allow the researcher to document her own thoughts and opinions which will add to and influence to the data produced.

Often the debate surrounding qualitative research has questioned the validity, reliability and replicability of such work. In order to address such concerns researchers have often used a number of different methods in triangulation. As Fielding and Fielding (1986, p. 33) state "we should combine theories and methods carefully and purposefully with the intention of adding breadth or depth to our analysis" (cited in Flick, 1992). However, the point here is not to suggest, as done in quantitative research, that if several methods reveal the same data then we can conclusively believe it to be true. Triangulation used in this way assumes a single fixed reality that can be known objectively through the use of multiple methods of social research (Seale, 1999). The use of several different methods (discussion groups, individual discussions and participant observation) in the case of adolescent identities will allow a deeper and broader exploration of the dialogical self and significant others. As Willig (2001, p. 71) states "triangulation enriches case study research as it allows the researcher to explore the case from a number of different perspectives". The combination of discussion groups, individual discussions and participant observation will give an insight into the multiple perspectives involved in the dialogical self and the complex nature of adolescent identity development in a time of transition.

The extensive literature on the topic of adolescent identity provides us with much information about what is going on at this time. However, it is argued that the theory of the dialogical self would prove effective in gaining a greater understanding of how young people see themselves and others. This would not only fill the gaps in the literature but also reveal ways in which we can better prepare young people for leaving school and support them during this transitional time.

Background and Context

Access to Construction is a Get Ready for Work programme run by a local authority in Central Scotland. The programme is conducted over a 26-week period with young people being offered the chance to sit practical certificates and participate in a work placement scheme. It is the hope and aim of the council that these young people will then make the positive transition into employment or further training. Originally eleven boys aged 16-18 started this programme in September 2008 and nine boys completed the programme in February 2009. The researcher previously conducted two discussion groups with these boys in December 2008 and attended their end of programme presentation as part of the wider research project. After completing the programme nine boys were then offered the chance to sit the CSCS Health and Safety test which they need in order to work on a construction site. Eight boys turned up to sit the test; one boy did not turn up (it was explained later that the missing boy did not have a suitable form of identification which is needed to sit the test). The researcher met the group along with their youth worker, Scott at the college. The test was held in a mobile unit located at the back of the college buildings.

All of the boys seemed relaxed and were chatting to each other, and while we were all walking towards the back of the college they stopped to talk briefly to other people they knew attending college. Once we reached the mobile unit the youth worker spoke to the man administering the test. The tester explained to us that the boys needed 35/40 to pass the multiple choice test. He also explained that apprentices are given 2 hours a week to work through a health and safety book, they then sit the test when they feel confident they know all the information. The youth worker explained that the boys had been given the work books but it was their responsibility to read them and study for the test – no support was available from the council and indeed this was the first time the worker had seen the boys since the end of the programme. The first four boys were called into the unit to sit their test and, I, the researcher spoke to the remaining four outside. I was comfortable that they all recognised me and I explained I had come along to catch-up with them now that their programme had finished. I checked it was ok with the boys to record the discussion. We sat on a wall next to the unit while we talked and I recorded the discussion with an Mp3 player after asking permission from the young people.

Dialogical Analysis

I began with an open question in an attempt to catch-up with what the boys had been doing in the interim period since their end of programme presentation:

LW*(researcher)*: So what've you been up to since I last seen you at the presentation?

Paul: sleeping, that's it

Steven: well I've no had a job so lying in the hoose [2]*(house)* all day

James: I've been trying to find a job but it's just no for happening

Although the boys seemed happy and relaxed the mood changed slightly when I asked what they had been doing since the end of the programme. It can be seen in this extract above that three of the boys have been unable to find employment and there was a sense of frustration about this. James in particular describes trying to find a job but "it's just no for happening". The boys describe having nothing to do and Steven says he's just been "lying in the hoose all day". I got the impression from the boys that they were bored and perhaps the reason for the initial happy mood was that the test gave them something to do and a focus on that day. I move the conversation on by asking:

LW: How long since the programme finished?

Paul: 5 weeks

Steven: is it?

Paul: aye, it's pish like

Again this part of the dialogue re-emphasises the negativity the boys feel about having nothing to do now the programme has finished. Paul states that it has been five weeks since the programme ended and Steven asks in surprise "is it"? His surprised tone suggests that he had not realised it has been as long as five weeks and highlighted the length of time he has been unemployed. Paul reinforces this by saying "it's pish like" this is a negative colloquial word which is often used instead of urinate. One of the boys Neil has not spoken yet so I ask him directly:

LW: (to Neil) what've you been up to since …

Neil: working

LW: so you've got a job

Neil: aye till Easter he's just needing a hand so I'm just helping him

[2] All of the young people who took part in this study spoke using broad Scots language; at times where their language is ambiguous the researcher has attempted to clarify meaning in brackets.

There seemed to be a tension here for Neil as he is the only one in this group who is currently working. He perhaps did not want to draw attention to this at the beginning of the conversation. When I ask him directly he seems to be giving me one word answers such as "working" and then almost trying to play down his job by saying his employer is "just needing a hand" and saying he is "just helping him". I realise that Neil may feel uncomfortable so I tried to move the conversation on more positively:

LW: Cool, then after that do you think he'll give you more work?

Neil: he's waiting until Easter then he's seeing if he's got mare *(more)* work, then if he's got mare *(more)* work then he's gonna keep me on for a wee *(little)* bit longer.

Neil seems more comfortable in his answer here as he explains his job is temporary. This almost puts him back in line with the rest of the group as he too is still looking for long term employment. Recognition is important here as certain people, for example, youth workers, will give recognition for Neil finding employment. However, as none of his peers have found work there is no recognition offered from them so he tries to down play his working role. While Neil and I have been talking, Paul started to explain to one of the other boys that he has been offered a two week placement with a local Regeneration Project at the end of April. The project offer many young people temporary work placements then pick the ones they judge as being the best to stay on and begin and apprenticeship.

LW: so you were saying you're up against 3 other guys...

Paul: for one apprenticeship at plumbing

Steven: is Kyle still at it?

Paul: nah he's at another one but there's another guy Kyle Hamilton, he's a wee boy about that size (*gestures he's small*) and cannae lift a fork to his dinner then there's this big massive dopey cunt that couldn't even fit in a door he's that stupit he dosne ken *(know)* how to work it...

(*everyone laughs*)

It can be seen here in the first part of this excerpt that Paul is deliberately mocking and belittling the other people he is in competition with for the apprenticeship. He describes the first boy as small and uses statements like "cannae *(cannot)* life a fork to his dinner" which is said to give the impression he is incapable of doing the job. He then describes the second person as a "big massive dopey cunt" who is "stupit" *(stupid)*. It seems like Paul is trying to position himself in the middle of the two extremes he describes, he would like to be seen as someone who is most appropriate and capable of doing the job. This may also be an attempt to show confidence and gain recognition

from the other boys. Recognition is shown by the rest of the boys as everyone laughs at Paul's statements. The conversation continues:

> Paul: ... see if I dinne beat them I'll be gutted like
>
> LW: So what do you need to do? How long is the placement?
>
> Paul: eh 2 weeks, well its fae the 20th tae the 1st of May eh so it's like round aboot *(about)* two weeks
>
> Neil: are they getting placements tae?
>
> Paul: aye we've all got the same placement, but one ey ma pals who's after me is only working for 10 days and I'm working for 12 he's getting May day off and he's getting another day off
>
> Steven: dae ye get paid in that placement?
>
> Paul: dinne think so no but ay the boy was telling me that they've got folk who've just passed their apprenticeship after 4 years and getting a thousand pound a week daeing *(doing)* plumbing I was like 52 thousand pound a year at 22 year old that'd be no bad, so I might just break some legs so they cannae dae their placement *(jokes)*

As the conversation continues Paul admits that he will be "gutted" if he doesn't succeed above the other two boys. The competition that Paul feels is apparent in his use of the word "beat". Paul answers my question and Neil's question and explains how the placements work. The importance of money is highlighted when Steven asks if Paul will get paid for his placement. Paul explains that he doesn't think he will be paid but that the incentive seems to come from hearing that other people who have completed their apprenticeships are earning a thousand pounds per week. It is clear Paul has thought about this as he explains that for him this would mean he would be earning "52 thousand pound a year at 22 year old" he goes on to say "that'd be no bad". Paul seems pleased and excited at the prospect of earning this much and jokes that he "might just break some legs" so that the other people he is in competition with cannot do their placements. This is not said in an aggressive or threatening way but it shows that Paul is perhaps not as confident as he appeared to start with, as he would rather not have any competition. Paul is trying to claim power here in a powerless situation. Power can come from beating the competition and gaining employment but if this fails then power can also be gained from being physically dominant. This highlights the structures of recognition which exist in the social world. Recognition can be sought and gained for pro-social or anti-social behaviours. In this example, Paul is trying to gain recognition in the field of employment but if this fails it seems he will resort to physical power and violence. This rest of the group seem to endorse this by laughing.

This relates to previous research conducted by Cheng et al (2006), discussed above, Paul is trying to boost his self-esteem by being recognised for gaining employment. If this fails then recognition can be gained by being physically dominant. Paul's discussion of potential wealth also relates to Bourdieu's (1984) notion of social recognition for capital as Paul is trying to make the transition in the adult world by earning money. He discusses the amount of money he could potentially earn at a young age and the recognition he would receive for this. Paul is keen to earn a wage within an adult society that he feels would be appropriate and possibly advanced for his age. Barry (2006) discusses the notion of social capital in her work with young offenders and suggests the need to gain social capital as a reason behind repeat offending.

I then ask what Paul will do if he is unsuccessful:

Paul: kill somebody (*jokes*)

(everyone laughs)

Paul: naw I'm going stay, just gonne keep pissing the lassie off at the Raploch till they gee me a job

Steven: go back to school for 2 weeks!

Paul makes another joke by saying that he will "kill somebody" if he is not offered an apprenticeship. He then goes on to give the impression that he is determined to get a job by saying that he will "stay" and "keep pissing the lassie off" until they give him a job. This suggests a determination and also a lack of options for Paul. As the school term does not finish until the end of May Steven suggests that Paul goes back to school. Again this suggests a lack of options and opportunities. Paul goes on to respond to this by saying:

Paul: aye go back to school aye, I dinne think I'd be allowed back to school

Steven: ne'er would I,

Neil: ne'er would I

Paul: na I was gid at school

James: teachers either hated me or loved me

Paul: na everybody loved me at school I was a gid *(good)* boy at school, I ken it's hard to believe, *(laughs)* that's crap like, I've got highers n everything n I'm still fuckin looking for a job

Paul begins by saying almost sarcastically "aye go back to school aye" and then adds "I dinne think I'd be allowed back to school" Steven and Neil identify with Paul's statement. Then Paul contradicts his previous point by saying he was good at school which suggests that there would be no reason for him not to be allowed back. James comments that teachers either hated or loved him at school. Paul again reinforces his

previous point by saying “na everybody loved me at school” he described himself as a good boy and then jokes that this is “hard to believe”. There is a point of realisation for Paul when he realises that he did well at school but he is unemployed his swearing further emphasises this point when he says “I’m still fuckin looking for a job”. This again reinforces the frustration that became apparent at the beginning of the conversation.

Society expects young people to be engaged in some sort of employment or training once they leave school. As Hodgkinson (2004 p. 12) states we live in a “work-obsessed world”, we look down upon people who do not work and use labels such as ‘spongers’ and ‘free-loaders’. As young people approach an age where they can choose to leave school they are asked by many people “what will you do?” The option of doing nothing is rarely seen as a positive and acceptable choice. However, in a time of increasing diversity of ‘post-school options’, (Archer & Yamashita, 2003) some young people do not make the transition successfully and risk falling into a stigmatised and labelled group.

After approximately thirty minutes the first group of boys finish their test and come out of the mobile unit. All the boys I’ve been talking to ask the others how they got on. James then says “I should’ve brought my book with me”, he said this very quietly and it gives the impression that just before he goes into the unit he realises he would have benefitted from reading the book. This could also be seen as an excuse given in advance just in case he fails the test. There is a lot of confusion as the boys are all handed letters as they leave the mobile unit and some assume this means they have passed without reading the letter. However, the entire first group failed the test. The test is split into several sections and their letters explain which sections they have failed. The tester talks to them about their results:

Tester: you should've passed the handling equipment you've done your abrasive wheels

Thomas: aye a know

The tester seems to berate the boys and says to Thomas that he “should’ve” passed one section of the test because of a previous course in Abrasive Wheels. At no point are the boys congratulated on the sections of the test that they did pass.

Steven: (*shouts over to group*) did Aldo pass?

Thomas: I actually thought it was easy I thought I was daeing *(doing)* alright tae

John: I thought I was daeing *(doing)* alright tae

Aldo: (*to Scott*) I dinne know if I've passed or not?

Scott begins to read out his letter "unfortunately"....

Ian: ah you've failed tae

Aldo: I've failed?

Scott: yeah

Aldo: I thought it wasne tae bad like, obviously no

Tester: you'll ken if you've passed, if you pass you get a wee certificate at the bottom of the letter and a number you've got to phone up

The confusion about the test results is evident in this excerpt. The second group of boys are keen to find out how the first group got on and Steven shouts over. Thomas then admits that he thought the test was alright and he thought he "was daeing (doing) alright tae". This shows Thomas' surprise at failing the test, John then agrees with Thomas. Aldo is confused as to whether he passed or not and gives his letter to Scott who begins to read it out aloud. It seems a slightly unfair for Scott to read the letter out, however perhaps he felt this was ok as the other boys had also failed. Ian then comments "ah you've failed tae" as if in recognition that they are all in the same boat. Aldo then clarifies this by asking Scott if he failed and Aldo goes onto re-iterate the earlier points by saying that he thought the test "wasne tae bad" but states that his failure means he was wrong. The tester then explains what the letters would look like if the boys had passed. This seems a strange thing to comment and it is not even of benefit to the other boys who have already gone into the unit by this point.

The first group stand apart, after the test rather than as a group which makes it harder to talk to them. Their mood seems to have become slightly more negative, as it seems they all thought they would have passed the test. Scott begins to talk about employers and the boys being out on placement. He mentions a local employer that I know:

LW: I don't know Rhuri as well as I know Neil

Scott: a very understanding boss, you ken what he said, it was Jamie he's the guy that's no here the day right *(laughing)* after the 5, 6 weeks Rhuri, Rhuri was sitting in the office wi his feet up and he says Scott goin come in for a quick word before you go, and I thought oh no what's the young lad done, and my heart stopped, so ah goes in and says what's up, and he'd missed a day, said he had problems with transport, he was late a couple of mornings, and you know he was getting every tool in this workplace and he says look he's fine when he's here, he's absolutely bang on he says, I says well what's the problem then, he says the excuses I says what's wrong wi his excuses he says they're shite *(laughs)* I went well ok we can work on that then

Scott describes what he feels like as a council employee trying to support a young person on a work placement with a local employer. Scott begins by describing the employer, Rhuri, as "a very understanding boss" he then talks about the only young boy that has not come along to sit the test. Scott is talking openly here and the other boys

were standing not far from us. It's clear that Scott takes his job very seriously as he says his "heart stopped" when he assumed the employer was going to tell him something the young person had done wrong. He then goes on to explain that the young person has had some time off his work placement. However, Scott is clear that this is a bad thing as he believes the placement is good and the young person is getting taught how to use "every tool in this workplace". The employer tells Scott that when the young person attends his placement he is "absolutely bang on", but he goes on to say that the problem is the fact that his excuses for not being at work placement are "shite". Scott shows his relief when he laughs and he told the employer "ok, we can work on that then". This paints a very mixed picture of what it's like to be on work placement, on the one hand Scott describes a very flexible understanding employer but on the other Scott gives the impression that Jamie's time off is only unacceptable because this is a good placement with the opportunity to learn a lot. The tester then approaches us and begins to speak to Scott about the preparation the boys have done before the test:

> Tester: They've had no training for this test so I take it you've just thrown it in as an extra
>
> Scott: aye but what we done the last time they got a mornings training somebody went through the book we thum
>
> Tester: they've no hud a book, they said
>
> Scott: they have they've been issued with a book, but dae they read it? dae they wheeky! but the last time at least they got the morning and just aboot 7 out of 9 of thum passed it because they were switched on to it
>
> Tester: we had 45, 50 turn up this morning, and see out of the full 50 of them standing there I said how many of your have brought your books with you
>
> Scott: not one of them
>
> Tester: what do I want to bring my book with me for? I said see when those 4 are in what're you's lot doing?
>
> Scott: exactly, exactly you want to pass the bloody thing don't you?

After the first group failed the test the Tester then asks Scott about the training the boys have had before the test. The Tester's use of the word "thrown" suggests that this is how he would explain the failures in the first group.

The Tester shows an awareness here that these boys have been given no support to prepare for the test and have effectively been set up to fail. It is unclear who benefits from this situation, the council may benefit by being able to say they have provided the boys with the opportunity to sit the test but this would mean they would have to acknowledge that so many of the boys failed the test. This seems to be at best a waste of time and at worst a potentially very damaging experience for the young people. In terms

of adolescent identity construction who young people think they are, and who they think they might become is shaped by the recognition that they receive from significant others (Mead, 1934; Gillespie, 2005). This test is an example of a circumstance where they have been excluded from positive recognition.

Scott agrees that the boys have had no training but describes the process that he went through with a previous group. However, the Tester then says that they boys told him they have not been given a book, Scott disputes this and says that the boys have been given a book but they don't read it. Again, he describes a previous group where seven out of nine boys passed the test, this seems to be Scott's attempt to redeem himself for the bad results the current group have had. But it begs the question if it worked so well the last time then why did they take away the support this time? Scott himself admits that the previous group passed because "they were switched on to it" after a mornings training. The Tester then identifies with what Scott is saying by describing the number of people who turned up in the morning without their books. Scott seems to differ in where he places responsibility, he has just described the difference that some training can make but he then places the responsibility back with the young people when he says "you want to pass the bloody thing don't you?".

After a short time the second group come out of the unit and we find out that one of the boys has passed his test. Neil, the only boy who is currently working, passed the test. He walks over to the other boys and they all look at his letter as it is different to their own. Scott then says:

Scott: that's funny that's the man, he's the only yin that I've got an outcome out ey so far, picked it up last thursday (pause) that's amazing, and see when he started his placement he was wi Griffin it was heavy heavy work the boss man went pfff he's no very gid, right, then after about 5 weeks I went oot to get a signature, his exit review and the boss man said he's a good worker we're wanting to hauld onto him, what a turnaround, amazing.

LW: maybe people shouldn't judge them so soon

Scott: well, well, his first impression was he's no very good

LW: but it just shows you that that can change

Scott: aye

Scott is clearly pleased that Neil passed his test, saying "that's amazing". We can see hear that Scott is very pleased about one of the boys passing the test and this exonerates Scott from the failures of the rest of the group as it proves the test can be passed even with not support or preparation. This also supports Scott's argument for individual motivation and responsibility. Scott goes on to describe how Neil is working so the council can claim "an outcome". Here Scott is speaking the language of the council; the term 'outcome' is used by the council to describe a case of a young person

gaining employment. Wertsch (1990, 1991) states that an individual speaker is not simply talking as an individual but that in his or her utterances the voices of groups and institutions are heard (P. 76). This has become known as ventriloquation and Bakhtin (1981) also referred to this term which he defined as "the process in which one voice speaks through another voice" (p. 78). Hence, our dialogue is multi-voiced as Bakhtin (1981) described "people's views of the world and of themselves may be more or less dominated by the voices of the groups … to which they belong" (p. 78) Here it is clear from the language which Scott is using, specifically, the word outcome what the young people mean to Scott. The more outcomes the council gain the more funding they can apply for and justify. Scott is judged on the number of outcomes he achieves and this reveals what the boys are to him in terms of his own recognition through his job. In a similar way the council are also judged on the outcomes they achieve. Scott then describes the first impression that Neil's employer had of him and this shows how the employer shared this opinion with Scott. However after five weeks the employer's impression changed and he wanted to "hauld (hold) onto him (Neil)". Scott and I then have a brief exchange about the nature of first impressions and how they can be wrong. A short while later, the boys and their youth worker Scott left the college.

Discussion

The scenario discussed shows the ways in which this group of young people talk about their search for employment. This group would fall into the category NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). This label arose from a government strategy which identified young people who fall into this group as a problem to be tackled (More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland, 2006). However, as MacDonald & Marsh (2001) have discussed, government policy assumes that there are the necessary number of jobs and training places available to accommodate young school leavers. The authors state that in the government's eyes "youth unemployment is a symptom of an ill-prepared workforce; the fault of the young unemployed" (p. 388). This is a message often portrayed by the media which further stigmatises this group. Although the Scottish Executive recognise the damage done by the media in portraying the NEET population in "feckless young tribe" headlines (p. 8) they have done little to try and change the public perception of this particular group of young people.

For those who have had an unstable relationship with the education system their choices become limited as they have perhaps not achieved the grades needed to enter into further education and many jobs. Changing times and economic climates have seen a move away from opportunities to work in various industries. As Lawrence & Dodds (2007, p. 406) describe "many forms of work previously open to young people are no longer available to those not possessing an academic edge". This is particularly relevant for this group of young people as they have just completed an Access to Construction

programme and industry that is struggling in the current economic climate. As one news report stated "The Get Britain Building coalition of construction organisations and companies is warning 300,000 jobs could be lost in the industry around the UK (BBC News, 25 March, 2009).

However, it can also be seen from the preceding analysis that these boys are seeking positive recognition. Many structures of recognition exist and operate in our social worlds. For these young people the CSCS Health and Safety test presented an opportunity to gain recognition but due to a lack of support from the council all bar one of the boys failed the test and recognition was denied. They also discuss their struggle to find employment which would allow them recognition within that area as they would moved from being classed as unemployed to employed. Employment would also allow them recognition in terms of a higher economic status and Bourdieu (1984) discussed the notion of social recognition for capital. For many young people the transition into adulthood is determined by recognition for such things as earning a wage and becoming more independent. This example of young people being denied positive recognition highlights the potentially damaging effect this can have on adolescent identity and the importance of the notion of recognition which require further study.

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