

Deepening Engagement in Learning: A question of identity?

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What do we mean by identity?

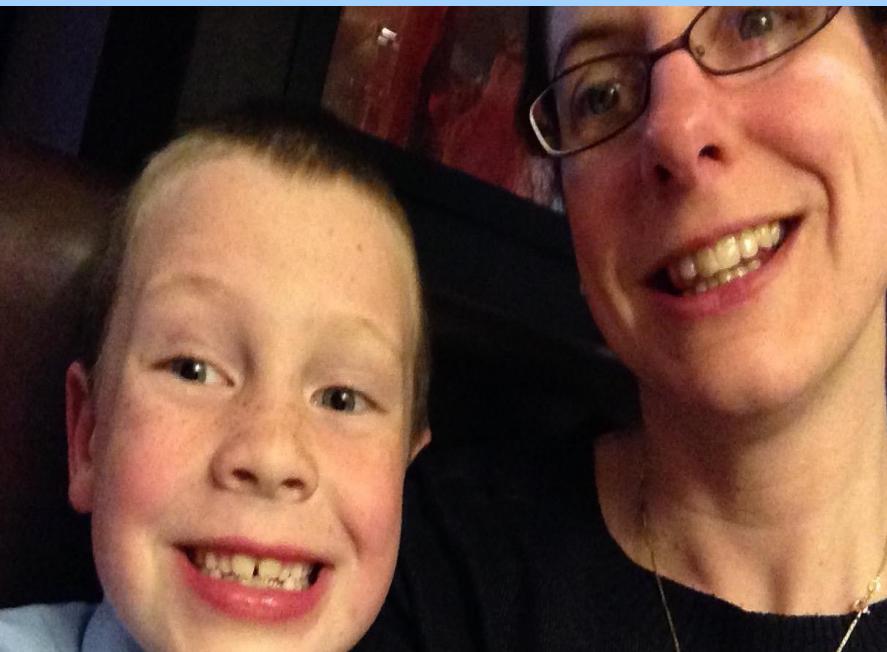
Practice is important!

- Reciprocal relationship – identity is mediated by practice and vice versa
- ‘From a social practice perspective it is through cultural practices as people ‘do life’ that social identities are constructed (Nasir and Saxe, 2003).
- Multiple practices = multiple identities

Narrative identity

- Holland et al (1998) – narrative as a ‘practice of identity’ - self authoring with cultural models in figured worlds
- Mediated by practice – subjectivity mediated by activity becomes crystallised and reflected upon – becomes an identity
- Generalisations

An Example....



I've learned to use meditation and relaxation to handle stress...

Just kidding,
I'm on my
third glass
of wine.



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The ‘Other in Me’

Bakhtin/Volosinov

- Addressivity – every utterance is a response to a previous utterance and is made in anticipation of the expected response of the addressee
- Heteroglossia – multiple voices which manifest in dialogue and inter-animate with one another

“I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong .”

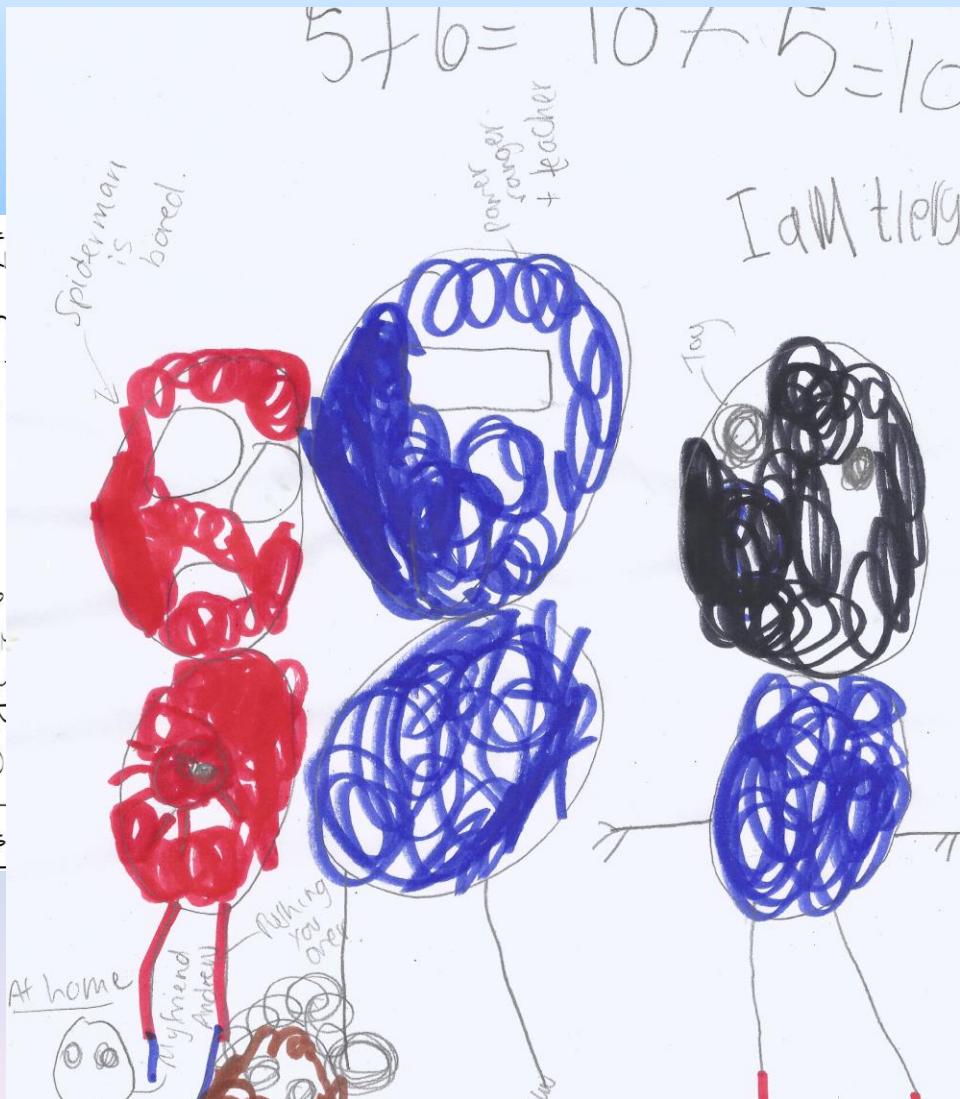
(Voloshinov 1973, p86)



Why is this concept of identity of useful?

- Identity as intensifier of engagement or disengagement in practice (including teaching/learning practices)
- A tool which mediates relation of subject to the motive of activity = emotional work.
 - “ ...we are who we are [and do what we do] because of what we care about” (Archer, 2000, p. 10).
- Lasting consequences – stability across time

Why Mathematics?



Why is looking at identities useful in mathematics education?

- Explanatory of engagement/disengagement – from subjectivity in practice to identity
 - ‘I don’t understand these fractions’
 - ‘Fractions don’t make any sense’
 - ‘I’m rubbish with fractions/maths’
- Produced/co-constructed in practice which are themselves mediated by institutions, ideologies
 - E.g. Pampaka et al - we see ‘teaching to the test’ is inversely related to disposition (identity) to further study

Looking for contradictions....

Black et al, (2010); Black & Williams (2013):

- The case of Mary – leading identity - developmental
- We identified contradictions between identities– i.e. several leading identities enacting diverse developmental pathways
- These arise because of engagement in contradictory practices/activity systems in the wider social structure

What is the value of identity here?

- Adult can come to see contradictions and through semiotic action (discourse with self and others) take control over them
- Progressive action and world making (Holland et al, 1998)
- Rooted in practice and requires allies!

Early Years as the 'seeds' of later Identities

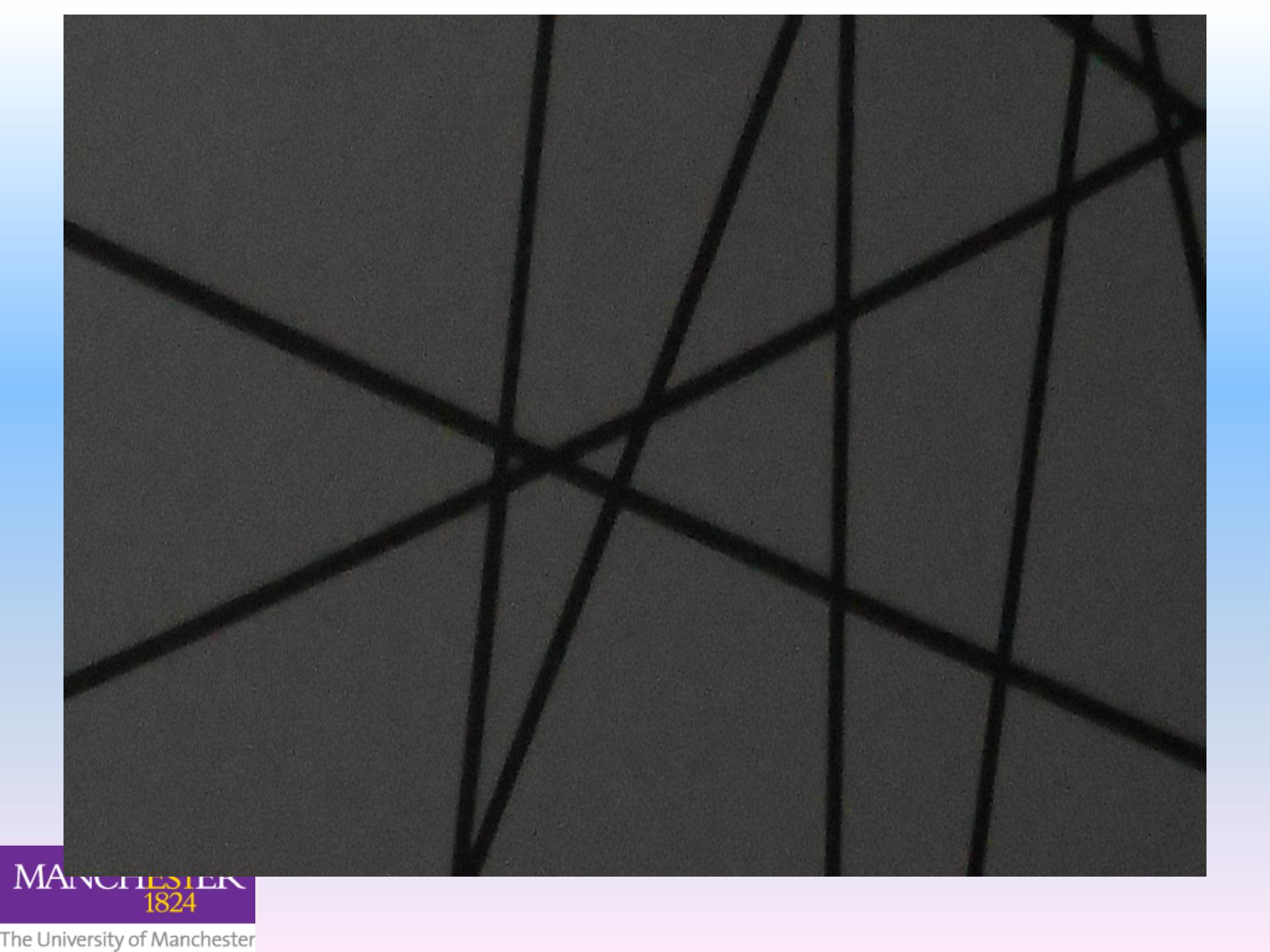
No easy methodology of identity with young children

How?

- Difficulty with asking young children to reflect in this way – interpreting their cues... but it is possible
- The move from identity to identification

Reflection takes on a different guise

- 'subject-in-activity' is reflected back by others – an act of identification – subjectivity is given cultural form by others



- **Researcher:** Now this one...
- **Nico (interrupts):** Shapes
- **Researcher:** Pretty amazing... we have a posh word for that in maths... do you know? Geometry. There's loads of geometry in that picture
- **Nico:** It's the chair... at my house
- **Researcher:** Is it? I thought it was overhead wires...Is it a pattern on your chair? Why did you take that photo for me?
- **Nico:** It's because there is a shape {...} Triangles and I can see a bit of square but the triangles are blocking the squares..
- **Researcher:** oh right.. point to a square for me then.. Can you see any squares in there Nico?
- **Nico:** a bit of that... cuss... that looks like a square... cos if you see the picture properly..of the whole chair you can actually see the square



- **Researcher:** What are you doing in this one?
- **Bilal:** [slowly and confidently] I'm... erm.. I'm putting those on the *whiteboard* and then [.] I wrote 15 add 5 [.] and then I counted altogether and then I wrote the number... the number altogether [.] and *then* [.] and then I did another one down there and then I wrote that answer
- **Researcher:** there you go.... [questioning tone] Who took the photo?
- **Bilal:** my ... my mum [Farya]
- **Farya:** [starts laughing] I took it
- **Researcher:** [questioning tone] you took the photo? Ahhh [elongated] Did he tell you to take the photo?
- **Farya:** No. I just did it.

How might examples such as this help us understand engagement/disengagement?

- Collection of photo-and-talk acts help to establish the ‘seeds’ of identification beginning to take shape
- Alignment or contradictions between the home and school
 - E,g, Nico talks of school maths as boring and just ‘counting over and over again’
- We argue the home-school relationship is the site of alienation at this age – maths is potentially the **most** disconnected school subject from children’s everyday lives.
 - But also other work in mathematics education has highlighted this disconnection – e.g. Funds of Knowledge (Gonzalez; Civil; Baker & Street; Martin Hughes HSKE project).

What is the value of identification here?

- Identifying the social experiences which become the resources for self analysis later on
- A way to understand development as mediated by institutional practices & policy
- Big Questions:
 - What are we doing?
 - How can we do it better?
 - Revolution – reform – or both!

Conclusions

Identity is useful because:

- It provides an understanding of how and why individuals invest or resist particular practices which (re)produce social/institutional structures and do not always serve them well.
- It helps us to understand investment/resistance as a long standing process which begins early on
- Through reflection, it raises these issues to consciousness and therefore, helps us to imagine doing education differently