

Title:

'Hidden voices': an exploratory single case study into the multiple worlds of a 15 year old young man with autism.

Submitted by Stephen O'Leary, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education (Special Educational Needs) by research in December 2011.

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Stephen O'Leary, December 2011

For Nana

“The invention of madness as a disease is in fact nothing less than a peculiar disease of our civilization... We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbours, and communicate and recognise each other through the merciless language of non-madness... We must try to return, in history, to that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself... To explore it we must renounce the convenience of terminal truths, and never let ourselves be guided by what we may know of madness... Then, and then only, can we determine the realm in which the man of madness and the man of reason, moving apart are not yet disjunct; and in an incipient and very crude language, antedating that of science, begin the dialogue of their breach, testifying in a fugitive way that they still speak to each other.”

*Michel Foucault
Preface: ‘Madness and Civilization’
1967*

“It was the Special Olympics, 1968, in Seattle. Eight athletes were at the starting line. And low and behold, they were all going for gold, silver and bronze. And the gun went off and they all started going for the winning line- a hundred yard dash. Then the last little girl fell, and she cried. The second last little girl looked back. She saw a girl down, and she stopped. And the whole auditorium stood up. After that, the other six kids- stopped. And what did they do? They all went back, and they all linked hands and they all came across the winning line together.”

*Pat Falvey: ‘Sean’s Awards Night’
2010*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a 31-day case study carried out with a 15 year old young man who has classical autism. The study involved introducing him to a number of new and challenging activities, in a variety of contexts, over 31 days, that were previously assumed to be outside of his range of capability. The case study found that the application of the concepts of choice, control, challenge and risk had an unexpectedly positive impact upon the young man's performance. This study further attempts to explore the concept of narrative as a 'pedagogical bridge' between the 'worlds' of autism and neurotypicality, arguing that narrative may provide a 'way in' to the world of autism. 'Narrative', this study contends, may provide a tapestry across which the world of autism may be connected with the world that surrounds it; by revealing a multiplicity of selves in a multiplicity of contexts. Methods of data collection included field notes, interviews, photographs and film footage. Ultimately, the study found that the use of 'performance texts' (DVDs featuring the young man's achievements) constituted a powerful means of celebrating his accomplishments within the school and its wider community. Research approaches were participatory and ethnographic in the data collection phases, while a more phenomenological approach was adopted in the data analysis phase. The overarching analytical framework was that of 'narrative analysis' in telling a story of bravery, courage, hope and optimism.