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CONCERNING MR. SMITH AND HIS (VERY BRIEF?) REIGN OF TERROR.

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1. Introduction: The Conception of Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith is a tyrant - an extremely authoritarian mathematics teacher. He was created out of the political and educational turmoil in South Africa in an attempt to address several key tensions, which I had experienced in the training of mathematics teachers in a University pre-service diploma course.

Firstly as a response to the pressures of the schools' crisis in South Africa in 1985 and 1986, I had tried to examine the possibilities for alternative programmes in mathematics education (Breen 1986). I found myself in complete agreement with Fasheh (1982:6) when he wrote:

In short, I came to believe that the teaching of math, like the teaching of any other subject in schools is a 'political' activity. It either helps to create attitudes and intellectual models that will in their turn help students grow, develop, be critical, more aware and more involved, and thus more confident and able to go beyond the existing structures; or it produces students who are passive, rigid, timid and alienated. There seems to be no neutral point in between.

I came to the conclusion that the most important area that progressive teachers of mathematics should try to improve was the area of classroom practice. The traditional Christian National Education model holds the authoritarian teacher in high regard as the teacher is vested with the authority to guide the pupils. The need for discipline and control is stressed to the extent that these teacher behaviours are financially rewarded through distinct categories in a merit award system. Student teachers entering a one year postgraduate teaching diploma course are the successful products of this system - they have survived sufficiently well to have passed University examinations in Mathematics and have the interest in the subject to want to teach it. My problem was: how could I demonstrate the urgency for students to develop alternative teaching methods?

The second significant tension had occurred during the running of a content of mathematics course offered to future primary school teachers. The students' range of last success in mathematics (as measured by a pass in an end-of-year examination) varied from standard 6 (13 years old) to 2nd year university level. What was particularly striking was that, although the majority of the class had successfully passed mathematics at a school-leaving level, their responses were all very similar when asked to respond to the question 'What emotions does the word "Mathematics" bring out in you?' Typical answers were:

Revulsion, apprehension, frustration, boredom.

Fear, insecurity and the will to do the minimum. An attempt to survive.

I always associate maths with awe/apprehension and even fear, not knowing whether I'd ever cope. Worrying about grasping facts and figures also pervades my mind.

My maths experience was intensely traumatic, and because I feel that I finally succeeded, the subject triggers ambivalent feelings of success and intensely unhappy feelings.

This was strong language, which hinted at so much more. Some of these comments are made by "successful" students who have always passed mathematics easily. I responded by designing a course which aimed at demonstrating (through an investigative and group approach) that it was probably not the mathematics per se that had induced these strong feelings, but rather the traditional learning environment in which they had learnt school mathematics. This rational sounding approach asked for the students to enter the course with an act of faith - to believe in the possibility that it wasn't mathematics itself which damaged them. How could I try to highlight some of the pressures felt in a traditional classroom situation?

The next major tension came in my Method of Mathematics diploma course for graduates. Over the years in this course I had offered the students a highly experiential humanistic mathematics group approach to mathematics. The students tended to enjoy the activities, but on teaching practice fell back on traditional teaching methods. The most distressing setback came one year when I talked of the damage done to children in a dehumanized classroom environment, and I encountered several sneers. "After all it's a competitive world, survival of the strongest, some must fall by the wayside, etc...." These students have a highly confident construct of the world. They have successfully graduated from University and have to complete this minor irritation of a teaching diploma before becoming professionals. They find it far easier to project any difficulty onto the system rather than to accept the challenge of looking at themselves. They deny the at times devastating socialising effects that schooling has had on them. How can I put them in touch with their feelings and true experiences of schooling so that they can understand the damage done to people under an overly authoritarian system of schooling?

These were the major tensions and questions, which had troubled me. It was only after an all day workshop in Cape Town on Drama in Education run by Dorothy Heathcote of the Institute of Education at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in which she showed the power of teacher intervention by taking a role in the drama, that I thought of using this medium to attempt to address some of these tensions.

This then is how Mr. Smith was conceived.

2. Situation: The Arrival of Mr. Smith.

During my first session with the Mathematics Method class of approximately fifty postgraduate diploma students, I apologise for not being able to remain with them all morning, as I have to attend an important meeting. They will not be left alone, however, as I have arranged for a teacher, Mr. Smith, to come in and take them while I am away. I keep looking at my watch. I go out of the room to look for him, giving the warning - "watch out how you behave - he's quite strict."

I go out and put on an academic gown. Then I return to the class in my role as Mr. Smith - complete with a harsh expression. "Good Morning class". They are amused and bewildered and look at Mr. Smith. He gets angry at their lack of manners and tells them to stand when he enters the room and greets them. He goes out and enters again. "Good morning class". This time they all stand - they think they know the game and smile to each other.

"I want to see how good you are at arithmetic - you're going to write a test. You've got 5 minutes only to work and you'll swap papers at the end and mark each other's work. Are you ready?"

(During this time he has continued to assert his authority with such comments as 'What are you smiling at?' etc)

"Right the problem is: Using 4 fours only and recognised arithmetic signs such as +, -, x and -, make as many different answers as you can:

e.g. $4 + 4 + 4 + 4 = 16$

$$4 + 4 - 4 - 4 = 0$$

Right start. Those who fail the test will have to stay in and work during our usual morning's break."

The rest of the time is spent with Mr. Smith stalking around the room continually commenting harshly on students' work and behaviour. He peers critically at each student's work, and shouts anyone down who tries to ask a question to clarify the vaguely given instructions. He humiliates those whose work shows that they haven't understood the problem by reading out their mistake, calling them an idiot and/or tearing up their work so that they are forced to start again. He accuses people of cheating and copying each other's work. He delights in finding someone who appears to be resisting and stands over them ridiculing their incompetence and stupidity until they start writing and conforming. He swoops down on those who have made careless arithmetical errors, uses his red pen and scorns their ignorance. He fixes on one student in the class who is producing a long list of answers and is flourishing in the competitive atmosphere and loudly congratulates her: "At least we have one intelligent person in this class."

He ends by pressurizing the class with a half-minute countdown of time, even to the last fifteen seconds "15 - 14 - 13 - 12 - 2 - 1 - Pens down. Swap papers."

He then excuses himself from the room, and takes off his gown in the corridor.

I return to the class as myself - Mr. Smith does not return.

3. Aftermath: The Impact of Mr. Smith.

Hoyles (1982) gives three areas for explanations of an anxiety particularly related to mathematics:

- i) explanation derived from the nature of the subject mathematics
- ii) explanations based on the influence of past experiences in mathematics and the self-concept of ability in the subject
- iii) explanations concerned with how mathematics is taught and learned.

Yet a review of the literature reveals that little work appears to have been done on the pupil's reaction to pressure from the teacher. An exception is Buxton (1980) who suggested that time pressure and an authoritarian teaching style could induce anxiety amongst adults in mathematics classes.

In the intervention, which has been described in this article, we are in the fortunate position of being able to gain some idea of the extent of the impact caused by Mr. Smith's visit. Part of the requirements of the course were that each student keep a diary in which they record their reflections of each day's session.

Before reading some of these extracts, it is important to remind ourselves that these are graduate students with at least a three-year degree. In addition they have had sufficiently good experiences with mathematics in school to choose to return to the system as teachers of mathematics. Some of the students are in fact already experienced teachers.

A. Student Reaction.

The students' initial responses show how real they find this exercise. Although Mr. Smith is obviously an extreme case, the joke wears off very quickly and is replaced by old survival strategies where it is everyone for herself, even though conflicting emotions come to the fore.

Then this person came in wearing an academic gown (Chris in disguise). Before even greeting the class or at least showing some sign of acknowledgement, he scolded us for not standing to attention. He demanded that everybody stands, even a student with a broken leg. We could only speak when spoken to. I was so scared that he would pick on me, that I tried to blend in with the furniture. That did not help. He picked on me anyway, and all because I was looking down at my book for too long. According to him I was not paying attention. The tone of voice that he used wanted to make me cry.

My intensely emotional response shocked me. I did not expect to feel the urge to burst into tears especially since Chris was role-playing. (F.A.)

Firstly, I felt deceived and tricked by Chris Breen himself. I was expecting a guest speaker to come in and chat to us about something interesting and different but instead ended up with what was first seen as a joke or play or sketch! He then proceeded to talk loudly, as if we were thick, deaf or dumb, assuming that he had to talk loudly in order to get through to us. The cloak alienated me from him and I proceeded to do as I was told in fear of attracting attention to myself. One of students tried to resist his authority but was eventually crushed! Here at first I thought that the student was being totally foolish and silly to try and get in the way of the teacher and to undermine his accepted power of asserting authority. On the other hand I was a little glad; probably in a sadistic, competitive way that he had been picked on, causing him (the student) to 'throw his name away' even more! The student was 'getting a bad rap' and that would clearly count against him in the future. Furthermore, the student, as a member of the group or class was threatened and I was keen to grab the teacher and punch him for being so assertive, loud and noisy toward a single pupil. (G.S.)

I was very aware that he was humiliating other people in the room and I was not happy with that but I think I was more relieved that he didn't come and look at my work. I felt that the class was coming together and silently ganging up on this Mr. Smith. (J.B.)

B. Conformity

Perhaps the most surprising but important lesson which comes out of this exercise is the ease with which they accept the role-play. No-one refuses to participate even though J.B. feels a 'coming

together' of the class. They do not get up and walk out, and despite G.S.'s strong feelings above, no-one tries to hit Mr. Smith. Can there be any doubt that these rebellious liberated students are very much a product of Fasheh's school, which breeds them to be "passive, rigid, timid and alienated".

Looking back at what happened in the class, it is amazing to think what power a person with a booming voice and an authoritarian approach wields. We, the students, are all intelligent (supposedly) graduates, with at least four years' out-of-school experience, and yet we were all taken in, or rather, we all toed the line, just to keep the peace. (C.S.)

What really amazed me the most was that people slotted in with the autocratic schmuck. The whole class let him get away with humiliating other students. No one thought of expressing his or her opinions. It was as if we were in some time warp. (F.A.)

C. Memories of the Past

The most shattering feature of the exercise is the way in which the past is so easily and frighteningly recalled by students, even when these memories go back into the early years' of schooling. This is in marked contrast to the recent finding of Ismael (1989) in her interviews with 18 pupils from a disadvantaged, working class family in South Africa. Only two of these pupils were able to supply a story or critical incident that changed the pupil's attitude either positively or negatively. These students show no difficulty at all in recalling what are obviously still extremely painful memories. For example:

Mr. Smith reminded me of a teacher I had in Std.2, Mrs. N. She was a real old dragon, with fleshy arms and floral dresses which struggled to contain her ample figure. She was a tyrant! Homework not done, books left at home by mistake, working too slowly, untidy desk/work and her very high pass-fail threshold (75%) made all her students into jibbering wrecks. My parents swear that she did more damage to my creativity and normally-cautious nature than anything else. My compositions became pieces of contrived writings without much meaning or depth - textbook examples of correctness, precise spelling but little feeling. She lauded that sort of work and beat you or screeched at you hysterically if you didn't. As Mr. Smith entered, and I slipped earnestly into role-playing (so earnestly that at times I couldn't judge reality from the role) - I was once again in Mrs. N's classroom. My stomach turned, I quickly worked until I had more than 10 e.g.s (but afterwards I saw that I had carelessly made 2 errors - $4+4+4+4=20!!$ and $(4-4)/(4+4)=1/8!!$) In Mrs. N's class, I had been one of the best in the class to the point of being her pet. I was quite 'jealous' of Colleen's privileged position. (G.L.)

F.F. was particularly strong in his feelings when I asked the class if anyone had had a teacher like Mr. Smith. He told us that he had had a Mr. S in Std 3 teaching him mathematics. He had seen S the other day in the street and had wanted to kill him. The rest of the class laughed at this exaggeration; but when they were quiet again I asked F.F. if he really meant 'kill'. He was shocked to admit that he had. We talked it through in class and I suggested that maybe next time F.F. saw his ex-teacher, he should go across and tell him how he remembers his maths classes. F.F. reported later in the year:

I saw old S again the other day. Looked at him and tried to pluck up enough courage to go and tell him what you told me, only problem, it seems such a small thing now that I couldn't find the pluck to do it. I know that this may be a cop out, but it really does seem trivial now, and to think that I carried it around from 1972, unbelievable. I suppose the best way to handle something is to share it and then analyse it to see if it really was that important. (F.F.)

The rest of the stories in this section are remarkable for the strong emotions expressed. When these extracts were later read to a class of experienced teachers, several suggested that these were exceptional stories taken from the negative side of school experience, and that there would be just as many positive stories. The class was shocked to find that almost half of those present were easily able to identify with the memories. In fact several said that Mr. Smith should be carrying a cane to add to his reality. Again one must stress that these stories come from 'successful' mathematics students. What would we hear from those who hate mathematics?

The autocratic behaviour of the teacher was so familiar to me. It was something that I had grown accustomed to throughout my high school career. I used to go to great lengths so that the teacher would not notice me. I would sit in front. I would not talk during class; and I would always do my homework. In other words, I was a puppet who was manipulated by the teacher and my fear for him.

It is important to bear in mind that my submissive behaviour was in no way tainted with respect. I could not stand the man. This was illustrated by the fact that I was one of the people who brought nails from home to flatten his tyres (VICIOUS HEY!!).

The fact that this teacher can probably get results out of people made no difference. I did not care that I was one of the top students in maths because whatever I had learnt was out of fear and not a desire to discover what was going on.

The role playing by Chris brought back memories that I would far rather forget. IT WAS VERY FAMILIAR. (F.A.)

This is what I wrote down: Terrible. Frightened, and anxious. Chris had shouted at someone in the class who wasn't getting the work done. This struck fear in me who wasn't achieving either. This brought back memories to me of when I was a child and left alone to cope with such a teacher. My Mom and Dad were too far away to call on, and I was really frightened by this teacher, yet even when I would be able to tell them about it, I felt they wouldn't be able to identify with it. My Maths class became one of those terrifying dark times in my life, which were overwhelming yet which I couldn't avoid, being forced to attend. My thoughts turned to the many children today who have to endure such terrifying times because tyrants like these were 'out there' teaching. If anyone in the class had no sympathy before for any victim of such a teacher, today's lesson put them in the victim's seat and I'm sure they won't forget the terrible feeling. (A.K.)

One of my teachers at secondary school was like 'Mr. Smith'. although she was pointed out as a politically aware and progressive teacher, her methods and approach in the classroom contradicted her position. She ran the classes, Maths and Latin, like an

army. We were extremely scared of her and this made us do all her homework and study hard for her tests.

I always wondered why she was like this, because it only made us despise her, and she suffered a nervous breakdown and thus had to leave school for near to six months. (J.P.)

The incident also reminded me of something I observed on Teaching Practice: a teacher who screamed, shouted at and insulted her pupils. The effect on the pupils was clearly noticeable. Some sat silently (in fear?), others mumbled continuously under their breath, and still others were outrightly defiant! These pupils were 'stupid', 'irresponsible', 'lazy' and 'evil' - according to the teacher. When I taught the class, I found them wonderfully responsive and attentive too. (I know that I am not authoritarian at all!!). (D.V.)

D. Lack of clarity/stupidity

Hoyles (1982) reported that 22% of all bad stories in her research contained statements categorised in a sub-category called Teacher Pace, Pressure. All of these statements were concerned with the perceived presence or absence of sources of stress imposed by the teacher in the learning process. For example, the pupil may have said that the teacher had proceeded too fast, had imposed an unreasonable workload or had presented work in an unplanned or discontinuous manner. The teacher could also demand instant answers or tell her to work out something in front of the class.

How did these students cope with the four four's? Instructions have been given clearly with two examples - but only once and in a supercharged atmosphere. How well do the students perform under the tension of restricted time and the continual pressure of the teacher's presence? Is this what the students' picture when they are asked to think about Mathematics?

Although I did not know what on earth the instructions meant, I decided that, since the rest of the class seemed to know what's going on, I'd better keep my mouth shut. This is typical of the actual classroom situation. If students feel that they will be scolded or ridiculed, they would rather miss out on a lesson than risk being exposed. (Shaf)

'Silly fool who does he think we are.' I kept thinking that here I was, a maths graduate, and I couldn't even do this silly game properly. I felt like telling him to shut up so that I could think properly. I found that I had this knot in my stomach and I covered my work with my arms so that he wouldn't see how little I had done when he walked past. I was afraid. (J.B.)

On this particular occasion I felt very stupid, nervous and didn't know what to do in that the instruction was swift and vague. The fact that it was made under a hostile atmosphere, with Mr. Smith shouting and sarcastically abusing students compounded the feeling of uncertainty with regard to what has to be done as instructed. (V.B.)

I felt unable to think quickly. My brain seemed to have been blocked under all that pressure. I couldn't even get to 6 simple operations using the "four-fours". (M.F.)

The teacher's attitude filled me with fear and I couldn't think straight. I didn't fully understand what to do, but I dared not ask anything. I was gripped/paralysed with fear and these feelings were very real even in a make believe situation. (C.H.)

Although everyone knew it was an act, everyone was on their nerves, they were almost afraid, writing down any rubbish as long as it looked as if they were busy and could escape the teacher's anger. (C.S.)

E. Teacher's Pet

These comments all show an extremely negative and fear-filled situation. You may recall that one student, in this case Colleen, was singled out as being 'successful'. How did she react to this praise, and what were the feelings of the other students? Firstly Colleen:-

I caught on very quickly what Chris was trying to do but I didn't feel threatened because I knew I was 'okay'.

For a moment I did enjoy the attention I was receiving and also being told how clever I was. I did not enjoy being complimented at other people's expense. Initially I couldn't relate to what the others were saying about their past teachers. I couldn't remember any of my teachers being like that. But then I realised that I have had many teachers like that but because of my personality and because I nearly always did things 'right', it never caused me any stress.

It never once crossed my mind that what teachers were doing to me was alienating me from my classmates. (C.C.)

The reactions of her classmates paint a very different experience.

I also got upset when he kept congratulating Colleen and I wondered why I couldn't do as much as she was doing - after all we had done Maths 3 together. I felt really stupid. (J.B.)

This lesson was also able to reveal to me how a relationship is developed between teacher and student which leaves the pupil to be termed "teacher's pet" by the rest of the class. One of the students was doing her work well and Chris often turned to her to compliment and encourage her. This made the rest of the class feel angry and resentful towards her, because she was being favoured only because of her performance. Being placed in this position by the teacher left this particular student in an uncomfortable relationship with the rest of the class, but she enjoyed being praised by the teacher. This often happens to students who are wonderfully keen about the work and perform well, whereas those who don't, tend to get neglected and are not considered as valuable as the other pupils - or as worth investing in. The teacher's view of things is not always

that of the students', and this is something a teacher needs to be aware of, i.e. showing favoritism, and giving the kids the idea that they are only valuable if they perform - their worth is measured or determined by results or performance. (A.K.)

It was only once I had been screamed at personally that I felt totally embarrassed and humiliated. This feeling was worsened by the "teacher" loudly praising certain people for their own work. Strangely enough, when other people were shouted at and put down, I seemed to feel a kind of bond with them. It took me back to my school days where the pupils sort of united against the "baddie" teacher. My initial reaction to the "teacher's" enthusiastic praise of one pupil was to think "That Miss Goody Two Shoes. (M.F.)

I felt envious of Colleen's position as being teacher's pet. In fact, I was freaking out when I learned that Colleen had eight examples and I still only had one. (J.P.)

When he praised Colleen for her list, I felt really antagonistic towards them both: 'teacher's pet!' At the same time I realised that poor Colleen had been isolated and alienated - simply because she had, by luck, caught onto his instructions. More than ever, I was aware of the teacher's power and the pupils' helplessness. (D.V.)

Only one student found some benefit from the interaction with Colleen:

I felt vicarious relief when you commended Colleen as I had done something similar. (C.W.)

In another class the experience was different. L spoke of her anger at G - who had randomly been selected to receive the praise. She also mentioned her own insecurity about mathematics. In a later exercise in the same session, G made a contribution to solving a problem. I asked L how she felt about G now. She responded that she felt in awe of him because of his astute answer. Closer examination of G's answer revealed it to be very ordinary, and in fact did not contribute to the solution of the problem. Yet because of Mr. Smith's random selection of G as the 'bright' student in the class, his answers are immediately elevated to an 'astute' level and ones to be admired by those feeling less secure.

4. Reflections: What Was Gained From His Life?

Mr. Smith was created in an attempt to meet certain specific tensions, and in particular to serve as a strong motivator for change. How successful was his brief appearance? Once again it is worthwhile to turn to the diaries of the students, since they have gone much further than merely recorded the events of the day and have themselves reflected on the value of his appearance.

Several students recognised the de-humanising effects of a strongly authoritarian approach:

It was a good lesson. I think we all forget just what it felt like to be at school - the kids look so grown up and mature these days but at heart they can really 'hurt'. (D.V.)

It made me think of a teacher at the school where I did my teaching practical. One day I was speaking to him at his desk in the classroom after a lesson when all of a sudden he turned to a student who was waiting to ask him something and with his face ten centimetres away from this kid, yelled, 'Dammit, Jones, get out of here!' I nearly fell over with surprise. But only today thought of what that child had experienced and how he felt. Only when we suffer what another has been suffering do we know what he has been feeling like. An intellectual understanding misses the mark compared to the experience of the event. (A.K.)

It was interesting to see that one student was certain that she had made an important discovery about the source of her attitude to mathematics:

In that short space of time, not only did I re-live my early school days (long-forgotten in order to survive), i.e. re-live every emotion that I ever felt in the Maths class and at school in general but was also able to isolate why I had come to hate school, exams and rules and had come to fear maths.

Chris Breen's role-playing was a re-enactment of the typical teacher (and more particularly my maths, science and accounting teachers) I had experienced at school. I felt anger, fear, humiliation even when remarks weren't directed at me personally. (Y.C.)

The students are able to extend their insights from this exercise into their own future teaching and one is even open enough to acknowledge a part of Mr. Smith in herself:

But, most of all, a feeling of fear for the consequences of what I as a teacher can cause in the future, for as we were acting out this whole show, memories from my schooldays flashed past me. Exactly the way we were experiencing it now.

This incident 'opened my eyes', it made me aware of the powers I as teacher can exercise one day, of the traumatic effects I may have on children, and I pray that God will help me not to become such a 'moron'. (S.M.)

Yet my teaching method does similar things to people. Oh not as obviously of course, but still the messages sent out are 'stupid incompetents'. (C.W.)

The recognition of the role of socialisation is interestingly attached by one student to the use of an academic gown as the mark of the authoritarian Mr. Smith.

Short lesson by 'Mr. Smith'. Gown gives the mantle of authority, superiority, arrogance, depending on the wearer; note the change of persona that comes over anyone who wears it. Also by implication the change of persona that comes over any class facing the teacher who wears a gown. At P. Boys' High School (self 1963 - 1967) each and every master wore a gown all the time. It is easy to put fear into a class merely by the adoption of a gown. The pupils suddenly sink into 'class' mode, and it is interesting to note the expectations that we as pupils or students experience because of this, i.e. we expect him to teach in a certain way purely because of the mask he has adopted. Thusly, as Garfield would put it, are we conditioned. (C.A.)

Finally the students start to reflect on the system. They also ponder on the position in the education system of a teacher such as Mr. Smith and how to counteract his power, realising that there are no easy answers:

This short exercise showed that we should be very careful in our dealing with students. The authoritarian teachers may solve noise problems and probably gain more promotions in the present system, but it obviously leaves a scar on the student and restricts the student's activity in the class. (J.P.)

If I think about that in a classroom - it's frightening. children would not have the confidence to challenge a guy like that. And if they did, what would it help? He'd just come down on them and probably pick on them from then on. Parents would also just say, 'Hang in there, and yet he could destroy a subject and a period of their day, everyday. Teachers like that should not be allowed into a classroom. (C.S.)

This made me wonder, what does one do when one sees a teacher doing this. Stop him? Is it possible without resorting to blows? One could argue with them and point out..... But they're usually beyond reason! I don't know ! (K.D.)

5. Conclusion: Is There Life After Mr. Smith??

McLeod (1987) feels that the first task for researchers is to analyse the barriers that children face as they learn mathematics, for it is these barriers that prevent a schema from reaching completion (Mandler 1984) or that keep a student from reaching a goal (Skemp 1979). The affective component of the children's reactions to these barriers constitutes the raw material from which attitudes are formed.

This study has tried to shine some light on the nature of some of the barriers that occur in an overly authoritarian classroom teaching situation. The responses from the observed class have been powerful and provide many openings for future work both with them and with future classes of student teachers. The intervention has certainly gone some way to addressing the three main tensions outlined in the introduction and to that degree it has been worthwhile.

It is important not to underestimate the strong responsibility of the researcher/facilitator to ensure that sufficient time is made available for all students to participate and share their feelings. It is evident that the exercise produces strong reactions and it is crucial that these different reactions be respected and dealt with.

This session was followed by Chris Breen's portrayal of an authoritarian teacher. I felt intimidated even though it was only a role-play. I decided there and then not to attend after the break. I also felt extremely angry for feeling intimidated and timid. If ever I had doubts before, the experience taught me to be a gentle, understanding teacher rather than a disciplinarian. (C.C.)

This portrayal by Chris of a tyrannical teacher really had a striking effect on me. I only wish that many teachers could have been present at this lesson. I think there is value in

acting out situations like this one in front of a class, so that we can learn to assess and appreciate our own behaviour and attitudes towards people. (A.K.)

The success of such an approach needs to be tested over a longer period and the lasting effects of the exercise on the students after teaching in the 'real world' monitored. It is also important to consider the possible extensions of this intervention. Can it be used to shed more light on the source and nature of maths anxiety? Can Mr. Smith be adapted to encourage pupils to recall 'critical incidents' more readily?

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