

How do I contribute to improving educational relationships, space and opportunities?

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Background

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of enabling pupils to contribute to decisions concerning the structure and delivery of what they are to learn. Pupils' voice and personalisation of learning are current themes in research in education (for example, the 'Special Issue of *Educational Action Researcher* of September 2007' on Young People's Voice). The focus has been on engaging pupils more in the 'given' curriculum. Motivation, participation, social and emotional well being, are conceptualised as tools, subservient to exam and test results, employability and rates of entry to prestigious universities.

A current governmental concern is how to improve the abilities of individual's to contribute to the common good and enhance their own sense of happiness and wellbeing. This is an opportunity for educationalists to research collaboratively with pupils to enable them to develop and pursue a personal(ised) and life-long curriculum to live satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives for themselves and others.

The Living Theory methodology (Whitehead, 2008) developed in this paper includes a multi-media narrative (Huxtable, 2009) to explicate the meanings of the energy flowing values and understandings that constitute the explanatory principles of educational influences in the thesis. Rigour is enhanced using the methods advocated by Winter (1989) and social validity is enhanced using the principles advocated by Habermas (1976, 2002).

I work as a senior educational psychologist with responsibility for developing and implementing inclusive gifted and talented educational theory practice and provision within a small English Local Authority. This paper arises from my work researching to improve my practice.

This paper is in two inter-related parts framed by the questions:

1. How do I contribute to educational relationships, space and opportunities which support children and young people developing talents to create knowledge of the world, knowledge of them self, and knowledge of them self in and of the world?
2. How do I enable learners and educators to offer the knowledge they create as educational gifts to enhance their own learning and wellbeing, that of others and the communities of which they are a part?

1. How do I contribute to educational relationships, space and opportunities which support children and young people developing talents to create knowledge of the world, knowledge of them self, and knowledge of them self in and of the world?

The qualities of educational relationships, space and opportunities I am contributing to might be summarised as those that enable us each, in living our ontological values to become a more inclusive, emancipated and egalitarian influence in learning and life: our own; other people's and the social formations we are all part of. I am taking 'ontological' values to stand for the unique constellation of values that we each recognise as giving our own life purpose and meaning. I summarise my ontological values as those that are consistent with: a loving recognition; respectful connectedness and; educational responsibility. I can summarise inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian values as qualities of the society I believe can help to make this a world worth living in. Together they provide the values-based evaluative standards by which I judge whether what I am doing is improving. I still feel there is something lacking in these descriptions, which is why I create a multimedia narrative to communicate more of the energy-flowing nature of values that is difficult to communicate adequately through text alone.

I can describe the activities that comprise my practice and provide you figures to illustrate the extent of my activities as I do in reports for budget holders. That may give you some idea about *what* I do but that doesn't answer the question, *how* do I contribute? To understand *how* I contribute requires an understanding of *what* I do (my activities) but more importantly it requires an understanding of *why* I do what I do. This requires an explanation as you might expect to find in an account of my living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989). My living educational theory (foreshortened to living theory) is the values-based explanation I give of my educational influence in learning, my own, other peoples, and the local and global social formations I am part of. In sharing my research I hope you and I might come to a better and generative and transformational understanding of my energy-flowing, life-affirming and life-enhancing values that gives meaning in practice to *how* I contribute to improving educational relationships, space and opportunities. As Eisner (1993) said:

'We do research to understand. We try to understand in order to make our schools better places for both the children and the adults who share their lives there.' (p.10)

Although I would go further and say I do research to try to understand in order to make this world, not just our schools, a better place to be for all.

It is difficult to step out of the traditional form of research in education, which tries to isolate and quarantine the influence of individuals, and accept responsibility for the influence we each have by our unique presence in the world and as Gandhi said, 'Be the change you want to see in the world'. It is very difficult to resist the academic and social pressures to work with a methodology and epistemology that are inappropriate for researching to contribute to improving educational practice.

I agree with Biesta (2006) that language is problematic as we have a language of 'learning' where learning is associated with acquisition rather than creation of knowledge. What we need to develop is a language appropriate for developing what is

educational about education. I am not saying that educators at times, within their educational practice, do not appropriately employ instruction, training and schooling. I am distinguishing an educator's practice as educational by their focused concern with the supporting the learner learning to develop talents, expertise and knowledge associated with living a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for self and others. The knowledge to which I refer is knowledge of the world, of self, and self in and of the world, created and offered as a gift. Gifts and talents are values-laden words. By using the words gifts and talents I want to maintain a clear connection between enhancing learning and education as a life-affirming and life-enhancing values-based activity and show what I am meaning by developing inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision.



In this collage you can see represented some of the activities that are part of what I do to support children and young people develop and follow their personal(ised) curriculum through which they develop talents to create knowledge of the world, them self and them self in and of the world. I am not simply trying to give a window into the world of my work; I am trying to communicate human qualities such as vitality, humour, warmth, love, curiosity, creativity, surprise, enquiry, pride, interconnectedness, sustained effort, a vibrant flow of a loving life-affirming and life-enhancing energy... I ask you to hold the feelings of pleasure and energy I hope these pictures evoke as you engage with this paper. These living human qualities and values, so poorly communicated through simple words on a page, are what distinguish the knowledge I seek to offer as educational. I want to communicate throughout this paper, qualities such as warmth, love, and humour that carries the flow of energy, which is life-affirming and life-enhancing and should be at the core of improving educational theory, practice, provision and policy. There is something about humour that can evoke a healthy physical and psychological sense of well-being and well-

being flowing with life-affirming energy. Bateson (1952) in his paper, 'The Position of Humor in Human Communication', noted:

'One of the rather curious things about *home sapiens* is laughter, one of the three common convulsive behaviours of people in daily life, the others being grief and orgasm.' (p.2)

There is a quality of humour that communicates what I have been trying to say about the contribution I want to make to educational knowledge. I would like to keep this sense of pleasure and the connection with this brief visual narrative of some of the activities that constitute my practice creating and supporting educational relationships, space and opportunities for and with children and young people.



This picture was taken at a Saturday workshop, which is part of a programme of learning opportunities I organise for children and young people. It offers an example of I have used it a lot on posters and in presentations as it reminds me of the quality of education that is important to me and provides an eye catching challenge to the preconceptions of those I work with. When I look at it, it brings to mind the buzz of small children filling the large school hall with their presence in contrast to the rest of the school building, which has a hollow emptiness of the weekend. The floor is strewn with colour, fabric, materials, equipment and people. The space echoes with their humour, excitement and enthusiasm for what they are creating and who they are in communion with.

It communicates to me the complexity of life that schools and authority have so much difficulty in being at peace with and the surprises, humanity and uniqueness of people that procedures of accountability seem to remove. That is what I want to achieve – to enable children to surprise themselves and others with the pleasure of creating the person they are and want to be in and of the world, the life they want to live and the quality of the contribution they can make.

I like the word 'passion' as it carries with it a sense of energy. I contend that aptitude (what I appear to find easy to learn) will go nowhere without energy, whatever the source of that passionate energy be it consuming curiosity, dedication to an ideal, family, love... In that I agree with Vasilyuk (1991). What follows are examples of how I have enabled children and young people to hear their own voice and begin to recognise and pursue their own personal(ised) curriculum, which may become life-long.

Evidence of the educational influence in the learning of young people can be seen in the presentation to the 14-19 strategy managers of two of the first group of AS Extended Project students and the second group working with Sally Cartwright (Cartwright, 2008). I give an account of this in a paper published in the Educational Journal of Living Theories (Huxtable, 2009).



Young people offering their talents and knowledge as gifts 2009

This clip is of a group of young people who worked with Vicky Tucker (who shares an account of her educational learning which she submitted for accreditation as part of her Master's (Tucker, 2008) when she worked with the CPD group I have run with Jack since 2005). It is of their presentation at the end of APEX Summer 2009 <http://tinyurl.com/3lb588z> when they had 10 minutes to share what they had learned during the four day module with an audience of 500 or so, comprising other 'APEXers', family and visitors.



Young people offering their talents and knowledge as gifts 2010 <http://tinyurl.com/3moff2p> .

This clip is of a group who worked with Vicky a year later. I believe this offers evidence of the appreciation of the young people of themselves, their talents, themselves as knowledge creators, their ability and willingness to offer their talents and knowledge as gifts to others. These clips are particularly important to me, as the young people have been researching questions that have brought them closer to understanding their own values and how they may want to make a difference that is important to them. I believe you get a sense of the expression of Vicky's values and her educational influence in her own learning and those of young people she is working with. Vicky worked with Jack Whitehead and myself to successfully submit her Masters assignment, 'A response as to how my involvement with the Gifted and Talented programme initiated by Bath and North East Somerset has made me re-assess my living educational values and beliefs, thus influencing my delivery and provision for the SEBD students with whom I work' (Tucker, 2008). She concluded her assignment with, 'Although this particular account has concluded the journey for knowledge and educational influence continues and will continue throughout my life.' I believe you can see this expressed in the following two video excerpts I have included here.

The next clip is of one young person presenting to peers and teachers what she had learned through her enquiry sparked by a collaborative, creative enquiry day with Jack Whitehead, Andrew Henon and myself in the Guildhall, Bath, 2009



Video 18 Young person sharing her passion-led enquiry

<http://tinyurl.com/4ygf6o8>

I believe you can see this young person sharing the knowledge she has created as a result of having begun to engage in knowledge creating research and an explanation of why it is important to her. I feel the sense of pleasure and confidence she expresses shows her presenting herself to herself as she offers her talents and knowledge as gifts to her peers, teachers Jack Whitehead and myself.



Young person communicating energy-flowing values

<http://tinyurl.com/3z6ec8d>

This clip is of an AS Extended Project student responding to questions having presented his paper to a participating audience. Again he shows a confidence and pleasure in what he is doing. I can feel him extending himself a loving recognition, making respectful connectedness with his audience and expressing an educational responsibility for himself as he explains his research. He has chosen the subject of his research and I feel the importance this has for him with respect to his values.

In watching these clips I feel an empathetic resonance with the pleasure of the children and young people in presencing themselves to themselves in valuing and offering the knowledge they have created of the world, themselves and themselves in and of the world, as a gift to themselves and others. In these videos I believe I can see evidence that my work has contributed to enhancing the life and learning adventures and journeys of these children and young people, learning to living loving lives that are satisfying, productive and worthwhile. That is how I know I am making a difference that matters to me.

I am not intending to imply that the biggest influence in their educational learning could be attributed to me. Rather I am claiming that I have contributed to their learning by bringing their teacher into the educational space of the Masters group with Jack Whitehead, supporting and encouraging her on her learning journey and adventure and creating the opportunity for Sally and her students to learn with Jack to engage in their own educational research and in an educational research community.

I concede that the values that some people may hold may not be from a life-enhancing and life-affirming source. The work of Crompton (2010) drawing on Schwartz makes the distinction between values that are intrinsic and those that are instrumental. He contends that we each hold many values, some of which are in conflict but recognising and resolving in practice these conflicts is what enables us to contribute to making this a better world for us all. For children and young people particularly there are times in their live when their instrumental values are given precedence so they are in a position to make a living and get the their needs met that are at the lower

levels of Maslow's hierarchy. However, that is not to say they have to be encouraged to abandon their intrinsic values.

When Samantha Etheridge talked about her values at one of the Masters group sessions what she said resonated deeply:



Loving what you do

<http://tinyurl.com/3vx03zr>

'I just love being happy I think. My Dad had his own little business and we hardly saw him as kids. When we got a bit older he quit that and just took a little low paid job. He said to us never work for money if you have the choice. Never work for money because you spend the majority of your life at work and if you don't enjoy it and you are only there to earn the cash the life that you have out of your work you'll never be able to spend the cash you earn so you will never be happy.

If you ever have the choice work for the love of it and so I took his advice and went to work for the health service. I loved it. It was great after I graduated. I've always taken that road - I want to be happy and I think everyone should have the right to be happy in what they do and it shouldn't be something you are ashamed of, loving what you.

When I worked in the Psyche Unit we had to have psychotherapy. We were obliged to be offered it but not to take it but we had this great guy called Neville and we always used to say that the nursing staff had a go at us because we always laugh when we are working and they say that it is detrimental because it shows we are larking about and not concentrating.

But he said that it shows great confidence in who you are and what you do if you can laugh as you are working and maybe it was your own insecurity if you couldn't laugh at work. So I've always thought it was OK to laugh at work at any given point.

So loving what I do being happy and excited being allowed to be creative being encouraged to be creative all those things that's why I get up and come to work.'

I feel Sam's Dad and Sam are saying something very important for me; adults able to work with love and good humour for what they were doing, able to enjoy, to have a sense of pleasure and well-being, doing something they value with the possibility of

being valued by others as they live and earn a living. That is what I want for all, not just a privileged and lucky few.

The responses of young people at the conference Living Learning 2011: Developing Research Skills for Life, <http://livinglearningconference.info/>, show how introducing them, even in very brief workshops to living theory research, opens possibilities for them to begin to develop and follow their own personal(ised) curriculum as they engage with the given curriculum and gain qualifications offered to them by school. This is one example of their reflections on the day in the form of a poster.



Finally I want to give you one more example of a primary school, which opened the possibility for their pupils to follow their own passion-led learning following a workshop for children and adults to learn collaboratively to research to make a difference that matters to learning and life. Their account which follows shows how they have enabled the children to begin to experience the motivation, participation in learning, and a sense of wellbeing by learning by beginning to develop and follow their personal(ised) curriculum while making progress with acquiring the skills and content of the given curriculum:

Gifted and talented provision at St Keyna

Report by Megan Morris (Lead Teacher for Inclusion) and Adrienne Hughes (Head teacher) 30th June 2010

How do we define what it means to be 'gifted and talented'? Are we talking about our 'bright' pupils who achieve highly in academic subjects? Are these the children whose names should be on a Gifted and Talented Register?

That is one way to think about gifts and talents.

Perhaps a more inclusive and wide reaching approach is to begin from the premise that all children and gifts and talents, and that our responsibility as educators is to ensure that all our pupils are given opportunities that:

- Enable them to discover what they are good at and passionate about
- Allow them to explore their talents and gifts
- Engage, stretch and challenge them in a wide range of subjects and learning situations
- Encourage them to develop skills of resilience, independence and perseverance
- Develop their skills and understanding of themselves and the ways in which they and others learn

Year 4 G&T project

A discussion about gifted and talented provision between Adrienne and myself resulted in us thinking about how we could increase children's engagement with learning, improve their ability to work independently and work on projects that were child initiated. The year 4 children had created mind-maps of their gifts, talents, difficulties and passions and this stimulated the discussion too. It had been interesting to see the children's own assessments and reflections, but also illuminating to see how excited they were at having an opportunity to say what they wanted to say about themselves and their learning.

Soon afterwards we attended a workshop entitled 'Making a Difference that Matters in Learning and Lives' led by Marie Huxtable. At Marie's suggestion we took a group of Year 4 pupils with us. During the morning both children and adults were encouraged to think about what excites them and what they feel passionate about. Each participant was given a high quality sketchbook to use as a planning/thinking/learning journal, and a variety of writing and drawing tools to use. The children loved this, enjoyed talking about themselves and again we discovered things about their interests, thinking and personal skills that we didn't really know before. The children also loved being 'taken care of' through the provision of lovely refreshments – as well as being related to like adults, listened to and treated very respectfully. It made them feel special.

We decided to share what we'd experienced with the rest of the class, and tried to make it feel special and different in the same way we had been treated. Rather than being adult led we asked the children who had attended the workshop to lead, and to help their classmates do what they had done. This was a great session, and we were yet again surprised at the children's ability to speak with confidence, share what they had learned and plan for their own learning.

We also realised that to enable the children to research and progress their learning needed to access high quality ICT resources, so the school bought a new set of 16 laptops. These proved to be not only essential but absolutely invaluable in facilitating independent learning. The children were delighted to use them and christened them the 'anti-jam laptops'!

Then came the scary bit – we decided to let them continue what they had begun and start to research and learn about their own individual interests and passions. For us, as teachers, this felt scary because we began with no clear learning objectives and it was impossible to closely monitor what children were doing when there were at least 26 different topics under investigation!

What we did feel clear about was:

- We wanted the children to become more independent, making their own choices and decisions, finding what they needed and planning their own learning.
- We wanted to see the excitement and engagement we'd seen at the workshop continue.

How to fit this into a tightly packed curriculum was a problem and involved a bit of risk taking. We decided to dedicate a whole afternoon a week to the project instead of following the PSHE programme – we hope that some of the skills that were learnt would tie in with the PSHE curriculum.

What happened next?

We tried to get the children involved in leading sessions through sharing what they had done or were doing, but also by working with a small group before each session to plan what we needed to do in order to plan for our learning, decide what we wanted to know, how we were going to find out, reflect on what we had achieved, etc. This was hard to do and involved lunchtime meetings with them. However it was worth the effort because all the children became more confident, were keen to lead discussions and activities, were able to share what they were doing and a natural outcome of this has been that every Thursday lunchtime the children set up the room themselves and prepare their learning environment independently.

At this stage we learnt a lot about children's personal qualities:

- Confidence
- Ability to speak in front of others
- Listening skills
- Ability to articulate what they wanted to say
- Ability to remember what they had done

The children in turn were interested to know about our learning as adults and we shared our own planning, thinking and learning with them in a way that established us all as 'equals' in the learning process. They loved this and it gave both them and us a very real sense of learning together.

The hardest part was the next step – letting go and allowing the children to start researching and working on their passions. At this point it felt like everything was out of control, I couldn't keep tabs on what each child was doing, couldn't help all the children who were asking for help, was worried that they were just having lots of fun and not really learning anything at all. On a couple of occasions we stopped to reflect on our learning through self-assessment/evaluation exercises – I'm not sure if that

helped me more to feel in slight control again, or the children with learning. I think on reflection that it benefitted us both, because it helped them re-focus their learning and make decisions about what they wanted to do next.

At first we had no clear timescale for the project, and that was both helpful and difficult. Helpful because it meant the children really were learning independently and could take the time they needed to get started (and quite a few make false starts or changed their minds about what they wanted to do).

The children knew they would have to present what they had done – and the first of these opportunities would be through their class assembly. In the last week of term they will be presenting their work to each other.

What the children have learnt

Some of the children learnt about videoing and interviewing as part of the project. The intention is for them to do more of this and teach each other until all children have learnt videoing skills. A surprising result of this work was discovering that some children are really good at listening to each other and asking questions. Others were good at camera work. Others were good at sharing their skills with each other. What was surprising was that those who were good were not the ones we expected – we learnt more about individual children's strengths.

Also, children with SEN have demonstrated qualities and abilities (e.g. confidence to speak to a large audience, ability to interview others meaningfully, create power points with visual and sound effects, create large pieces of text) that have had a powerful effect on their self-esteem and self belief. Other children, who are high achievers but had some social difficulties, have learnt to work with others and have been delighted to put themselves in a helping role and teach others – as well as discovering that there were things they could learn from other children.

In addition the children learnt (this is from their own reflections and largely uses their own words):

1. ICT skills – especially to do with Power Point, but also combining text and images to make an informative 'learning page', and how to use the internet
2. Factual knowledge about their own and others' topics of interests that learning is fun
3. About themselves and other people – both about personal qualities (perseverance, patience, ability to teach others, to be able to stand in front of other people and not to be embarrassed, to be brave when standing in front of a crowd) and capabilities (that people are different, some people are good teachers, what people are interested in and good at, learn about people because we talk to each other, to talk to the teachers, to like the teachers, we can teach a teacher, some people are good at helping others)
4. How to use a video camera
5. How to research, how to find out things
6. PSHE skills – co-operation, collaborative working, listening to each other and asking questions, to work together in a good way, to be nice to each other, to never give up, to always listen well, to behave yourself, to be good
7. That they are good at things

8. Literacy skills, spelling
9. Science skills
10. How to compose a song and music, how to do magic tricks, how to make a poster, how to make a club

ICT, Literacy and research skills were a real feature of this learning, but the PSHE skills and understanding that were acquired and reflected upon by the children was impressive. What was really amazing was to observe how they worked with each other, helped each other and shared skills and knowledge. For the first 8 weeks of this project there were no behaviour warnings or sanctions given at all. Since then, one child with challenging behaviour has had to be disciplined, but only on two occasions.

Comments from children that are particularly gratifying include

- I am good at teaching
- I can learn one little thing from someone and then teach everybody
- Learning myself is fun
- I can co-operate with other people
- I never felt clever at the start and at the end I did
- Even when things are hard I kept going
- I know how to work well with people
- I learnt that other people can help me
- I have learnt that I am a good writer
- I learnt that I am good at learning
- I can do stuff that grown ups do
- I can believe in myself
- I can be more patient sometimes
- I'm really good with research
- I can not be shy in front of people
- I learnt how much people like me
- I learnt how proud people can be of me
- I get annoyed easily
- I know about lots of different things
- I can help other people in their learning

Where next?

We need to work out how we take children's learning further and develop their skills. We need to:

- Deepen learning – most children have researched at their level, and some have still not grasped the difference between informed research and their own opinions/beliefs
- Help children to use a process of learning that develops problem solving skills and gives them a framework to use in other situations – perhaps through the TASC approach or a modified version of it
- Help children develop skills of using time, imagination and research opportunities even more effectively
- Try and understand what the processes of learning are and how they are working – so that we can encourage and develop them

- Understand better how we can focus on the learning (and the skills and understanding acquired in that process) rather than the result
- Work out how we can give time for learning – slow learning
- Develop relationships of trust, warmth and mutual respect – between pupils and between adults and children
- How to be truly creative in our approach to learning – seeing mistakes and contradictions as opportunities for creative thinking rather than something to be rectified.

Schools have been continually exhorted, by the national gifted and talented strategy, to identify and register gifted and talented students. I have set out elsewhere why I believe identifying and creating a register of a minority of children labelled as gifted and/or talented is at best irrelevant and at worst damaging to individuals and to the context and culture in which they learn. Some schools chose to ignore, others to comply but neither response offers generative or transformational possibilities. I struggled with the conundrum of how to help schools develop a response that could contribute to the development of a supportive educational context and culture, while being politically prudent. I came to a notion of an inclusive and educational register of gifts and talents.

To develop an inclusive educational gifted and talented register is consistent with the development of personal(ised) curricula and inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian education. Developing such a register contributes to a culture where each learner is recognised as having a valued and valuable contribution to their own learning and that of others. To populate such a register requires that a teacher expresses their educational responsibility for themselves and towards the learner by seeking to recognise the child or young person's best intent and afford them a loving recognition through at least a conversation with each pupil about what is important to them, what talents they want to develop, what talents they have been developing, what talents they want to offer as gifts to others. In the process every child and young person has an opportunity to experience the pleasure of developing and offering their talents and knowledge as gifts to themselves and others and enjoy the affirmation of having their gifts appreciatively engaged with.

In the process of developing and offering talents and knowledge as gifts learners deepen their knowledge of their values, passions and the self they are and want to be in and of the world. In making public their work in the progress and learning collaboratively and creatively with other, they also contribute to an inclusive, emancipating, egalitarian culture of learning. A further example of how this translates into my practice is offered by the www.livinglearning.org.uk website. Examples of narratives of educators research journeys following their own personal(ised) curriculum to improve their practice can be found on <http://www.actionresearch.net> - which brings me to the second part of this paper.

How do I enable learners and educators to offer the knowledge they create as educational gifts to enhance their own learning and wellbeing, that of others and the communities of which they are a part?

Through the process of researching to evolve my living theory praxis I create knowledge not only of the world to understand and make it a better place to live. I also create knowledge of my self, a knowledge of that complex ecology within comprising, amongst other understandings: my values; what gives me satisfaction; my talents and aspirations; motivations; attachments; the stories and narratives I tell that explain my self to my self; and knowledge of my self in and of the world, that is how I am and want to be living a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile.

A living theory account is concerned with creating and offering as a gift the knowledge created through researching praxis to improve praxis. In evolving my living theory praxis I have created such accounts as multimedia narratives. I have learned from the gifts Jack Whitehead has made public on his website <http://www.actionresearch.net> and have been inspired to offer what I can on my website, <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite>. Like Jack my purpose is not to create and offer knowledge to satisfy my ego but rather it is to give expression to the responsibility I have to enable others to take from narratives of my learning journeys to enhance their own learning and wellbeing and in that way enhance the learning of the world I am part of.

I have encouraged others to do the same and as a consequence you have access to the gifts of others such as Sonia Hutchison from <http://www.spanglefish.com/soniahutchison>, Jacqueline Delong from <http://www.spanglefish.com/ActionResearchCanada> and Moira Laidlaw from <http://www.spanglefish.com/moiralaidlaw>.

So, as you may have gathered, I believe it is important to not only create knowledge of self, the world and self in the world but to offer what has been created as a gift with the hope of contributing to making the world a better place to be. It is both a selfless and selfish act; in the process of creating, offering and accepting gifts a person can come to recognise, value and enhance the knowledge they have created beyond what is possible when it remains ephemeral and unarticulated. There is something very important about talking the walk and articulating thoughts clearly enough to create an account that communicates to others beyond the moment. To create and offer such an educational gift that enhances learning however takes energy. Given the stresses and strains of dealing with the urgent creating such an account can be relegated to the backburner for that fanciful ‘when I have time’, which never comes. A spur is often needed. Making a commitment to creating an account for a purpose, such as for accreditation, or a paper for a journal, or a presentation at a conference, can be the motivator needed to make time for what is important. To provide an energising focus is one of the motivations I have had for developing the opportunity for educators to create accounts that can be legitimated through a university as a recognised CPD. I have enabled educators to create and offer their knowledge as educational gifts to the profession by supporting them to work on accounts as part of their Masters with Jack Whitehead who makes their work public on his website, <http://www.actionresearch.net>.

I have also encouraged and supported others to research their practice and make their knowledge public. By researching as Living Theory researchers educational practitioners, not directly involved with children and young people keep connection with, recognise and show the educational influence they want to have in the learning and lives with children and young people. Nigel Harrison (Manager of the Education and Inclusion Service) in his BERA 2011 paper (Harrison, 2011), shows how he is taking responsibility for his learning to improve his practice. Chris Jones (senior inclusion officer) in her Master dissertation (Jones, 2009) shows how she is taking for her learning to improve her practice in the creation of a multimedia account of her living theory as she stepped beyond the given curriculum and offered a creative contribution to the learning of the university where she was registered. Kate Kemp (Pupils Support Manager) in her assignment as part of her SENCO accredited course had the courage and commitment to take responsibility for her educational influence in her own learning to make an original and creative response beyond the given curriculum as you can see in as she presents her account in the form of a letter to her tutor which begins:

‘Dear Tony,

You may remember that I wrote to you last July on completion of my portfolio for the National Award in SEN Coordination to express some of my concerns and frustrations about the portfolio process. I said in that letter:

‘...I think my frustration lies in that what is being assessed in the portfolio is my knowledge of ‘stuff’ (information, legislation, categorisation, procedures, assessment, strategies etc etc). What is not being assessed is my ‘embodied knowledge’ - by this I mean *how* and *why* I do what I do’. (letter from Kate Kemp to Tony Caston, 20.7.10). You replied to me in an email on to say:

‘I just had a quick look at your letter and understand what you are driving at. The LO’s are clearly a competence-based set of standards, resembling a detailed job description and, as you rightly point out, do not get to the heart of being a SENCO. I am sure that you will be able to demonstrate this more in your case study’

(email from Tony Caston to Kate Kemp, 27.8.10)

Therefore in this further (rather longer!) letter I want to ‘get to the heart of being a SENCO’ or rather more specifically the heart of me being a SENCO.’ (Kemp, 2011)

One of the motivations for developing <http://www.livinglearning.org.uk> has been to provide a valued space for adults, young people and children to share and support knowledge created through their passion-led enquiry. By creating and making public articles of their learning as it evolves, learners of all ages are able to enhance their own learning and wellbeing and that of others and a wider community of people who share their enthusiasm. By sharing their research in progress educators and their pupils learn collaboratively while each pursues their own personal(ised) and life-long curriculum to live a satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others. I have enabled them to offer the knowledge they create as educational gifts by introducing them to a synthesis of a Living Theory approach to action research (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) and TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context), developed by Belle Wallace (Wallace and Adams, 1993), and multimedia narratives as the means of both collecting data and communicating.

This is the Living Theory approach to action research from Whitehead I draw on:

What is my concern?

Why am I concerned?

What am I going to do about it?

What data will I gather to help me to judge my effectiveness?

How does the data help me to clarify the meanings of my embodied values as these emerge in practice?

What values-based explanatory principles do I use to explain my educational influence?

How do I use my values-based standards of judgment in evaluating the validity of my claims to be improving my practice?

How will I strengthen the validity of my values-based explanations of my educational influences in learning?

This diagram shows the steps of enquiry of TASC:



As I have worked to enhance my own understandings in practice of TASC (Wallace and Adams, 1993) and Living Theory research I have come to understand a disciplined process of enquiry that holds the organic and systematic phases of research together and where ends and means are consistent:

‘Education *for* democracy can only be developed by education *through* democracy...’ (Wallace and Adams, 1993, p.2)

The diagrammatic representation of TASC (Wallace, 2004) given above is attractive, neat and colourful. However, I agree with the children working with Joy Mounter

(Mounter, 2007) that it does not communicate the multidimensional, interrelated flow that is the actuality of their learning. They built a model and used colour to show the flow. They represented the eruption of learning and knowledge created up through the centre, the heart of the enterprise, as a shower of sparks on what is in the present and future.



You can get a better sense of the children's learning theory by reading Joy's account and engaging with the videos of three of her pupils explaining their theory as it is evolving as they communicate their meanings with and to each other. These clips are to be found in the Appendix (Mounter, 2007)

'You can access the clip:

'What use is the TASC Wheel?'



at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH2-5xexbAQ>

and you can access the clips:

'What do you think of the TASC Wheel?'



at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti4syOrIDdY>



and at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSqg1phEEaM>

I have not made such a brilliant and three-dimensional model so you have to use your imagination more in understanding Living Theory TASC as multidimensional and forming, I have been told, a zero spiral knot.



I believe as Medawar (1969) says:

‘The purpose of scientific enquiry is not to compile an inventory of factual information, nor to build up a totalitarian world picture of natural Laws in which every event that is not compulsory is forbidden. We should think of it rather as a logically articulated structure of justifiable beliefs about nature. It begins as a story about a Possible World – a story which we invent and criticise and modify as we go along, so that it ends by being, as nearly as we can make it, a story about real life.’(p. 59)

In bringing TASC and a Living Theory approach to action research together I am seeking to develop a research method that:

- Holds together the organic and systematic phases of my living research in a relationally dynamic multidimensional manner;
- Connects research to create knowledge of the world, self and self in and of the world.

For simplicity of reference I call this method Living Theory TASC. I give an account of Living Theory TASC in, 'Living Theory and TASC: a multidimensional, inter and intra-relational, flowing knot of enquiry' (Huxtable, 2008c).

So, to conclude I seek to enable learners and educators to offer the knowledge they create as educational gifts to enhance their own learning and wellbeing, that of others and the communities of which they are a part, by walking my own talk. I research my own practice and create and offer knowledge as an educational gift to enhance my own learning, that of others and that of the social formation I am part of by making public through events, publications and my own website.

Conclusion

Marx said, 'Hitherto, philosophers have sought to understand the world; the point, however, is to change it.' Through evolving my living theory praxis I seek in the process of understanding the world to understand my self and my self in and of the world to change all for the better. While this knowledge is rarely articulated it is embodied and communicates influentially in all a person does. If you need evidence of the efficacy of my claim think of people you know whose presence is felt as sunshine or thunder, whose understandings carry hope or blight, whose influence destroys or enhances. Ginott (1972) wrote: 'It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather.' (p.15). It is no less true in life as it is in the classroom. I have explained in this paper how that responsibility and research my living theories to enhance my contribution to improving educational relationships, space and opportunities.

I have shown how Living Theory research offers a way for the practitioner to understand their embodied ontological values as explanatory principles and living standards of judgment in the process of researching to improve their practice. As they recognise their embodied values and beliefs they search for evidence of their influence with the anticipation of recognising when and how they are living contradictions so they can develop practice to enhance their educational influence.

In the process of developing educational relationships I seek to encourage educators and learners to research and offer the life-affirming and life-enhancing knowledge they create. Sometimes that gift might be offered to an unknown other in the living boundary between self and the world provided by the web, other times it may be offered only to a few in a negotiated space such as provided by the research communities or only to self. None-the-less creating a research account that can communicate beyond self deepens and holds the possibility of evolving the learning of each and all.

The paper is offered as a contribution to educational research through its creative use of multi-media narrative/s to understand and communicate the meanings of values. These values, flowing with life-affirming and life-enhancing energy, explain why I do what I do. I have also offered a relationally dynamic approach to research.

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