

How do I create a generative response to the implementation of the Department of Children Schools and Families' (DCSF) Gifted and Talented strategy?

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Abstract

I am seeking to improve my practice co-ordinating and developing the implementation of my local authority's inclusive gifted and talented policy. At the same time I am expected to support schools to develop responses to government expectations of practice which can exclude and disenfranchise learners from their own learning and lives. I describe the development of a generative response that is based on values and carries energy and hope of educational transformations. I offer evidence of progress and an explanation that focuses on the living values of individuals and those expressed within national strategies and the quality of educational relationships. I bring in a multi-media analysis to support my explanation.

Introduction

Irrespective of where we live I believe we all face the challenge of working with impositions and constraints. I am learning to find a way, which rather than sapping my will to live, fills me with an optimistic energy for continuing to work in education. I hope to communicate some of this through this paper.

I start by introducing myself and telling you something of my context. Then I describe my understanding of inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented education and the experiences I believe help all children to develop their talents and create and offer gifts, to their own and everyone's benefit.

I then outline my research methodology and how I came to it. Employing a living theory approach to action research (Whitehead, 2007) I go on to describe my concern, why I am concerned and what I have done about it.

I describe what I mean by a response that generates hopeful and productive activity, and offer evidence of the progress I am claiming to be making and an explanation I give for my practice. I take an explanation to be constituted by the reasons for why I do what I do. The explanatory principles I use as reasons for why I do what I do are composed of energy and values. They include my understandings of the social, historical and cultural contexts in which I live and work. I use my explanatory principles as the criteria I would like you to use in judging the quality and validity of my account - do I communicate: -

- A sense of my understanding of the social, historical and cultural contexts I live and work in
- Me as the person I am and wish to express through my practice
- What I have done that is making an improvement,
- The educational values by which I am judging improvement
- A living educational theory I am offering to explain the progress in my learning and practice.

- My living theory methodology for exploring the implications of asking, researching and responding to my question, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’

Background

I am a senior educational psychologist coordinating and developing the ‘gifted and talented’ educational provision in a small English Local Authority. The area can be traversed by car in about 45 minutes (traffic and cows permitting) and includes a World Heritage city, small towns and villages. The education establishments include schools with 50 to 1,200 pupils, a couple of further education colleges and a couple of universities. The authority is considered high attaining and rarely qualifies for government funding connected with under-attainment or social disadvantage.

I bring to my work a personal commitment to the inclusive and un-limiting sentiments expressed in my own local authority’s vision,

‘We want all Children and Young People to do better in life than they ever thought they could. We will give children and young people the help that they need to do this’ (Bath and North East Somerset Local Authority, 2005)

My contribution to improving the quality of the educational experience of children and young people is in developing, supporting and spreading inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice. By ‘inclusive’ I mean an educational context where all are valued and enabled to benefit from, and contribute to, their own learning and that of others. When I talk of ‘inclusional’ I am working with Rayner’s (2006) idea of a dynamic relational awareness of space and boundaries, which are connective, reflexive and co-creative.

I understand gifts and talents not as the defining categories of traditional theory and practice but as living educational concepts; dynamic, evolving, inter-relational and based on values. Ikeda (2004) expresses something of this kind in this extract,

‘Everyone has some kind of gift. Being talented does not mean just being a good musician, writer or athlete. There are many kinds of talent. You may be a great conversationalist, or make friends easily, or be able to put others at ease. Or you may have a gift for telling jokes, selling things or living economically. You may be punctual, patient, reliable, kind or optimistic. Or you may love taking on new challenges, be strongly committed to helping others, or have an ability to bring them joy. Without doubt, you possess your special jewel, your own unique talent. In the same way, each of us has a mission that only we can fulfil. That mission will not be found somewhere far away, in doing something special or extraordinary. Even those people who seem to have led great lives have really only done what they felt they had to do in order to truly be themselves.

We realize our purpose in life by doing our very best where we are right at this moment, by thinking about what we can do to improve the lives of those right around us.’ (p. 4)

I work from the premise that all children and young people hold within themselves the possibility of living a satisfying and productive life and the ability to make a valued and valuable contribution to their own life and the life of us all. I believe there is no predetermined limit as to what that contribution might be. I do not mean that I believe a child is able to grow up to achieve anything they might choose, rather I believe it is not possible to predict what they might achieve during their lifetime given opportunity and their determined inclination and commitment to realising their aspirations. My purpose as an educator is to open the imaginations of children and young people to the various possibilities of living satisfying and productive lives so they can make informed decisions as to what they want to do as they enter the adult world.

I believe each individual is the only one who can determine whether their life is satisfying and productive, and they do so according to his or her own living values as standards by which to make such judgements. When I refer to living values as standards of judgment I do so with reference to Laidlaw (1996) who developed the notion of ‘living’ standards of judgement in creating her living theory. ‘Living theory’ originated with Whitehead (1989); living theories being the explanations produced by individuals for their educational influence in their own learning and in the learning of others and social formations. I see gifted and talented education enabling all children and young people to develop their ability to understand and live lives they find satisfying and productive by focusing on enabling them to develop their talents and create and freely offer gifts.

Having explained briefly my understanding of inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice it beholds to me to describe the talents I am developing. I have been told one is my ability to communicate my enthusiasm for education, as I understand it. The gift I wish to create and offer through this paper is a way of working educationally given the constraints and impositions of the ‘system’. I am coming to understand ‘working educationally’ to include recognising the other, what it is they are wanting to do, the talents they are developing and the gifts they may wish to create and offer others which will enhance their sense of well-being and that of others, the values they are using to determine the quality of the life they are living and wish to live as satisfying and productive. It is connecting them to opportunities to develop their recognition, valuing and learning transformationally about themselves. It is bringing them into receptive≈responsive contact with people, ideas and contexts, which might help them enhance their gifts in creation and offering to others and recognising, valuing and engaging creatively with those of other people.

Coming to a Living Theory Methodology

Understanding the power of forms of thought to shape those thoughts and finding a methodology, which enables me to ask and research the questions important to me, such as, ‘how do I know what educational influence I am having?’, has been a long journey.

Through my work as a school psychologist I was continually faced with irresolvable questions – how could I improve my practice, how did I know whether I was making a difference, how could I research to improve the advice I gave concerning individual children?

I was aware that I could never know, let alone explain someone else’s life, but I could on occasions help them realise what they already knew and develop and test their own explanations. This is the basis of a model for clarifying concerns and interventions that I developed as part of a referral and service delivery system during my life as a school psychologist (Levey and Mallon, 1984, Levey et al, 1986). Therapies such as solution-focussed therapy rest on a similar set of assumptions. I had not made the

leap of imagination to realise that this could enable me to research to improve my practice and evaluating my work.

As I developed my interest in high ability I was again acutely aware that I was unclear about what I was doing that made the difference I wanted to make, what made an educational difference to children's lives, and how I could evaluate the project. I became aware of action research but I did not find anything that was fundamentally different from many of the approaches I had already been working with. In 2004 I had the good fortune to be introduced to Jack Whitehead by a teacher I was working with who was the 'able coordinator' in his school. Coming to understand Living Theory as a method, but more importantly as a methodology (Whitehead, 2008), has enabled me to begin to create responses to questions that have troubled me for decades such as, how can I research to improve my practice, how can I create a generative response to the government strategies while questioning the educational validity of the policies, how can I evaluate my educational influence?

I agree with Bullough and Pinnergar (2001) that 'Determining just what it means to be involved in self-study research has proven very difficult' (p.17). I like what they say about ontology, 'The consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research (Bullough & Pinnergar, 2004 p. 319) I am not concerned here with an academic discussion of living theory in the context of self-study approaches. I am concerned with trying to understand better the influence I can have to improve the educational context and relationships in which children and young people grow given the impositions of national strategies.

I want to be clear about what I mean by methods and methodology as I have found them often confused in the literature. A method I understand to be a tool or procedure used to investigate. A methodology I understand to be a coherent and internally consistent ontological, epistemological and logical approach, which serves to inform the choice of the methods for enquiry and underpins the analysis and understanding of the research. Living Theory as a self-study method (Whitehead, 1989) has enhanced the variety of methods I use to enquire. What has made perhaps the biggest difference to my work is beginning to understand Living Theory as a methodology. Whitehead (2008) clarifies the distinction between an individual's living theory, living theory as a method and living theory as a methodology.

'A distinction can be made between the uniqueness of each individual's living theory and a living theory methodology that can be used to distinguish a theory as a living theory. It is sometimes useful for researchers to be able to identify paradigmatic ideas that can be used to identify the research as belonging to a particular community of enquiry. In using the idea of a living theory methodology I want to stress that this includes the unique contribution of an individual's methodological inventiveness in the creation of a living theory, rather than referring to some overarching set of principles to which each individual's methodology has to conform, in an impositional sense of the word. There are however distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology that include 'I' as a living contradiction, the use of action reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence.'

It is the only methodology that I have found that enables me to ask, research and create improving responses to the questions I am interested in which emerge through enquiry. The questions that can be asked are determined by the nature of the answer that can be understood and the language that can be used to enquire, as much as by the methods of exploration. Whitehead draws on propositional, dialectic

and living/inclusional logics, which provide a coherent rationale for understanding values and energy as explanatory principles which emerge through the enquiry and the development of accounts which communicate them.

What is my concern in this paper?

I am expected to support schools in responding to a national gifted and talented strategy that is an expression of policy that I question as to its educational validity. For instance schools are expected to define, categorise and register 10% of their population and make provision specifically for those on the register. The advice in the national strategy handbook (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2007) is that the register should be reviewed regularly and ‘learners should move on and off the register when appropriate.’ (p.13)

Progress is recognised towards predefined targets drawn from National Curriculum levels particularly in Maths and English. Early classification of children is promoted,

“Membership of the new YG&T Learner Academy is available for learners between the ages of 4 and 19, subject to validation by their school or college. The Learner registers as an associate and submits an online application for full membership to their school or college. The school or college will approve or decline the application, and the learner will be notified in due course. Discussions with the school/college Leading Teacher for G&T may be appropriate.

The DCSF strongly encourages schools and colleges to maintain their own G&T register.”
Retrieved 10th July 2008 from the Young Gifted and Talented website
<http://ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/Content.aspx?contentId=312&contentType=3>

I agree with White (2006) that the beliefs about intelligence and curriculum, which underpin so many of the national strategies and implementation plans, and so much of the practice in schools, have no rational base and are rooted in values of a bygone era when everyone knew their place, divinely bestowed, and behaved accordingly. I find his argument compelling when he asserts:

“...if you look for sound supporting arguments behind them, you will be disappointed. There are no solid grounds for innate differences in IQ; and there are none for the traditional subject-based curriculum.”(p. 1)

In the national strategy there is a tension between the dominant theories and practices, which have their origins with Galton’s notion of ‘intelligence’ reflecting 19th century values (White, 2006), and educational theory arising from modern values. Galton lived in an age of empire, class and predetermined destinies. He developed his theory of intelligence, which subsequently gave rise to the practice of selection for schooling, as an expression of his values. England in the 21st century espouses values of inclusion, emancipation and self-determination but continues to operate, unwittingly, with inappropriate theories and practices in education developed for values of the past.

I share the sense of White’s conclusion,

'The school curriculum is not a thing in itself. It is a vehicle to realise larger aims. ... The school curriculum is – or should be – a vehicle to enable young people not only to lead a fulfilled personal life, but also to help other people, as friends, parents, workers and as citizens, to lead as fulfilled a life as their own' (p. 151)

Educational standards are needed to judge the effectiveness of educational theory and practice. Such standards can only be generated and understood by employing a research methodology that embraces the dynamic inter-relationships between questions, responses, values and people as unique, living, complex entities within living, complex social formations. As Biesta (2007) concludes his paper, *Why "What Works" Won't Work: Evidence-Based Practice And The Democratic Deficit In Educational Research*,

'If we really want to improve the relation between research, policy, and practice in education, we need an approach in which technical questions about education can be addressed in close connection with normative, educational, and political questions about what is educationally desirable.' (p.22)

Why am I concerned?

A number of the practices that schools are expected to implement are exclusive, predefine an individual's learning journey, do not recognise and affirm the learner as capable creators and contributors of valued and valuable knowledge and disenfranchise the learner in their own learning and life. They can also confer labels on children that can have life long consequences (Dweck, 2000).

The notion of a generative response

As I have said I am tasked with enabling schools to develop their responses to the government expectations within the context of the inclusive values expressed through the Every Child Matters agenda. However there is theory and practice that is inconsistent within and between national strategies, some of which is also negating of inclusive and inclusional educational values.

There are many responses that can be made to negating power which don't take you to an optimistic, energising place of creation. Responses that are just oppositional or subversive consume rather than generate energy. Creative compliance can help to hold a space open but perversely creates nothing to bring into the space. The intent behind developing a generative response is not to simply withstand negations of power but it is to use the energy that power offers to generate activity, which is hopeful and productive.

I am learning to create a generative response by keeping my values in focus, identifying these values expressed in the strategies, making contradictions constructively visible, promoting practices which appear consistent with my values, researching my own practice, supporting educators to research theirs and amplifying inclusive and inclusional voices.

To describe the development of my generative response I have to do so in a linear form as though I were on a single clearly directed journey with a discrete point of beginning. In reality I have multiple foci and they are rarely clear; paths intertwine, peter out and arise apparently from nowhere, sometimes run into swamp and fog and sometimes meander without apparent connection. Many people along the way, their thoughts, their way of being, the spore they leave often felt if unacknowledged, have influenced me. So as you read please bear this in mind.

How have I developed a generative response?

In 2006 the government began to signal the imminent role out of the next phase of its gifted and talented education strategy. After many redrafts and with help from colleagues, I sent out this email to all schools to prepare them for what was coming.

The DFES expectations, with respect to 'gifted and talented' education, are that schools:

- *Will use the DFES Quality Standards*
- *Are required to indicate which of their pupils are gifted and talented in their School Census return*

And

- *By September 2007 every secondary school are advised to have a leading teacher and primary schools to have a leading teacher per cluster. Ahead of the September 2007, Local Authorities will work with schools to help identify the leading teachers in preparation for the training.*

Schools are expected to:

- *Have an agreed process for identifying gifted and talented pupils*
- *Ensure that all staff understand this and use it*
- *Keep an accurate record of gifted and talented pupils*
- *Review the gifted and talented cohort regularly*
- *Self-evaluate and update the school's process as necessary*

My focus in coordinating APEX is to contribute to the development of an inclusive educational understanding of the creation of gifts and talents through supporting educators and schools to research answers to two questions:

- *How am I/how is my school, helping all pupils generate, reveal, develop and share their gifts and talents?*
- *How am I/how is my school, improving my/its practice and contributing to an educational environment of quality?*

You will be aware of the advice and training to support challenge in the curriculum provided by the school improvement team, the support to develop an inclusive school through the Inclusion Quality Mark led by Chris Jones (Inclusion Officer), the work that comes under the umbrella of the Participation Sub Group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership chaired by Rosie Dill...

I am seeking to add to that tapestry of support and opportunity by, for instance:

- *Encouraging schools to use the self-evaluation framework offered by the NACE (National Association of Able Children in Education) Challenge Award.*
 - *The next meetings to which all schools are invited are Friday 19th January, 12.30m – 3.30pm, Wellsway School (a secondary school focus), Friday 2nd February 1.15pm – 3.15pm, St Johns RC, Bath, Pultney St (a primary school focus). Cost £0*
- *Supporting educators seeking to improve their practice through practitioner research*
 - *Heads and Hearts in Learning, Making the Link, - a day led by Dr Jack Whitehead, Tuesday 23rd January, Combe Lodge. Cost £85*
 - *Tuesday evenings educational conversations and masters programme 5.15pm-7.00pm University of Bath in 1WN 3.8 led by Dr Jack Whitehead , see the masters programme section of <http://www.actionresearch.net> .cost to teachers £0*
- *Connecting educators with an enthusiasm to creatively engage with children and young people as:*
 - *budding mathematicians - next meeting Thursday 18th January 4.00pm – 5.30pm venue to be confirmed, facilitated by Sarah Savage, consultant – cost £0*
- *Informing schools about P.A.S.S. (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School), which can contribute to amplifying the pupil's voice.*
 - *Information about P.A.S.S. and a list of schools which have purchased it are on the APEX website <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/apex> . The next users support group meeting will be arranged in the new year.*
- *Organising the APEX Saturday workshops, summer schools and collaborative, creative enquiries and sharing understandings of developing quality learning opportunities beyond the curriculum*
 - *Information about the Summer School and Saturday Workshop programme is on the APEX website.*
 - *Workshop on developing quality learning opportunities beyond the curriculum on Thursday 1st March, 9.00am – 12.30pm, Roman Baths led by Lindsey Braidley (Museum Service) and Marie Huxtable (APEX), cost £20pp*

I will update you in the New Year with the developing programme which I hope will contribute to your possibility of creatively engaging with the challenge offered by the DFES to continue to improve educational practice from the bedrock of your educational values and theories.

I took heart from the response of a head-teacher who emailed saying:

'I think you've given schools a really strong clear way of creating a climate for learners in 'generating, revealing, developing and sharing each others' gifts and talents'

As I talked with other people they enabled me to be mindful that those with national power and influence share the educational values I am trying to live in my practice. For instance, another head-teacher showed me the statement of values in the National Curriculum: Handbook for primary teachers in England. I hope that this extract will show you why I felt an optimistic surge of hope; what we are trying to do locally through APEX can be recognised as within the national framework, and we are contributing to improving the educational contexts where we are living the visions that inspire us as educators:

'We value ourselves as unique human beings capable of spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical growth and development.

On the basis of these values, we should:

- * develop an understanding of our own characters, strengths and weaknesses*
- * develop self-respect and self-discipline*
- * clarify the meaning and purpose in our lives and decide, on the basis of this, how we believe that our lives should be lived*
- * make responsible use of our talents, rights and opportunities*
- * strive, throughout life, for knowledge, wisdom and understanding*
- * take responsibility, within our capabilities, for our own lives.*

Relationships

We value others for themselves, not only for what they have or what they can do for us. We value relationships as fundamental to the development and fulfilment of ourselves and others, and to the good of the community.

... the document concludes:

Schools and teachers can have confidence that there is general agreement in society upon these values. They can therefore expect the support and encouragement of society if they base their teaching and the school ethos on these values.'

Accessed 20th July 2008 from http://www.nc.uk.net/nc_resources/html/values.shtml

When the Department of Children Schools and Families told local authorities there was an expectation they would 'deliver training' for all teachers leading in improving gifted and talented education in their schools, I worked with local authority advisers and the senior inclusion officer to devise a programme that was consistent with the authority's commitment to inclusive education. A yearlong programme of two introductory days, repeated 3 times to accommodate everyone, and subsequent support through half days was offered. I realised that my voice alone would not be heard so I asked the senior advisers and the head of children's services to send out invitations as well. An extract from the letter to head-teachers gives the flavour,

Can you answer questions such as:-

- What does gifted and talented education mean in your school in practice?*
- Do you have a gifted and talented definition and register?*
- What use are you making of the IQS, CQS and the Challenge Award?*
- How are teachers personalising learning?*
- What use is being made of AfL, thinking skills and dialogue in the classroom to stretch and challenge?*

- *How are teachers identifying underachievement and tracking progress?*

The expectation is you will be able to! The changes are upon us but you can choose to shape the changes or be shaped by them.

The DCSF is expecting *Head Teachers to identify teachers to lead in improving gifted and talented educational provision in their school and the local authority will provide an appropriate CPD programme. The locally delivered programme will cover the points identified in the national package and respond to local needs by tailoring the programme to recognize and value educators as creators of educational knowledge and practice.*

I deliberately included the new acronyms to help communicate that there is something new on the horizon that will demand a response. It was a head-teacher that offered me the phrase which summed up the message I was trying to give,

'The changes are upon us but you can choose to shape the changes or be shaped by them.'

We were successful in engaging the majority of schools at some point.

Over the years I had run 'collaborative, creative enquiries' for children and educators where they shared the space as co-learners variously with authors, mathematicians, scientists and a choreographer. These had been very successful so schools were invited to send teachers with pupils to the programme who might be part of their leading team. A few did and the presence of the children and young people offered an exciting dimension to the learning of us all. For instance the children from a primary school who accompanied their head-teacher have subsequently had the opportunity to be 'a head-teacher' for a day and continue to work with her to improve the learning in the school.

This helped to strengthen the connection of leading the improvement of inclusive gifted and talented education in school with the personalisation and children and young people's voice agendas.

In 2005 I asked Jack Whitehead to re-establish a master's group locally to help teachers develop their own learning as they researched to improve their practice. I was particularly keen to bring teachers into contact with his work as I felt a resonance with his theories and his way of engaging as an educator. I cannot understand how our children are to learn to value themselves as creators of valued knowledge and develop the sophistications of a self-sustaining learner if their teachers are not walking the same road. I could see how Jack was unusual as an educator and academic as he walked his own talk and practiced a pedagogy I believe carries hope of transforming schools as educational contexts for children.

There is now an expectation that teaching will become a master's profession. I could see accredited courses being developed for leading 'gifted and talented' teachers, which I believed would serve to maintain the status quo and divert teachers from educational research. I worked with Jack Whitehead and Chris James at the University of Bath to devise a Teaching Development Agency funded master's unit for gifts, talents and education, tutored by Jack Whitehead and supported by myself. The unit (appendix 1) was specifically designed to value and enhance the teacher's ability to create valuable knowledge and contribute to their own learning and that of the education community, while giving them a recognisable accreditation with respect to leading on improving gifted and talented education

inclusively. This has extended the opportunity for the teachers already working with Jack to further develop their research and complete all their master's modules with him and is attracting others who are starting with an interest in developing their theory and practice as they lead their school in improving inclusive gifted and talented education.

I have so far described procedural details of how I have created a generative response to the implementation of a government strategy. What is missing is a description of the energy that I bring to it. I have been told repeatedly that what I offer is my enthusiasm for the other to recognise what it is they want to develop and offer the world. I believe that people come to see that in different ways, at different times and therefore need diverse opportunities that might sow the seeds of reflective thinking.

I was told by a teacher after a workshop on 'Thinking Skills' that I ran a number of years ago that what she saw me do was 'create and offer a palette' of opportunities. I very much like that description of my work. I am selective about what I add to the palette. I have added, for example, TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) with Belle Wallace, Philosophy for Children with Barry Hymer, living theory action research with Jack Whitehead, approaches to stimulating thinking and questioning with Robert Fisher and Guy Claxton. It is the quality of the person running the sessions, as much as the ideas and practices, which has been influential considerations for me. These people embody many of the qualities I hope I communicate. These are also the qualities I see communicated in the accounts of the educators I work with such as Sally Cartwright (2008), Ros Hurford (2007) and Joy Mounter (2007) and Claire Formby (2007).

Feldman (2007) expresses why these values are important,

'In the present paper I argue that an awareness of their existential freedom allows teachers to act responsibly to construct educational situations that help pupils to become aware of the way that they exist in the world. For this to happen, teachers and their pupils must recognize that each is an individual human being who is situated, whose self emerges through experience and who has freedom to choose.' (p. 239)

It is this sort of open educational enthusiasm I try to maintain rather than an impositional missionary zeal, although with the benefit of hindsight I can see I unintentionally tread over the delicate line between the two more often than is acceptable.

Another way of opening invitational but non-impositional spaces is on the web. I am developing the use of web-spaces to make public the teachers accounts accredited on the masters programme, improve access to resources, extend the influence of other inclusive and inclusional educators and open the possibilities of like minded educators connecting. Different types of website offer different possibilities. I established a space on the local authority website <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/apex> a number of years ago for the project when the opportunity arose. As part my research programme I am making accessible material, resources and writings as I come across them as well as sharing some of my own learning journey on <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite> . I am experimenting with wiki-spaces for collaborative enquiries and have just started a space <http://www.spanglefish.com/yourlivinglearningresearch> for educators, children and young people to connect and share their enquiries and living theory accounts and a mail-list for those interested in sharing inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and research.

Evidence of progress

I will present evidence of my improving practice through the creation of a generative response, which has extended access for teachers to transformational continued professional development (CPD), developed the educational influence of inclusive and inclusional educators in the authority and enhanced educational relationships.

I take Whitehead's point about the difference of 'showing evidence of influence' rather than 'measures of impact'. As my standards of judgment are relational and dynamic I use video narratives as evidence of progress.

Extending access for teachers to transformational continued professional development

The first two accounts have been accredited at masters level and contribute to the growth of the knowledge base for educators locally and nationally developing inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice.

Vicky Tucker (2008) - *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.*

<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/vickytuckerg&t.pdf> (SEBD - Social, Emotional and Behavior Difficulties)

Ros Hurford (2008) - *How does using philosophy and creative thinking enable me to recognise and develop inclusive gifts and talents in my pupils?*

<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/roshurfordg&t.pdf>

I feel a sense of pleasure in reading the accounts of what the teachers have achieved and offer. I know the time and dedication that it took for the teachers to create them, the openness to self-challenge and the courage to make their learning public. I also feel a pleasure of affirmation that they have drawn on the project I have nurtured for years to enhance their work.

Other teachers are now registering to create their accounts and at my request the programme is extending next year to offer evening sessions and half-day a term sessions during school time with TDA (Teacher Development Agency) funding.

Developing the educational influence of inclusive and inclusional educators in the authority.

Over the years I have brought national and internationally known educators into the authority to work with teachers locally. The influence they have had can be seen in the accounts of the teachers involved in the master's programme with their references to TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) developed by Belle Wallace (2004), P4C (Philosophy for Children) introduced by Barry Hymer together with his own work on G-T Create (Hymer, 2007), and Living Theory and action research approaches developed by Jack Whitehead (2006) to name a few.

The educational values of these educators resonate with my own. By extending the influence of their work I am contributing to the development of inclusive and inclusionally gifted and talented educational theory and practice. One example of the influence I have wanted to have can be seen in the work of Sally Cartwright. Sally teaches in a secondary school and is registered on the master's programme. In her educational enquiry of January 2008 Sally (Cartwright, 2008) provides an evidence based explanation of an educational innovation with her school in which both staff and students are now using the TASC approach (Wallace, 2004) I introduced her to, to improving both professional learning and the learning of students.

Sally has exercised her own originality in generating her own living educational theory as she expresses and develops her own talents as an educator and offers the gift of her account to the professional-knowledge base as can be seen in her masters accounts on <http://www.actionresearch.net/mastermod.shtml>

She has supported her 6th Formers to complete their extended projects, which will be accredited as an AS. After a first session, which I had helped her to organise at the university for her students with Jack Whitehead, she wrote to me

'Many thanks for organising the meeting tonight. Who would have thought that first cup of coffee you got for me in Keynsham would have enabled those students to be there tonight - which I found to be a very exciting process. They seemed to grow as learners in front of my eyes.' Personal email 13th March 08

I have drawn on this history in creating a generative response to the implementation of the national strategy that accord with my values. I have created and taken opportunities to extend the educational influence of local inclusive and inclusionally educators. This is one example:

I was given the opportunity of contributing to the training programme for school governors. When I began the session I asked who amongst them were familiar with APEX. A number of hands went up and the enthusiasm of those who had contact with the Saturday and summer holiday learning opportunities through a family member or by hearsay was evident. I briefly explained that schools were expected to register a percentage of their pupils and demonstrated the absurdity and the implications. I then introduced the notion of inclusive gifted and talented education for all, setting it in the context of what they understood of the APEX Saturday and summer holiday learning opportunities. This captivated their imaginations and a lively discussion ensued. I drew attention to the work of the teachers on the master's programme to illustrate the implications in practice and to help the governors and local authority personnel recognise the quality and importance of what the teachers were doing. The following meeting of the Master's group I was greeted with a hug by one of the teacher's who told me that the chair of governors of her school had subsequently asked what the school was doing and would she run a dedicated session to share her work with all staff with the expectation of developing practice and policy.

Enhancing educational relationships

I appreciate Lather's (1994) notions of ironic validity as it is difficult for me to communicate qualities of educational relationships in text alone so I want to bring a multi-media narrative and analysis in here to support my explanation.

I find it very difficult to actually describe these relational qualities let alone provide evidence of the progress made to enhance them. Let me give a personal example. The setting is a group I helped establish. A few local authority staff and Jack Whitehead meet weekly at 8am for an hour of coffee, croissants and conversation focussed on improving practice. When the clip was taken we had been meeting for some time so we were familiar with one another although the members of the group varied from week to week. We start by going round and each share any buzz, news or incident they want to from the preceding week. Sometimes the conversation develops from there and sometimes we focus on writing or thoughts someone brings.

This clip (accessible from <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/marie/mhjwclip1.mov>) is from the beginning of the session when we are going round sharing whatever we want to. I am explaining to my colleagues my concern with the way 'targets' form a 'basket of indicators' and what I think is missing from the present 'standards' in terms of the values I believe to be vital to education. This was taken a couple of years ago (29/03/06) and at the time I believed it showed me demonstrating some of the qualities that I value in other educators such as love, humour, pleasure, the genuine feeling of valuing the other and interest in them. I continue to feel the intense desire to express those values myself yet as I look at the video I find it difficult to see them. What one person experiences as someone else valuing and showing an interest in them, another person experiences the same gaze and body language as an unpleasant invasive intensity.

So – trying to look with other eyes I can see myself expressing the ironic humour I was feeling in actually asking to be videoed making a contribution about something I felt passionately about. I say ironic because I dislike both being videoed and talking in public and yet I feel the necessity to do both to do what I am wanting others to do; I know that those who find it difficult to get a word in edgeways when I get going will find this a surprise.

I can see myself about 40 seconds into the clip talking about connections between people that are communicated without saying anything.



In about 15 seconds I acknowledge that connection with each of the people in the room and although you cant see them they return that gaze of recognition with the pleasure that you can see me express in this still below.



As I am talking the ‘story’ I am telling does not progress in a neat time lined sequence and it relies on shared understandings of some of the contexts and people. A transcript makes little sense without the video as I can now see how much I use my hands, face and body to communicate. This still gives some impression of what I mean.



But to really appreciate what I am talking about watch the clip in QuickTime and run the cursor along quickly. You can see the movement through which I am connecting with the people in the room, the people in the different settings in the previous two weeks and the dynamic nature of the concepts I am trying to understand and express.

The same can be recognised in this still taken from a video clip of Joy Mounter and her pupils talking about TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) retrieved 20th July 2008 from

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSqg1phEEaM> (Mounter , 2006)

Here you can see the children creating a three dimensional learning theory to explain their learning as an improvement on the two dimensional wheel that is used to represent TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context). They are illustrating the point that there is a connection between the dimensions.



You can get a sense of the attention they are paying to each other and the collaborative task in this still below.



To really appreciate the dynamic concept they are trying to develop and the flow of communication between the group watch the clip in QuickTime and run your cursor along.

To understand, explain and improve inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice this form of evidence is going to have to be developed further and offered alongside the traditional test based measures that the government demands.

I have offered some examples of what I believe constitutes progress by showing teachers and schools responding productively to the DCSF gifted and talented strategy by creating and contributing inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice.

My contribution to improving the educational experiences of children and young people in the context of the national strategies has been to develop a generative response. I have been drawing attention to the values in the strategies that resonate with my own, the contradictions of the expected practices and encouraging educators to make their own informed decisions as to what they should do. To support them I have created a palette of opportunities intended to enhance their educational practice and research. I have sought to amplify their voice in their own learning and the influence they have in the learning of others and the social formations in which we work, locally and nationally by bringing them into contact with others both in the physical world and the virtual one. As people practice their voice they gain confidence both to reflect critically on what they are doing and to offer their learning stories to others. By introducing them to a Living Theory approach I am hopeful they will open the possibility to their pupils in turn to become emancipated in their own learning and lives and make the best contribution they can to a more humane world as they grow older and earn a living. These responses to the last learning event I organised this year give me hope for the year to come. It was a day led by Jack Whitehead for children, young people and educators to work collaboratively improve their learning by working to develop their own enquiry and helping other people to develop theirs.

This email communicates the energy and emancipation that the participants felt.

'My goodness Marie, you will be sOOOOOOOOOOO proud! 2 of our girls did a power point presentation to the FULL GOVERNING BODY of our school starting with.....WE are passionate about school dinners! STUNNING, AMAZING, SIMPLY INSPIRING! Governors were very surprised but liked the fact that the girls did it! It will be followed through in Sept!!!!!!!

Marie, thank you for a very productive day, the children really got lots out of it. The presentation the children did was...wait for it... the VERY NEXT DAY on the Thursday! That is how inspired they were!!!! –'

Personal email 22nd July 2008 from the Head-teacher of the school who had brought a teacher and a group of KS2 pupils to the day.

And this email shows the educational influence participation had in the learning of the young people and their educational influence in the learning of their teacher. This is an email from a teacher who had wanted to work with the masters group but had ‘stalled’ a number of times for various reasons. She brought three pupils with her to the day. She wrote,

‘Many thanx for your support and the students got a lot out of this. They came up with some great ideas and I think they felt a bit more empowered to move forward and take the risk of trying to make a change. The all agreed that they got stuck with how to implement their ideas. I have spoken to the Head and he loves the ideas the boys came up with. He would like to offer them a forum so they can have a dialogue with the staff on how to improve lessons for the academically able. The ‘I question’ they want to use is ‘what can I do to help improve the teaching/delivery of lessons’. They were under no doubt that disruptive behaviour came from “boring” lessons. However they did not feel they had the power or the skills to tell the teachers how to teach/deliver their lesson.... A massive thanx for your continued faith in me. I will get this assignment done - even if it is never counted as part of the masters. I have learnt a lot over the last few years and I owe it to a few people to tell the story and get it communicated. The day was very helpful to me as it helped me take a step forward and the whole cycle part of the action research is getting even clearer. I know where I am going, just need the time and space to get there.’

Personal email 21st July from a leading teacher who brought a group of secondary school pupils to the day.

An explanation of my practice

Through writing this paper I have refocused on my practice and the systemic phase of my research, systematically with a detailed care and attention to not only what influence I have had through my practice to contribute to the emancipating learning of others but also to my own. I have come to recognise, if not appreciate, that my enthusiasm and energy for such learning is a talent that I assiduously try to develop. The gift I seek to create and offer are opportunities for each to recognise, value and work with what is important to them which will enable them to look back at the end of their days on their lives and feel that sense of pleasure and satisfaction that comes from having lived a good life well.

My enthusiasm comes from my commitment to wanting each person to live a life they feel is satisfying as well as productive and to feel the pleasure of being in a loving relationship with themselves and others. While I find it difficult to express in words, especially in only a few words, what I am trying to achieve, how I am with people communicates far more fluently. As Maya Angelou is reputed to have said,

'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.' Maya Angelou (Poet, b.1928)

I find that enthusiasm in others and bring others into contact with them. For instance I amplify the voice of local inclusive and inclusional educators and bring international educational researchers into the local area as I want to see the qualities they embody more in evidence in education. These people exude an enthusiasm for improving their own learning and a love for what they are doing. They encourage others to take responsibility for their own learning and the quality of the educational experience they create for their pupils which values them as people. They stimulate critical and creative engagement with their ideas. They are open to learning from and with those they work with and a show humour and pleasure in being with them. It is one of the qualities I recognise I have brought to local teachers and schools over the years.

I have come to develop what I have called a generative response because it has not felt sufficient to simply to try to withstand impositions; I want to offer something hopeful and productive. I have also had a very strong inclination to be able to give reasons for why I do what I do.

I can identify three major nodal points in developing a generative response over recent years.

Until 2006 I had been able to develop the project without external dictates, as my local authority had not had any external funding for the work. Then the government began 'rolling out' a programme developed as part of its Excellence in Cities initiative with impositions I had previously avoided having to engage with. Having read material from the government on the gifted and talented strategy that was shortly going to be coming my way, I was feeling low to put it mildly. My spirits were lifted at an early morning meeting in December 2006 with Jack Whitehead and Louise Cripps (a head-teacher of a local primary school. They showed me that the governmental enthusiasm for gifted and talented education also offered opportunities if I engaged creatively.

This is a critical point in my beginning to realise that there was a possibility of creating a response to such an imposition that might be productive. Jack and Louise helped me recognise the context that I had created to respond from, and how I might progress the work by helping schools recognise the contradictions and connect with those parts of the strategy which were consistent with their inclusive values.

Barry Hymer (a longtime friend and colleague in the field) helped me look at the national quality standards with thoughts of how to engage with them generatively. My reading was that they were guidance, not mandatory. This is a very important distinction. Those that are mandatory require creative compliance to minimize the damage but those that are expected can be responded to from a place of reason. Although the quality standards are obviously written, for the most part, but with a few encouraging inconsistencies, from the position of a discrete notion of a 'gifted and talented' population, they can be worked with very generatively if you hold to an inclusive and inclusional notion of all children and young people generating, revealing and developing their gifts and talents. To do so I have to make a few changes in the language, for instance from 'define' to 'describe' and to keep my focus on how this can help me support all children and young people benefit from, and contribute to, the educational environment I am trying to develop.

While I recognized that there is practice that is contradictory in national strategies I did not understand why until I heard John White speak at a seminar on the Flynn Effect and subsequently read his book,

Intelligence, Destiny and Education: The ideological roots of intelligence testing (White, 2006). I then realised that the practices that were causing me such discomfort were actually developed originally as expressions of values that ran contrary to my own. Since then I have looked very carefully at what government expectations are, identified values that are educational and inclusive, and practice that is consistent with those values. I can now give a rational explanation for why I do or do not agree with the practices being advised and help others to do the same.

I believe that those who create the strategies and policies, for the most part, do so with the best of intents. This belief helps me look with the hope of finding values expressed in the material that stacks the shelves and web-spaces that resonate with my own, which I can use to contribute to improving the quality of the educational experience we wish our children to have.

I believe I have offered evidence of working educationally, with a focus on the best intent of the other, helping them to connect with that of others and recognising their own living values as standards by which to make decisions about what they do. I also believe I have contributed to the sense of well-being of individuals and the social formations within which they work. It has enhanced my own sense of well-being and enabled me to continue to strive to develop and improve my responses to further impositions I feel to be negating and damaging as Biesta (2007) says,

'I have argued that to suggest that research about "what works" can replace such judgments not only implies an unwarranted leap from "is" to "ought," but also denies educational practitioners the right not to act according to evidence about "what works" if they judge that such a line of action would be educationally undesirable.

...Research can only tell us what has worked in a particular situation, not what will work in any future situation. The role of the educational professional in this process is not to translate general rules into particular lines of action. It is rather to use research findings to make one's problem solving more intelligent. This not only involves deliberation and judgment about the means and techniques of education; it involves at the very same time deliberation and judgment about the ends of education — and this in a strict and conjugate relation with deliberation and judgment about the means. (p.22)

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to show how I have created generative responses to the implementation of the national gifted and talented strategy by focussing on the values of individuals and as expressed within national strategies. I have been, and am, working to further develop inclusive, inclusional, energizing and creative educational spaces and relationships.

I ask you the reader to respond in a way which will help me in discharging my educational responsibilities in coordinating and developing inclusive gifted and talented education in my local authority. I also ask you to respond in a way that will help to improve the quality of knowledge I am creating and wanting to offer as an educational gift. You can contact me at marie_huxtable@yahoo.co.uk or <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite>

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