

## **How do I improve what I am doing with a living theory praxis?**

**Contribution to a symposium ‘Transforming Educational Knowledge through Practitioner-Research’ convened by Prof. Jack Whitehead, Liverpool Hope University. BERA annual conference 6th – 8th Sept 2011 Institute of Education.**

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### ***Introduction***

There has been much discussion in BERA and AERA about the appropriate forms of representation for the educational theories generating by practitioner-researchers in their educational research (Eisner, 1988, 1993, 1997, 2005; Whitehead 2008a, Laidlaw, 2008; Adler-Collins, 2008). Discussions in *Research Intelligence* have suggested that an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge is underway in the living educational theories being produced by practitioner-researchers. However the latest issue shows the continuing confusion between education research, dominated by the social sciences, and educational research with its own distinct epistemology and understandings of theory and practice of education. It is to the latter that the evolution of my living theory praxis makes a contribution.

The Living Theory methodology (Whitehead, 2008b) developed in this paper draws insights from a range of methods from phenomenological, ethnographic, case study, grounded theory and narrative approaches to educational research (Cresswell, 2007) as well as autoethnography, in the generation of my living theory praxis. It includes a multi-media narrative to explicate the meanings of the energy-flowing values and understandings that constitute the explanatory principles of educational influences in the paper. Rigour is enhanced using the methods advocated by Winter (1989) and social validity is enhanced using the principles advocated by Habermas (1976, 2002).

In this self-study of my professional practice I explicate relational dynamic standards of judgment that can be used to validate and legitimate in the Academy, the embodied educational knowledge of practitioner-researchers. The explanations of educational influence and living standards of judgment I present include the recognition, expression, clarification and communication of energy-flowing ontological values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility and inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian social values. The explanations include analyses of, and creative educational responses to, government and local government policies on gifts and talents in education.

In this paper I begin by giving a brief outline of the context for the research and clarify what distinguishes Living Theory praxis. I briefly illustrate how I improve what I am doing with my living theory praxis and conclude with the contribution living theory praxis makes to educational epistemology, theory and practice.

### ***Context***

In my work as a senior educational psychologist in Bath & North East Somerset Authority I am researching to improve my educational (values-based) practice, recognising my underpinning belief that each person, irrespective of age, is capable of:

- Being an expert in their own learning and enhancing their expertise;
- Developing and offering talents as life-enhancing gifts;
- Creating, offering and accepting knowledge of the world, of themselves, and of themselves in and of the world, a gift, to enhance their own well-being and well-becoming and that of others;
- Coming to know, and evolve, their own living educational theory.

The intention of my practice is to have an educational influence in the learning of children and young persons in the process of learning to live loving, satisfying, productive, worthwhile lives. I believe that educational relationships, space and opportunities are those that enable us each to become a more emancipated, inclusive, egalitarian influence in learning and life, our own, other peoples and the social formations we are all part of. I therefore see my research as educational and contributing to the evolution of an educational epistemology with life-affirming and life-enhancing values as explanatory principles and living standards of judgment.

I have a systemic responsibility to organize both the programme extending educational opportunities for children and young people and the leadership programme on Gifts and Talents in Education. The work is generically known as APEX (ALL are Able Pupils Extending Opportunities). It develops inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision extending the work of people such as Hymer (2007), Huxtable (2005) and Wallace (2008) and contributes to the realization of the 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 Children and Young People's Plan 2005)

The vision statement and my practice contain an implicit understanding of the purpose of education. I express this in my own way as: the purpose of education is values-based and is concerned with each person learning what it is for them to know and be able to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others. The values I am concerned with are intrinsic (Biesta, 2006 and Crompton, 2010) and flow with life-affirming and life-enhancing energy. Something of my meaning is expressed by Biesta (2006) drawing on Faure et al. (1972):

‘For Faure the aim of education is ‘to enable man to be himself’, yet learning-to-be always has to be understood in democratic terms, i.e. as learning-to-be-with-others. This is why the report concludes that uniting ‘homo sapiens’ and ‘Homo faber’ – the knowing human being and the producing human being – is not enough. What is needed instead is the ‘homo concors’, the human being ‘in harmony with himself and others’ (p. xxxix).’ (p.172)

Biesta in the same paper expresses the complexity of the inter-related purposes of education succinctly:

‘... – it is important to keep in mind that lifelong learning has probably never meant only one thing but has always been a ‘composite’ concept. Aspin & Chapman (2001) have argued that that lifelong learning represents three different ‘agendas’ and hence can serve three different functions or purposes, which, in their words, are: (1) lifelong learning for *economic progress and development*; (2) lifelong learning for *personal development and fulfilment*; and (3) lifelong learning for *social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity* (Aspin & Chapman, 2001, pp. 39-40).’ (p.173)

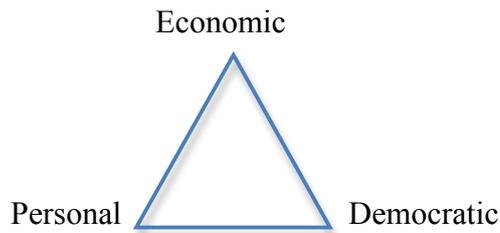
I do not want to debate the notion of democracy but take the third agenda to be concerned with ‘bigger than self problems’ (Crompton, 2010) and contributing to the evolution of a society worth living in for all. You will have your own expression of this. I express this in articulating my social values as those of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society:

- Inclusive – the talents and knowledge that each person develops and offers is recognised and valued. The unique ‘i’ is valued as distinct but not discrete within ‘we’.
- Emancipating – each person is empowered to accept and express their responsibility for the educational influence they have in their own learning and life, that of others and the social formations they are part of;
- Egalitarian – power to create, contribute and benefit from talents and knowledge is by each and all and expressed within an i~we relationship (Whitehead and Huxtable, 2006; Huxtable and Whitehead, 2006).

These are consistent with my ontological values, the values that give meaning and purpose to my life, which I have expressed as a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility (Huxtable, 2008). My values continue to evolve as I research to improve what I am doing. In that sense my lived values are living.

Expression, formation and evolution of my ontological and social values are not discrete. For instance, in expressing a loving recognition of other I am valuing their unique and distinct ‘i’ and the evolving understanding of their best intent. In trying to develop a loving recognition of other through developing respectful connectedness with educational responsibility I am intending to help them recognize, and realize, their best intent. In helping them extend themselves a loving recognition, develop their respectful connectedness and express their educational responsibility for themselves and towards others they give living meaning to inclusive, emancipation and egalitarian values in an i~we relationship.

Biesta represents diagrammatically the three agendas of lifelong learning identified by Aspin & Chapman as:



The three functions of lifelong learning – (Biesta, 2006, p.173)

I believe the contexts and focus of education as a process of lifelong learning may change and the form may differ, reflecting the age and sophistication of the person as learner, but in essence there is a consistent purpose. However, I do not think the representation with fixed points and connections enables us to understand education as a relationally dynamic, multidimensional process as Biesta suggests:

‘What the triangle of lifelong learning thus helps us to see is how the relationship between the functions of lifelong learning differs in different configurations of lifelong learning, and also how this relationship has changed over time.’ (p.173)

Crompton (2010) tries to use other forms to represent the relationship between values that is complex, dynamic and multidimensional but recognizes the limitations of text and diagrams. I use multimedia narratives instead. I accept Lather’s point (1994) quoted in Donmoyer (1996) about ironic validity, that no form of representation can communicate education as it is experienced and lived. However, I believe that multimedia narratives get closer than other forms and keeps the connection with the humanness that is at the heart of what education, and hence what the praxis of a professional educator, should, in my opinion, be about.

I understand learning as an educational process of creating and offering as a gift, valued knowledge of the world, self and self in and of the world. I deliberately refer to the creation and offering of such knowledge as a ‘gift’ to imply something that is valued by the creator and offered in the hope that it may be appreciated and creatively accepted by self and/or another. This illustrates what I mean.



I wrote (Huxtable, 2008):

‘This is the photo taken by Belle [Wallace]. This child’s gift is not an abstraction; it is the crafting of the artifact, the child’s intention, the connection between herself and Belle that you can see in her eyes, her smile, the way she is, and in the pleasure flowing between the child and Belle at that moment when the gift is first offered, accepted and valued.

It feels to me there is a space between Belle and the child, where both are attending carefully to the learners’ voice, which at that moment, the others in the class are not invited into. I think that an attempt to participate would have been an intrusion which would have been resisted or resented, whereas if someone quietly moved alongside they would have shared the moment of pleasure and in so doing added to the pleasure of Belle and the girl and their own. Their contribution would have been valued as they offered a respectful, connection. I will return to what I mean by ‘*respectful* connection’ later. I am using this as an example of many moments I have had in a classroom and other educational contexts. I do not intend to project my own feelings and interpretation onto Belle and the child but rather to show you how I accept and value the educational gift that Belle offered me and the catalytic influence it has had in the development of my inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice.’

There is an i~we relationship comprising Belle and myself. I am also pointing in the text to the i~we relationship between Belle and the child. I hope you are beginning to have a sense of what I mean by a living boundary, the ~ space in an i~we relationship, which is inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian. A living boundary is a trustworthy, respectful space where gifts can be offered and accepted freely. It might also be construed as an inclusional space drawing on Rayner’s (2005) notion of inclusionality as a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries that is connective, reflective and co-creative.

‘No one can persuade another to change. Each of us guards a gate of change that can only be opened from the inside. We cannot open the gate of another, either by argument, or by emotional appeal’ (Marilyn Ferguson poet quoted in Covey, 2004, pp.60-61)

The relationships, space and opportunity carries the possibilities of an educational experience. I understand an educational experience as an experience where something significant and worthwhile is learned which is generative and transformational. Not all experiences in ‘educational’ institutions, such as schools, colleges and universities are educational and many people experience the converse with damaging life-long consequences. This is an educational process consistent with the purpose I ascribe to education and to the different agendas that Biesta identifies, and values the distinct contribution each person makes to their lives and other people’s without the individual being subordinate or superordinate to the collective.

So, how do I improve what I am doing? I have argued that educational practice is values-based; I therefore need an educational research methodology and method to research to improve my educational practice.

### ***What distinguishes Living Theory praxis***

Living Theory praxis is as an integration of Living Theory and praxis, with values-based explanatory principles and living standards of judgment of educational influence in learning and life, clarified as they emerge in enquiry within living boundaries.

Praxis has a long tradition going back to Aristotle. The understanding of praxis is various as can be seen in the ALARA special issue, 2011, on Future Praxis. To give a couple examples from the literature, Freire (1972) defines praxis as, ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.’ (p.79). Similarly Zuber-Skerritt (2001) defines praxis as, ‘... the interdependence and integration – not separation – of theory and practice, research and development, thought and action.’ (p.15). While simple, these do not communicate the importance of values-based explanations, which I believe are core to an educator’s praxis. Carr and Kemmis (1986) provide a slightly richer description of praxis:

In *praxis*, thought and action (or theory and practice), are dialectically related. They are to be understood as *mutually constitutive*, as in a process of interaction which is a continual reconstruction of thought and action in the living historical process which evidences itself in every real social situation. Neither thought nor action is pre-eminent. In *poietike*, by contrast, thought (a guiding idea or *eidos*) is pre-eminent, guiding and directing action; theory directs practice. In *praxis*, the ideas which guide action are just as subject to change as action is; the only fixed element is *phronesis*, the disposition to act truly and rightly. (p.34)

At the simplest level Living Theory research can be understood as a form of praxis; it holds theory and practice together with a moral imperative in a dynamic and multidimensional relationship. However, Whitehead’s Living Theory research (Whitehead, 2011) goes beyond Carr and Kemmis with their focus on dialectical relationships in their notion of praxis. Further, he recognizes that while the intention to act ‘truly and rightly’ may be consistent, the expression is evolving and in that sense living. Living Theory offers a form of research that is educational as the embodied, ontological values of the researcher are revealed and clarified in the process of researching questions of the form, how can I improve what I am doing, and are recognised as explanatory principles and living standards of judgment. A practitioner, or social scientist, engaged in education research attempts to implement general theories of others or use them to explain practice. A Living Theory researcher draws on the theories of others in the process of understanding and improving their own values-based living theory; that is a valid ‘explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and social formations’ (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

Living Theory is self-study research whereby the researcher researches questions of the form, ‘how can I improve what I do to live my values more fully?’. In the process the research generates values-based explanations for their educational influence in learning, their own, other people’s and of social formations (Whitehead, 1989). The values that Whitehead is concerned with are those that are ontological, those that give meaning and value to an individual’s life. They are values that are energy-flowing,

life-affirming and life-enhancing and form the explanatory principles and living standards of judgment of the researcher's practice. Whitehead recognises the complex relationship between theory, practice and values is at the heart of Living Educational Theory research. In the process of researching to create knowledge of the world, knowledge of improving educational practice in the case of professional educators, the living theory researcher also creates knowledge of self and self in and of the world. They come to know themselves, the person they are and want to be making a contribution to a world worth living in.

The narratives of Living Theory researchers offer an integration of the process of creating knowledge of practice and knowledge of self in and of the world. The distinguishing feature of a living theory praxis is the attention paid to the living boundaries within which living values emerge, theory is created and practice improved. I am not using the notion of boundary to denote a bounded world with a border to defend. The boundary identified is where worlds meet, and it is living when it is a respectful space, which affords creative and co-creative possibilities.

There are many living boundaries can be experienced. For instance, in a meeting of theory and practice there can be a living boundary formed with life-affirming and life-enhancing energy-flowing values. This could be denoted as '~' in theory~practice. Laidlaw (1996) showed values as standards of judgment are living in such a boundary in the creation of a researcher's living theory.

Worlds of knowledge meet, for instance, those of the academy and the practitioner. These can provide a living boundary, which I am representing as ~ in academy~practitioner.

A person can experience a living boundary in relation to others. Whitehead and Huxtable (2006) describe an i~we relationship where the individual 'i' is not subsumed within, or subordinated to, the collective 'we' and the 'we' is a negotiated, collaborative collective. The living boundary denoted by ~ is a co-creative space which is inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian. It is a living space within which intrinsic values (Crompton, 2010) are lived and living as they are expressed, recognized and researched. Sonia Hutchison's representation (Hutchison, 2011) of the pooling of energy offers another illustration of the nature of the boundary.



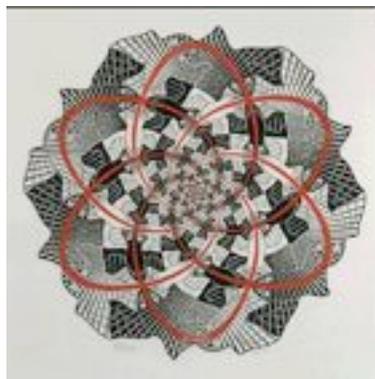
The boundary is living and flows with energy and as Covey (2004) says it is a space for choice:

‘Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In those choices lies our growth and our happiness.’ (p. 43)

The choice may not enable me to take action but even then I can decide how I feel about what is happening and whether I develop a story of blight or of hope. I believe that for the most part I live and work with constraints and impositions but that is not to say I have to relinquish my responsibility to try to use the ‘space’ as creatively as possible to make, at least in some small way, a productive ‘response’. That is another reason Whitehead’s (2008b) notion of Living Theory as a methodology resonates with me. He acknowledges explicitly that educators often experience themselves living a contradiction and they accept responsibility for it. Living theory research accounts are the stories of how, and to what extent, the educator can resolve that tension to live their values as fully as they can, wherever they are.

In the dominating form of academic research there is an implied separation of head, heart and body, which makes no sense to me. Practice without trying to understand seems pointless in education and is as incongruent as trying to understand educational practice only intellectually without reference to emotional and visceral understandings. Academics live these contradictions when their research in education is cleansed of the messiness of being human. As I have said before, the terrain of my living theory praxis is multidimensional, dynamic, and relational. It is peppered with social, cultural and fragments, stressed by the expectations and relationships with power and buffeted by the ebbs and flows of local demands, as Lee and Rochon (2009) describe.

As I have said a form of representation that communicates this complexity and the energy-flowing values emerging, clarified and evolved in living boundaries is needed. To be understood however requires a different form of engagement than simply engaging the intellect in the traditional manner with a sharp discrete focus. This picture by Escher, illustrates something about the nature of the form of engagement with this multimedia narrative that is needed if the terrain and my living theory praxis is to be understood.



Escher, ‘Path of Life III.’

What I see and understand of space and boundaries held within the picture are not one of infinite regress. Rather it depends on where I choose to look and how I look while

being aware of the complexity beyond the focus. Lee and Rochon (2010) indicate something of this complexity when they wrote in the invitation to submissions for the 2010 AERA annual meeting, which had the theme, *Understanding Complex Ecologies in a Changing World*:

‘Education research sits inside what Donald Stokes calls “Pasteur’s Quadrant,” referring to the dual focus of building basic theory while simultaneously improving practice. This process occurs through attention to individual psychological functioning (cognitive, social, emotional); social organization of settings; curriculum design and assessments; educational policy; or historical, political, and economic circumstances as they influence opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn within and across both formal and informal settings occur in the complex ecologies of peoples’ lives, not isolated in a single setting such as a school or family. These complex ecologies include people’s participation within and across multiple settings, from families to peer and intergenerational social networks, to schools and a variety of community organizations; and participation within and across these settings may be either physical or virtual. Our attempts to understand and influence such learning often try to strip away complexity for presumed efficiency...’

So, I am asking you to resist the urge to ‘strip away complexity’, and instead be aware of the complexity of the terrain and engage head, heart and body to make intellectual, emotional and visceral sense of the account that follows of how I improve what I am doing by evolving my living theory praxis.

### ***The evolution of my living theory praxis***

I have said in holding myself accountable to my employer (a public service) I do so with regard to the values expressed in the vision statements of the local authority such as these on the Bath and North East Somerset website August 2011:

‘We want all Children and Young people to enjoy childhood and to be well prepared for adult life.’

Although detail may change with time the underlying values expressed don’t. With this in mind the key question, the one that underpins all my activities is of the form:

How can I help children and young people learning to live loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives through my professional practice as an educational psychologist?

In creating an account of my living theory praxis I hold myself accountable to my employer with an appreciation of my educational responsibility towards others and for myself to have an educational influence in learning of individuals and the collectives they constitute. Through the evolution of my living theory praxis I seek to make the best contribution I can to improving the education of children and young people towards whom the local authority expresses the local community’s responsibility. In holding myself accountable to my employer as a public service I am also holding myself accountable to live my ontological and social values as fully as I can by researching to improve my professional practice.

I identified a need for a policy on high ability learning in the local authority. I subsequently took the role I took in leading the creation and implementation of the policy adopted by the council in 1999:

‘Bath and North East Somerset LEA is committed to a partnership with schools, challenging and supporting them in improving standards and ensuring that all pupils have their abilities identified and promoted.

Bath and North East Somerset LEA is committed to a partnership with parents and the wider community.

It is recognised that many pupils have particular strengths in one or more areas of ability, endeavour or talent. Areas that have been identified include:

- Academic and Intellectual
- Expressive and Performing Arts
- Sports and Physical
- Social, Leadership and Organisation
- Visual, Spatial and Mechanical
- Design, Technology and ICT

Bath and North East Somerset LEA aims to increase the opportunities for individual pupils to explore and develop areas of ability to their own and society’s benefit by:

- Increasing awareness of pupils with abilities and promoting a positive view of their needs by all those involved with children and young people including schools, colleges, the community, and parents;
- Supporting schools in extending and developing a variety of responses to meeting the needs of pupils with abilities, improving standards and promoting a culture which seeks, applauds and promotes achievement;
- Encouraging and facilitating communication and co-operation between personnel in all areas of the Council and beyond;
- Establishing links and forming partnerships with parents, community groups, colleges and universities, businesses, other LEAs and national associations such as NACE (National Association for Able Children in Education).
- Promoting research, development and dissemination of information in the area of meeting the needs of pupils with abilities.’

I have provided evaluative evidence of the contribution I have made to the implementation of the policy since in the form of reports and presentations. I have shown myself accountable to my employer and myself by making public values-based explanations of my practice in the evolution of my living theory praxis since 2006. I want to repeat the process is relationally dynamic and multidimensional and as the saying goes, ‘The sum of the parts is greater than the whole’.

Having spent my career as an educational psychologist focussing on what children found difficult I became interested in what enabled people to grow as adults able to live satisfying and productive lives making outstanding contributions to society. I began to explore what the field of 'high ability' had to offer to prepare children to live such futures. After a relentless and increasingly bureaucratic focus on 'special needs' many schools and teachers were also eager to refocus on how they might develop their pupils 'strengths'.

The more I explored the subject the more I came to the conclusion that the features of 'high ability', thinking, higher order learning, creativity, 'successful' learning were in essence the same and were learnable rather than 'hard wired'. I developed my own ideas on inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision which I summarised in article's such as, 'Everyone a winner - Towards exceptional achievement of ALL' (Huxtable, 2005) and in my contribution to, 'Creative and Philosophical Thinking in Primary Schools' (Huxtable, Hurford, and Mounter, 2009).

While I run a programme of workshops for children and young people the only way I can contribute to improving the educational experience of the majority of children and young people is to have an educational influence in the learning of the educators who have daily responsibility for them. As CPD (Continuing Professional Development) has become a national strategy the less teachers and schools take the opportunity to explore what is not prescribed and the more they buy into packages promising to quickly and easily improve results. However, I have found creative possibilities within the living boundary between the world of the universities and the world of the practitioner.

In 2005 I asked Jack Whitehead (then at the University of Bath) to offer a Masters programme to provide the opportunity for educators to learn to research their own practice. Sally Cartwright having worked with the Masters group as an educational research community formed an educational research community to support the students working on their AS Extended Project (Cartwright, 2008). This is an extract of a video of her students talking to the 14-19 strategy managers in the Authority about their experience of working with their research community. They explain how working with Sally has enabled them to develop as expert enquirers creating and offering valued knowledge and to grow in their understandings of themselves and themselves in and of the world. As you watch the video I ask you to particularly look for expressions of a loving recognition of themselves and others, extend a respectful connectedness and express an educational responsibility. I expand on this in a paper presented at BERA 2009, 'Developing Talents to Create and Offer Knowledge of the Self and the World as Educational Gifts' (Huxtable, 2009).



## **Pleasure and confidence in knowledge creators**

<http://tinyurl.com/44of77d>

Sally and her students showed me there are two researching communities: one that connects the person with others who share their learning passion or field of enquiry, such as space travel, AIDS, the fall of the Berlin Wall...; the other that connects the person with others with different passions but with enquiring minds involved in co-creating knowledge of the world and themselves in and of the world. The latter I call an educational research community. These communities are distinct but not discrete and can comprise the same people with the agenda moving between the two notions.

A disciplines/passion-led research community offers access to the knowledge base, expertise and energy of that interest. Einstein is reputed to have said, 'We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life, when all that we need to make us happy is something to be enthusiastic about.' There is a sustaining, creative and productive energy that comes from being with others who share our particular enthusiasms. It offers a community that not only supports the creation of gifts of knowledge of that world but also provides a discerning audience, where gifts offered can be appreciated for the valuable contribution they make. Research communities sometimes have overt ways of valuing the gifts of knowledge made, for instance BAFTA awards, Nobel peace prizes, Olympic medals.

An educational researching community offers relationships, space and opportunity in the living boundaries between the various worlds that we each belong to, to co-create knowledge of self in and of the world we want to make a better place to live in. An educational researching community is created by people with shared intrinsic values who are both open to recognising, valuing and working with the gifts of unimagined possibilities that others offer, and also have a generosity of spirit to offer their own presence and knowledge freely as gifts. I recognise such a community when I sense an expression of my ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility. I also need to experience the community as inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian. You may have a different way of recognising an educational researching community, which reflect your values.

Researching these values as they emerge in the living boundary is bringing me to a better understanding of the time, space and support that enhances a person's ability to reflect on the learning that they have created in the process of researching to create knowledge of the world. The purpose of their reflection is to learn and create knowledge of themselves and themselves in and of the world, which will enhance

their learning to live a loving, satisfying, productive, worthwhile life for themselves and others.

Researching to understand these communities and how to support learners in them enhancing their educational possibilities and influence, is a contribution to improving inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision. The challenge is to do this with schools dominated by targets and actuarial forms of accounting for the quality of the educational experience children and young people are offered.

There is little official requirement for schools to provide space and support for learners, adults as well as younger learners, to create and offer knowledge by researching their passions. I contend there is even less requirement for schools to provide space or support for learners to create knowledge of themselves in and of the world. This is not the space and support that SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning, a DCSF inspired package), PSHE (Personal Social and Health Education), careers advice, or tutor time offers. The focus there is on improving the learner's compliance with predetermined expectations. I am not saying there is not a place for acquiring knowledge presented in the given curriculum. However, the learning I am concerned with here is that of the learner as knowledge creator and their learning journeys and adventures as they come to know themselves in and of the world. The focus is on the knowledge they create of the person they are and want to be in and of the world. They create knowledge of what it is that gives meaning and purpose to their life as they develop their expertise as experts in their own learning and come to recognise and value the talents and knowledge they develop and enhance to offer as life-affirming and life-enhancing gifts.

The accounts created in the course of their Masters programme by the educators working with Jack Whitehead is evidence that it is possible to create and offer educational space and support for learners to come more fully into their own presence even in the present climate by developing educational research communities in living boundaries between school requirements and educators' desire to improve their educational practice. Many of these accounts can be accessed from <http://actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>.

I have come to think that enabling children, young people *and* adults to collaboratively develop as Living Theory researchers offers the possibility of enhancing the educational learning of learners developing and offering talents and knowledge as gifts that improve their own and other peoples life chances, well-being and well-becoming. I believe this can be done as Leigh (2002) describes by:

‘...inviting participants to bring into the learning space their knowledge and learning goals as well as their values, beliefs and emotions’

As an educator I am concerned with enhancing the educational possibilities and influence of relationships, space and opportunities. I want, amongst other things, to enhance contexts that encourage learners to explore themselves as knowledge creators of the world in a wide range of fields. For children and young people this is so they may answer for themselves what it is to develop expertise for knowledge creation as an expert: musician; mathematician; writer; dancer... This provides a palette of experiences for them to draw on to inform their decisions as to what they might find satisfying and productive to devote time and energy to as an adult.

I also want to enhance the educational influence of relationships, space and opportunities on learners coming to know what it is for them to live a loving, satisfying, productive, worthwhile life. It might be easiest to understand what possibility educational researching communities offer if they are conceptualised as distinct from researching communities and other types of learning opportunities. My hesitance comes from my concern not to inadvertently create another potentially bounded isolating world.

I have come to see living boundaries as offering opportunity for educators to particularly focus on enhancing the educational learning of the individual rather than focusing on improving strategies for raising attainments in the given curriculum. This is the basis from which I am now developing a better understanding of the distinct, but not discrete, contribution to improving educational practice and provision made by different 'types' of learning opportunities held in a relational dynamic together with the impositions and expectations of other worlds such as government, parents, communities, other educators with different beliefs and theories of education and so on.

Andrew Henon's Creativity|WORKS (Henon, 2009, downloadable from <http://tinyurl.com/3md6zba>) offers an example of Andrew making visible the educational space in living boundaries he created through his development and management of the NESAs (North East Somerset Arts) project and the creation of the book. I particularly want to draw attention to pages 41-53. They show the contribution APEX in collaboration with others, has made to creating educational space in living boundaries between the usually bounded worlds of beyond school learning opportunities, school, curriculum, and learning opportunities I have described as types 1,2 and 3, and the worlds of pupils, students, teachers, academics, socially engaged artists and educational psychologists.

The first living boundary created as an educational space I recognise on re-reading Creativity|WORKS is that created by Andrew (socially engaged artist), Karen Drews (photographer), Gill Kenny (the class teacher), Gill's colleagues and Head-teacher, me and Gill's 7 year old pupils in the collaborative, creative enquiry for artists in St Mary's Primary School:

'The sessions had two aims; to provide an opportunity for children and adults to experience themselves as artists, collaboratively developing talents with an artist, and second, to provide an opportunity for them to develop their talents as researchers creating, offering and accepting gifts of knowledge of themselves and the world.' (Henon, 2009, p.45)

The educational space was created in the living boundaries between worlds of classroom, socially engaged art and educational research, between teachers and learners and educational researchers, between the individual and community. In those living boundaries some of the children and adults recognised themselves as knowledge creators able to offer and accept valued knowledge. Look at these photographs.



In the first I can see Andrew inviting the children to share the unique marks they have created, two girls carefully deciding which they want to share, the boy offering his to Andrew. In the second photo I can see children offering and accepting the knowledge they have each created with interest and pleasure. Their eyes and books are not all directed towards Andrew, they hold aloft so all can see and their faces are variously turned so they can look at the work of others.

Some of the children had taken responsibility for extending their own learning between the sessions as well as during them. For instance, one of the children had gone to the extent of making charcoal at home and bringing some of it in.

I wanted to share this venture as it was within a school and with a whole class of young children. Up to this point I had only run these sessions outside of the classroom and with older children as co-learners. What is not evident in these photographs is the relational dynamic in the space and the influence on the worlds that form the living boundaries. That is more easily seen in the brief account of a collaborative, creative enquiry day in the Guildhall, 2008.

80 children, young people and educators participated in a day held in the Banqueting Room, the Guildhall Bath facilitated by Jack Whitehead and me. This day was also a step into an imagined but unexplored possibility. I have never before managed to create an inclusive, collaborative, creative, educational space in the living boundaries between such diverse worlds; school and beyond school, adult and child, teachers, academics, educational researchers, education administrators and many more.

This collage of photographs gives you some feel for both the educational space and the energy. I can see expressions of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility. I believe I can see in these photographs evidence of those in the space to be living the qualities of an egalitarian, inclusive and emancipating society.



A better sense of the relational dynamic flow of energy I am describing as an expression of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility and values of an egalitarian, inclusive and emancipating society can be seen in this video. It is an hour in 20 seconds.



### **Relationally dynamic flow of energy in expression of values**

<http://tinyurl.com/42vjdkh>

What I learned from that day was that it is possible to engage a very diverse group in collaborative, creative enquiry. I also learned the power and responsibility for

learning is distributed in an educational research community with each person recognising themselves and others as emancipated, equally valued members of the community or group, making their unique contribution to enhancing their own well-being and well-becoming and that of others. This is rather different to the dynamics of most learning groups where there is often a 'leader' and prescribed or negotiated outcomes that serves as a common goal.

### ***Conclusion***

The significance of the paper is in the contribution it makes to an educational knowledge-base of practice, theory and systemic influence in relation to gifts and talents in education and in the development of a new, inclusional educational epistemology.

I have offered a multimedia narrative to clarify the notion of my living theory praxis distinguished by the clarification and evolution of values as they emerge in living boundaries through researching to improve values-based practice. I invited you to engage intellectually, emotionally and viscerally with the evidence I offered of how I am improving what I am doing though evolving my living theory praxis.

I want to conclude with asking you the questions following Habermas (1976) – have I communicated effectively and clearly the authenticity of my praxis developed with an awareness of the normative context of my work? Have I offered sufficient evidence that over time I have been committed to improving my contribution to the educational experiences of children and young people? Has this account provoked any thoughts about how you are improving what you are doing and contributing to your endeavours to enhance your educational influence in learning, your own, other peoples and social formations to make this a better world to be?

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