

# **'How are we sustaining educational relationships to improve educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge?'**

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## ***Introduction***

Teacher professional development, students learning for life, the development of an educational epistemology, and improving educational practice and provision, are the subject of national and international interest to politicians, and educational practitioners and researchers. However, the dynamic inter-relationships between these interests and the connection with the expression of the meanings of energy-flowing ontological values that contribute to what constitutes something as 'educational' are often lost in research, practice, academic writings and policy papers because of limitations of traditional epistemologies and research methodologies and print-based media in communicating these meanings (Whitehead, 2010, Huxtable 2009).

The idea that gives coherence to the educational knowledge presented here is that individual educational researchers can generate their living educational theories as explanations of their educational influences in learning (Whitehead, 1989).

The idea that gives methodological coherence is that individuals express their methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) in the generation of an appropriate methodology in the course of exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

This multi-media narrative explains our educational influences in improving our values based educational practice and addresses three inter-related questions that have emerged in the course of our main enquiry: How have we:

- Researched our own practices as educators in higher education to explain how we have influenced the learning of educators and students to develop talents in becoming more fully emancipated in their own learning and life and to gift the educational knowledge they create to enhance their own wellbeing and well becoming and that of others?
- Researched to improve educational practice and the creation and legitimation of an educational epistemology which is contributing to the transformation of the complex ecologies (Lee & Rochon, 2009) in which we live and work?

- Developed new living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) that are grounded in the embodied expressions of energy-flowing values, which contribute to improving educational practice and evaluating the validity of claims to educational knowledge (Adler-Collins, 2008)?

We conclude with reflections on what we have learned through researching how we are sustaining educational relationships to improve educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge about:

- A relationally dynamic understanding of standards of judgment in educational theory.
- Inclusional explanations of educational influences in learning as distinct from the propositional and dialectical explanations produced by researchers in the disciplines of education.
- The use of multi-media narratives in clarifying the influences of complex ecologies in the living boundaries that are constituted by energy-flowing ontological values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, with humour.

### *Context*

Lee and Rochon (2009) highlight the necessity for locating research in the complex ecologies of the researchers as well as the research. Something of the complexities of these inter-related and evolving ecologies is indicated by our websites <http://www.actionresearch.net> and <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite>, which, for the sake of the brevity required here, are condensed to the two paragraphs that follow.

Jack works as an educator, academic and educational researcher primarily with professionals in education and business in a variety of settings, such as The Research Centre for the Child and Family at Liverpool Hope University in England, Durban University of Technology in South Africa, and in the virtual world comprising web-spaces such as <http://www.actionresearch.net> and the practitioner-researcher jiscmail. His practice is concerned with supporting educators to research their embodied knowledge and help them make the educational knowledge they generate public as gifts, which can contribute to the evolution of an educational epistemology. One of the current foci of his research is the development of multi-media narratives that communicate energy-flowing values as explanations of educational influence transformationally.

Marie's work and research is contextualised by her systemic responsibility as a senior educational psychologist, developing and implementing a local authority programme, which contributes to improving the educational space and relationships that support all children and young people to each create, develop and offer talents and knowledge as gifts they value, to enhance their own well-being and well-becoming and that of others. The programme includes developing educational: opportunities; relationships; and resources, in the 'physical' and 'virtual' worlds for educators to research their practice and for learners to research their passions for learning, and for both to offer the talents and knowledge they develop as educational gifts to themselves and others. She is currently engaged in a doctoral programme researching to improve her practice.

We each work in different worlds; for instance Jack primarily works in academic worlds and Marie in those formed by local and national government policies and strategies. However, it is by sustaining educational relationships in the boundaries between these varied and often bounded worlds, that educational knowledge has been created, which offers generative and transformational possibilities to influence the complex ecologies of those worlds. Evidence to support this claim can be seen in the Masters accounts successfully submitted by teachers, Head Teachers and educators we have worked with. (Access from <http://actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>.) The accounts show the educational influence in the learning of educators, teachers and pupils. The creation of a 'Gifts, Talents and Education' Masters unit shows the influence of our collaboration to sustain educational relationships in the boundaries of university and local authority pervading both worlds.

### ***Researching our practice educationally***

The aspect of our practice we have been researching here is how we sustain our educational relationships with and for educators and learners, with a focus on improving educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge.

One distinguishing feature of educational knowledge, practice and research is the integration of values. For example, values implicit in describing a society as emancipating, egalitarian and inclusive, and describing personal values expressed in our educational relationships as including loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility. These values flow with our life-affirming and life-enhancing energies, the expression and meanings of which are revealed through our research as explanatory principles for our practice.

The multimedia narrative of our educational research is intended to communicate the relationally dynamic qualities of sustained educational relationships, and of the research methods employed, in the generation of educational knowledge.

There are three inter-related questions that have emerged in the course of our main enquiry, all of which are focused on the 'how' of our research. That is, they are focused on methods. In researching to improve our practice and to develop new living standards of judgment in an educational epistemology we have focused on:

- i) 'empathetic resonance and empathetic validity' for **recognising, clarifying and communicating** the expression of ontological values and for establishing the validity of the meanings of the expression of ontological values in explanatory principles in explanations of our educational influences in learning.
- ii) 'Visual narratives' **to communicate** the meanings of the energy-flowing values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning.
- iii) 'Action reflection cycles' **to transform** the embodied expressions of energy-flowing ontological values, in explanations of educational influences in learning, into publically communicable, epistemological standards of judgment.
- iv) 'Validation Groups' for **enhancing the validity and rigour** of our explanations.

As we read again the description of the research methods we develop and employ, we are aware of the embedded statement of values and the inter-related and relationally dynamic nature of the influences of researching our practice in the complex ecologies of our research and our selves. This might be better understood in the descriptions and explanations of how we have used these methods.

### **Empathetic Resonance**

The methods of empathetic resonance (Whitehead, 2009) and empathetic validity (Dadds, 2008) are used in **recognising, clarifying and communicating** the meanings of energy-flowing ontological values in the educational practices of educators and their students.

Jack first encountered the idea of empathetic resonance in the writings of Sardello (2008). For Sardello, *empathetic resonance*, is the resonance of the individual soul coming into resonance with the Soul of the World (p. 13). We are using *empathetic resonance* to communicate a feeling of the immediate presence of the other in expressing the living values that the other experiences as giving meaning and purpose to their life. (Whitehead & Rayner, 2009, p. 16)

Jack usually uses the following video-clip of Moira Laidlaw at the end of a class at Guyuan Teachers College in China to demonstrate his understandings of empathetic resonance.

This 1:04 minute clip was taken at the end of a lesson where the students are leaving a lesson Jack was video-taping. Jack thought the lesson had finished and turned the camera off but when he saw Moira moving to the door and turned the camera on again.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno>

If you allow the clip to load in your browser you can move the cursor backwards and forwards along the clip pausing at particular frames. Jack has done this with Moira and they share an understanding that Moira is expressing energy-flowing values in the relational dynamic with her students as they flow past her. One of these values is the expression of a loving warmth of humanity as she communicates her recognition and valuing of individual students.

You may, of course, be responding to the visual data in a very different way to Moira and Jack. What we are claiming is that a valid explanation of Moira's educational influences in her own learning, in the learning of her students and in the learning of the social formation in which the action is taking place, must include the expression

of a loving warmth of humanity as an explanatory principle. It is important not to disconnect the words 'a loving warmth of humanity' from the embodied expression of their meanings. The meanings are being expressed in the relational dynamic shown on the video. The words help us to communicate their meanings but the focus of meaning is on their embodied expression and the feelings of empathetic resonance with those expressions of values that are evoked.

We have found Dadds' understanding of empathetic validity useful in sharing our meanings with others. For Dadds empathetic validity is:

“... the potential of practitioner research in its processes and outcomes to transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other, such that greater empathy and regard are created. Dadds distinguishes between internal empathetic validity as that which changes the practitioner researcher and research beneficiaries and external empathetic validity as that which influences audiences with whom the practitioner research is shared.” (Dadds, 2009, p. 279).

For example, in terms of external empathetic validity we are sharing our insights concerning empathetic resonance in terms of a loving warmth of humanity. We are doing this in the hope and intention of influencing you in seeing the relevance and use-value of integrating visual narratives into your own accounts to communicate and evoke an empathetic resonance of the meanings of your embodied expressions of the energy-flowing values that give meaning and purpose to your own lives in your educational practices and educational research.

### **Visual narratives**

Visual narratives are used **to communicate** the meanings of the energy-flowing values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. Text alone is usually not adequate to communicate and evoke an empathetic resonance with the embodied values expressed and can lose connection with the experience of educational relationships in practice. Eisner (2005) put it well when he said:

“Human beings are, after all, sentient beings whose lives are pervaded by complex and subtle forms of affect. To try to comprehend the ways in which people function and the meanings the events in their lives have for them and to neglect either seeing or portraying those events and meanings is to distort and limit what can be known about them. The artistic treatment of forms of representation has the capacity to arouse such feelings. Such forms provide the conditions through which empathy can emerge, and generate the *nachleben* that gives us vicarious access to the lives of others.” (p. 116)

We agree with Lather's (Donmoyner, 1996, p. 21) notion of ironic validity in that the harder we try to get closer to representing and communicating the energy-flowing values that underwrite our practice the more we recognise the impossibility of the task. None-the-less using text, images and video we can get closer. However, as we have illustrated above, the 'reader' as well as the 'writer' must develop new skills for the meanings to be communicated. It requires a desire on the part of the 'reader' to engage with 'heart' and 'body' rather than just with 'head' to comprehend.



In these two photographs we ask you to experience with us the intensity of a respectful connectedness between educators and learners.



In the left the quality of teacher's gaze communicates the quality of a loving recognition of the child as she listens carefully to him beyond his words to understand his best intent. In the photograph on the right we experience an empathetic resonance with the

educator focusing on the conversation between himself and the student as an expression of his educational responsibility towards the learner constructing knowledge of himself and himself in and of the world. This is in the context of a workshop on 'Making a Difference That Matters' where adults and younger learners are collaborating to construct questions that each wants to research to make a difference that is important to them.

A single image however is often not enough to communicate. In the one below it may appear that the girl is in 'performance mode', ignoring those around her, whereas when you watch the video and employ the technique previously described we believe you will experience the flow of ideas and the knowledge being created in the relationship of the children and adult as learners creating knowledge together of the world, themselves and themselves in and of the world.

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



By 'knowledge of the world', we are referring to the knowledge that is located in a field or domain of enquiry, such as mathematics, rock climbing, education...

By 'knowledge of themselves' we mean the knowledge a person creates of their ontological and societal values. By ontological values we are thinking of the values that give meaning and purpose to an individual's life. By societal values we are thinking of the values that carry hope for the future of humanity and our own. Within 'knowledge of themselves' we include explanations of their educational influence in their own learning; of the talents and gifts they create that give them pleasure and a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction; and the stories they tell themselves to make sense of their lives.

By ‘knowledge of themselves in and of the world’ we mean the knowledge of the contribution they want to make to creating the world as a better place to live in and how they can make those contributions. This knowledge is the life-affirming and life-enhancing gifts a person is prepared to commit time, energy and resources to not only creating but also to offering with the intention of having an educational influence in the learning of others and of social formations.

We would include wisdom as an important aspect of knowledge, which is educational. We agree with Ackoff and Greenberg (2008) when they say there is little effort made to encourage the development of wisdom. They say that a critical failing of education is the focus on masses of information that is represented as the essential component of knowledge at the expense of understanding and wisdom.

In stressing the importance of wisdom Ackoff and Greenberg say that we want our fellow citizens to be able to make value judgements, to know the consequences of their (and others’) actions and to learn from their mistakes. In our view they rightly say that the only way to develop values and judgement about one’s actions is to be able to exercise judgment and apply values in everyday life, in a way that is meaningful and relevant to one’s self:

“...to be wise is to own wisdom, as yours, not as someone else’s, and to do that one must constantly be faced with situations that call forth the practice and application of wisdom – in school, at work, and throughout life.” (Ackoff & Greenberg 2008, pp.21-22)

No knowledge can be created in isolation. The process of creating and offering knowledge of the world, self, and self in and of the world, is influenced by complex ecologies. Self, others and knowledge are in a relationally dynamic mutually influential relationship with self, others, knowledge and the complex ecologies (Lee & Rochon, 2009) within which we live.

### **Action reflection cycles**

In supporting teachers and pupils Action reflection cycles are used to **transform** the embodied expressions of energy-flowing ontological values, in explanations of educational influences in learning, into publically communicable, epistemological standards of judgment. What we want to communicate is the organic as well as the systematic nature of these cycles, which is a transformational process, emancipating the learner in their own learning.

Joy Mounter’s pupils (above) are explaining the limitations of the form of representing an action reflection cycle as a two dimensional wheel. In one sense it is very helpful to have a simple, colourful two-dimensional form of representation such as this one, which those familiar with TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) will recognise:



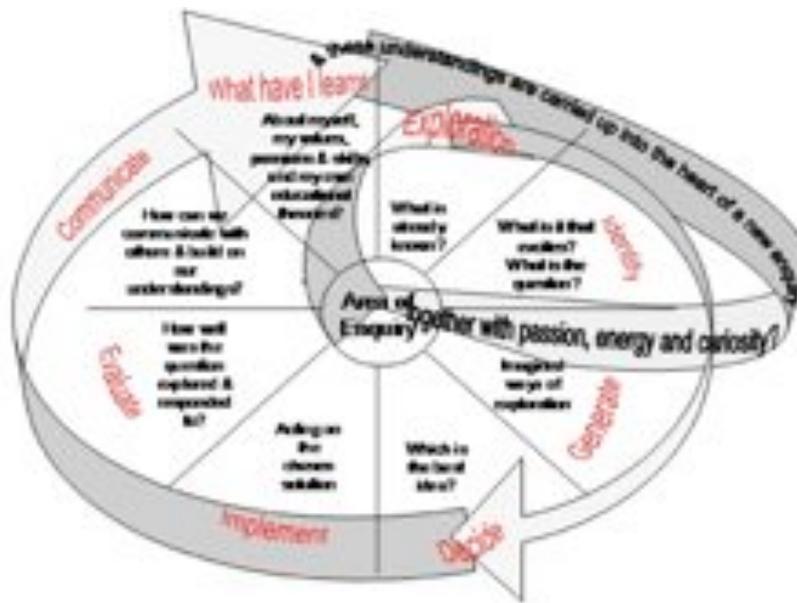
In another it constrains, as the children explain. The pupils offer a three dimensional representation showing the knowledge created as sparks that influence all their learning with the colours to represent flow (Mounter, 2006):



This model communicates something of the vibrancy and relationally dynamic nature of the action reflection process of knowledge creation that is educational. We have got a little closer to explaining the process by integrating TASC with the questions, ideas and actions that Jack identifies as distinguishing an action reflection cycle:

- 1) What do I want to improve? What is my concern? Why am I concerned?
- 2) Imagining possibilities and choosing one of them to act on in an action plan
- 3) As I am acting what data will I collect to enable me to judge my educational influence in my professional context as I answer my question?
- 4) Evaluating the influence of the actions in terms of values and understandings.
- 5) Modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of evaluations.
- 6) Making public a validated explanation of educational influences.

We have represented it as a zero spiral knot (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2007):



However, to represent a multidimensional model in a two-dimensional format is extremely difficult and requires a considerable degree of imagination on behalf of the ‘reader’ to appreciate organic and systematic phases of living theory research held together dynamically. We are still working on how to communicate more effectively the organic, inventive and transformational nature of the process of creating educational knowledge and the dynamic inter-relationship that flows within and between one phase and another. Mellor (1999) talks of something along these lines in his thesis where he develops the notion of ‘messy methods’:

“The complex process of inquiry, involving a wide range of techniques, is called "messy method", where messy is taken to mean difficult, not careless.’ The creation of the account, rather than being merely a record of what has been done, is an integral part of the living research process.” (p.1)

Jane Spiro (2008) describes the process of creating her living theory using action reflection cycles to transform expressions of values in explaining her educational influence in the construction of her thesis. Jane illustrates this in a metaphorical story, ‘I and the Fellow Traveller’, included in the appendices of her thesis.

So far we have tried to communicate something of the action reflection cycles as a transformational research method. The expression of these action reflection cycles transforming in practice can be appreciated through the accounts of living theorists, such as the Master’s dissertation by Chris Jones (Jones, 2009). The award of Master and Doctoral degrees by the Academy legitimates the claim that these accounts contain publically communicable, epistemological standards of judgment.

We hope that we have communicated how we have used action reflection cycles to transform the embodied expressions of energy-flowing ontological values, in explanations of educational influences in learning, into publically communicable, epistemological standards of judgment. This transformation of meanings of embodied expressions of ontological values into their inclusion into explanatory principles and

epistemological standards of judgment, is at the heart of the claim to originality we make for this presentation. It is open for you to help us test the validity of this claim.

In enhancing the validity and rigour of our research we have used validation groups.

### **Validation Groups**

The methods for **enhancing the robustness of the validity and rigour** of the explanations include the use of validation groups that draw on Habermas' four criteria of social validity, learning in communicative action and relation to the other (1976, 1987, 2002), and Winter's (1989) six criteria for enhancing rigour.

We have been most influenced by Habermas' four criteria of social validity as we work at reaching an understanding between ourselves and others and at strengthening the validity of explanations of educational influence:

“The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression (*verständlich*) so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true (*wahr*) proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully (*wahrhaftig*) so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right (*richtig*) so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified.” (Habermas, 1976, pp. 2-3)

To help to strengthen the validity of explanations we participate in validation groups comprising peers and ask that their questions include the following questions. (Habermas' points above have influenced these):

- i) How could the comprehensibility of the explanation be enhanced
- ii) Is there sufficient evidence to justify the claims being made? If the evidence isn't sufficient what is needed:
- iii) Is there an explicit awareness in the explanation of the normative pressures that are influencing the explanation?
- iv) Is there evidence of the authenticity of the writer in the sense of living the values they explicitly espouse through time and interaction?

The application of this approach to strengthening validity was first exemplified in Martin Forrest's 1983 masters dissertation *The Teacher as Researcher*. You can access Forrest's approach to strengthening the validity of his explanation of educational influence at <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/writeup/alval.pdf>

Habermas (1987) also provides support for our focus on learning when he writes at the end of his Theory of Communicative Action:

“.... I have attempted to free historical materialism from its philosophical ballast. ‘Two abstractions are required for this: I) abstracting the development

of the cognitive structures from the historical dynamic of events, and ii) abstracting the evolution of society from the historical concretion of forms of life. Both help in getting beyond the confusion of basic categories to which the philosophy of history owes its existence.

A theory developed in this way can no longer start by examining concrete ideals immanent in traditional forms of life. It must orient itself to the range of learning processes that is opened up at a given time by a historically attained level of learning. It must refrain from critically evaluating and normatively ordering totalities, forms of life and cultures, and life-contexts and epochs as a whole. And yet it can take up some of the intentions for which the interdisciplinary research program of earlier critical theory remains instructive.

Coming at the end of a complicated study of the main features of a theory of communicative action, this suggestion cannot count even as a 'promissory note.' It is less a promise than a conjecture."(Habermas, 1987, p. 383)

In being open to the range of learning processes that is opened up at this time by a historically attained level of learning we are focusing our attention on explaining educational influences in learning. This is because not all learning is educational. Individuals and groups can learn to damage each other and the environment in ways that can be seen to be crimes against humanity. We are interested in learning that carries hope for the future of humanity. Hence our interest in educational influences in learning as we associate education with the values that enhance the common good.

In relation to our understandings of our educational influences in the learning of social formations we are also influenced by Habermas' (2002) insight that '*The private autonomy of equally entitled citizens can only be secured only insofar as citizens activity exercise their civic autonomy.*'" (p.264)

As we create our living educational theories, we take care to engage in transforming social formations that affect our private autonomy in ways that fulfil our responsibility to act in support of the values that carry hope for the future of humanity, in exercising our civic autonomy. We believe that this can be seen in our explicit engagement in developing local authority policy for schools in responding to the talents of each young person and by engaging with the procedures of legitimation in Universities to transform what counts as educational knowledge.

Richard Winter (1989) advocates the use of 6 principles for enhancing the rigour of an action research account. Winter names these principles as reflexive critique, dialectical critique, plural structure, multiple resource, risk and theory practice transformation.

The first clear use we have of the application of Winter's criteria to the creation of living educational theory is in Peggy Kok's 1991 M.Ed. Dissertation, 'The Art of an Educational Inquirer' (<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/peggy.shtml> ). You can access Kok's (nee Leong) account on improving the rigour of your research in the section on the third action reflection cycle at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/95contents.htm>

## ***Sustaining educational relationships to support learning and the generation of educational knowledge***

What we have done so far in answering our questions 'How are we sustaining educational relationships to improve educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge?' is to focus on the methods of empathetic resonance, empathetic validity, action reflection cycles, visual narratives, validity and rigour. Whilst these methods go some way to explaining how we are sustaining educational relationships, they omit an understanding of the significance of the ideas of others in guiding our use of the various methods. They also omit an understanding of the energising relational values that are necessary to understanding how we are sustaining our educational relationships.

The idea given coherence, so far, to the educational knowledge presented here, is that individual educational researchers can generate their living educational theories as explanations of their educational influences in learning (Whitehead, 1989). This learning can include one's educational influence in one's own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work (Whitehead, 2008a, p. 104). The idea that gives methodological coherence is that individuals express their methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) in the generation of an appropriate methodology in the course of exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

In this final section we present some of the insights we have used from the theories of others and clarify the relationally dynamic values that are expressed in our mutually sustaining educational relationships for knowledge creation from within the complex ecologies that influence our practice.

### ***Insights from the theories of others***

In answering our research questions using the above methods we include the following insights from a number of theoretical frames including Bernstein's (2000) mythological discourse; Biesta's (2006) language of education; Bourdieu's (2000) ideas of habitus and social formation and Whitehead's (1989) ideas of living educational theories.

Through his idea of mythological discourse Bernstein (2000) alerted us to the importance of avoiding the creation of a form of discourse that becomes disconnected from the political ideology and social arrangement of the society. For Bernstein a mythological discourse consists of two pairs of elements, which, although having different functions, combine to reinforce each other. He says that one pair celebrates and attempts to produce a united, integrated, apparently common national consciousness; the other pair work together to disconnect hierarchies within the school from a causal relation with social hierarchies outside the school (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxiii). When we use Habermas' (1976, p.2-3) criteria of social validity we take care to demonstrate our awareness of the normative influences in our cultural and practices in relation to the political ideology and social arrangement of the contexts in which we are researching and working.

In answering our questions we include Biesta's (2006) understanding that we come into the world as unique individuals through the ways in which we respond responsibly to what and who is other. We accept Biesta's argument that:

'the responsibility of the educator not only lies in the cultivation of 'worldly spaces' in which the encounter with otherness and difference is a real possibility, but that it extends to asking 'difficult questions': questions that summon us to respond responsively and responsibly to otherness and difference in our own, unique ways.' (p. ix)

Biesta contrasts learning as acquisition and learning as responding, He argues that learning as responding is educationally the more significant:

'... if it is conceded that education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their "coming into the world" as unique, singular beings.' (p. 27).

The creation of living educational theories includes both learning as acquisition and learning as responding in seeking to enhance the energizing flows of values, skills and understandings that carry hope for the future of humanity and our own.

In using Habermas' (1976, p.2-3) about the importance of showing an awareness of the normative influences in communicative action we are mindful of Bourdieu's point about the 'automatisms of the *habitus*' in analyzing social formations. This awareness of the influence of the 'habitus' is particularly significant in the creation of living educational theories that explain the influences of individuals and groups in the learning of social formations.

For Bourdieu social science makes greatest use of the language of rules precisely in the cases where it is most totally inadequate, that is, in analysing social formations. Bourdieu explains that because of the constancy of the objective conditions over time, rules have a particularly small part to play in the determination of practices, which is largely entrusted to the automatisms of the *habitus*. (Bourdieu 1990, p. 145)

'The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. This system of dispositions – a present practice that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structure practices, an internal law through which the law of external necessities, irreducible to immediate constraints, is constantly exerted – is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it: and also of the regulated transformations that cannot be explained either by the extrinsic, instantaneous determinations of mechanical sociologism or by the purely internal but equally instantaneous determination of spontaneist subjectivism.' (p. 54)

In the creation of our living educational theories we are mindful of the dangers of contributing, in practice, to the reproduction of social formations whilst our intentions are to contribute to social transformations that enhance the flow of humanizing values and understandings. Bourdieu's understanding of the habitus draws our attention to the continuous need to question the reproductive and/or transformative implications of what we are doing and thinking in our ways of being and researching.

Rayner's (2010a & b) ideas on natural inclusionality have been most helpful in developing our understandings of our transformative influences in higher education. In particular his idea of inclusionality as a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as connective, reflective and co-creative has focused our attention on the need to develop a relationally dynamic understanding of standards of judgment in an educational epistemology. We see the legitimization of such standards of judgment in Universities as contributing to a transformative process as to what counts as educational knowledge.

***A relationally dynamic between the mutually sustaining educational relationships for knowledge creation within complex ecologies.***

In this brief paper we are unable to do justice to the numerous relationships that are influencing the sustaining of our educational relationships to improve educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge. What we can do is to highlight relationships that emphasise their importance in local, national and international contexts.

### **Local – working and researching with the Inclusion and Education team in Bath and North East Somerset.**

For the past four years we have had Thursday morning conversations with members of the Children's Service in Bath and North East Somerset on improving practice and generating knowledge. Members of the group include Nigel Harrisson (Manager of the Inclusion and Education team), Sandra Harris (Nigel's Personal Assistant) and Christine Jones (Senior Inclusion Officer).

Here is an extract from Nigel's presentation at BERA 2010. We are including it because it communicates to us the values that Nigel brings into his sustaining and sustained support and relationships to enhance the quality of educational experiences of the most vulnerable young people in B&NES. We find that Nigel's expression of his energy, values and understandings help to sustain our own:

‘One of the innovations I have supported in B&NES is the development of the Inclusion Quality Mark for Schools. This involves making a judgment on the quality of inclusion developed in a school. My colleague Christine Jones has been responsible for making these judgments. As part of my commitment to find appropriate forms of accountability in living values of inclusion as fully as possible in the schools, I have worked with Christine to support her enquiry, “*How do I improve my practice as an inclusion officer working in a children's service?*”

Her multi-media dissertation was the first living theory Masters dissertation to be legitimated at Bath Spa University. It shows the meanings of embodied

expressions of the inclusional values I am seeking to enhance through my work as Head of Service for Education Inclusion.

Christine has developed the ability to form positive relationships quickly and demonstrates the living of her inclusive values. In order to show this, access the You Tube clips of Christine at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEr6JpIchlQ> and see if you can see or feel the empathetic resonance of Christine's living values.



Secondly, I have been working with my PA, Sandra Harris, to develop her skills and confidence as a new PA. Sandra's inimitable (authentic) ability to engage others through the life affirming energy connections she makes with everyone, including those unknown to her, is palpable, as can be experienced at:



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

As a PA, Sandra is my representative and we have worked at placing her in a position where she does just that. This, Sandra would accept, is something that is outside her current comfort zone (in my terms, she is moving into the zone of complexity, where learning takes place). In this video clip is of Sandra discussing her thoughts and feelings after 'going solo' in attending a meeting as my representative. Sandra was encouraged to enter her 'zone of complexity', knowing that she would be 'held' by myself. In viewing the clip, look and feel for the excitement Sandra felt at having achieved. I am sure you will see and feel the life affirming energy (and an empathetic resonance with Sandra) and will recognise that, in my attempts to create a space for learning within the organisation, I can have an educational influence on others and support their learning.

This is the space and connections I hope to develop as the basis of the learning organisation.'

For those who have searched for birthday cards with words that carry the meanings you want to communicate I think that you will experience the qualities that are helping to sustain our educational relationships in our local context.

“...the things I love most about you...

the light in your eyes,

the warmth of your smile,

the love in your heart.”

The educational relationship we are sustaining with Chris Jones (Senior Inclusion Officer in Bath and North East Somerset) serves as an example of how our knowledge-creating capacities can be developed. We and other members of the Improving Practice Conversation Café, supported Chris developing her talents and knowledge to research to improve her educational practice and contribute to an educational epistemology. The knowledge she created by creating and successfully submitting her dissertation (Jones, 2009) to be legitimated in the award of her Masters. Her multi-media living theory dissertation broke new ground for the awarding body and contributes to transforming the complex ecology within which she works.

Chris’s paper for BERA (Jones, 2010), ‘How Can I Improve My Practice as a Senior Inclusion Officer in contributing to the development of the Knowledge and Skills of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) through my involvement in the implementation of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination’, offers evidence of how sustaining educational relationships in living boundaries between university, local authority and schools, enhances and sustains educational relationships with teachers and pupils and contributes to the transformation of the complex ecologies formed by those worlds. We hope to spread the influence of Chris’ ideas in national and international contexts as we sustain, deepen and extend our relationships.

### **National – working and researching in the practitioner-researcher group of Liverpool Hope University’s Centre for the Child and Family.**

We are both participants in the practitioner-researcher group of Liverpool Hope University’s Centre for the Child and Family, directed by Joan Walton (2010). In thinking of the local, national and international contexts that influence our relationships we are aware that these contexts are distinct but not discrete. For example, in whatever context we are working we are attracted by individuals who are seeking to live loving and productive lives. We find energizing the stories in which such individuals reveal and share the ontological values that give meaning and purpose to their lives. You can access Joan’s story of learning as she explores the implications of asking, researching and answering the question in her doctoral research programme: ‘Can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning?’ at <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/walton.shtml> . Here is the way she describes some of principles that are guiding the Centre for the Child and Family. These resonate with our own principles and are part of our sustaining relationships:

‘Developing a centre as a participatory process in an academic environment which is rooted in more hierarchically structured forms of accountability is not straightforward. This became evident when university procedures required that the Centre progress through various stages of approval, which included setting up a steering group. In the initial meeting of the proposed steering

group, there needed to be a decision made as to the role of the steering group itself. There was considerable tension between the view that it should play a more conventional role, in that it would sit 'outside' of the centre, playing an advisory role in relation to its strategic direction and evaluating it with its own processes not needing to be evaluated; and my preferred option that members of the steering group should see themselves as an integral part of a participatory action research process. In the latter case, the steering group would be inclusive rather than exclusive to the Centre, and an evaluation of its role would be included in the research. An additional role of the steering group, then, would be to contribute, receive and respond to the research findings that would be produced as a result of the development of the centre being seen as a research enquiry in its own right.

After considerable and often challenging discussion, the second option was accepted and incorporated into the constitution. In living theory terms, having been influenced myself by a participatory worldview and a trust in collaborative learning, I believe that through the process of decision making that led to the constitution being written in this way, I was providing evidence of my influence on others.' (Walton, 2010, p. 13)

As members of the practitioner-researcher group of the Centre for the Child and Family we see our local research programmes as contributing to the national influence of the Centre in enhancing the well-being and educational opportunities of young people and in the creation and sharing of educational knowledge. We are also committed to engaging in international contexts for the purpose of enhancing educational opportunities and generating educational knowledge.

**International – mutually influencing expressions of energy, values and understandings in the complex ecologies of international contexts.**

Jack sustains his educational relationships with the help of invitations that enable him to extend the space where he can share his energy, ideas and values with others in international contexts. He draws a sustaining energy from these opportunities. During 2010 he has given presentations in Croatia, the USA and South Africa. You can access a video of his keynote to a conference of the Action Research Unit of Nelson Mandela University at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwkeynmmu200810opt.pdf>

In his keynote Jack is sharing his energy, values and understandings in an international space. This was made possible by an invitation from Prof. Lesley Wood, the Director of the Action Research Unit that attracted and funded Jack's presence into this space. Whilst Jack is expressing his energy, values and understandings he is influenced by being in the presence of a gathering of committed educators in a programme of presentations that resonate with and enhance the flow of his motivational energy, values and understandings. You can access the programme, titles and abstracts of the presentations at

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/southafrica/NMMUARUprog1920aug10.pdf> .

There are some 14 Abstracts in the programme from the Self-Study for Transformatory Higher Education and Social Action Group of Durban University of Technology (DUT) convened by Prof. Joan Conolly. Invitations to Jack from Prof.

Conolly to share ideas on action research and living theory to this group at DUT are also contributing to the sustaining flow of life-enhancing energy, values and understandings in his educational relationships.

Having explained the influence of the theories of others and the local, national and international contexts in sustaining our educational relationships, we shall conclude with what are perhaps two of the most important qualities in understanding how we are sustaining our educational relationships.

The first is establishing living boundaries that are sufficiently robust to protect educational relationships from hostile and pathological pressures. The second is 'holding openness' to flows of life-affirming and life-enhancing energy.

### **Robust Living Boundaries**

In understanding how we are sustaining our educational relationships it is important to recognise the importance of developing robust living boundaries that can protect flows of creative energy from being stifled by constraining pressures. These pressures can be experienced as structural constraints within the social organisation of the workplace. They can be political constraints in policies that carry the force of government legislation. We are thinking here of the kind of constraints described by the House of Lords Merits of Statutory Instrument's Committee

'Able, brilliant and skilled professionals do not thrive in an environment where much of their energies are absorbed by the need to comply with a raft of detailed requirements. .... the evidence that we have seen during this inquiry has highlighted the problems that are caused to schools when too little thought is given to the systematic need to rely so heavily on regulation, and too little effort is put into managing the overall impact of statutory instruments issued, and monitoring whether the myriad requirements being imposed on schools are being taken seriously and implemented on the ground. .... We recommend that DCSF should now look to shift its primary focus away from the regulation of processes through statutory instruments, towards establishing accountability for the delivery of key outcomes.' (House of Lords, 2009, p.15)

We continue to find the idea of 'creative compliance' (MacDonald, 1987) useful in responding to constraining political influences. Jack's 1993 publication on the Growth of Educational Knowledge (Whitehead, 1993) is an early example of creative compliance in the face of constraining pressures:

'Perhaps, in the present circumstances, defeated for the time being by force majeure, we need to construct a theory of educational resistance, perhaps a black economy of inadmissible enterprise and undeclared outcomes. We need to culture the arts of creative compliance, as subject peoples have learned to do. Certainly we need to repair the damage done by divide and rule strategies, to rebuild old alliances and forge new ones, to reconstruct the checks and balances of a severely disabled infrastructure. And just as certainly we must not concede to simplified definitions of the teaching/learning task or to forms of control that cannot take its complexity into account.' (p.5)

The pressures can be experienced as psychological in the sense of a damaging influence in one's sense of identity and challenge to one's way of being. We have found Anna Freud's analysis of some 13 defence mechanisms useful in strengthening our living boundaries with healthy rather than pathological responses. At the extreme end of pathological pressures we have identified those of a malignant narcissus and are grateful for the insights provided by Fromm (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malignant\\_narcissism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malignant_narcissism)) that alert us to the qualities that our living boundaries may need to be robust enough to withstand.

In strengthening our living boundaries to resist pressures that can constrain our knowledge-creating capacities we are also seeking to sustain our openness to the flows of life-affirming energy that life itself permits.

### **Holding Openness**

We like the way Alan Rayner (2010a) represents 'holding openness' in his 2010 keynote to the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the Action Learning Action Research Association. We particularly like his understanding of 'holding openness' in terms of the *co-creative, fluid dynamic transformation of all through all in receptive spatial context*.



Figure 7. 'Holding Openness' (Oil painting on canvas by Alan Rayner, 2005). *Light as a dynamic inclusion of darkness continually brings an endless diversity of flow-form to Life.*

'As William Wordsworth recognized almost 200 years ago, 'in nature everything is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute, independent singleness'. The discrete (completely definable) numerical units of conventional mathematics and assumed to exist by every objectivist science theory – including Darwin's adversarial notion of 'natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life' – cannot and do not exist in the variably fluid cosmos we actually inhabit. Evolution cannot

proceed through the paradoxical imposition of external, selectively judgemental force upon singular subject-objects. Evolution can only proceed through natural inclusion – *the co-creative, fluid dynamic transformation of all through all in receptive spatial context.*’ (Rayner 2010, p. 24)

### ***Concluding reflections***

We have explained how we are sustaining educational relationships to improve educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge. This explanation included the use of an original constellation of methods of empathetic resonance, empathetic validity, visual narrative, action reflection cycles, validity and rigour.

However, our focus on methods was not sufficient to explain how we are sustaining educational relationships. To understand how we are sustaining relationships we needed to revealed and share meanings of energy-flowing and relationally dynamic understandings of explanatory principles for explaining educational influences in learning and for including in living standards of judgment for evaluating the validity of contributions to educational knowledge from living educational theories.

In sharing our understandings of our explanatory principles for sustaining relationships we needed to develop **inclusional** explanations of educational influences in learning as distinct from the propositional and dialectical explanations produced by most researchers in the disciplines of education. Our inclusional explanations engaged with some of the complex ecologies in which our practice is located.

We have also shown how multi-media narratives can clarify the influences of complex ecologies in the living boundaries that are constituted by energy-flowing ontological values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, with humour.

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