

How can inclusive and inclusional understandings of gifts/talents be developed educationally?

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“The major cultural dichotomy affecting educational provision for the gifted and talented is between the largely Eastern perception - ‘all children have gifted potential’ - and the largely Western one - ‘only some children have gifted potential’.” Freeman 2002 p.9

Summary

The paper explores how the gifts and talents of all pupils can be engaged and enhanced in improving the quality of learning by moving beyond attempts to define and categorize people in terms of an objective measure or judgment of gift and talent. A living educational theory approach is used to show how, inclusive and inclusional practices can develop gifts and talents that contribute to a world of educational quality as described in the values, aims and purposes of national strategies and agendas including those underpinning the national curriculum http://www.nc.uk.net/nc_resources/html/values.shtml

Introduction

‘Gifted and talented’ as defining categories used to classify children, dictate their attainment targets and prescribe their education programme is an emotive and controversial issue. A very different educational concept is communicated if we talk of developing theory and practice to improve contexts within which children are supported to recognise their aptitudes, interests and passions, develop talents and create, value and offer gifts over time.

White (2006) asserts that the beliefs about intelligence and a subject based curriculum, which underpin many of the English national strategies and implementation plans, and so much of the practice in schools, are rooted in the values of bygone eras. White says,

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

He concludes by seeking to re-focus on the aims and purposes which drive our practice when he writes:

The school curriculum is not a thing in itself. It is a vehicle to realise larger aims. ... The school curriculum is – or should be – a vehicle to enable young people not only to lead a fulfilled personal life, but also to help other people, as friends,

parents, workers and as citizens, to lead as fulfilled a life as their own .(p. 151)

We believe that to articulate and understand why we do what we do is part of our professional responsibility as educators. This is expressed in the CWDC (Children's Workforce Development Council) Induction Training Programme: for Level 3 / 4 children's workforce practitioners – Learning Mentor Role Specific Modules: Handbook,

'What we value and believe has an impact on how we behave and the choices that we make. It is therefore very important that practitioners examine their values, beliefs, attitudes and opinions and consider how these may affect their practice'.(p.8)
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/learningmentors/downloads/ModAHB.pdf>

The handbook explains:

'Beliefs are what we hold to be true. Values are what we hold to be important.' (p.10)

When we test our beliefs as offering valid explanations of the educational influence we are seeking to have through researching our practice, mindful that we are researching to improve what we are doing, we begin to create our own living educational theories. Eisner (1993) put this very well,

'...we do research to understand. We try to understand in order to make our schools better places for both the children and the adults who share their lives there.' (p.5)

Eisner connects educational research clearly with values and it is beholden to us to say what we mean by making schools better places. As educational research is values based we understand our progress with reference to our living values as standards of judgement.

The titles of the units written on the master's programme give you an indication of what we are meaning by educators connecting with their values as they research to improve their practice

'How does the Writing of a new Gifted and Talented Policy enable me to reflect upon and evaluate my Personal values about Gifts and Talents? In what ways am I living my values in this area?' Hurford (2007) retrieved from
<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/roshurfordee2.htm>

How can I carry out Masters level educational research without abandoning my own educational values? Harker (2006) retrieved from
<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/ehee06.htm>

In 2006 Mary Hartog won a National Teaching Award. Mary gained her doctorate for a self-study of her educational practices. In her doctorate Mary sets out the values-based standards to which she holds herself accountable and she asks that her readers use the following values to judge her writings from her **educational research**:

"If this Ph.D. is differentiated or distinguished as a research process, it is

because its methodology is underpinned by the values I as a researcher bring to my practice. It is with this in mind that I ask you to bring your eye as examiners to bear on the following questions, asking yourself as you read this thesis whether these questions are addressed sufficiently for you to say “yes, these standards of judgment have been met”:

- Are the values of my practice clearly articulated and is there evidence of a commitment toward living them in my practice?*
- Does my inquiry account lead you to recognise how my understanding and practice has changed over time?*
- Is the evidence provided of life-affirming action in my teaching and learning relationships?*
- Does this thesis evidence an ethic of care in the teaching and learning relationship?*
- Are you satisfied that I as researcher have shown commitment to a continuous process of practice improvement?*
- Does this thesis show originality of mind and critical thinking? “ (Hartog, 2004, p. 3)*

We are not saying that **research in education** is not important. We learn a lot from investigations into different instructional and training techniques and from ideas from the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history and other disciplines of education, but that is not sufficient. We make educational decisions which are influenced not only by the efficiency with which we can ‘deliver’ curriculum content or skills and by ideas from disciplines of education but also by considerations for the child and young person’s wellbeing and well-becoming as described in the ESRC (The Economic and Social Research Council) paper:

‘Wellbeing is a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one’s goals, and where one enjoys a satisfactory quality of life’. (p.1)

We have a responsibility to theorise our practice, in other words not to simply describe but to *explain* our practice and to make explicit the values we are using as standards of judgement. It is fundamental to appraising what constitutes good practice, how we evaluate our work, and what constitutes evidence of improving educational practice. As Deborah Eyre (2002) said when she led NAGTY (the National Academy of Gifted and Talented Youth)

Change is, in itself, not difficult to achieve but judgements also need to be made regarding whether such change has actually been beneficial. (p.7)

‘Evidence based practice’ is a phrase increasingly heard yet the question, ‘evidence of what’ is not being asked with sufficient rigour, vigour or educational authenticity. In this paper we are encouraging educators to attend to this question for themselves as White has done and Ginott (1972) expressed in the 1970’s

“What is the goal of education?” he would ask, “When all is said and done, we want children to grow up to be decent human beings...By recognising that the process is the method, that the ends do not justify the means, and that in our attempt to get children to behave in a way that is conducive to learning, we do not damage them

psychologically. Also, that we do not talk to children in a way that will enrage them, diminish their self-confidence, inflict hurt, or cause them to lose faith in their competence and ability.’ (p.10)

We are asking this of ourselves as we seek to develop inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice. Our research rests on the bedrock of our values of an inclusive, egalitarian, loving society. A society where people are supported to become emancipatory influences in their own learning and their own lives able to make valued and valuable contributions to a world worth living in. Claire Formby (2007) shows how influential this perspective can be as a teacher in an infant classroom in her enquiry, *‘How do I sustain a loving, receptively responsive educational relationship with my pupils which will motivate them in their learning and encourage me in my teaching?’*

“What has love got to do with receptive responsiveness?”

Earlier I wrote about the mutual affection that I enjoy with the children in my class, described by Lewis aswarm comfortableness (p.34). I wrote that I don’t think those words adequately express what I feel for the children or what I mean by receptive responsiveness.

One consideration for me could be Lohr’s (2006) understanding of an aspect of Ruddick’s Maternal Thinking :

‘She (Ruddick) defines preservative love as seeking to work with the child’s personality, with the way the child sees the world. It is a way of thinking through feeling, which is focused on giving the child what it needs in terms of education, training and security. Thinking through feeling then develops in the process of carrying out, and then reflecting on, her mothering acts’. (Lohr, 2006, p.5).

However for me a more relevant consideration is Divine Gift-love, which Lewis says can also inspire us to love not just that which is lovable but also that which is not. He relates Divine Gift-love to our Need-love of God in the following rather beautiful simile. He says it is: ...like a magic wine which in being poured out should simultaneously create the glass that was to hold it. (p.118)” (Formby, 2007)

We recognise we have to work with the policies and strategies emanating from central and local government and our institutions but we also believe we have a responsibility to develop educational practice that is consistent with our educational values. We see ourselves having a professional responsibility to improve by researching and theorising our practice; to examine and explain what we do, to understand what we and others believe to be true about the educational processes we are engaged in, and to constructively and creatively challenge those beliefs, which are inevitably communicated through everything we do.

We are seeking to respond to the ‘given’ demands made of us by national strategies and the prevailing wisdoms, by engaging constructively and creatively with these ‘givens’, by explicating our ‘living’ embodied knowledge, theories and values, recognising and acknowledging where these are contradicted, offering possibilities for movement and describing our living standards of judgement by which we judge our progress. Amy Skuse offers us an example of what this looks like as she deals with her concerns about SATs.

This essay is based upon my personal experiences as a teacher within Year 2 and the subsequent research undertaken as a result of this experience. I found the year very stressful in terms of the underlying pressure that existed from the knowledge of the judgement my pupils would receive at the end of the year in terms of teaching and learning. I was also conscious that the children felt some anxiety and this therefore sparked an enquiry into assessment in school, reasons for national testing in the UK and the affect that this has upon children and teachers in the primary classroom. This essay will define assessment and outline its purpose within school. It will then examine how assessment has evolved in the UK and explore why current changes and debates maybe happening. I have drawn on both my personal perceptions and pupils experiences as well as further research and I will conclude with my opinion on how we can move forward in the area of assessment within schools. (Skuse, 2007, p. 1)

‘Gifted and Talented Education’ is a national initiative in England but the implementation is not rooted in a universal truth; there is heated debate at conceptual and practical levels by educators and academics in the western traditions. An example of this can be seen in the paper by Howe et al (1998) where their research *‘examines findings from a number of sources that appear to either support or contradict that viewpoint, and considers alternative causes of exceptional abilities. (abstract)*. It is noteworthy that the protagonists in this particular publication are all highly respected academics who have worked in the field of gifted and talented education for years. What is missing in the interchanges are clear descriptions of the beliefs and values of the researchers. Despite their shared recourse to statistics and accepted logics and research methodologies, it is uncommon for any of the arguments mustered to lead anyone to change their mind and the same arguments continue to be rehearsed today.

In this paper we will introduce another form of logic and research methodology which has allowed us to move from the debate as to who is gifted or talented, to exploring how gifts and talents can be developed educationally.

The prevailing wisdom in England, as demonstrated in the national strategies, is rooted in a:

‘... largely Western one - ‘only some children have gifted potential’’. (Freeman, 2002 p. 9)

This expectation leads to a preoccupation with definitions, categories and the development of associated tools. Hymer asserted

*‘Children don’t get gifts, or have them – they **make** them’*

This invites us to shift our focus to the educational processes that support gift creation and devote our energies to exploring what we can do that makes a difference to the educational experiences of children and young people to open the doors of their futures to the possibilities that life offers.

In this account we will focus on the work of researchers such as Barry Hymer, Belle Wallace, Carol Dweck and Joy Mounter because we can see them recognising, and seeking to resolve,

the problem of resisting the damaging prolonged imposition of technical skills on their imaginations in their own practice and theorising. They offer, as we do, narratives of how they have done this as educational gifts. Their gifts are offered not as recipes, as packages with the manuals to ingest and replicate. Rather they open a space for the imagining of possibilities for other researchers exploring the implications as they seem to improve their practice. The individual accounts offer understandings for others to relate to their own circumstances rather than claiming theories as explanations of the learning of all people as do the traditional forms of research.

Evaluation drives practice and they are intimately intertwined. A great deal has been written about the affect of 'high-stakes' tests (Gipps, 1994). However, there is as yet little offered by researchers by way of living educational standards which are values based by which we can judge improvement in our practice or that we can be held to account to with respect to 'inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational practice'.

Through this paper we will seek to show our living values, educational theories and standards of judgement as we research answers to our question 'How can inclusive and inclusional understandings of gifts/talents be developed educationally?'

Starting With Educational Relationships

In the masters degree programme at the University of Bath, Jack has been tutoring educators for their units on 'educational enquiry', 'understanding learners and learning', 'research methods', and most lately, 'gifts, talents and education'. His purpose is to enable the educators to bring their embodied knowledge into the Academy for legitimation as they develop their educational understandings. You can access the master educator accounts at <http://www.actionresearch.net/mastermod.shtml>.

At various points in this text we shall be stressing the importance of Joy Mounter's masters enquiry, '*Can children carry out action research about learning, creating their own learning theory?*' We think it is important for a number of reasons. As Joy explained to her 6 and 7 year old pupils that she was studying a unit on understanding learners and learning, the pupils expressed some indignation that she thought she could do this without sharing the enquiry with them, the learners. Joy agreed and together with her pupils explored the above question. So, we think the enquiry is important because it shows how teacher and pupils' voices can be combined in an educational enquiry into understanding learners and learning. The account includes video-clips of the pupils describing their work with Belle Wallace's (2004) TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) Wheel and explaining how they would modify it to make a more appropriate model to explain their learning. The video-clips show the expressions of a life-affirming energy, a relationally dynamic awareness and a gaze of recognition between teacher and pupils that can be so easily missed from accounts that consist solely of words on printed pages of text. Here is an extract from the account that focuses on the children's creativity in forming a representation of their approach to learning they called QUIFF:

"Perhaps learning is a journey we undertake our whole lives, by realising the quality of the experiences on the journey and not the results, we learn more about ourselves and our values

grow and change'. (Wallace, 2004)

The children thought about this quote for a long time, trying to understand the message she was sharing. They felt strongly that achieving the end result you want is important as well as the journey to sustain you to want to go on. But felt definitely that through the process of research and the reflecting necessary they had learned a lot about themselves and how they had changed even in the last year, as learners and their self belief.

Our discussions often tend to wander from the path that we set out on. What follows is one such occasion. The talk about theories had awakened a keen need to begin planning and articulating their ideas to form a learning theory of our own. Following the idea that TASC meant something when you looked at each letter, the children talked in pairs for a special word of their own to summarise the learning theory. I was amazed as 'A' suggested the word 'Quiff', quite quickly. The children liked the sound of the word and began thinking what the individual letters could stand for, just like in TASC. They didn't have to argue or even debate ideas, they quickly agreed and all ideas seemed to come from the group almost as a collective mind.

Q 'questions we all have to ask to learn'

U 'understand – making sense of things around us and ourselves which is harder'

I 'I am important'

F 'feelings' so important as a learner

F 'focus' to be able to concentrate and persevere

QUIFF, 'I' as in I am important is in the centre, just as we are the centre of our learning and self.' I' is surrounded by our understanding of 'things' and ourselves, feelings which often control our learning. Focus applying ourselves as a learner.

The class then decided that as TASC is represented by a circle, they needed a visual image for QUIFF. Paper to draw out ideas was quickly given out, and thoughts turned to the shape QUIFF would be. The pictures are all so different and thoughtful. Below is 'A's' picture. She has used a triangle with I at the point, represented by an eye, the most important point. An eye to the world and into ourselves. Questions are at the bottom, the start and widest part of the shape. Focus is almost like an egg floating in between our questions and feelings that control us, our thoughts and learning. Kellett (2005) highlights the opportunities for pupils to engage with a subject in great depth and work with primary, self-generated data (Kellett). The depth of the children's thinking shocks anyone we share our journey with. Age, knowledge and skills have often been quoted as barriers to children taking part in action research successfully, but this study will challenge these preconceptions, encouraging the children to critically challenge each others thinking and funnel down their research question and test their hypotheses."

Shock, surprise and pleasure at what the young people are capable of are characteristic responses to the account and the video-clips. The young people are expressing their creative

talents in the generation of shareable understandings of their learning. They are describing and explaining their learning and showing, in action, their educational influences in their own learning. We refer to such explanations from young people and adults as their living educational theories. We are advocating a living educational theory approach to answering questions of the kind, *How can inclusive and inclusional understandings of gifts/talents be developed educationally?*

A Living Educational Theory Approach

The paper is based on assumptions concerning the meanings of a living educational theory approach to the educational development of inclusive and inclusional understandings of gifts and talents and is concerned with showing how the generation of living theories with educational action research can contribute to the creation of a world of educational quality which contributes to the realisation of the values expressed in national strategies and agendas.

Whitehead (1989) originated the idea that individuals can generate their living educational theories as explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. Like Biesta (2006) Whitehead believes that educational researchers must go beyond learning in establishing what counts as educational knowledge and theory through the exercise of educational responsibility. In Whitehead's view this educational responsibility is expressed and developed in relation to one's own form of life in learning to live more fully the values and understandings that contribute to loving and productive lives (Fromm, 1949). It is expressed in educational relationships as a responsibility towards the other to assist in developing the values and understandings that contribute to their loving and productive lives. It is expressed as an educational influence in the learning of social formations in contributing to the social, material and cultural conditions that support the development of loving and productive lives.

Living educational theories are distinguished as the explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in learning. The explanations often emerge from educational enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in personal and professional contexts where the 'I' is experienced as a living contradiction. In experiencing ourselves as living contradictions, we are aware of holding opposites together. It was the use of video in his classroom with his pupils in 1971-2 that revealed to Whitehead such a living contradiction. He believed that he has established enquiry learning with his pupils. The video showed that he was giving his pupils the questions and organising the learning resources in a way that was not conducive to enabling the pupils to ask their own questions and work on appropriate answers. In responding to his experience of himself as a living contradiction Whitehead moved through an action reflection cycles of: experiencing concern because his values were not being lived as fully as they could be; imagining possible ways forward and choosing one in an action plan; acting and gathering data with which to make a judgment about the effectiveness of the actions; evaluating the effectiveness of the actions in terms of the values and understandings; modifying the concerns, imagined possibilities and actions in the light of the evaluations.

An assumption in a living theory approach to improving practice, in the sense of improving educational influences in learning is that the validity of the explanations one gives to oneself for what one is doing are significant in improving practice. Another assumption is that whatever is educational flows with a life-affirming energy. In a living theory approach the explanatory principles of educational influences in learning include a flow of life-affirming energy with values and understandings. We cannot do anything without energy and the representations of flows of energy, in explanatory principles for what we do, contribute to the explanations of educational influences in learning.

A further assumption is that whatever is educational is values laden and involves learning. So, in a living theory the explanatory principles individuals use in explanations of their educational influences in learning, involve flows of life-affirming energy with values. The importance of recognising the importance of enquiry in explaining what an individual does has been stressed by Vasilyuk:

Conceptions involving energy are very current in psychology, but they have been very poorly worked out from the methodological standpoint. It is not clear to what extent these conceptions are merely models of our understanding and to what extent they can be given ontological status. Equally problematic are the conceptual links between energy and motivation, energy and meaning, energy and value, although it is obvious that in fact there are certain links: we know how 'energetically' a person can act when positively motivated, we know that the meaningfulness of a project lends additional strength to the people engaged in it, but we have very little idea of how to link up into one whole the physiological theory of activation, the psychology of motivation, and the ideas of energy which have been elaborated mainly in the field of physics. (Vasilyuk, 1991, pp. 63-64)

At least three forms of educational influence in learning can be distinguished in the generation of living educational theories. There are explanations that individuals generate for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work.

The increase in accessibility of multi-media technology with video and web-space is enabling many more practitioners to use video to see themselves as others see them in educational relationships. The use of visual media in the production of visual narratives is also enabling individuals to see themselves in relationally dynamic educational contexts and to appreciate the multiple influences in the educational development of individuals and their social formations. Some of the latest living educational theories to be legitimated in the Academy are flowing through web-space and can be accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living.shtml> .

Developing inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational practices

The assumptions about an inclusive and inclusional approach to gifts and talents are taken from Hymer's (2007) enquiry, *How do I understand and communicate my values and beliefs in my work as an educator in the field of giftedness?* In his doctoral research that answers this question, Hymer describes and explains the source of his dissatisfaction with traditional western, rationalist approaches to the field of gifted and talented education, with their

instrumentalist, dualistic, individualistic, pragmatic, tool-for-result knowing-centred associations. He suggests an inclusional, non-dualistic alternative to the identification or discovery of an individual's gifts and talents by arguing in favour of educational environments that lead to the creation of gifts and talents.

In developing a living theory approach to the creation of gifts through the development of our talents we are working with a commitment to inclusive education; to support all children and young people to create, value and offer their gifts. We are making a distinction between 'inclusive' and 'inclusional(ity)' as we draw on Rayner's (2004) idea of inclusionality as a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as connective, reflective and co-creative. This recognition of inclusionality as a relationally dynamic awareness carries implications for the generation of new living standards of judgment in the Academy as an answer to Schon's (1995) call for a new epistemology for the new scholarship.

We will now explain how a living theory approach to the creation of gifts through the development of talents has generated a new epistemology for educational knowledge with living standards of judgement that are consistent with some of the values in the national curriculum and in OFSTED inspections. We are using Whitehead's (1989) view of living theory:

In saying that the theory should be in a living form, I recognise that this creates a fundamental problem. The way academics think about theory is constrained by propositional logic. All academics working in the field of educational theory present the theory in terms of propositional relationships. However, the purpose of my own text is to direct your attention to the living individuals and the contexts within which a living theory is being produced (Lomax 1986). Again I wish to stress that this is not to deny the importance of propositional forms of understanding. In a living educational theory the logic of the propositional forms, whilst existing within the explanations given by practitioners in making sense of their practice, does not characterise the explanation. Rather the explanation is characterised by the logic of question and answer used in the exploration of questions of the form, 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead, 1989)

We draw on Wallace's (2000) action research approach in the TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) Wheel, in which teacher and pupil researchers ask, research and answer questions and issues of the kind:

What do I know about this?
What is the task?
How many ideas can I think of?
Which is the best idea?
Let's do it?
How well did I do?
Let's tell someone!
What have I learned?

Wallace's TASC wheel enables us to describe our learning in a way that communicates to others and is so elegantly simple that a 6 year old can follow. We have pointed to the

evidence for this in the account by Joy Mounter described above and you can hear and see the sophistication of thinking of her pupils as they critique TASC with her to develop their own learning theories to account for their own learning:

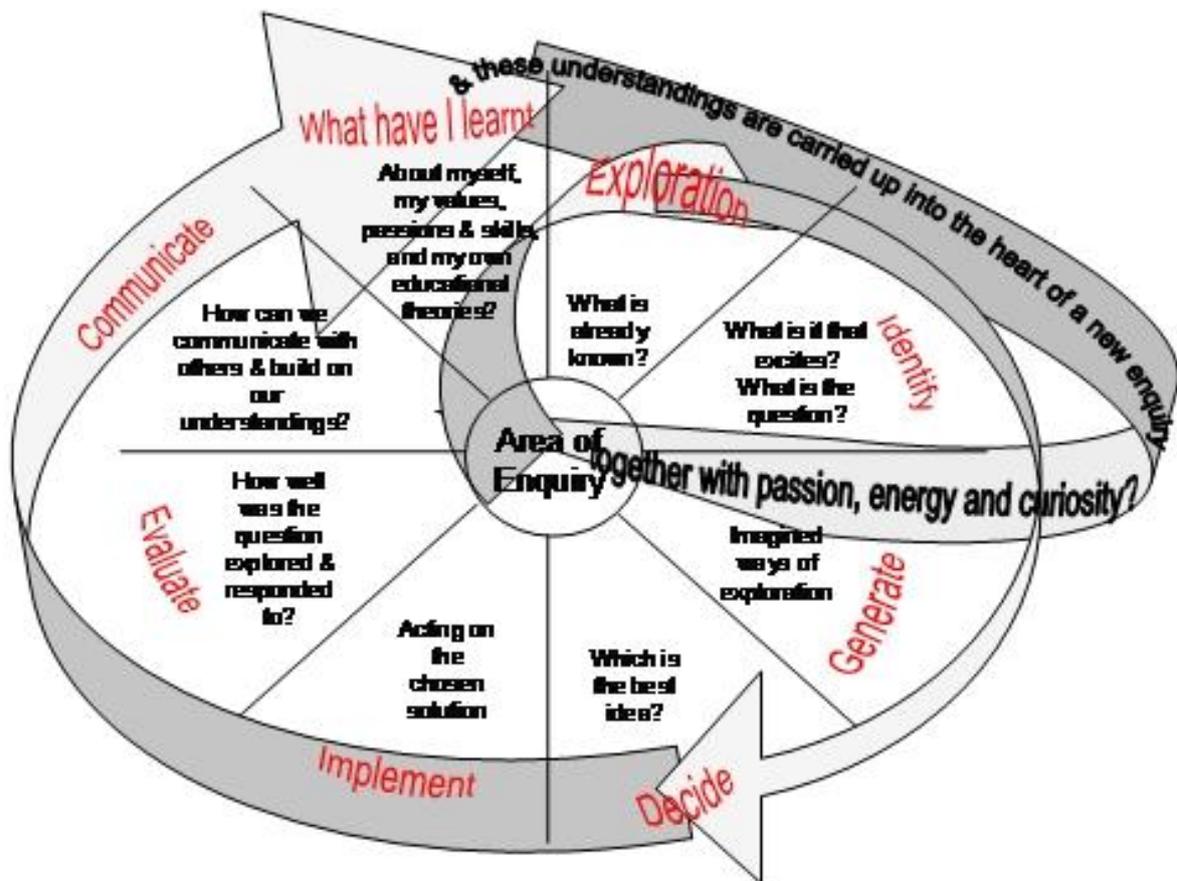
'What use is the TASC Wheel?' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH2-5xexbAQ>

'What do you think of the TASC Wheel?' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti4syOrIDdY>

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

TASC offers a framework for communicating, not a constraint to our thinking. What the children show us is that their learning is multidimensional, flowing and relational and they understand and can communicate the complexity of their thinking as they strive to go beyond TASC while constructing their own living theories as explanations of their learning.

Bringing the work of Whitehead and Wallace together enables us to see how the given curriculum (that provided by the Department for Children, Schools and Families) and the living curriculum (that which comes from the person) can be worked with as distinct but not discrete demands. As we live we go through a process of reflecting on what we have learnt and as we communicate that, to and with ourselves and others, we create new knowledge, embellishing or rejecting our embodied knowledge and create new explanations as our living educational theories. We learn more about the disciplines and our world, and about ourselves as learners with aptitudes, passions, interests and developing skills and understandings in various domains, which include the cognitive, the intra and interpersonal, the physical, and the emotional. We learn more about ourselves as the person we are; the values we hold, what is important to us, what makes us uniquely ourselves, our dreams and aspirations, how individually we want to be in the world and how we want to earn a living. As we enquire, whether within the terrain described by the curriculum, living and/or given, or our practices as adults trying to do the best job we can, we gather and organise what is known, focus on questions, imagine possible ways forward... in other words engage in the processes described in the multi dimensional TASC knot.



We do not learn systematically, in the sense of a linear process with each in a discrete place, in a predefined order with what is to be learnt already known. Our learning is better described as systemic, flowing and relationally dynamic, and arises as we construct knowledge of our worlds and ourselves. But to have an educational influence in our own learning, the learning of others and the education system we need to communicate our stories to and with each other in a form which is comprehensible. Our research is at times systemic, organic and flowing with many different process happening at the same time, at other times systematic with our learning brought together into an order that creates new understandings. As Murray writes

"One of the consequences of my epistemological nomadism for producing a clearly communicable text that I have come to understand through my inquiry is that I have this creative, excessive, or 'leaky' (Lather, 1993) tendency where my imagination is still working out the possibilities that have moved further on than I have been able to communicate in my text. This produces a 'gap' because I have not stabilized either my meanings of writings before I have moved on again in the direction of new, insightful 'oases'.

The flow of my liquid imagination requires a solution, or moment of stability, perhaps a stabilising process, in which the runaway liquidity of my meanings are staunched *just long enough* for me to translocate them in communicable ways into my text. This tension of exposing and opening up new ideas set against the practical need to hold them steady and stabilise them so that I can communicate their meanings has remained with me throughout

my research inquiry as a journey of liquid discovery, and ever-present in my writing—up process. I have not resolved this issue. The tension remains: I imagine it will require a very conscious effort of self-discipline on my part whenever I write. "(Murray, 2007, p. 208

We therefore need to tell stories that are systematic without too much distortion of the non-linear processes that characterise our lives in education. TASC offers us a way of linearising a non-linear dialectical and inclusional process. Generating our stories as our living educational theories (McNiff, 2007) offers us a way of acknowledging the non-linear processes that characterise our lives in education.

The creative and improvisatory, non linear, processes, in our educational development, is reflected in McBeath's important introduction to the personalisation of learning and the study support framework:

"Personalised learning is not something that can be 'done' by teachers to pupils. Rather it arises when pupils themselves take charge of their own goals and progress, together with a heightened awareness of their own learning styles and preferences. When young people enjoy a range of opportunities to test themselves, to explore their talents and cultivate new interests, they come to a deeper appreciation of how learning works, what can inhibit it and in what ways it can nourish self belief. When there are rich extended sites for learning, young people grasp that the purpose of school is not to provide an education but to stimulate a thirst for learning, and to give it life beyond the school gate." by John MacBeath, Professor of Educational Leadership, p.12 [in Study Support: A national framework for extending learning opportunities.](#) Retrieved 1st Feb 07

Dweck (2006) also shows clearly the power that self theory holds over the destinies that we create. My educational theory is an explanation I give to myself not as a disembodied theory of learning but an explanation of how I learn and what I am capable of learning. Dweck calls these growth or fixed mindsets.

Being human we can hold both theories to account for ourselves at the same time. In recognising the dis-ease that creates in us we experience ourselves as living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989) and we seek to resolve this internal conflict. Our way of seeking resolutions to experiencing our values negated in our practice has been through evolving research processes such as the TASC knot and action reflection cycles, which we engage with systemically through our living practice and systematically when we seek to communicate a comprehensible story of our living practices.

Dweck's (2006) personal story illustrates the power of that self fulfilling prophecy and the transformational power of working with educational theory. We make a distinction between educational theories and theories of education; it is what people believe about themselves and the values they seek to live, and how those beliefs and values are influenced that has educational significance and it is the messages we convey through our practice as educators or our own educational theories that should concern us. We draw on theories of education in the creation of our living educational theories.

In answering our question, *How Can Inclusive And Inclusional Understandings Of Gifts/Talents Be Developed Educationally?* we return to Mounter's (2006) account of her

pupils' educational influence in her own learning and her influence in her pupils' learning as she answers her question, *Can Children Carry Out Action Research About Learning, Creating Their Own Learning Theory?* You can access this account at <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/joymounterull.htm> together with three video-clips of the 6 year old pupils expressing their talents in the gift of their understandings of their theories of learning. In the clips the pupils are explaining to their teacher how the two dimensional model of learning of Thinking Actively In A Social Context (TASC) wheel (Wallace, 2000) should be modified into a three dimensional and dynamic understanding in order to adequately represent their learning. The three 6 year olds are exercising their creative talents in the generation of their gifts of new understandings. The educational relationship we see in the video-clips is consistent with Biesta's (2006) ideas about the qualities of uniqueness and responsibility that distinguish educational relationships:

“One of the central ideas of the book is that we come into the world as unique individuals through the ways in which we respond responsibly to what and who is other. I argue 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 asks, What is learning? He responds that learning theorists of both an individualistic and a sociocultural bent have developed a range of accounts of how learning – or more precisely, how the *process* of learning – takes place. He claims that many accounts assume that learning has to do with the acquisition of something “external,” something that existed before the act of learning and that, as a result of learning, becomes the possession of the learner (p. 26). Biesta offers a different view of learning in seeing it as a *response*. He says that *“instead of seeing learning as an attempt to acquire, to master, to internalize, or any other possessive metaphors we can think of, we might see learning as a reaction to a disturbance, as an attempt to recognize and reintegrate as a result of disintegration.”* (p. 27). Biesta believes that learning as response 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).

We also see educational relationships as involving the quality of responsibility that Biesta describes in a section called “The Space of Responsibility: Ethical Space” in which he draws on Levinas' notion of responsibility for the other (see Levinas, 1989b). Biesta argues that the educational responsibility is not only a responsibility for the coming into the world of unique and singular beings; it is also a responsibility for the world as a world of plurality (Biesta, 2006, p. 117) and difference. Like Biesta we are committed to the use and development of a language of education in the age of learning (p. 118). However, where Biesta appears to accept Levinas' notion of responsibility for the other, we prefer to exercise our responsibility towards the other. The distinction is important to us because of a feeling of oppression we both feel if someone assumes a responsibility for ourselves.

Values based Living Standards of Judgement

Amerein and Berliner (2002) illustrate a problem that educators have in trying to evaluate their work.

“A distinction is made between education and training—a difference of degree, but an important distinction, nevertheless. While training can provide some useful skills, including cognitive skills, we think of education as signifying thinking, that is, engagement in cognitive activity that is more demanding than the ability to employ skills. This report is an inquiry into the effects of high-stakes testing on learning, asking whether the imposition of high-stakes testing results in a more narrow form of training or a broader form of education for our students. The evidence reviewed here suggests that high-stakes testing creates a “training effect” only.” (Amerein and Berliner, 2002 p. 4)

Methods and means of evaluating the ‘impact’ of ‘training’ abound but as Amerein and Berliner (2002) point out the unintended consequence of using such tools to evaluate efforts to improve educational contexts can be detrimental rather than simply irrelevant. Simply using the same logic and related research methodologies does not provide a way forward. James (2005) shows how the mistake is easy to replicate.

One of the defining features of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme is that it ‘...aims to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts across the UK’. This paper argues that although it is possible to use the terms outcomes for learners and learning outcomes interchangeably, they have an important difference in connotation. (James 2005)

If we focus on ‘learning outcomes’ we are focussing on a ‘given’ curriculum where learning is construed as a deliverable product not as a dynamic, organic, creative process with the learner literally changing their minds as they create something new or are coming into presence (Biesta, 2006, p. 53) If we were to focus on outcomes for learners our gaze shifts to what changes have been brought about in the learner, the person not just as an absorber and regurgitator of received wisdoms but as a complex individual with intrinsic drives in a relational dynamic with others and as a co-creator of valued and valuable knowledge.

In his conclusion Sternberg (1999) wrote:

Intelligence tests measure developing expertise. Tests can be created that favor the kinds of developing expertise formed in any kind of cultural or subcultural milieu. Those who have created conventional tests of abilities have tended to value the kinds of skills most valued by Western schools. This system of valuing is understandable, given that Binet and Simon (1905) first developed intelligence tests for the purpose of predicting school performance. Moreover, these skills are important in school and in life. But in the modern world, the conception of abilities as fixed or even as predetermined is an anachronism. Moreover, our research and that of others (reviewed more extensively in Sternberg, 1997a) show that the set of abilities assessed by conventional tests measures only a small portion of the kinds of developing expertise relevant for life success (p. 373)

The inclination is to develop new tests resting in the same logics and research methodologies to 'tap' other sets of abilities which like the ant in the amber, loose contact with the living reality. Dweck (2000) expresses our concerns.

When I think of a person's life ruled by an entity theory and performance goals, I think of a life in which there is proof after proof of one's ability. What does it add up to? Thousands of proofs of ability, but, of course, never enough...

Or I think of a life in which time upon time there is a flight from risk, so as to protect an image of oneself. This adds up to an armed fortress containing all the things one could have been or done (p. 154)

Our concern is not with what the various types of assessment and evaluation tools purport to measure but the use that is made of them that has no connection with the values or living standards of judgement of the learner. Our intention is to develop living approaches to evaluating our educational influences in learning which are dynamically interrelated with the standards by which we make those judgements and have the possibility of contributing to our educational endeavours. To do this we need to develop new forms of logics, research methodologies and evidence which keep connection with the values we are seeking to live.

For example, the majority of theory in the Western Academy, uses a propositional logic with a 2,500 history going back to Aristotle, with the law of contradiction stating that two mutually exclusive opposite statements cannot be true simultaneously. Dialecticians however, hold that human beings hold living contradictions together in their practice. For example, in questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' individuals can experience themselves as a living contradiction in recognising that they hold together certain values with their negation at the same time. Dialecticians and formal logicians tend to deny the rationality of the other's position. We believe a third logic, a living logic of inclusionality can include insights from both propositional and dialectical theories without denying the rationality of either logic. We accept Marcuse's (1964, p. 105) idea of logic as a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational.

Joy Mounter (2006) shows how this living logic of inclusionality in her master's enquiry (retrieved 8th Dec 2006 <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/joymounteree.htm>)

...the awareness that we don't know exactly where the path will lead us or who will inspire us, but the openness to recognise it and explore it when it comes....

'I have learnt to never underestimate my skills of craft and learning, because nothing is impossible to a child with imagination.' (Learning evaluation by R. aged 10)

I read this and felt very touched and tearful. I wanted to show everyone how far we have travelled as learners, how exciting the journey is and the self- realisation that comes with it. The process of this action research has been an enlightening and thought provoking process for myself, the learners in my class and staff in my school.

The more we understand ourselves the more we can understand the standards by which we judge our lives to be satisfying and productive and it is that which we are researching to bring

to children and young people; enhancing the possibility of them understanding themselves and improving the chances they have of being the person they want to be, valued and valuable, contributing to a humane world, when they earn a living. We hold this possibility to be at the heart of education.

This is reflected in the values statements in the English national curriculum document.

“Foremost is a belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being, of the individual. Education is also a route to equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy, and sustainable development. Education should reflect the enduring values that contribute to these ends. These include valuing ourselves, our families and other relationships, the wider groups to which we belong, the diversity in our society and the environment in which we live. Education should also reaffirm our commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty.”

An extract reads:

Education influences and reflects the values of society, and the kind of society we want to be. It is important, therefore, to recognise a broad set of common values and purposes that underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools. In planning their curriculum, schools may wish to take account of the statement of values finalised after widespread consultation by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community (May 1997)

The statement of values

The self

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

On the basis of these values, we should:

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

Relationships

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

... the full document is accessible from http://www.nc.uk.net/nc_resources/html/values.shtml

And the document concludes:

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

The Every Child Matters green paper identified the five outcomes that are most important to children and young people:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

The five outcomes are universal ambitions for every child and young person, whatever their background or circumstances. Improving outcomes for all children and young people underpins all of the development and work within children's trusts.

In working with a living theory approach to the development of inclusive and inclusionary gifted educational practice we see the possibility for keeping a connection between the demand to hold ourselves to account given standards by our government and institutions and our desire as educators to hold ourselves to account to educational standards that embrace the living and embodied knowledge, values, theories and living standards of judgment of the children and young people who are the future of our world.

In conclusion

We see 'gifts' and 'talents' as values laden terms and we are working with an educational intent. We recognize personal volition in deciding where an individual decides to devote time and to developing their talents and creating their gifts which is influenced from various quarters. We are working with a living theory approach where the educational intent is to support the skills, understandings and sophistication not only in 'gift creation' but also in the emerging understandings of the child's own living values and theories by the child as they grow to live the life they judge as a life worth living. Through this approach we are working for the individual to learn about, and to develop, their own living standards. These contribute to their decisions as to how they will develop their talents and what gifts they value and will work to create and offer, to whom and in what manner which will enable them to contribute to their own and other's wellbeing.

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