

## **Educational research: Evolving forms of representation, which communicate relationally dynamic energy-flowing values.**

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### ***Introduction***

Snow (2001) offered a challenge to find ways of making the embodied knowledge of educators' public and Eisner (1997) advocated the creation of representational forms that are appropriate for enquiring into educational relationships, which are complex and relationally dynamic. More recently Bruce Ferguson (2008), drawing on her New Zealand experience, began a dialogue in *Research Intelligence* concerning the transformation of what counts as educational knowledge and the evolution of new forms of researching and representation. The dialogue was extended by Laidlaw (2008), talking from a perspective from China, Adler-Collins (2008), as a Buddhist priest in Japan, Whitehead (2008a, 2010) and Huxtable (2009) in Britain. More lately the epistemological transformation called for by Schön (1995) has been the subject of a keynote symposium at the 2009 BERA annual conference: *Explicating A New Epistemology For Educational Knowledge With Educational Responsibility* (BERA 09, 2009).

In this self-study of my professional practice I seek to make a contribution to an epistemology for educational knowledge through explicating relationally dynamic standards of judgment that can be used to validate and legitimate embodied educational knowledge in the Academy.

The explanations of educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations (Whitehead, 1989), include the multimedia narratives of the educational professionals and learners whose work I have supported. They include analysis of, and creative educational responses to, government and local government policies implementation of the Every Child Matters agenda. The explanations of educational influence I present include the recognition, expression, clarification and communication of my energy-flowing values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility.

The living theory methodology (Whitehead, 2008b) developed in this research draws insights from a range of methods and includes a multi-media narrative to explicate the meanings of the energy flowing values and understandings that constitute the explanatory principles of educational influences. Rigour is enhanced using the methods advocated by Winter (1989) and social validity is enhanced using the principles advocated by Habermas (1976, 2002).

The paper draws on:

- Whitehead's (1989, 2008b) living theory and living theory methodology.
- Hymer's (2007) generative-transformational framework for gift creation.

- Rayner's (2005) idea of inclusionality.
- Biesta's (2006) ideas on moving beyond a language of learning into a language of education through the exercise of educational responsibility.

### ***Context***

The academic context is the dialogue begun by Bruce Ferguson (2008) in BERA's publication, *Research Intelligence*:

'It takes courage and open-mindedness for people accustomed to and trained in 'traditional' research processes to consider and even embrace alternative ways of researching and of presenting that research. But it will validate forms of research that can convey knowledge not easily encapsulated just within pages of written text and work to overcome those whose knowledge and skills have been, in the past, inappropriately excluded.' (pp. 24-25)

My local context is as a senior educational psychologist, co-ordinating and developing inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision, in a local authority. My practice is concerned with creating and enhancing educational space and relationships that support learners coming to know and be the person they want to be in the world, as they create, develop and offer talents and knowledge as gifts, which enhance their own well-being and well-becoming and that of others. The knowledge I am concerned with is that which the learner creates of the world, of self and of self in and of the world.

I am responsible for contributing to the implementation of the local authority policy on high ability. While the detail of the wording of the policy, ratified by the Council in 1999, might now be argued about, there is a consistency of my intent to contribute to the realisation of the local authority's vision of inclusive, personalised education for each child and young person. The inclusive, egalitarian and emancipating aspirations of the authority can be seen expressed in the vision statement of 2005:

'We want all Children and Young People to do better in life than they ever thought they could. We will give children and young people the help that they need to do this'

(Bath and North East Somerset Local Authority, 2005)

and most recently in the Head Teachers' vision statements of 2010:

- Confident in Learning, Caring in Life
- Collective responsibility for all learners in the LA (Local Authority)
- Making the impossible, possible
- Creating and realising our dreams together
- Nurturing my confidence to write my own story through life

In contrast, the various policy statements by the government appear to be inspired by notions of gifts and talents, derived from the theories of intelligence originating with Galton, that expressing ideological beliefs with roots in the values of the 19<sup>th</sup> century English society he lived in (White, 2006). This gives rise to policies and strategies that lack coherence that I have to help schools develop responses to.

I draw on the work of psychologists such as Dweck (2000) from America with notions of self-theory, Matthews (Howowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009) from Canada with notions of moving from mystery to mastery models and Hymer (2007) from the UK with notions of gift creation, which exemplifies modern theory and practice in the field of gifted and talented education. I consider modern notions of gifted and talented education to be distinguished by the development of theory, practice and provision, which express values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of inclusive, egalitarian and emancipating communities. As I engage with the foremost thinking in the field, and national policies and strategies, I particularly look for what will help me to develop practice consistent with these societal values and my ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility.

### ***What is my concern and why am I concerned?***

I want to begin by clarifying what I mean by educational research, the purpose it serves and one function of representation.

I am distinguishing what is educational research as the integration of ontological values as explanations and standards of judgment in researching questions of the form, ‘how can I improve what is happening?’ and ‘how can I improve what I am doing?’.

I agree with Eisner (1993) when he said:

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

However, I would broaden the context and say educational research should be concerned with trying to understand in order to make our *world* a better place to live in for both the children and the adults who share their lives there now *and* in the future.

I believe the form of representation used to communicate, plays a significant part in shaping what is communicated, which in turn influences what and how theory, practice and provision evolve. Educational research therefore needs forms of representation that communicate energy-flowing ontological and societal values expressed in the development of educational theory, practice and provision by educators and learners in the complex ecologies (Lee & Rochon, 2009) in which we live and work and are part of. I am alluding to an inter-relationship as I have described before:

‘As an educator my lived and living educational values, form the explanatory principles of my practice and my living standards of judgment in appraising my work. They are at the core of my being, and are unconsciously expressed in what I do and the way I am. I do not exist in isolation and my values are relationally dynamic being held, formed and re-formed in that complex space between self and other/s.’ (Huxtable, 2009)

The traditional form of representation concerns text, numbers and diagrams. However, it is very difficult to communicate the expression of ontological values, such as a loving recognition, respectful connectedness or educational responsibility, or the values of a society that are inclusive, egalitarian and emancipating, in such forms. Images can get us a little closer, but I agree with Whitehead that a multi-media narrative gets closer to communicating the relationally dynamic, life-affirming and life-enhancing qualities of ontological values.

There is a saying, 'seek and you shall find'. I would go further and suggest that the way you look and seek and the forms of representation you use do more than simply describe a disembodied reality to be found. The forms of representation involve creative processes that contribute to bringing an imagined (even if unarticulated) future into being. That is why I believe it is important to develop forms of representation in educational research that communicate values, which are, or should be, drivers of practice in education.

I use the word 'beliefs' to indicate what a person or community believes to be true. I use the word 'values' to indicate what gives purpose and meaning to an individual's life or collective's existence. These values, by their nature, are relationally dynamic and imbued with life-affirming and life-enhancing energy and there is a need to evolve forms of representation that communicates such energy, which is integral to educational knowledge, if research is to progress and contribute to the evolution of educational practice and theory.

### *How can I improve matters?*

'Gifts' and 'talents' are values-laden words and as such are unusual to find in statements of policy and descriptions of practice. I believe this presents an opportunity to develop responses to demands made of schools from a values-base through educational research.

One approach I have taken is to develop inclusive educational gifted and talented theory, practice and provision by encouraging and supporting educators to research to enhance their own 'gifts' and 'talents' in their professional development, and schools to develop inclusive, gifted and talented educational policies, practice and provision.

I am taking 'talents' to be understood as expertise developed and expressed with creativity in the process of creating and offering knowledge. By knowledge I mean knowledge of the world, self, and self in and of the world. I am working with the notion of gifts as life-affirming and/or life-enhancing contributions of talents and/or knowledge, developed and freely offered to enhance the well-being and well-becoming of self and others.

I agree with Biesta (2006) when he says, we have a language of learning but not of education. In referring to 'a language', I am not thinking that this is just concerned with words. The Webster on-line dictionary demonstrates a much richer understanding of 'language', for instance:

(1) audible, articulate, meaningful sound as produced by the action of the vocal organs

(2) a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings

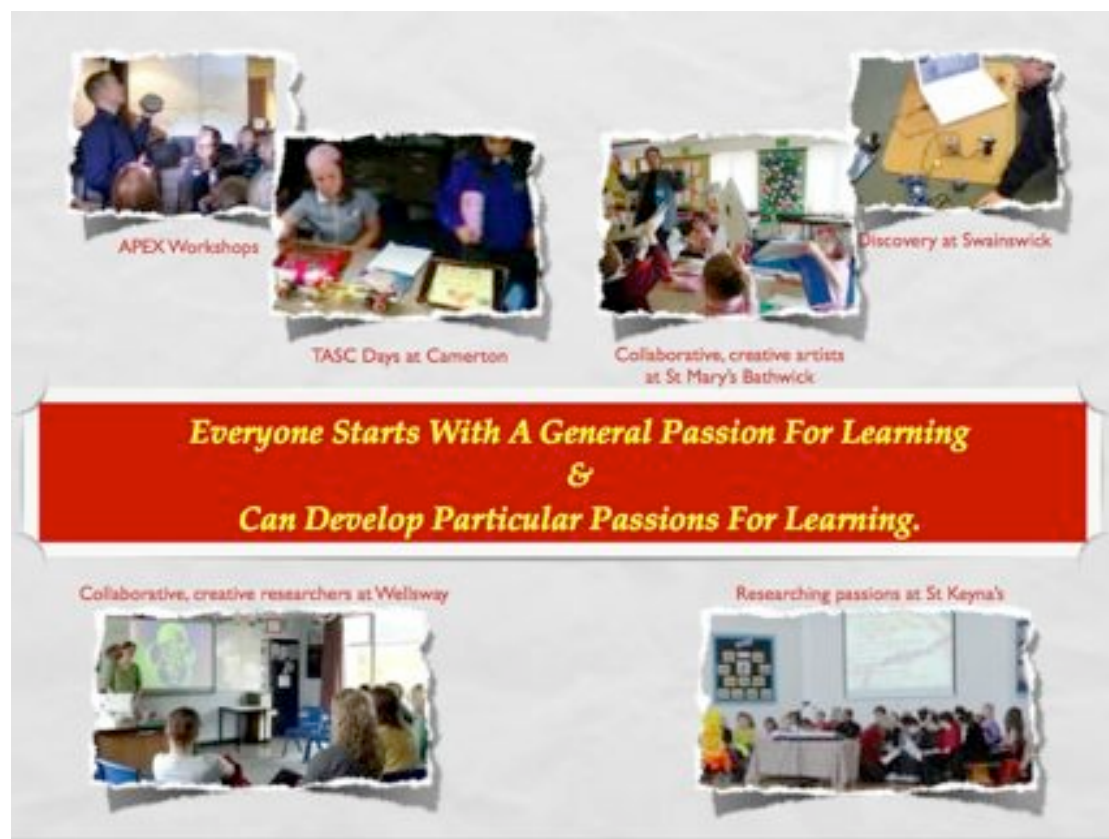
(3) the suggestion by objects, actions, or conditions of associated ideas or feelings <language in their very gesture — Shakespeare>

Interesting that the old English for teach is 'to learn you' and the phrase is still common in vernacular language.

Evolving forms of representation, which communicate the relationally dynamic energy-flowing values inherent in educational notions of learning, have a considerable role to play in the development of a language of education that influences practice. Expertise and talents are required that are often undervalued in our education systems and relegated to ‘art’ lessons after the ‘important’ work, such as becoming literate and numerate, has been done for the day. As a consequence many people, such as myself, are struggling to develop even the basic skills, which enable them to research to improve what they are doing, and to represent their thinking to themselves and others in a way that communicates their talents and knowledge educationally. So, I have sought to create opportunities for educators and learners to become familiar with processes of educational research and with different forms of representation, and to support and encourage them to offer their developing and knowledge as gifts to enhance their own learning and that of others. In this paper I focus on three such spaces; one is through conferences such as this, another is the Masters programme I asked Jack Whitehead to establish and support, and the Improving Practice Conversation Café, that is now a research group of the Centre for the Child and Family of Liverpool Hope University. Each space is distinct but not discrete and inter-relates with others, such as the collaborative creative enquiries, which I exemplify in the presentation I refer to next.

***What progress am I making?***

As this is a self-study I should perhaps start with an example of my own learning. I was invited to make a 10 minute presentation at a conference of the developing inclusive, educational gifted and talented theory, practice and provision in my local authority. I developed a slide presentation to help me focus on key points while not losing contact with my audience. This is one of the slides:



I hoped to communicate, with the visual representation and the hyperlinked captions, something of my relationally dynamic energy-flowing values and the educational influence the educators and learners I work with, have in my learning, their own learning, that of others and in the social formations in which we live and work. I tried to communicate a loving recognition of each person in the audience comprising adults with various professional educator roles, and children. I wanted each to feel I was addressing them as a person with a unique constellation of learning passions and aspirations, but also with a shared value of education. I wanted to develop a sense of respectful connectedness, where boundaries did not feel violated. It was one of the reasons I stressed that the knowledge offered as gifts was not offered as 'perfect'. People can feel very vulnerable when their work is made public and I wanted the audience to recognise the courage of the gift creators and engage respectfully with the gifts offered. I also wanted to express my educational responsibility by extending the educational influence of those gifts by presenting them with the warmth, humour, hope and enthusiasm they engender in me. Whether I was successful I invite you to judge for yourself by accessing the slides and the videos of my presentation from <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/publishedwritings.asp>.

Using questions derived from Habermas's (2002) principles for enhancing social validity:

- Is my presentation understandable? I am asking, do you know what I have done, why I have done what I have done and how I hold myself to account?
- Is the narrative believable? Do I provide enough evidence to support my claims to know my practice and that I do seek to live, as fully as I can, the values that give meaning and purpose to my life?
- Are my educational values and the normative contexts of my work clear?
- Do I offer a well-reasoned and reasonable explanation of why I do what I do?
- In engaging with the video and the slides of the presentation has your imagination been stimulated in the sense the thoughts have contributed to your educational journey as you seek to improve your educational contexts and relationships?

The other spaces supporting the development of educational research and forms of representation is the Masters programme I asked Jack Whitehead to set up and the Improving Practice Conversation Café that Nigel Harrison (Inclusion and Learning Manager, Bath and North East Somerset) has been instrumental in developing.

I want to focus on the work of Kate Kemp as it particularly illustrates the inter-connectivity and complexity of the relationships and ecologies within which I live and work and the evolution of forms of representation which communicate relationally dynamic energy-flowing values.

Kate is a member of the Improving Practice Conversation Café and has completed Masters modules from the programme, which was then offered through the University of Bath, and is currently completing modules for SENCOs offered through Bath Spa University. Chris Jones (Senior Inclusion Officer) tutors the SENCO module (Jones, 2010).

Kate expressed the values she seeks to live in her work in Children's Services when she shared this extract from a book by Donna Leon at the Conversation Café:

"He seemed a man who gazed on all he saw with approval and affection who began every interchange with deep and abiding regard for the person in front of him."

You can get some sense of the warmth and life-affirming energy that is held within these words as expressions of Kate's values by engaging with this image of her. I am asking you to engage not just with the 'head' but also with 'heart' and 'body'; to be aware of the feelings evoked; to be sensitive to your feelings of an empathetic resonance (Whitehead, 2010) with the values that Kate wants to live as fully as she can through her practice.



This image is of Kate at 42 seconds into this video

<http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=JackWhitehead#p/search/1/cDcggqIb7J4>

I think you get a better sense of these energy-flowing values by hearing and watching her explain, which she does in this 1.06 minute clip. I invite you to look again using a technique developed by Whitehead (Huxtable, 2009). Wait for the video to download then run the cursor back and forth. I am asking whether you feel points of empathetic resonance (Whitehead, 2010), with the values that Kate is expressing not just in words but also in her way of being.

I see Kate expressing her values in this video taken three years later. It was during a session she had asked me to video but she did not know at the time the video was still running after the 'event' had concluded. She has given permission for the clip to be put on YouTube. The context was a parenting group that Kate was leading. A parent had brought in her baby and after the session had finished Kate went to look at the baby.



The mother had just moved away and Kate was not aware that she was being observed at this moment or that the video was still running (which accounts for the odd camera angle). Looking at this image now I still experience an empathetic resonance with Kate's embodied expression of her ontological values, she began to articulate in 2007. I can feel the smile spread through me as I watch the few seconds during which she is completely focussed on the baby.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sHj-jA8u6A>

It is not the baby that evokes this feeling in me; it is experiencing Kate's embodied, energy-flowing values.

Kate researched the tensions of living her values in practice and made her knowledge public in her Masters Educational Enquiry (Kemp, 2010), *'Can I reconcile the tension I feel between living my values at the same time as exercising professional judgements and, in doing so, improve my practice?'*

'Over time, and particularly through the development of my Buddhist practice, I believe these values now underpin my daily life rather than just being theoretical and the Donna Leon quote is an embodiment of what 'non-possessive warmth' actually looks like.

However during the course of my second Masters writing on gifts and talents (Kemp 2009) I became aware that to approach all parents, pupils, staff etc with 'non- possessive warmth' might be pleasant for them but was too simplistic in relation to doing my job well. In particular in relation to parents and the safety of their children the situation is more complex. As a professional my first responsibility is for the safety of the pupils in my care. How therefore do I hold my value of 'deep and abiding regard' for the parent whilst at the same time making judgements about their capacity to keep their children safe?'

Here she clearly identifies one of the problems with seeking to answer the fundamental questions I believe all who claim to be professional educators should be seeking to answer: What is my educational influence in learning: of myself; of others



and; of the social formations within which I live and work, and how can I improve what I am doing?

There are many times that an image of Kate ‘in action’ would not evoke a smile, for instance when she is making difficult and painful decisions required to keep a child safe. This is an integral part of the complex ecology of a professional educator researching to improve their practice. Kate refers to the work of Robyn Pound who, as a Health Visitor, also struggled to respond to these tensions without violating her values. Robyn, through her doctoral research (Pound, 2003) developed a notion of ‘alongsideness’. Kate integrates what she learns from Robyn’s educational research:

‘I understand Robyn to be describing here the same tensions that I am aware of. I can also see in the video clip of her what I recognise as ‘unconditional warmth’ not just in the content of what she says but even more so in the way that she smiles and engages with the listener  
<http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=JackWhitehead#p/search/0/Xuyna20wYXk>

Is it possible to resolve the tension? Having considered my writings and those of Robyn and other professionals the conclusion I have come to is that this tension will always exist. Therefore the key question for me now is how I can get better at both developing relationships with parents whilst safeguarding their children? Having become conscious of this tension how can I improve my practice?

A key element of this for me is that of being ‘genuine’. By this I mean that when I am with a parent I am really listening to them and not just half listening whilst waiting for an opportunity to continue with my own agenda.’

Engaging with the clip of Robyn evokes in me an empathetic resonance with Kate’s value of ‘unconditional warmth’ and also with being ‘genuine’. Robyn feels to me to be ‘genuine’, to be fully present with herself as well as the person behind the camera, without ‘fear or veneer’ (a wonderful phrase I have Belle Wallace to thank for), offering the knowledge she has created freely as a gift. Kate also identifies other difficulties in evolving forms of representation, in living theory action research (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), which communicate ontological values as explanatory principles and living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996) and offers a resolution.

‘Its all very well having values but what if you don’t live up to them? The danger in saying ‘these are my values, this is how I want to live my life’ is that other people can then readily point to the times when you don’t live up to your ideals! Here the Buddhist concept of ‘honin’myo’ comes in handy. Its literal translation is ‘from this moment on’ and it means that we can always restart and try again.’

This takes me back to recognising that evolving forms of representation appropriate for educational research concerns communicating something of profound importance to the researcher. In communicating their ontological values, what it is that gives purpose and meaning to their life, the educator researching to improve their practice is genuinely trying to answer the questions concerning what educational influence they are having in learning and how they can do it better. The forms of representation they evolve, which communicate their energy-flowing values to themselves and others, is in a relational dynamic with the construction of knowledge of themselves, and themselves in and of the world in which they live and work, as well as the world of their practice.

As an educational psychologist I was very aware that assessment was intervention. For instance, if I asked a teacher to collect data on the frequency they spoke to a child in class, I was aware that I influenced not only the relationship between child, teacher

and others in the class, in class and school. I could also, sometimes very subtly, be influencing how individuals saw themselves. For example, a teacher in becoming more conscious of how often they were speaking to a particular child could begin to become more aware of, question, and change their own embodied beliefs and values. In becoming conscious of how their embodied knowledge was being expressed, changes could result in their emotions and feelings, which changed how they behaved with a particular child and with other people. The point I am trying to make is evolving forms of representation, which communicate the ontological values of the educational researcher, is an integral relationally dynamic aspect of the evolution of the knowledge researched. The knowledge researched is knowledge of the world, of self and self in and of the world, which has an inter-relational creative influence in the knowledge creation process in educational research.

To do this requires courage, not only to suffer the inevitable slings and arrows of those with malevolent intent, but also to face self with an 'unconditional warmth'. The way I have found to express this is for a person to develop talents which enable them to extend themselves as well as others a loving recognition, to develop a respectful connectedness which does not violate their own as well as other people's boundaries, and to express an educational responsibility for themselves as well as towards others.

The clip of Kate is rare. Either a camera is not available or could not be used. Often the issues concerning ethical permissions and the limited understanding of self-study mean educational researchers can not see for themselves, let alone represent to anyone else, what influence they are having, educational or otherwise. It is only available because I had learned from Whitehead to look for the unplanned and unexpected moments when embodied ontological values are communicated freely. So after the 'event' I left the video on and tried to keep an unobtrusive focus on Kate. How often do we have the opportunity to see ourselves as others see us, let alone experience ourselves as another experiences us?

Further evidence of the educational influence I want to have is offered with reference to the work of the educators who I have helped to develop talents and knowledge to offer as educational gifts in the form of accounts as part of their Masters programme. These accounts can be accessed from <http://actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>. Some of these accounts are text based, some include multi-media narratives, such as the Masters dissertation successfully submitted by Chris Jones (Jones, 2009), which can be accessed from <http://actionresearch.net/living/cjmaok/cjma.htm>.

### ***Conclusion***

In this paper I have focussed on one of the distinguishing features of educational research as the integration of energy-flowing values that emerge through the research and which form explanatory principles and standards of judgement of the researched practice (Whitehead, 1989). I have shown in this account how I evolve forms of representation in a dynamic, generative, transformational and evolutionary relationship with others, to help learners to emancipate themselves in their own lives and learning, to develop and offer talents and knowledge as gifts to enhance their own learning, well-being and well-becoming and that of others. Through this work I believe I am contributing to the development of representations that contribute to the evolution of an educational language and an educational epistemology.

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