2: Which routes do I know? Imagining and acting on solutions

2.1: A matter of definition – who's gifted, and who says?

In this section I set out to document how I have striven to move my practice into domains which fit more comfortably with my ontological values and with my experiences as an educator in the field of gifted and talented education. I do this by tracking how I have shifted my definition and usage of the term 'gifted' from one implying fixed-state, within-child quantification to one involving the development of metacognitive awareness within a social, relational context – a route pursued through reflection on critical conversations with peers and through the insights offered by children's own reflections. I record how growing awareness of living contradictions in my thinking and my practice have led to parallel moves to address these contradictions in my writing and in the nature of my job (from representative of educational institutions through to freelance educator).

In June 1998, two years into my work as co-ordinator of Cumbria LEA's Able Pupil Project, I was invited to submit evidence to the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee Inquiry into Highly Able Children. At that time our Project had adopted the 'operational,' readily measurable and traditionally achievement-oriented definition cited in 1.4 (Dialectic 1). Yet in my submission to the Inquiry, reinforced verbally before the Committee in December 1998, the definition I advocated was very different, drawing as it did much more on a multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 1999) perspective:

> *I would define a highly able child as that child who, given access to a wide and stimulating environment, creates products (which could be recorded in a range of forms) which demonstrate originality, depth of understanding and high levels of*

expertise. This definition resists quantitative measurement. I believe it is counter-productive to set out to identify that sample of children who meet the requirements of an operationalised definition, which will be largely arbitrary, and then to provide that sample with a qualitatively or quantitatively enriched educational experience. If all children are given access to an enriched curriculum, the most able will identify themselves. This is not – in my view – an idealistic or precious position to adopt – it is a necessary one. (Hymer, in House of Commons, 1999, p.136)

Even ignoring the *naivete* of the penultimate sentence[1] I attribute the substantial inconsistencies between the views identified above and the definition I had in practice implemented, as evidence in part of the living contradiction between my values and my practice, and in part to my reflecting over time on the inadequacies of the 'operational' definition as it was being applied in our schools with 'real' children. The yawning gap between social science and social policy becomes a chasm when social policy is considered in relation to the individual person. Looking back now on the definition recommended to the Inquiry, I can see that it too was couched in a western, modernist and undeconstructed (let alone reconstructed) understanding of the term 'gifted and talented' – although it took a more obviously liberal and less reductionistic line.

As mentioned in 1.2, in 2001 I was invited to shift sideways from my role as co-ordinator of Cumbria LEA's Able Pupil Project, to initiate and implement development work within the Barrow Education Action Zone (EAZ) on a part-time basis (initially 0.4, thereafter 0.5). This move carried some career/income risk, as it involved my resigning from Cumbria LEA, and looking for freelance work to supplement the part-time salary from the EAZ. It was a move I made quite readily, however – even eagerly – for the following reasons:

[1] The suggestion that given access to an enriched curriculum "the most able will identify themselves" is ignorant of the literature on institutional racism – children who have 'ability' but who lack cultural or social capital in certain contexts and who are typically under-represented in traditionally-identified gifted and talented populations – *cf.* Lidz & Macrine, 2001; Chaffey & Bailey, 2003, Lidz & Elliott, 2006.

1. In anticipation of a forthcoming OfSTED inspection of Cumbria LEA, I had found myself considering taking defensive measures – setting quantitative targets which could readily be measured and achieved (but which would scarcely progress provision within the LEA), initiating high-profile 'glamour' projects, tightening the scope of the Project's involvement by raising the inclusion threshold, etc. I questioned my reasons for considering these actions, and in choosing to reject them, resolved instead to seek out opportunities for developing my future work in the field within structures that wouldn't invite me to consider compromising my core principles and beliefs (identified in 1.4).[2]

2. In pursuance of my values and beliefs, I was anxious to explore the educational viability and efficacy of non-traditional, non-normative, inclusive routes to the definition, identification of and provision for 'gifted and talented' children. EAZs at the time were not bound by the definitions and constraints impinging on *Excellence in Cities* schools *and Excellence Clusters*, as the remit of EAZs was to innovate and seek unorthodox routes to the raising of academic standards. I was aware, therefore, that I would have greater opportunities for innovation within the EAZ and through freelance work than I did within the LA as a whole.

3. I was looking forward to working collaboratively with a colleague, Deb Michel, who was also considering resigning from the Cumbria County Psychological Service in order to undertake developmental work within the EAZ. I knew from past cooperation over professional activities that we worked well together, bringing distinct but complementary skills within a shared value-set and vision of educational possibilities.

On beginning work within the Barrow EAZ, and following liaison with colleagues, I resolved as an initial activity to attempt a deconstruction of the terms 'gifted and talented,' before attempting a reconstruction which corresponded more closely to the

[2] Having in the end taken no prophylactic measures (e.g. set more easily achievable targets for numbers of schools with policies for the gifted and talented), the project I oversaw was the subject of some criticism in the ensuing OfSTED report – even though at the time Cumbria LA's provision for more able learners was far in advance of most authorities in England and Wales.

vision and needs of the EAZ, its schools and learners. I knew from initial conversations with the heads of our partner schools that some were already working – at times reluctantly – within the prevailing national agenda and a definition which bifurcated the field into *gifts* (seen as relating to the core academic areas) and *talents* (seen as relating to sports and the expressive arts), and which then added an actuarial element and an invocation of segregated provision (DfEE, 1999):

- Giftedness relates to high-level ability (or potential) in one or more statutory subjects other than art, music and PE.
- Talent relates to ability (or potential) in art, music, PE or any sport or creative art.
- At least 2/3 of the cohort are to be gifted.
- The cohort should comprise 5-10% of the school roll.
- The cohort should have access to a distinct teaching and learning programme.

This definition met almost perfectly the specification I (and others) had cautioned against before the House of Commons Education Committee Inquiry in 1998 (see above). Our concerns over this definition, and doubts over its potential for making a significant difference to the educational opportunities of the children attending our schools, were several and multi-faceted. These included moral and ethical concerns over the rationalist, uninclusional and discriminatory *weltanschauung* of the sort embodied in the phrase "distinct teaching and learning programme," which assumes neat delineations of human characteristics at an abstract level, in the belief that these correspond to the *truth* of individual people. There are also practical and pragmatic reservations over a *test-and-place* methodology outlined in 1.4. Moreover, I was troubled by the synthetic distinction being made between *gifts* and *talents*, and the implicit hierarchy established. I was aware, for instance, of Winner's work:

> *While children who are precocious in those kinds of scholastic skills assessed by an IQ test are called gifted, children who show exceptional ability in an art form such as the visual arts, music, or dance or in an athletic area such as skating, tennis, or*

diving are called talented. Two different labels suggest two different classes of children. But there is no justification for such a distinction. (Winner, 1996, p.7)

In September 2001, during a critical conversation with my colleague Deb Michel, she asked the question, "What would be different if we spoke about *gifts* and *talents*, rather than *gifted* and *talented*?" Reflecting on that question permitted our subsequent reframing of the concept from one representing a static *within-person* state to one allowing a separation between the concept (giftedness) and its embodiment (the 'owner' of the 'gift'). At the time, this distinction was attractive to us, and I at least was unconcerned by the reification implied in the concept of 'gift' and the dualism involved in the separation between concept and embodiment. In the co-creation of Barrow EAZ's definition, I was more concerned to give due regard to the complexities underpinning the terms gifted or talented, and to frame the definition of individual gifts and talents in relative terms, rather than as absolute 'abilities' measured against set 'norms'. This would be a departure even from the more inclusive – but still performance-based – definition I'd provided to the House of Commons Inquiry. We wanted factors giving rise to giftedness and talent to be seen as inextricably inter-related and, wherever possible, we were anxious to reject false dualisms – e.g. *intellect-body, gift-talent, knower-known, identifier-identified*. Looking back on this period, I recognise that these ambitions were only partly realized, and our attempts to liberalise conceptions of giftedness were nonetheless framed within a traditional psychological epistemology: the complexity would embrace, for instance, both within-child factors (e.g. inherited or acquired predispositions, aptitudes and intelligences, learning dispositions) as well as situational and motivational factors (e.g. levels of opportunity, encouragement and learning challenge). Moreover, the *concept-embodiment* dualism was retained, as observed above.

We were also anxious for our definition also to draw heavily on a metacognitive component – i.e. the awareness of and control over one's own mind or thinking (Flavell, 1979; Claxton, 1999). This would offer increased scope for the creation and self-identification of gifts and talents over time (as revealed in any single domain of knowledge or experience), not just a snapshot identification drawing on the usual

test-and-place criteria – with learners seen as the passive recipients of a label awarded on the basis of a test score, exceptional performance, or similar criterion.

Whilst the job of identification should lie, we felt, substantially with the individual learner, the educational provider (in this instance seen as the teacher/s and school) had a responsibility to ensure a broad, balanced, enriched and truly challenging curriculum for all, as opposed to a distinct teaching and learning programme for the few. The identification of personal gifts and talents should represent, we argued, an opportunity open to all learners, irrespective of 'ability,' 'potential,' or prior achievements. A definition which we felt could go some way to achieving these intentions, yet without becoming unhelpfully complex and over-nuanced, was the following:

<u>A gifted or talented student is regarded as one who has:</u>

(i) experienced a degree of facilitated self-reflection on his or her pattern of learning strengths and preferences, *and:*
(ii) identified his or her area(s) of greatest strength(s) within the framework of an enriched or extended learning environment.

Strengths would include gifts and talents as identified by the DfES Excellence in Cities initiative, G&T Strand (DfEE, 1999), and also less easily measurable 'soft' skills and qualities such as inter-personal and intra-personal skills and other elements crucial to thinking for learning (e.g. resilience, analysis, wise judgement and discernment, intuition and imagination, etc.).

Such a definition defied any capping of the numbers of children identified (e.g. by an arbitrary figure of, say, 5-10%), or a narrow understanding of who might be gifted or talented, yet it also avoided, we felt, a woolly "All children are gifted, so let's not talk further about it" response. Without being prescriptive about means of implementation, implicit in the definition is a clear requirement for schools rigorously to discharge their responsibilities – e.g. to provide metacognitive learning

opportunities to support the child's self-reflection (stilling activities, guided visualisation, learning logs and thought journals, peer-mentoring, etc. – *cf*. Fogarty, 1994), and to focus their energies on creating enriched, challenging, stimulating learning environments. There was the potential (never fully realised during my association with the EAZ) for 100% of a school's roll to be identified as gifted or talented – but only through the rejection of a norm-referenced, comparative understanding of the term, in which a child is gifted because she is objectively "better," "brighter," "more successful" than another, in any given domain – the "competition game" described by Holzman (1997). Instead, there is the potential for the term to be conceived in ontogenetic terms, in which a child (any child) is seen to have a gift in a domain, because *relative to her other interests, aptitudes or performances*, this domain emerges as a relative strength or focus of energies. With this latter interpretation, it is clearly possible for a special school to engage fully, genuinely and unapologetically in the 'gifted and talented' agenda.[3]

This definition was subsequently adopted without revision by the EAZ, and promoted in our schools. Alongside the definition, we advocated an identification strategy based on *identification-through-provision* (Freeman, 1998), characterised by the following features:

- seeing identification as process-based and continuous;
- basing identification on multiple criteria, including provision for learning and outcome;
- validating indicators for each course of action and provision;
- presenting students' abilities as profiles rather than as unitary figures;
- adopting increasingly sharp criteria at subsequent learning stages;
- recognition that attitudes may be affected by outside influences such as culture and gender;
- involving students in their own educational decision-making, especially in areas of their own interest.

[3] As indeed was the case within the Barrow EAZ, which included support for a special school for children with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, and a Pupil Referral Unit for children and young people with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.

In promotion of this approach, we recommended supportive procedures and tools – those which might probe and illuminate from multiple angles – e.g.:

- self-reflection exercises;
- evidence-based checklists (e.g. Freeman, 1998, pp.12-13);
- teacher-nomination based on a combination of structured observation, instinct and intuition, and inspection of classwork performance;
- peer-nomination through games and affirmative activities;
- parental-nomination;
- self-nomination through the process of self-reflection, communicated to teaching staff;
- standardised and unstandardised test results, including national curriculum tests, tests of attainment and aptitude available through commercial publishers, and tests of creativity.

To promote identification and provision contiguity we encouraged consideration of general principles underpinning decisions in relation to organisational responses, with an emphasis on maximising:

- effective learning for all students (including self-knowledge and metacognitive awareness as well as the acquisition of facts and concepts);
- the delivery of an enriched curriculum to all students;
- the active participation, engagement and inclusion of all students.

We believed these principles to be incompatible with a policy of blanket student streaming or even setting. That said, it was considered that there would be times where teachers might feel that significant alterations to the usual inclusive arrangements were appropriate, without violating the general principles above. These alterations would best, we felt, be related to the time, context and groupings needed for the learning objectives to be met or realized. An example: the formation of an editorial board for the construction of a school magazine or prospectus, drawing on

students with appropriate gifts and talents from across the school. Similarly, the option of pursuing forms of acceleration in particular content areas was retained, but it was expected that this would be appropriate for only a small minority of students, and only after:

- the introduction and outcomes of sustained high-quality enrichment and extension activities had been critically evaluated;
- full consideration had been given to the likely short, medium and longer-term impact of the acceleration on the whole child; this would include reference to the perspectives of the child and his or her parents.

Realization of these considerations would involve, we considered, the use of a wide variety of class and students groupings in order to promote effective learning. This included:

- collaborative learning groupings;
- groupings arising from curriculum compacting processes (Reis *et al.*, 1994);
- the use of mentors, including peer mentors;
- cross-age interest groupings and clusters;
- a degree of informed experimentation with groupings (with evaluation and review);
- where appropriate to the learning needs of the students, occasional opportunities for advanced enrichment work in withdrawal groups.

Having created what we felt was an inclusive and evidence-based framework for configuring our work in the field, very little time (and very few resources) was subsequently devoted in the EAZ to initiatives devoted specifically to "the G&T." Instead, the EAZ's energies were concentrated on inclusive 'provision' – the advocacy of and training in methodologies which we felt were in sympathy with our approach. These included the Critical Skills Programme (*cf.* www.criticalskills.co.uk), Philosophy for Children (*cf.* www.sapere.org.uk and section 2.2) and, to a lesser extent, Schools Councils (*cf.* www.schoolcouncils.org) and Dilemma-Based Learning/Webs of Meaning

(*cf*. 2.3). Of the two major training initiatives, in total around 450 Barrow EAZ teachers and teaching assistants received accredited training in the Critical Skills Programme, or P4C – or both.

I cite the foregoing descriptions and explanations as evidence of my attempts to shift my practice in the direction of my values, and in particular, of the value of intellectual respect – the conviction that all people, not just those traditionally identified as 'gifted and talented,' have the capacity to think for themselves, recognising that through the practice of metacognitive and other learning strategies there is the potential to "increase the intellectual capacity of all students" (Hopkins, 2003).

These values and beliefs premised the design, recruitment and delivery of a residential "gifts and talents" summer school in 2003, which was held under the auspices of Barrow EAZ at Brathay Manor – an outdoor-education management training centre near Ambleside, Cumbria. Perhaps betraying my background as an experimental psychologist, my original intention was to design the summer school as a research study within the social sciences tradition, permitting evaluation of the short and longer-term impact of the summer school on the children involved – 'the subjects' – and perhaps even permitting the drawing of conclusions based on the study's replicability and generalisability. These are not the purposes to which some of the data collected are put in this research report, although the ensuing descriptions and terminology will betray the experimental nature and sensibilities in which the study was conceived. Elements of the study *are* described in this research account because of the insights they offered me into the conceptualisations of the terms 'gifted and talented' as revealed by the children themselves. I will describe how, in seeking to discern the sense that children made of these terms, my own insights into and possibilities in the field were expanded.

Funding for the summer school came from the DfES's Gifted and Talented Summer Schools programme, topped up with EAZ resources, as we wished to hold a follow-up ('Time 3') three-day residential three months after the initial five-day residential experience. We were able to fund 30 places for this summer school, and uniquely

within the country (as far as I'm aware), we sought to recruit children on a mixed-ability basis: all our schools were invited to nominate Year 6 and Year 7 children (the primary-secondary transition period required by the DfES) for the summer school. We asked for the names of every 6th child on each Year 6 and Year 7 class register, together with a record of that child's current academic attainment, and available *Cognitive Abilities Test* scores (Lohman *et al.*, 2003). From these data, by ensuring a gender and scholastic attainment mix, we selected 30 children to be broadly representative of the wider Year 6 and Year 7 population. We then approached the children and their parents/carers for expressions of interest, and the composition of the party was finalised.

Subsequent individual assessment of each member of the party (shortly before the start of the summer school) involved administration of an individual test of cognitive abilities (Elliott, 1997). Psychometric, educational and sociological data confirmed (within the social sciences tradition) that the summer school party would be broadly representative of all abilities – including a child with severe learning difficulties, and one who attended Barrow Pupil Referral Unit – but with the majority clustered in the average range of CAT and BAS-II scores.

After the psychometric data had been collected, as part of the semi-structured interview, we asked the children a number of questions (*cf.* Appendix 1). Having recorded their responses, and reflected on the range of beliefs, understandings and views that these responses revealed, I attempted a categorisation. The category headings I mooted for the children's responses are reproduced in Appendix 2.

The children's collective responses to these questions about the nature, the distinguishing features, the aetiology, the influences and the routes to identification of gifts and talents could be considered (depending on one's perspective or theoretical orientation) variously to be insightful, sincere, naïve, astute, original, received, true, false, confused, etc. – but in their raising of cognitive, affective, environmental, hereditary, social, motivational, metacognitive and personality-related themes and influences I felt they mirrored almost perfectly the content of well-regarded textbook

syntheses of issues surrounding gifted and talented education – *cf*. VanTassel-Baska, 1989; Gross, 1993; Montgomery, 1996; Porter, 1999 – and for that matter most of the core areas in developmental psychology too! It should be remembered that these children represented a broad range of abilities and attainments (as measured by psychometric tests and scholastic achievements at least), and it was not the case that only the high-IQ, or high-achieving children (the traditionally-conceived 'gifted and talented') had views, insights and understandings to offer in response to my questions. Whilst a number of responses from the 'identified able' did indeed cluster around the theme of genetic inheritance in giftedness – the fixed-state, neurologically-located model which dominated early 20th century conceptualisations of intelligence and which retained support at the end of it (e.g. Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Cooper, 1999) – this was true too for the 'unidentified able' and the 'unidentified un-able.' And alternative explanations and understandings were offered by both groups too. To the children taking part in this study at least, giftedness and talent were complex concepts offering no neat, linear, uncontested and uncontestable routes to understanding their nature, course or aetiology. As observed by Sternberg (2004a, *op cit*.) and many other researchers in the field (e.g. Winstanley, 2004; Winner 1996; Young & Tyre, 1992; Freeman, 1980, 1991, 2001), there are few undisputed understandings in the field's research literature – small wonder then that there is little agreement, but a rich range of possibilities, advanced by children themselves.

Where did the children's insights and views take my own thinking? This I find difficult to track in any precise sense, but I know that many of the emergent themes found voice in the reading and reflecting I was doing at that time – a time which coincided with a hard decision, made by the family, to home-educate our two daughters for a year (to coincide with their Year 2 and Year 6 school years respectively – the years given over substantially to SATs preparation in many state schools in England). In the summary document of the children's responses (above), I highlighted each emergent theme, and wrote this question:

> *"How do these relate to our decision to HE?"* (home educate)

I made best guesses. I placed prominent ticks against themes such *as broadening of/reflecting on experiences, fruits of effort, latent expertise, service to others, nurture, internal satisfaction, persistence/personal agency, aspiration,* and *personality/non-cognitive factors*. I placed question marks against *social, external rewards, nature* and left the others blank – none had a cross against it. On balance therefore, it seemed to me that in my personal life, as it affected the people closest and dearest to me, home education was a route offering the prospect of some reconciliation between my values and my practice – as a parent.

In my professional practice too, I can discern around that time a recognisable movement in the content and delivery style of my inservice work and conference presentations. Though I'm aware of having lapsed into the comfort-zone of 'authoritative knowledge-speak' on *many* occasions (these instances are recorded in the jottings I made at the end of many training sessions – e.g. "Well-received, but too much 'research,' "Didn't get them talking enough," "Avoided [the] activity – went for Dweck [presentation] instead") I was sincere in my attempts to redirect my practice in a number of ways. Evidence of how these attempts were experienced by course attenders/participants is provided in Chapter 3 of this research story, but my attempts were several: I tried to be honest, firstly, to the complexity of descriptions and explanations provided by our summer school participants, and to invite course delegates/audiences/participants to ask these questions of themselves. I included slides and, where possible, whole sessions designed deliberately to problematise concepts such as *intelligence, gifted and talented, bright, ability, achievement* and *potential*. I tried to loosen and undermine reified terms and concepts which posed as representations of "reality," and as part of this I imported provocations from my readings around home education and alternative educational models (e.g. Holt, 1981; Illich, 1973). I critiqued the currently dominant model of conceptualising the field in England – i.e. that conveyed through the *Excellence in Cities' Gifted and Talented Strand* (Hymer, 2005). I advocated and modelled approaches which came closer to reconciling my values (especially the value of independent thought) and my practice – e.g. *Philosophy for Children* (see 2.2) and DBL (see 2.3), but tried too to create the space for challenge and critique – as my values demanded. I invited and gave more

space to dialogic engagement, never knowing where this would end, or how successfully I would 'resolve' this engagement. I struggled to avoid seeing 'resolution' as a desirable end-state. I created conference presentations, which tried to provide pointers towards a non-deterministic, inclusive and process-oriented conceptualisation of the term gifted and talented. The titles of a few examples convey a flavour of their content:

- 'Four Funerals and a Wedding – The contribution of psychology to gifted and talented education' (*NACE* LEA Conference, London, 2 April 2003);
- 'Gifted and Talented Learners – *A rising tide lifts all ships*' (St Helens, 2 December 2003);
- 'Beyond Compare – Gifts and talents in the progressive primary school' (*National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth* Primary Launch, Warwick, 30 September 2004);
- 'Higher-Order Thinking Skills – Creating a community of enquiry in the classroom' (Peterborough, 19 April 2004);
- 'Jugglers and Tiger-Tamers – A sideways look at gifted and talented education' (*Essex Advisory & Inspection Service*, 22 March 2004);
- 'Who Taught Eddie Izzard? Exploring the social-emotional roots of creativity' (*NACE-East* Regional Conference, 14 October 2003);
- 'Dilemma-Based Learning in Secondary Geography' (*St Helens Excellence in Cities Gifted and Talented Working Party*, Haydock, 2 December 2003).

In these presentations and during training days, I tried hard to replace "Evidence suggests …," "Research reveals …" and "Best practice requires …" with "Here's one way of looking at it. And here are some problems. Are there others? Are there other perspectives? How do you see it?" Though I hadn't come across this concept at the time, I can now see myself trying to practise Wittgenstein's 'language games' – deliberately messing with an over-determined, representationalist connection between language and thought, and seeking to expose the assumptions we make, based on the language we use. *"Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning"* (Wittgenstein, 1967, p.173) suggests a relational, activity-oriented approach

to linguistic meaning, rather than one which is declarative, denotative and fossilised. An example: in a field which is embedded with declarative assumptions, declaring before an audience that my personal favourite definition of intelligence dates back to the 1920s, invites first thought, and as part of that process, also engagement, challenge, and the questioning of assumptions. It is a beautiful, absurd definition, crushingly declarative, achingly simple, and wonderfully circular in its reasoning:

> *"Intelligence is what intelligence tests test."* (Boring, 1923, p.35)

Do we have here, in the words of the late Michael Howe (1997), "A measure in search of a concept?" I like to play with this definition in juxtaposition with an alternative perspective, borrowed from the character from the novel and film, Forrest Gump: "Stupid is what stupid does" – and its logical corollary: "Intelligence is what intelligence does." Intelligence, like life, is neat in its conception, and messy in its living.

In this section, I have chosen to use my struggle with the definition/s of concepts like *intelligence* and *giftedness* as a symbol of/marker for my wider struggles in the field of 'gifted and talented' education. Though the attempt to shift my practice began conspicuously in 2003, its roots of course lay deeper, and many of the principles underpinning my conference presentations predate 2003. And the period from 2003 to the present day has seen a continued struggle to advance my practice in the direction of my values. This, in part, has involved my seeking to come to terms with old and new contradictions, to recognise returns to familiar, safe styles, and to resolve the ethical crises arising when, as a freelance consultant with no independent source of income, I'm asked to work in and with institutions and material that challenge me – that raise questions about the authenticity and congruence of my values and my practice. Much of my work, for instance, is paid for by structures and frameworks that I have many reservations about – aspects of the *Excellence in Cities Gifted and Talented Strand*, for instance, or requests to work in *Academies* – both of which can be seen (and have been seen), in the declarative nature of their core assumptions, as having the potential to inhibit the ability of staff and children to ask good questions,

and to challenge responses. In these contexts, as in others, I have often asked the people with whom I have worked, to reflect on my practice, and to let me know, in writing, if my values are in evidence in my work. And if so, what do they understand these values to be? And do I live these in my practice? And in their own situations, can they live their own? These accounts, and their impact on my continuing action research, are described in Chapter 3.

The contribution of two specific approaches to my practice is explored in the next two sections of the current chapter. I describe my relationship with these approaches in some detail as they arise, for me, as the logical (albeit evolving) methodological consequence of my ontological perspective and my (evolving) epistemological stance. Both of these approaches represent, for me, the methodological outworkings of someone in the process of coming to see himself,

> *As a participant in the world, interacting with others, [seeing his] interactions as a process of creating new knowledge individually and collectively. [He] would test any provisional understandings against the critiques of [his] companions. This living process would require an openness to new possibilities, and a resistance to closure.* (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p.23)

2.2: Doing and promoting philosophy with children

In this section I outline how I have sought to exemplify the co-creative nature of my developing understanding of giftedness through my reflection on, immersion in, and advocacy of the practice of philosophy for/with children, an approach which is usually used in mixed-ability contexts and which has been shown to support the generation of intellectual functioning.

Dear Barry

I really enjoyed Philosophy Club today. I was confused about what a soul is so I talked to Mum about it and I slept on it and came up with a soul is something inside you that you can't see. It is a bit like a spirit and leaves your body and goes to heaven or an afterlife. Ancient Egyptians and Celts believed in something like that. Christians believe you rise out of your body and go to heaven after you die. Mum said that she thought a soul was the essence that made people or animals who they are. I agreed with Mum and thought a soul was all to do with emotions and feelings and it's something that makes everybody different. I thought it was a hard topic but I think I've come up with a good conclusion. It might change though. See you next week,

Joe

In Chapter 1 of this research story, I outlined the aetiology of my sense of being a *living contradiction*: the experience of there being a disjunction between my values and my practice – at the levels of content, process and product. Having described my attempts to deconstruct conventional, modernist understandings of the term *giftedness* in the previous section and to construct new understandings in my personal and professional practice, in this section and in the section that follows I set out to show how I have tried to further bridge the values-practice dichotomy, however imperfectly, in my embracing of approaches which embody significant aspects of the *unlived* elements of my practice.

I do not see the purpose of this section as offering a detailed elucidation of the background and procedures of the approach known as *Philosophy for Children* (or P4C). The P4C method is well-described elsewhere (e.g. Lipman, 1993; Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyon, 1980; Cam, 1995; Williams, 2000; Haynes, 2002; Sutcliffe, 2004, and the website for SAPERE, the charity that promotes P4C in the UK: cf. www.sapere.org.uk). Whilst I will offer a brief introduction to its practice in exploring my role in an enquiry (with reference to a transcript), my chief intention in this section is to make explicit how I have firstly imagined and secondly engaged in the P4C approach as a way of moving in the direction of my values, and specifically, the value of *intellectual respect* for myself and for others. I connect P4C ontologically to my core values, and epistemologically to its constructivist roots not only in the (distinct) dialogical methods of Socrates and Wittgenstein, the proto-constructivism of de Hostos, and the phenomenology of Heidegger – but more generally to living theory, and its attendant critical standards of judgment. I will take you, the reader, through my reflections on an enquiry I facilitated with children, and show where and how this transcript provides evidence of my teaching in the direction of my values of intellectual respect and toleration of uncertainty, in pursuit of a richer, constructed (not donated or imposed) understanding of a complex issue.

My introduction to philosophy with children was made in 1997. I read a book by Victor Quinn (Quinn, 1997), in which I recognised a passionate enquirer (Dadds, 1994) and educator, who was explicitly articulating his practice and connecting this to his own core educational values. In reading it, I sensed a real (and long-dormant) surge of educational excitement. Whilst I rarely annotate printed text, gushing annotations in the margins of this copy of his book betray my emotional state whilst reading it – "Yes!!!," "Absolutely!!," "Why not?," "This must be right!" etc. At that time I hadn't heard of the concept of *living contradiction*, but I identified immediately with its implicit naming by Quinn:

> *What assumptions do I start with? The first is that you [the reader] are dissatisfied with current practice in your school, perhaps in your own classroom. Children often*

surprise us in the midst of routine activities by the profound question, by the glimpse of shocking intelligence, by the sheer intellectual care, or by the tenacious yet tender refusal to be browbeaten. This profundity, in the midst of our many cares, is something that frustratingly challenges us. We know that nurturing it is real education, we know that certain devices we have do facilitate it, without undue effort, and we wish we had a richer resource of such devices. (Quinn, *ibid*., p.3)

Whilst I recognised the truth of this assumption both in my professional practice and as a parent, I was struck also by Quinn's very personal intrusion into the work. He acknowledges at the beginning that,

This is a personal book, based on personal experience and on personal reflection on that experience, addressing teachers. I strive for objectivity in that I check my claims against teachers' comments, video and transcript evidence and the regular observation of children's bodies and eyes after extended work. But I do not shun subjectivity in that I am at the centre of this book, insisting time after time that the success of my work depends not on my personality but on skills, qualities and interactions that most teachers can learn. If you judge the book a failure, you will do so, I hope, on criteria that I avow, not on criteria that I disown. (*Ibid*., pp.4-5)

From the reference to "observation of children's bodies and eyes" it is clear that Quinn, like Heidegger, and the pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce (whose work influenced strongly the later development of P4C) is interested in speaking about aspects of experience which are not easily represented linguistically, i.e. those aspects of immediate existence that get lost in translation when they are mediated, or re-presented back to us in words, as thoughts. In this regard, Quinn's actions match the interest of Jack Whitehead (e.g. Whitehead, 2003) in exploring visual, mixed media representations of experience, through digital imagery and the like, since "… interrelationships, which communicate the inclusional and relational nature of practitioners' underpinning logics and values, may be more adequately expressed in visual narratives rather than in solely linguistic form" (McNiff, in press). Consider, for instance, the quality of evidence revealed in the photographs overleaf, taken from

philosophical enquiries with children (and, in the first example, older volunteers from Age Concern Barrow), and the difficulty (impossibility?) of reducing them to a meaningful linguistic form:

Wittgenstein taught us that words are tools, not essences,[4] and the truth of this is, for me, recognised in photographs such as these: intense, respectful listening to others' thoughts, eludes linguistic capture. Moreover, Quinn's insistence on placing himself at the centre of his own learning whilst having influence on the learning of others, together with his insistence on identifying pertinent (not imposed) critical standards of judgment to gauge the validity of his own enquiry, locate him comfortably within the tradition of practitioner self-study as exemplified by such action researchers as Whitehead, McNiff and Dadds. He himself recognised that his approach would not draw acclaim from adherents to a positivistic or a Hirst & Peters "disciplines" approach to learning (e.g. Hirst, 1974; Peters, 1974), in the form represented by these words from Dame Mary Warnock in 1977:

> *Our first duty as teachers must be to teach what is known. And this carries with it the mark of non-relativity. One is saying, 'This is how it was' or 'this is how it is'. One cannot consistently, in the same breath, say 'but it may not have been' or 'but I may be wrong.'* (Warnock, 1977, pp.121-2)

In this view Warnock aligns herself with an Aristotelian, propositional, *either-or* stance, in which contradiction must be eliminated from correct thought. But it was just this capacity, as exemplified by Quinn, indeed to say 'but it may not have been' or 'but I may be wrong' that so excited me, and so connected with the value of intellectual respect that the allowance of intellectual fallibility affords. For me, fallibilism was not synonymous with relativism (*cf*. Law, 2006), nor certainty with absolute truth. I aligned myself (conceptually, if not consistently in my practice) with a Platonic, dialectical tradition in which multiple ways of thinking could be valued – seeking to hold the one and the many together at the same time, or in a Deweyan sense, seeing educational value in the liberation and clarification of (multiple) meanings, rather than the pursuit of the one true answer: "Poetic meanings, moral

[4] "We are struggling with language. We are engaged in a struggle with language." "The limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence." (Wittgenstein, 1980, pp.10e – 11e)

meanings, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth" (Dewey, 1958, p.411).

This Platonic, Deweyan acceptance of the possibility of multiple meanings, dialectically engaged, is illustrated in its negation by this reference to a school account for the future Channel 4 newsreader, Jon Snow:

> *He must learn to accept that his own ideas are not of equal value with those of the experts whose books he is instructed to read.* (Hurley, p.63)

I used this extract as the hook for a short introduction to a catalogue advertising a range of books aimed at teachers of 'gifted and talented' children, back in 2003:

> *Bad advice, surely? Shouldn't we be encouraging all our students to approach their learning with a quizzical eye, giving the acquisition of facts and skills its due status but never forgetting the importance of the questioning stance that students can bring to their own learning? Isn't meaning-making (not just meaning-getting) at the heart of a truly gifted and talented education?* (Editorial – *Incentive Plus* Gifted & Talented Resources Catalogue, October 2003)[5]

Where specifically did Quinn's book lead me? As an EP well-versed in the administration of psychometric tests of intelligence I found myself invited, implicitly, to problematise apparently settled concepts. I was especially struck by Quinn's musings on *intellectual challenge* and *intelligence*, which reclaimed these abstract concepts from the domain of measurement for the inclusive classroom, putting them in the province of the learning community as a whole, whilst also neatly distinguishing them from other concepts, like *academic*:

[5] Whilst I see in this passage an attempt to explicate my value of *individual intellectual respect*, I am aware now as I was then that many of the books listed in this catalogue carried with them an exclusive, 'gifted only' cache. Was my editorial an unconscious attempt at the 'expiation of my sins'?

> *If there were only one idea whose importance I could guarantee you would take with you from this book, I would choose the distinction between the academic and the intellectual. OfSTED regularly confuses the two and calls them both 'academic.' The 'academic' refers to the conventions of a subject, its procedures and formal material; the 'intellectual' refers to the exercise of intelligence. Of course we want both, but I often see children faced with activities which have excessive expectations of them academically, whilst the intellectual expectations are laughably low*. (Quinn, *ibid*., p.7)

Being relatively new to my role as coordinator of Cumbria LEA's Able Pupil Project, and anxious to divest *intelligence* of its strongly within-child character, reflecting on the book I saw in Quinn's practice an opportunity to explore ways of providing intellectual challenge in our classrooms, yet in ways which needed no *test-and-place* procedures for identifying the worthy, endowed, precious few. Quinn's practice seemed to me to be inclusive, based on whole-class experience of intellectual adventure, and a recognition that good thinking isn't easy – as suggested by William James' description of philosophy as being the *dogged struggle to achieve clarity*, and by Joe's observation, aged nine: "I thought it was a hard topic" (post-enquiry letter to me, reproduced above). For Socrates, incessantly exposing his own and others' ignorance, for Wittgenstein, wracked with self-doubt about his own thinking,[6] for Heidegger, insistent on the "demands and rigour of thinking" (Bonnett, 2001), and for many other thinkers throughout history, good thinking involves struggle, even pain, and it is through the struggle to come to know that learning takes place – not through some linear transaction between innate intelligence, absorption of data, and the "banking" of knowledge (Freire, 1993). Philosophy, like 'intelligence' too perhaps, is best *done/experienced* – not *learned about/'banked'.*

Alive therefore to its potential, I sought to enrich my theoretical understanding of philosophy with children through further reading (e.g. Fisher, 1990, 1995, 1998; Cam, 1995; Lipman *et al*., 1980) and through accredited training in P4C (SAPERE-

[6] Wittgenstein, it is recalled, in his engagements with his students would sometimes break off, saying, "Just a minute, let me think!" or exclaim, "This is difficult as hell" (Gasking & Jackson, 1962, p.52).

certificated training, from an introductory novice-practitioner understanding at Level 1 through, over a period of several years, to Level 3 qualification as a 'teacher-educator,' training other educators to Levels 1 and 2), and to combine theory with practice by seeking out opportunities regularly to *do* philosophy with children, in schools and, later, also as an extra-curricular activity, and with adults. To this end, in addition to 'borrowed' classes in schools, in 2001 my wife and I set up a Philosophy Club which met on Sunday mornings and which was open to anyone interested, between the ages of five and twelve. From time to time, with the participants' permission, we recorded these enquiries and produced transcripts of the sessions. One such enquiry, from 2001, is described below (*cf*. Appendix 3 for the transcript of the enquiry itself), and is provided as an example of the process whereby individuals are allowed and encouraged to think for themselves, in the company of others – a social constructionist route to the making of personal meaning. This particular enquiry was the last scheduled for our first Philosophy Club season, and some confusion over dates meant that only nine children were in attendance. The following contextual and procedural commentary contains a number of reflections on the process and on my facilitation, reflections which I recorded at the time:

<u>Choice of stimulus</u>:

Usually, a new stimulus (story-book extract, picture-book, video-extract, game, drama-activity) is presented at each session of the Club. These stimuli are selected with the aim to promote a state of perplexity, to get the children thinking. We had invited the children over the course of the year, however, to bring to the Club any thoughts or questions which had occurred to or puzzled them in their daily lives. These had been aired at our meetings, but not subjected to the scrutiny of a full enquiry. Instead, they had been printed out and pasted on an "Unanswered Questions" section of the Club Noticeboard in the Meeting House Barn, where we met, with the promise that they would be considered for choosing as the focus of an enquiry at the end of the season. For the present enquiry, therefore, no new stimulus was introduced, but the children present were asked to reflect on the motivation and thinking behind their own question/s, and to air these for the group. The questions

were therefore unrelated to each other, and they are reproduced below. Whilst the children needed to think hard about their reasons for coming up with these questions (sometimes some months previously), it was felt that they deserved to have these thoughts valued before the group, and 'legitimised' through the experience of a P4C question-selection.

Approach to the session:

At the previous meeting of the Club we had asked the children how they wanted to celebrate our final meeting of the season. They had decided, unanimously, that they wanted an enquiry and a "philosophy party". We undertook therefore to plan a session which involved no preparatory activities, in order to maximise the time for both an enquiry and a small party. The fact that the questions generated by the children over the course of the year did not, of course, require any new stimulus for their elicitation, also served to free up time for the enquiry and the party. We were keen for the final enquiry to be a group enquiry; as it turned out, the low numbers present on the day meant this was the only viable option anyway.

Display and airing of questions:

I had transferred the "unanswered questions" from the display board to a flipchart, and then removed the questions posed by children who weren't present at this enquiry (these were retained for future consideration). The questions were then introduced in turn, with their originator asked to recall and outline something of their genesis to the rest of the group. Whilst one or two children found it difficult to recapture their thinking 'after the fact', almost all were able to evoke rich recollections and descriptions. In a few instances (notably a child who described the experience underpinning his question, 'Can you hate someone that you love?'), the children spoke with great openness and honesty about what was at times very personal and emotionally sensitive material. The children listened to these accounts attentively and empathically.

The questions considered, were these:

- Without using the word to explain a word, what is forever?
- Did Jesus do anything wrong?
- Which is more important, fun, or work?
- Can you hate someone that you love?
- Did time start?
- Is God a boy or a girl?
- Why not forget when it hurts to remember? [This question received most votes.]
- When you photocopy a sheet, it comes out bad quality. So in theory, if I cloned myself, it would come out bad quality, so is it impossible to get an exact clone?
- Will war ever stop?

Voting procedure:

Our 'default' procedure for selecting children's questions for an enquiry, as on this occasion, is the *omnivote* method, in which children can vote for as many questions as they wish. They can vote for their own questions, but are not required to. We have experimented with alternative methods, but have found that over time the children offer their multiple votes with discernment and care, and the omnivote method maximises the opportunity for all children's questions to be affirmed. With group numbers lower than usually experienced in school classes, the 'processing' difficulties that the omnivote system can produce are not in evidence.

Development of the enquiry:

No activities had been planned to take the specific enquiry further, but if the enquiry had finished earlier than anticipated, I had intended to pose three general questions for consideration by the group:

- How satisfying or useful was this enquiry compared to others we've had this season?
- What makes for a satisfying or useful enquiry?
- Can one 'plan' for a satisfying or useful enquiry?

Facilitation:

In my early readings around the theory and practice of P4C I was struck by Philip Cam's analogy of the facilitator to that of the conductor: "You need to co-ordinate and enhance the performance. You may need to be vigorous at one moment, but restrained at another …" (Cam, 1995, p.41). I sensed this fluid shifting of roles would be a challenge – I was aware that I had a blunt fulcrum: whilst I was reasonably comfortable playing both a directive and a non-directive role (when teaching, counselling or group-facilitating), I could be slow to sense when the moment was ripe for transition from one role to another – and I was aware of many moments when I failed to keep a social transaction in balance. Whilst I believe I have in some ways developed these transition-skills over time, albeit from a low baseline, inspection of the transcript of the present enquiry (*cf*. Appendix 3) reveals that these skills 'needed attention'. An instance: the enquiry got off to a laboured start. Contributions 1-38 I think reflect this awkwardness. Josh established a number of possible lines of enquiry in his opening exposition (2): What did they/do we mean by *the war to end all wars*? Are there alternative meanings? As a non-participant, *can* one 'remember' an act of horror? Did the soldiers actually *believe* that they were fighting to end all wars, or is that a post-hoc justification we've created? Is the fact that wars *didn't* stop, a negation of individual or group sacrifice? Does forgetting diminish the horror or suffering? etc.

In retrospect, I believe I should have reined the enquiry in from the outset (3), however temporarily, if only to facilitate a more considered review of the implications of the question - and to prevent (possibly) the repeated calls to return to the question later (26, 38, 55). The dialogic method would have lent itself to my confessing my perplexity and struggle more frequently and more honestly, *a la* Wittgenstein (the

personal battle to comprehend), rather than in the Socratic dialogic tradition, where one might claim ignorance, but thereafter follow a rather directive and non-fallibilistic route towards the exposing of others' ignorance. This might have taken the form of a restating of Josh's initial formulation – e.g. "So you're asking, Josh, if there's any point in remembering something awful, if it doesn't lead to that awfulness being less likely to happen again? Could someone help us define though what we mean by 'remembering'?" This might have focused the inquiry (initially at least) on a shared understanding of the term 'remember' – including a consideration of the emotional, social and cognitive aspects to memory, and a consideration of possible other uses for the remembering of great hurt (other than the questionably pragmatic one – that it *might* inhibit the revisiting of bad histories), before embarking on an enthusiastic tour of the historical antecedents of atrocities in the 20th century (12, 21, 29, 37).

That said, in unwittingly permitting the 'tour of cultural awfulnesses' which followed, my lack of initial steer did result in an eventual realization, as expressed by Josh himself, that "At the moment we're just like getting a list of all the people who died willingly …" (39), and to a more fruitful conceptual exploration (39 again) – which came with certain twists and turns to form the focus of the rest of the enquiry – of the nature of horror and evil and our place in promoting or resisting this. This arrived at a cost, however: the enquiry's movement away from the initial question, to an elaboration and development of a question addressed in an earlier enquiry.

In considering my contributions as facilitator in this enquiry, seeking to respect others' capacities to think for themselves, and simultaneously trying to reach a degree of clarity on certain issues, a number of broad strategic categories present themselves, with illustrative instances:

facilitator-as-encourager: 3, 15, 30, 61, 67, 81, 90
facilitator-as-sensor (of a potential 'big idea'): 40, 61, 71
facilitator-as-warden (of the enquiry itself, or of individual members' sensitivities): 7, 26, 38, 55
facilitator-as-mover (of the enquiry): 57, 78

facilitator-as-challenger (to deeper thinking, conclusions or concepts): 74, 76
facilitator-as-clarifier: 11, 28, 34, 38, 44, 67
facilitator-as-includer: 36, 42, 59
facilitator-as-donor (of vocabulary, a phrase, etc.): 50, 83, 103
facilitator-as-mediator: 86, 88.

I'm aware that these categories are more or less arbitrarily named, that there are many useful facilitator-roles that are not represented, and that there are some that are named that may be less than useful in all instances. I have a tendency, I'm aware, to overplay two such roles – that of encourager and that of donor. Consider my hyperbolic affirmations of certain contributions, as revealed for example in 61 and 67: to name Ben 2's contribution as "… a really deep thought", or Harry's metaphor as "brilliant" may have the opposite effect to that intended (*cf*. Dweck, 1999, 2006, and the dangers of 'entity' praise). However unwittingly, I may be serving not so much to affirm some powerful thinking, but to invoke the authority of the facilitator over the participants, to define what is good or useful or impressive in an enquiry, and thereby to devalue the children's own judgements or contributions, or indeed to inhibit the contributions of children who feel unable to produce "deep" or "brilliant" thoughts of their own. The effect, if not the intention, in these instances may be to disrespect the thinking of others, through retaining a position in which I am able to judge others' contributions as more or less 'worthy.'

Or related to the encourager role, consider the donor role: even if I were able more eloquently to capture a child's thought with a well-chosen word, phrase or quotation, there are similar risks associated. I don't *think* my donations in this enquiry (50, 83, 103) significantly damaged the tone or ethos, but I'm aware of instances in other enquiries in which these contributions have been at best ill-timed (interrupting a nascent idea or thought) and at worst intellectually arrogant.

More positively, I was reasonably pleased with some aspects of the facilitation:

- the attempts to keep the enquiry's bearings (e.g. 26, 38);

- the attempts to move from the particular to the general (e.g. 28, 59, 74, 76);
- the attempt to respect all contributions (e.g. 7, 36, 42 etc.);
- the attempts to provide the space for enquirers' self-corrections or thought-elaborations (e.g. 43, 60, 79);
- the attempts to make connections (e.g. 28, 38, 67).

I should have liked to have played a more active role in drawing out distinctions between enquirers' views (78 being a solitary exception) and between similar or related terms (e.g. remembering/forgetting, being killed and sacrificing oneself), and in tolerating and exploring apparent disagreements (86). Most especially, I regret that I was unable during this enquiry to find a way of encouraging active participation of the three youngest members of the group – all of whom were either totally or virtually silent. Sarah's solitary contribution (13) was slapped down by her older brother, and she made no further contributions. Clare and Sam were silent throughout. Clare tends to be an observer and listener rather than a contributor, but says that she prefers this role in the group, and she demonstrates active listening skills during enquiries. Sam can be very forthcoming in enquiries constituted of younger members, but he felt that this enquiry was "too hard" for him. In retrospect, I should have tried at an earlier stage to give these three children a chance to voice any confusions or thoughts, and the others a greater responsibility to summarise their ideas in such a way that all members of the group might better be included.

Development:

In a short period of time, and despite relative inexperience and frequent ineptness as enquiry facilitator, I believe that a true community of enquirers began to develop in the Meeting House Philosophy Club, and this grew stronger over time. I attribute this growth almost entirely to the deceptive power of the P4C method, and to the responsibility it gives to all participants to 'own' each enquiry, and indeed the Club itself. This was most vividly and (for my wife and I as facilitators) movingly illustrated at our final session of the first season, when we arrived fully prepared with party food (including a Philosopher's Cake in the form of a question-mark) – only to find that

each child, unbidden, had taken it on him or herself to arrive with his or her own contribution. It was *their* party, and therefore the food was a *shared* responsibility!

At the time, I wrote down my thoughts about how I wanted to see this group develop. I wanted, I noted, in the forthcoming season, to address in particular the following:

- inclusion issues, and the sensitivity of older members to the needs of younger members;
- the extent to which I value the contributions of younger and less forthright members – e.g. their ability consistently to come up with rich and thoughtful questions;
- the extent to which I value and cope with disagreements, and the critiquing of individuals' ideas;
- opportunities for more experienced members to take responsibility for preparing stimuli and facilitating enquiries;
- my own skill as a facilitator, as I move from 'unconscious incompetence' to 'conscious incompetence' or even 'conscious competence' (unconscious competence I suggested I'd leave for later!).

I contend that experiences and reflections of the sort outlined above provide evidence of my preparedness systematically to develop my practice in the direction of my values – especially that of intellectual respect and of the child as active co-creator of knowledge. Both in the 'ritualistic' elements of the P4C process (e.g. the children's responsibility both to generate the questions and to select for whole-group enquiry one particular question), and in my attempts to facilitate thinking – not to impart pre-formed knowledge – I was embodying a constructivist vision in which "The mind does not receive ideas that are complete but, rather, forms them on its own and depends on the information from its senses" (de Hostos, 2000, p.214). This is the dialogical approach to the teaching of philosophy adopted by Wittgenstein, and to the teaching of history adopted by Mr Haarhof, described earlier. As described by Burbules & Peters (2001, p.18), Wittgenstein's "style of teaching philosophy was designed to enable listeners to shift their thinking, to think differently about a problem, which was

often in his view the only way to 'solve' it. In this respect, one can teach only as a 'guide'."[7] This differs from the vision of factual certainty outlined by Warnock earlier (1977, pp.121-2), and favours the fruits of critical self-reflection.

Matthew Lipman, who built particularly on the ideas of Socrates and the American pragmatists Peirce, Dewey, and James, predicated his book *Thinking in Education* on the belief that there are two sharply contrasting paradigms of educational practice. In the first, what he terms "the standard paradigm of normal practice," he identifies the following dominating, Warnockian assumptions:

1. Education consists in the transmission of knowledge from those who know to those who don't know.
2. Knowledge is about the world, and our knowledge of the world is unambiguous, unequivocal, and unmysterious.
3. Knowledge is distributed among disciplines that are non-overlapping and together are exhaustive of the world to be known.
4. The teacher plays an authoritative role in the educational process, for only if teachers know can students learn what they know.
5. Students acquire knowledge by absorbing information, i.e. data about specifics; an educated mind is a well-stocked mind.

He contrasts these with the dominant assumptions of the second paradigm – "the reflective paradigm":

1. Education is the outcome of participation in a teacher-guided community of enquiry, among whose goals are the achievement of understanding and good judgment.
2. Students are stirred to think about the world when *our* knowledge of it is revealed to them to be ambiguous, equivocal, and mysterious.

[7] This insight is also made by a number of adults with whom I have worked during P4C Level 1 training sessions – see 3.1.

3. The disciplines in which inquiry occurs are assumed to be neither non-overlapping nor exhaustive; hence their relationships to their subject matters are quite problematic.
4. The teacher's stance is fallibilistic (one that is ready to concede to error) rather than authoritative.
5. Students are expected to be thoughtful and reflective, and increasingly reasonable and judicious.
6. The focus of the educational process is not on the acquisition of information but on the grasp of relationships within and among the subject matters under investigation.

(Lipman, 2003, pp.18-19)

P4C inclines unambiguously towards Lipman's second, reflective paradigm, as it does towards Heidegger's concept of *da-sein* ('being-there') – the place where beings show themselves in human activity and meaning-making, in pursuit of ontological awareness and alert to the promise of the authentic life and authentic understanding (Heidegger, 1973). The instrumentalist, objectivist assumptions of the "standard paradigm" of normal practice, however, correspond closely with Heidegger's concerns over society's tranquilising obsession with 'calculative thinking' – immersion in the great busy-ness of immediate practical concerns, and oriented towards the 'they' – what 'everybody' thinks and says. In this state we resist thinking things through in terms of their ontogenetic significance, and instead understand experiences superficially and ephemerally in terms of what is currently in vogue – rather than testing the validity of our assumptions in personal terms. It's an easy life, but, to Heidegger, an inauthentic one, and one revealed by instances of sloppy thinking, as in such phrases (much hated by Quinn) as, "Everybody thinks that …". We have a responsibility, he believes, to name this danger:

> *What great danger then moves upon us? The great risk is that calculative thinking is accepted and practised as the only form of thinking. The need to uphold the*

> *value of more meditative thinking is the issue of saving man's essential nature*. (Heidegger, 1973, pp.121)

For Heidegger therefore, education is less about the 'calculative' acquisition of knowledge and skills than it is about the value and the meaning that we derive from personal learning –

> *How we feel it should affect our outlook and our actions, and our conception of ourselves both as responsible individuals and as participants in the human condition.* (Bonnett, 2001, p.25)

When we create the conditions for knowledge not to be *acquired* or *discovered* (the traditional responsibility of formal, objectivist schooling, and characteristic of Lipman's 'standard paradigm'), but *constructed* (as it is in P4C, in Lipman's 'reflective paradigm'), we are accepting the presupposition that knowledge

> *… is not an objective reality that is predetermined in a way independent of the subject, but rather a construction of the subject-in-search-of-knowledge. In other words, reality exists only in the subject and according to the subject; … it thus places the subject in a position of active research (actor) rather than passive absorption (receptor)*. (Daniel, in press)

It also, relatedly, gives regard to the student as capable of independent thought and judgment, with all the implications for our view of pedagogy that this involves:

> *… this extension of philosophical teaching entails thinking about, or rethinking, pedagogy. Philosophy as a practice means that to teach it, it is not sufficient to transmit knowledge: it also requires the teacher to educate, to develop pupils' thought and their capacities for judgement.* (Brenifer, 2006)

In this research story, I attempt to describe and explain how I have attempted to move my practice in the direction of my values and in the direction of *da-sein*, and in

reflecting on these experiences, to enable the creation of new theory. I maintain that in immersing myself in the potential of P4C for creating social, emancipatory spaces, where individuals think *for themselves but not by themselves* (Stenhouse, 1975), I have sought to escape the limitations of a theory-practice dualism, and have been able to see my claim to knowledge (theory) and my practice as becoming increasingly integrated and symbiotic in their relationship with each other. My reflections on my practice inform the development of theory, which in turn informs my revised practice. In accepting this cycle, I reject the rationalist tendency to see theory as primary, and providing the basis for the rest of experience. So do people – children and adults – when engaged in P4C. The activity *comprises* the act of theory-generation, it doesn't just *follow* it. This is evidenced, as one instance, by Lydia (aged eleven), a member of our Philosophy Club, who wrote a poem about the impact that doing philosophy had had on her life. Disarmingly unselfconscious, it's a joyous mixture of thought and intellectual activity, combining ultimately to create new (arithmetic) theory!:

Philosophy

When I think of philosophy I think of a lot of things,
Mini Coopers, Harry Potter, and every one the same.
But every bodies mind works a different way,
So every one count with strawberry's and shout hip hip hooray.
Because every one person is special in this world,
You may or may not think
But in this philosophy group you will see we all work together,
And, best of all – WE THINK!

So live life to the full this week and do all that you can
Don't sit in your room and think all alone
You must invent and plan, and always remember –
Two plus two equals strawberry jam!!!!!

In much the same way as theory is created in practice, P4C does not merely permit the *demonstration* of intelligence – it permits the *creation* of intelligence through its practice (Lipman *et al*., 1980; Perkins, 1995; Trickey & Topping, 2004; Trickey, in press). In the words of David Perkins (1995, p.199), "Intelligence can be taught by Philosophy for Children." In the next section, I will show how I have sought to elicit new insights in reflecting on my practice and making a claim to new knowledge (theory) through another constructivist methodology – in the development of which I have played a more direct role.

2.3 Creating webs of meaning through dilemma-based learning

In this section I describe the rationale behind the co-creation of the dilemma-based learning approach, and how it has provided for me an additional route to the valuing of children's capacities for independent thinking and reflection and the emergence of new learning. Along with philosophy with children, I cite dilemma-based learning as a practical manifestation of my attempts to move beyond a declarative, expert-speak mode of working with students and teachers, to a situation in which I (and others) might work best as a facilitator and co-learner.

What is dilemma-based learning?

Dilemma-Based Learning (DBL) is an enquiry-based approach to learning, using everyday dilemmas (e.g. Appendix 4) to support the development of learning dispositions – attitudes to learning which are essential pre-requisites for high level performance – such as resilience, interpersonal skills, persistence & coping with complexity & ambiguity. It can be used across most areas of the curriculum, but also in PSHE, citizenship and 'thinking skills' lessons. In general terms, DBL usually involves learners working in small enquiry groups of 4 to 6 people per group. Each group's task is collaboratively to seek the wisest possible solution to a dilemma. The groups might be asked to use one or more of the Wise Web tools (Appendix 5) to facilitate their thinking. When the individual groups have discovered their wisest possible solutions, they can usefully come together as a whole class group to question each other about the wisdom of their solution (content and outcome) and about how well they have enquired together (process skills). As a higher-level challenge, groups can be asked to develop their own dilemmas, according to certain core criteria.

Origins – A critical education

Dr Gilbert Burgh of Queensland University has observed that "To truly enter into dialogue requires that before making judgments we explore alternatives, understand different perspectives, do not accept authority without question (government pronouncements, news broadcasts, etc.) – all the things we hope that students will also value" (Burgh, 2003).

If it's accepted that we really do value these things (and it's is by no means assured, despite this value being the *raison d'etre* for this research account), *why* do we? I argue that our formal education system seems to value, in the main, other things – currently dominant discourses like curriculum coverage and measurement perhaps, and standardisation and accountabilities. These imperatives can be traced back to a dominant behaviourist psychological hegemony in education, which can in turn be seen to represent an instrumentalist, expedient orientation towards the needs of educational administrators and political systems (*cf*. the contribution of Thorndike in the early 20th century, and critiques of current practice – e.g. Gould, 1984; Holzman, 1997; Dadds, 2001). In keeping with my belief in the capacity for every individual to think for herself, I hold that many teachers and education professionals still value the less easily measurable things *because they seem important to us* – as people, as professionals and as responsible citizens in a democracy – because we know that life isn't simple, or linear, or uncontaminated by doubt or ambiguity. Our novelists often know this too: "The open-endedness of much of [Margaret Atwood's] fiction is also a quietly political gesture: she emphasises moments when people have a choice, and having sketched out the factors involved in such choices, and what might be at stake, she suspends the moment of decision" (Potts, 2003). Suspension and enquiry before judgment aren't quick or easy, but they're what make some judgements intelligent, and some dumb.

In 2001-3, as part of our work within the Barrow-in-Furness Education Action Zone, a colleague (Deb Michel) and I held a series of small-group enquiries with a broad range of people. These enquiries, which formed part of the *BarroWise Project*, sought to address a fundamental question:

> *What skills, abilities and dispositions does a person need in order to be wise within our local community?*

We examined this question collaboratively. We worked in groups composed of older and younger children, with groups of teachers, teaching assistants and parents, and with elderly members of the local community. We explored practical, real-world dilemmas such as those provided in Appendix 4. Some of our richest enquiries involved cross-generational groupings comprising past and present pupils of Vickerstown Primary School on Walney Island – groups consisting of individuals aged ten to eighty-six. Our aim as facilitators was to encourage, stimulate and provoke high-level thinking, reflection, speaking and listening in the groups, but to avoid (insofar as this is ever truly possible) donating our own views and beliefs. That said, we *did* aim to create environments in which individual members of the groups influenced each other's thinking. Individuals who could articulate good reasons for changing their minds were valued for the honesty of their concern to find the best resolution of the dilemma, not despised for capitulating to someone else's "bigger brain," more dominating personality or more strongly-expressed opinion. In this way, we tried to harness the best, most transformative and fluid characteristics of group learning processes, and to discourage the emergence of unhelpful *right-wrong, clever-stupid, popular-isolated* dualities.

We set identical tasks for both adults and children, but with the chosen dilemma and the instructions differentiated to suit the needs of the groups involved. Typically, the enquiries took the following form:

<u>What are wise skills?</u>

- Read the dilemma provided. (*Cf.* Appendix 4 for a few examples.)

- Consider how the main character in this dilemma should respond.
- Now reflect upon and list the skills and abilities you drew upon to make your decision as wise as possible.

When we asked teachers, other adults and children/young people to do tasks like this in small-group situations, our initial efforts were largely unsuccessful. Whilst participants seemed to enjoy responding to the dilemmas, their responses seemed to us to lack richness, breadth or complexity. Perhaps relatedly, such core thinking, social and emotional skills as making connections, showing empathy, listening with care and attention, making reasoned responses, etc. were rarely in evidence. Group decisions tended to be reached with alarming speed, taking only very few factors into consideration, and often influenced not by the most thoughtful contributions, but by the most dominant or influential personalities in each group. Reflecting on our initial failures, we recognized a need to 'scaffold' the groups' thinking and to build intellectual obstacles in order to cushion their rush to decision-making. We devised a set of 'Wise Webs' (see Appendix 5), which could be introduced as a focus for the groups' deliberations. This innovation brought with it a marked improvement in the capacity of group members to suspend moments of decision, and to take an increasingly wide variety of factors into consideration, before settling on any one judgment.

With the help of Wise Webs (and especially the final 'Group Review' web) both adults and children/young people came up with a range of skills and abilities that we decided to call wise skills and dispositions. It emerged that the same skills and abilities were being elicited independently across all groups, irrespective of the dilemma used as the stimulus or the age of the group participants. However, the specific terminology used *was* influenced by age, experience and educational levels. The wise skills and dispositions can be summarised in the form of four broad themes, which can be seen to relate to three broad domains of 'being a whole person' and the evaluative domain of wise judgement – which calls upon the integration of the first three domains:

Wise Skills and Dispositions

Thinking and Reflection – e.g. logical and analytical thinking, planning and organisation, creative thinking, using past experience and knowledge, curiosity and wonder, enquiry.

Working, playing and living together – e.g. sociability, belonging to a community, team-work, communication, empathy.

Feeling good about ourselves – e.g. independence, self-esteem, emotional resilience and well-being, persistence, motivation.

Making Wise Choices – e.g. keeping a balance, taking reasonable risks, decision making, being honest, showing love, good judgment.

Whilst the first three themes were half-anticipated by ourselves, corresponding as they do to the cognitive, social and emotional domains, the fourth emerged more slowly from interrogation of the emergent data. As the notion of 'Making Wise Choices' emerged, we struggled to find a way first of integrating, then of operationalising it in an educationally congruent way. The Yale psychologist Robert Sternberg provided a model to aid our early thinking in this area when he outlined his 'balance theory of wisdom' (Sternberg, 2000). This theory incorporates practical, inter-personal, intra-personal and extra-personal interests within the same model and provided us with a starting point to consider the core skills and abilities required to be an effective and humane person at school and in society. Sternberg (*ibid*., pp.254-255) has noted that:

The ultimate test of whether a judgement is wise is in how the judgement is made, rather than in what the judgement is. Two individuals can come to different conclusions, but both be wise if they fulfil the criteria specified by the balance theory.

Another eminent psychologist, the Harvard academic Howard Gardner (1999, p.133), has made a related observation, again valuing the process and breadth of the enquiry rather than the end-product:

The defining characteristic of wisdom is the breadth of considerations taken into account when rendering a judgment or recommending a course of action.

For Sternberg, Gardner and others working in or around the fringes of the modern movement of 'positive psychology,' the task of life is to harness our gifts, talents, skills, dispositions and virtues in the major realms of living (e.g. learning, work, love, parenting), and to seek to live a 'meaningful life' – which Martin Seligman describes as "the use of your strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are" (Seligman, 2003, p.127). However, both Sternberg and Gardner have questioned the extent to which we teach, value and model truly wise behaviour in our schools and in our society (*cf*. Sternberg, 2002; Gardner *et al*., 2001). The challenge, for us, was to consider how best *actively to promote* the emergence of wise skills, abilities and dispositions in our schools, not in instrumental, linear, *you-need-to-know-this* terms, but in a way which might engage the learners actively in the creation of their own knowledge. Mirroring differing approaches to the development of thinking skills *per se* (*cf*. McGuinness, 1999) we were aware of two broad mechanisms for transmission:

(i) explicit teaching within a discrete lesson;
(ii) an across-the-curriculum infusion model.

The first mechanism characterises thinking skills approaches developed in the UK, Israel and America by, amongst others, de Bono (e.g. CORT, 6 Thinking Hats, *cf*. de Bono 1978, 1987, 2000), Blagg (Somerset Thinking Skills, *cf*. Blagg et al., 1988),

Feuerstein (Instrumental Enrichment, *cf*. Feuerstein, 1980), and Lipman (Philosophy for Children, *cf*. Lipman, 1993, 2003), whereas the infusion model is more characteristic of the work of Swartz & Parks (*cf*. Swartz & Parks, 1994), David Perkins (*cf*. Perkins, 1992, 1995; Tishman *et al*., 1995), Art Costa (*cf*. Costa, 2001), Steve Higgins (*cf*. Higgins & Baumfield, 1998), Socratic questioning (*cf*. Fisher, 2003), and the work of Carol McGuinness herself (the ACTS Project, *cf*. McGuinness *et al*., 1996).

Whilst we believed that an infusion approach held perhaps greatest potential for the creation of wise learning communities, we also held that the only way to be truly effective is to place these skills and dispositions at the heart of what we do, in all areas of school life, irrespective of the methodology chosen. One possible way of looking at this is as a triad of approaches:

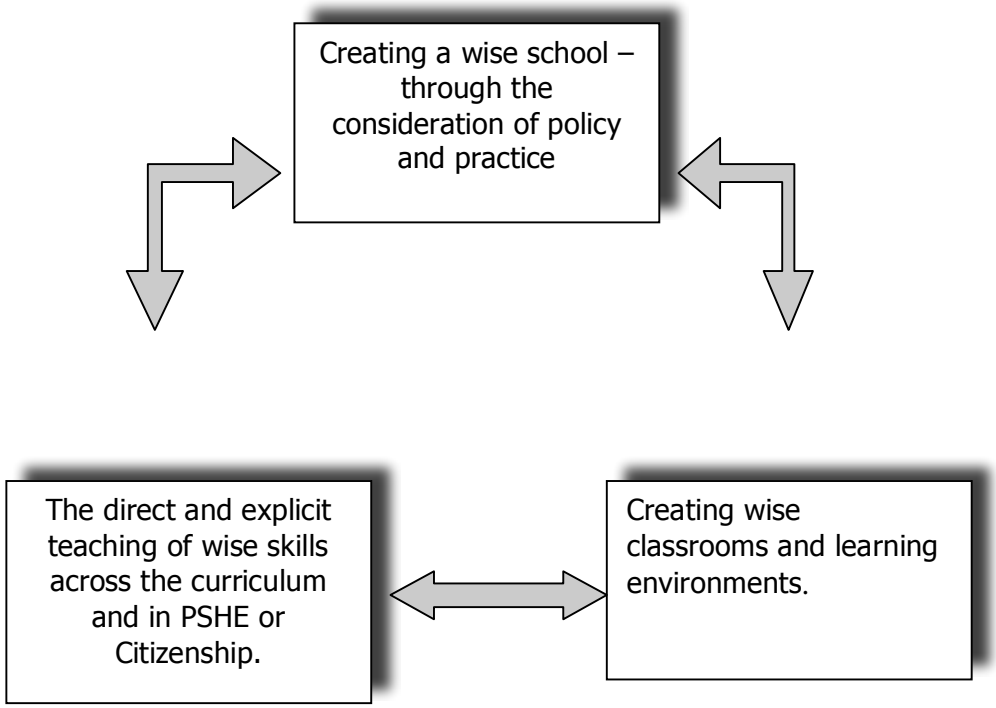

Fig. 1: Triad of intervention.

None of the three elements of the triad should confuse wise skills and wise behaviour with other abstract concepts, such as intelligence or personality. This is deliberate, and based on such evidence as provided in decades of research in the field by Baltes

& Kunzmann: "Wisdom … is not a primarily cognitive phenomenon. Rather, our analyses suggest that wisdom involves cognitive, emotional and motivational characteristics, and is a variant neither of intelligence nor of personality dimensions that can be assessed with psychometric tests" (Baltes & Kunzmann, 2003, p.132). Baltes & Kunzmann's work with adults seemed to mirror our early and much less comprehensive developmental work with children, young people *and* adults – behaving wisely is, we held, about integrating multiple domains of knowledge and experience, and it should be within the province of all.

Creating wise learning opportunities

If it is the case, we suggested, that wise skills are not only caught by osmosis but that there is a body of skills, values and understandings that underpins them, we felt it must also be important that these are valued in the curriculum. They might be seen as the skills and abilities that underpin high-quality learning in citizenship and PSHE, but they might also be taught actively within tutorial sessions or planned across the curriculum.[8] However, we made no attempt to compile an exhaustive list of what these skills and dispositions might be, nor to delineate what each consisted of. We trusted that in providing a rich and engaging task, and the space to *wrestle this task into the open*, the requisite skills, dispositions and values would be called upon and developed. Bruner identified the difficulty in this way:

> *To isolate the major difficulty, then, I would say that while a body of knowledge is given life and direction by the conjectures and dilemmas that brought it into being and sustained its growth, pupils who are being taught often do not have a corresponding sense of conjecture and dilemma. The task of the curriculum maker and teacher is to provide exercises and occasions for its nurturing. If one only thinks of materials and content, one can all too easily overlook the problem. I believe it is precisely because instruction takes the form of telling-out-of-the-*

[8] The SEAL materials currently being introduced into primary and secondary schools in England reflect much of the thinking underpinning the BarroWise Project and the development of the Webs of Meaning approach. This is in large part through the influence of Deb Michel, who went on to become a lead author of the SEAL materials for the DfES.

context-of-action that the difficulty emerges. The answer is the design of exercises in conjecture, in ways of inquiry, in problem-finding. It is something that the good teacher does naturally at least some of the time. With help from the curriculum-maker's exercises and conjectures, it is something that ordinary teachers will do much more of the time. (Bruner, 1966, pp.159-160)

How did we seek to ensure that we covered the 'wise' decision-making skills and abilities? In some Barrow primary schools staff chose to identify a 'wise' focus for each half-term and then for each week a key learning outcome was identified that was taught and promoted within PSHE and across the curriculum. Others looked to ways of incorporating wise skills and dispositions in their pedagogies. It was found that some pedagogical approaches lent themselves more effectively to promoting the wise skills than others. Examples of approaches which lent themselves well to 'wise work' included:

- Experiential group work
- Circle-time
- Philosophy for children
- Drama techniques
- **Dilemma-Based Learning (DBL)**

DBL became a development of our initial work in addressing the *BarroWise* question. We developed the approach, building on our exploratory work with dilemmas, because they'd struck us as being fruitful areas for enquiry-based exploration for many reasons, including the following:

- they involve 'real' problems, which we all face in some form in our day-to-day lives (the Nietzschean notion that the most instructive experiences are those of everyday life);
- they support the development of 'learning dispositions' – attitudes to learning which are essential pre-requisites for high-level performances – dispositions

such as emotional resilience, coping with complexity and ambiguity, and persistence;

- they are open-ended: there is rarely one, absolute, objectively best response which is immediately apparent to all learners. The best response is that which emerges successfully from the crucible of the group enquiry – *cf*. Vygotsky's *Mind in Society* (1978) – having been tested, adapted and transformed during this process;
- they value the creation of divergent, generative solutions, whilst also requiring these solutions to be tested against real-life constraints and implications;
- because of their open-ended nature, they invite rich, textured and collaborative discussion, differentiated according to the experiences and abilities of the individuals participating in these enquiries;
- because of their open-ended nature, there is a greater emphasis on learning and collaboration, and less of an emphasis on performance and competition;
- they invite the application and development of reasoning and other thinking skills, and a wide range of social and emotional skills – ie most if not all of the *wise skills and dispositions* identified earlier;
- they require the progression of discussion to the point of a reasoned and reasonable *conclusion*, through the weighing of evidence, implications, and possible consequences;
- they include an emphasis on pro-social, community-centred resolutions, not just those offering the quickest-fix or biggest gains for the few. In this way, resolutions are valued which are wise, not just smart;
- they value the involvement and inclusion of all members of the group, including those with literacy, attentional and behavioural difficulties. In our experience, children with special educational needs seem to derive particular benefit and enjoyment from DBL activities;
- they are intrinsically motivating to children and to adults.

Finally, whilst the DBL approach does not set out explicitly to 'teach wisdom,' it does, we believe, come very close to mirroring Baltes & Kunzmann's definition of wisdom as "expert knowledge and judgement about important, difficult and uncertain questions

associated with the meaning and conduct of life" (Baltes & Kunzmann, 2003. p.131). To test for it, these researchers presented people with difficult hypothetical situations, and used a standardised procedure to collect think-aloud responses. What is attractive for us about their tasks is that they differ from tasks associated with intelligence-testing in that they're deliberately poorly-defined and characterised by multiple solutions. As Baltes & Kunzmann themselves note, "High-quality responses to these situations therefore require exceptional intellectual and social-emotional abilities" (*ibid*., p.131). And these abilities, we believe, can be developed in children through regular, supported exposure to DBL experiences – the approach is less about testing than learning.

The DBL approach is not described in detail in this research account (*cf*. instead Hymer *et al*., in press), but its development is, I claim, further evidence of my attempt to live my values more fully in my practice. As co-developer of the approach, I was concerned for it to represent, as far as possible, an antidote to a 'body of good knowledge' approach to education. To this end, participants are encouraged to acquire the skills which will allow them to create and to interrogate knowledge, to assess its 'goodness,' and to arrive at reasonable judgments based on the consideration of multiple criteria. This involves not just coping with but also valuing uncertainty, as Dewey advocated: "Dewey was unusual in that he accepted uncertainty and the open and dynamic nature of life. (He) was one of the first to struggle with the messiness and complexity of human learning and development" (Abbott & Ryan, 2000, p.114). Students are encouraged to work towards, in David Perkins' (1995) term, 'a pedagogy of understanding.' Perkins has identified the features of topics that lend themselves better than others to a 'pedagogy of understanding'. Such topics are, he believes, 'generative': they invite understanding performances of various kinds, and make teaching for understanding easy. A good generative topic, Perkins (*ibid*., p.93) believes, embodies three standards:

> ***Centrality*** *– the topic should be central to a subject matter or curriculum.*
> ***Accessibility*** *– the topic should allow and invite teachers' and students' understanding (not just knowing) performances.*

Richness *– the topic should encourage a rich play of varied extrapolation and connection-making.*

Dilemmas, we believe, meet Perkins' standards for a good generative topic: beyond the baseline of content knowledge, they are central to all curriculum areas – dilemmas abound for instance in history, drama, English literature, science and mathematics, and if we choose not to confront or even to recognize them, our mastery of the subject matter is diminished greatly. As recalled by Bruner (1966, p.162),

I took a group of 14-year-olds to see Peter Ustinov's Billy Budd on film. The intensity of the discussion of moral philosophy on the way home convinced me that we have overlooked one of our most powerful allies in keeping our engagement in history, in the range of human life, in philosophy. Drama, the novel, history, are all built on the paradox of human choice, on the resolution of alternatives. They are in the best sense studies in the causes and consequences of choice. It is in their gripping quality, their nearness to life, that we can best make personal the dilemmas of the culture, its aspirations, its conflicts, its terrors. In some considerable measure we have intellectualised and made bland and good-natured the teaching of the particulars of history, of society, of myth.

Not all dilemmas take the forms embodied in the PSHE or citizenship curricula, but whilst their outworkings may be subject-specific, the principles of their resolution are pretty much universal. Subject-specific dilemmas in the secondary humanities are the focus of the DBL book currently being completed (Hymer *et al.*, in press).

Secondly, dilemmas are generative (in Perkins' sense of the term) because they not only allow and invite understanding performances, they demand it. Merely to list a series of possible solutions or to state a preferred solution is inadequate. Students must, in order to resolve a dilemma, make use of the following examples of understanding performances: explain a possible solution in their own words; provide examples of possible implications or consequences; apply their ideas in new or evolving situations; justify their preferences; compare and contrast one solution with

another; contextualise a solution within a wider framework (eg community needs); and generalise from one solution to a wider social or moral truth. Such a list could be extended. Work at this level of thinking requires an individual to make explicit the nature of their thinking.

Finally, dilemmas seem to us to be almost absurdly rich in their possibilities for extrapolation and connection-making. Children, given the opportunity, seem to have few difficulties exercising their human capacity for meaning-making, exposing apparent contradictions by drawing parallels between and across fields, sometimes with devastating and unnerving accuracy. An illustration: during one dilemma-based enquiry with nine-year-olds, the issue of under-age smoking was being addressed. The group, having moved towards a collaborative and shared understanding of the long-term consequences of this behaviour, was pulled up short by the observation of one child, who'd been relatively quiet until that point. She said simply, "We've decided that smoking is bad for us in our future, yeah? But I'm puzzled. Why then do so many adults say to me I should live life for today?"

To the insights of philosophers like Burgh, novelists like Atwood and educationists like Perkins might be added another, related justification for encouraging students to engage critically in their education – a critical, dialogically-based education supports the development of life-skills which are useful in their own right. Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, captures this well:

> *I do believe that dialogue can and should be taught in class. Presenting students with a controversial issue and having them debate it is a wonderful way to introduce them to the concept of resolving conflict non-violently. Indeed, one would hope that if schools were to make this a priority, it could have a beneficial effect on family life itself. On seeing his or her parents wrangling, a child that had understood the value of dialogue would instinctively say, 'Oh no. That's not the way. You have to talk, to discuss things properly.'* (Gyatso, 1999, p.191)

In seeking in this chapter to describe and explain something of the rationale and the processes behind the practice and development of *Philosophy for Children* and DBL I have tried to give an account of two congruent ways of being Barry Hymer – the Barry Hymer that I would most like to be, as idealised earlier in Chapter 1. In Vygotskyan terms, I have offered a description of my efforts to *perform above myself* – and thereby to create myself in my relational activities with others.

It is my claim that in my development as a person, in my experience of and practice in P4C and DBL, I come close to living my values in my practice. In Chapter 3, I will assert that my understanding of my own practice is my legitimate unit of appraisal, and that I can articulate the standards of judgment necessary to test the validity both of my claim to knowledge, and of my resultant living educational theory.