3: How can I tell when I'm there?
Evaluating the outcomes of my actions

3.1: Social evaluative reflections from critical friends and course participants:

- **the emergence of *generative-transformational giftedness***
- **creating *relationally dynamic epistemological standards of judgment***

In this section I introduce the concept of generative-transformational giftedness. I describe how this concept has emerged from my interrogation of research data – interrogation undertaken in search of evidence that actions taken in pursuit of living more fully my values and beliefs as an educator are *in deed* apparent – not only to myself but to others. In doing this, I return to the area of social validity introduced in 1.3 and also call upon the observations and judgments made by interested parties (critical friends, participants at conferences, workshops and school INSET sessions) to evidence my claim that the value of *individual intellectual respect* is adequately translated into my practice.

This account seeks to serve two functions, one public, and one private. The private function is akin to Cecil Day Lewis' belief that poets write in order to understand, not in order to be understood. But, he believed, the more successfully a poem has interpreted to its writer the meaning of his own experience, the more widely will it be understood publicly in the long run. This public function is embodied in the criterion of *comprehensibility* identified by Habermas (1976) as part-constitutive of a study's social validity and discussed earlier (1.3). This research story as a whole seeks to find

a way of systematising and thereby making both personally and publicly accessible the embedded, tacit, personal knowledge constructed a) in my struggles with the concept of giftedness and b) in my attempts to create values-congruent ways of 'being Barry Hymer' – an individual who holds a number of personal and professional beliefs and values, and who is looking to reconcile these in his professional life as a consultant in gifted education. The benefits of making personal knowledge public are well-argued by Snow (2001, p.9):

> *If we had agreed-upon procedures for transforming knowledge based on personal experiences of practice into 'public' knowledge, analogous to the way a researcher's private knowledge is made public through peer-review and publication, the advantages would be great. For one, such knowledge might help us avoid drawing far-reaching conclusions about instructional practices from experimental studies carried out in rarefied settings. Such systematized knowledge would certainly enrich the research-based knowledge being increasingly introduced into teacher preparation programs. And having standards for the systematization of personal knowledge would provide a basis for rejecting personal anecdotes as a basis for either policy or practice.*

In this final chapter of my research story the aim is to assert my understanding of my own practice as the legitimate unit of appraisal, and to do this through the articulation of the standards of judgment necessary to test the validity both of my claim to understanding, and of my resultant living educational theory. This aim forms part of the attempt to *systematise* (Snow, *ibid*.) the research narrative as a whole, but in this chapter in particular, the focus is on vetting and corroboration and the insights which emerge from this form of validation. I ask: what is the evidence that I understand my own practice? Am I justified in arguing that my enquiry meets the criteria of social validity identified by Habermas (1976) and cited in Chapter 1.3, namely that it is *comprehensible*, *sincere*, *true* to its roots and its purpose, and *appropriate* to the field of enquiry? Is there evidence that the values I hold dear in my personal and professional life, particularly the value of *intellectual respect*, are adequately translated into standards of judgment in my practice and systematised in this research

account? How is this evidenced? Whose judgments can I call upon to validate my claims to knowledge?

In beginning to provide answers to questions such as those raised above, I invoke the insights of those individuals who have come to know something of my ontological values, of my related epistemological values and of my revealed methodological values-in-practice, either over time or through their one-off engagements with me during workshops and conference presentations – engagements which for the most part form the raw material of my work in the field. In the latter instance, I draw occasionally on transcripts of video footage from presentations and workshop facilitation, and heavily on the written evaluative reflections made by delegates at the end of INSET sessions or presentations, as well as written reflections made in response to three specific questions, each located around educational and personal values (*cf*. Appendix 6). These questions were created when I realized that the usual evaluation forms distributed and collected by course organisers focused on the more visible, familiar, *technical* aspects of presentation skills and style, or issues of knowledge or skills *transmission* (Lipman's objectivist standard paradigm, *op cit.*, Chapter 2.2), and very little on alternative epistemologies: how delegates/participants "read" my values, for instance, or the congruence between these values and how I 'lived' these values in their experience of my practice, or how their perceptions of my values connected with their own felt ontological values, and how they were best able to translate their own values into practice in their unique circumstances.

In reflecting on the nature of the evaluative feedback described above, I have been interested to see the emergence of five core themes. None is neatly distinguishable from the others as they all have areas of coincidence and synergy, but they have been the categories I have found personally most meaningful in 'carrying' the collected data into evidential form. I acknowledge that they may not reveal any universally generalisable 'truth,' as they must arise from my own histories and ontological and epistemological stances. By way of illustration, I call in the first instance on the reflections of a co-worker in the field of giftedness, Marie Huxtable (Huxtable, 2005), who wrote in relation to the standards described by Snow (above):

I was powerfully reminded of the necessity of such standards recently during a keynote speech by Barry Hymer (Somerset Gifted and Talented Teachers Conference 2005 – 'Killing me softly: Why many able learners don't want challenges'). Barry introduced the audience of educators to the work of Carol Dweck (1999) focusing on the entity and incremental theories of intelligence and invited them to reflect on the implications of which theory they and their pupils, probably unconsciously, held. You can hear and see Barry's response to one member of the audience who had spoken about how she could see the reflections of her embodied educational theories through her grandchildren's stories as learners.[1] The very personal resonance in professional life of this understanding for another member of the audience can be heard when she says how deeply depressed she felt now she recognised (to coin Jack Whitehead's words) the 'living contradictions' in her own practice. I hear the audience laughter as an expression of the shared recognition, and empathy with, the irony and the emotional consequences that needed a supportive response in a public (and very English) arena. The damage of yardsticks provided by the establishment which berate, rather than scaffold, is acknowledged in that laughter.

I am heartened that Marie sensed that I managed, at least for these two participants, both to challenge them to see themselves as living contradictions (with all the pain that this sometimes involves), but also to respond with warm respect to their open and very public acknowledgement of their emergent insights. Her observation allows me to propose, for the first time and initially only very tentatively, that two values are here simultaneously being *recognised* (as already being) and *germinated* (coming into being): she sees evidence *of individual intellectual respect* for the experiences and unique meanings created by the speakers, but more than this, she describes through the articulation of the thought/insight and the reaction of the audience/peers the co-creation of something deeper – what I term here *generative-transformational giftedness*.

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[1] This presentation was videoed by Marie, and subsequently transferred to DVD. It formed in part the focus of an informal critical conversation between Marie, Jack Whitehead and myself on the evening of 1 December 2005.

I use the term tentatively because I prefer to see it as embodying not so much a reified 'thing,' as we have objectified 'intelligence' or 'giftedness' in the 20th century, but rather a limpid process-state, fluid and changeable, and simultaneously both a value in and of itself, and a relational outcome. For this reason, what I mean by invoking the term 'giftedness' is giftedness in a non-psychometric sense of 'gifted disposition' – a tendency to think with clarity, creativity, originality and insight in a certain way under certain conditions. This draws on but also extends the term as used by Perkins *et al.* (1993), who define a disposition as a 'tendency to think or behave in certain ways under certain conditions.' What are the 'ways' and the 'conditions' specifically in relation to *generative-transformational giftedness*? I suggest that these are categorisable under the following five emergent themes, presaged earlier in this account, particularly in my descriptions of the processes at play in the experience of philosophy with children and the creation of webs of meaning through Dilemma-Based Learning:

- *Generative-transformational* – in this instance (Marie's account above), the implication that at least one member of the audience might be disposed to change her practice in some way – or multiple ways (e.g. her engagements with her grandchildren, her classroom interactions, etc.), not through acceptance of 'research evidence' or authoritative pronouncement, but through a critical reflection of her own practice in the light of newly created knowledge and through her sense of empowerment as a lifelong learner, capable of transforming herself into an infinitude of new forms. The term is borrowed from McNiff *et al.*, who note: "This idea of generative power acts as the basic unit of energy whereby each thing may transform itself endlessly in the process of its own realisation of potential" (McNiff, Whitehead & Laidlaw, 1992, p.35). It draws also on the notion of *praxis* as used by Freire (1993, p.68) – the generative combination of reflection and action which exist "... in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world";

- *Temporal/Social* – in this instance not just the co-existence of myself and the speaker, but perhaps more importantly the shared, empathic response of the larger community, in that space, at that time. Social in the Vygotskyan sense that 'what I can do with your help today, can be done alone tomorrow,' in Rayner's (2005) sense of *inclusionality*, or in the African cultural notion introduced earlier, of *ubuntu* – 'I am who I am because of who we all are.'

- *Relational* – in this instance, a *power-with* or *power-through* rather than *power-over* relationship between myself and the speaker, and between the speaker, myself and the larger community – a relationship which is respectful of the different-ness of the *other*, yet also secure in one's own integrity and open to the creation of something new – "All real living is meeting" (Buber, 2002, p.xiv);

- *Activity-oriented* – in this instance, the intellectual activity generated between the stimulus of my presentation and the various meanings being created from it in the minds of the community, alongside (perhaps more importantly) the ensuing dialogical activity between myself, the speaker, and the other members of the community. Bruner (1966, p.117) speaks of "the energising lure of uncertainty made personal by one's effort to control it," and proceeds to argue that "To channel curiosity into more powerful intellectual pursuits requires precisely that there be [a] transition from the passive, receptive, episodic form of curiosity to the sustained and active form" (*ibid*.);

- *Contradictory/Dialectical* – the catalytic reaction which comes about in response to the juxtaposition of ideas, thoughts, beliefs and experiences which have an analytical tension at the surfaces, but synthetic power in the depths. In this instance, I argue that the meanings generated by the speakers consist of a dialectical *unity*, not a relationship of cause or tool (e.g. my presentation to the conference) and effect or result (e.g. a consequent 'understanding' *transmitted* to the listeners). "(T)he dialectical unity rather than metaphysical duality was central [to the totality of Vygotsky's enterprise]" (Holzman, 1997, p.59).

What I describe as *generative-transformational giftedness*, and the conditions under which I suggest it arises, is proposed as a theoretical scientific model – not a literal

picture of 'reality' – but a personally meaningful, partial and provisional way of imagining the unobservable. The model is very closely related to and influenced by the Deweyan (and proto-Vygotskyan) emphasis on the significance of the future in the present, which in turn anticipates the malleable or incremental self-theory of intelligence described by Dweck:

> *Everything we see in children is transitional, promises and signs of the future … not to be treated as achievements, cut off and fixed; they are prophetic, signs of an accumulating power and interest.* (Dewey, 1902, p.14)

> *For [people holding an incremental view of intelligence] intelligence is not a fixed trait that they simply possess, but something they can cultivate through learning.* (Dweck, 1999, p.3)

There is also a clear connection to the Marxian-Vygotskyan concept of development as continuously emergent, relational human activity – with the search for method as being necessarily *tool-and-result* (Vygotsky, 1978) rather than *tool-for-result*. Neither the tool (my presentation of Dweck's work) nor the result (the insights and learning demonstrated by the audience-responders) is, except in a shallow transmission-of-knowledge sense, independently meaningful – they exist synergistically, reciprocally, germinating together, "influencing each other in complex and changing ways as the totality tool-and-result develops" (Holzman, 1997, p.58). This is for me most in evidence not in the full flow of presentation-mode, but in the *gaps*, the hiatuses, the moments of reflection, challenge and dialogue with the community, where I can jettison the declarative 'expert-speak' *power-over* position in favour of something much more social, relational, activity-oriented and dialectical in its nature. In the words of one participant at a whole-school training event (23 September 2005):

> *I have learned a lot in this session – but I don't think he 'taught' me anything. How has this happened?*

It is at these moments that I can inform and develop my own grasp of the subject matter, refining, cultivating, pruning – *growing* it, and an 'audience' can do the same. In short, I have come to see myself as *performing* when delivering a well-rehearsed 'script' (past learning), but as *performing above myself* when in true dialogue with others (new, two-way learning). In the Vygotskyan sense, this performatory function is associated with learning not ego, and betrays no sense of inauthenticity or deception. We wear a mask without inhibition or guilt – to 'act up,' to play the 'role' of learner, and through this play to habituate to and advance within the learning role. In the words of Keleman (2001, p.95), "In the facades we put on for others we demonstrate our potential."

The *gaps* are significant. It may be no accident that teachers who hold as inviolable their pupils' capacities to think for themselves and to remember that "a body of knowledge is given life and direction by the conjectures and dilemmas that brought it into being and sustained its growth" (Bruner, 1966, p.159) often eschew the hegemonic concept of *teaching to ability* (and for which 'mixed-ability' classes are by definition no antidote) in favour of inclusivity of opportunity, open-ended learning outcomes, creativity, challenge and personalised enquiry (e.g. Jeffrey & Woods, 2003; Wilson, Mant & Coates, 2005; Wilson & Mant (in press); Hart *et al.*, 2004; Hannaford, 2005). A vivid example from Hart *et al.*'s seminal study is Anne, a Year 1 teacher who talks about children's "spontaneous, unpredictable acts of meaning-making" (*ibid.*, p.63) happening in the *gaps*:

> *'There has to be a structure, with gaps in ….' Is this an adequate or a satisfactory definition of a learning without limits school or classroom? Only if there is an accompanying account of what might fill those gaps. She is abundantly clear: with the children's acts of meaning-making, problem-solving, invention, imagination and discovery. Anne and her colleagues, the constraints of Ofsted, SATS, QCA and so on, may set the structures, but in the gaps, the children take the lead"* (*ibid.*, pp.64-65).

It is in these social, relational, activity-oriented, generative-transformational, dialectical moments that I personally have sensed a vitality and engagement amongst the communities with which I work, moments where they and I can discard our received roles as *teacher/student, expert/novice, actor/spectator, full jug/empty glass*, and take on a different stance, showing the value of *individual intellectual respect* for our uniquely constructed meanings, and permitting the creation of *generative-transformational giftedness* – embracing those fluid, inclusional conditions which nurture thinking with clarity, insight and creativity, to produce new meanings and create new products and achievements.

In reviewing post-event evaluation returns, I am encouraged if individuals feel they have had the opportunity to be *part* of the experience, not just the *recipient* of it, to have been challenged to think critically for themselves – even (especially?) to the point of rejecting aspects of my own 'truth,' to ask their own questions not just to respond to mine, and to sense a congruence between my implicit values and my explicit practice:

> *Our values need to be seen as in lived relation with others. For them to make sense, the values themselves need to be understood as real-life practices, not as abstract concepts*. (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p.58)

I am encouraged because it as at these times that I will see *generative-transformational giftedness* in gestation and emergence, evidence of my living my core personal and educational values and realising the relationally dynamic epistemological standards of judgment which are both consisting in and attendant on these values.

I see evidence of movement in the direction of living (in "real life") the value of generative-transformational giftedness (and creating the conditions for its emergence) in the following evaluative comments, made by participants in conference presentations, P4C and DBL workshops and training sessions at different times over the past two years. At times these participants are commenting directly on their

experiences of me, and on occasion they are reflecting more introspectively on their experiences of the course, presentation or workshop (often in response to the questions provided in Appendix 6). They reflect in these instances on their own values, practices and educational intentions and ambitions. I use the five themes embodied in the notion of *generative-transformational giftedness* in pursuit of conceptual clarity yet recognising its complexity, and not because I see these themes as necessarily separable or componential. They overlap in multiple ways:[2]

1. Generative-Transformational:

- Socrates' dialogues change you; so did Barry's INSET today.
- I only learned my subject when I had to teach and I was resolved to come out of all lessons knowing more. This is what happened in Barry's talk. I am different in significant ways.
- The reason I became a head was my passion to be able to do just that [live your educational values in your own practice] – the power to impact on change – to lead a learning-centred rather than performance-driven school.

2. Temporal/Social:

- [My sense of Barry's values:] Enabling us to become better learners by giving a safe environment in which to take risks, ask questions and explore ideas with each other.
- I am fortunate to work in an institution where the Head's vision links closely with the values (particularly that of social capital) of Barry.
- Develop environment of positive thinking so that children value each other and are prepared to make mistakes.

3. Relational:

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[2] I use just three examples for each theme for illustrative purposes. Further examples are provided for each theme in Appendix 7.

- … his ability to connect and empathise with the audience was excellent.
- Education is not purely about academic achievements but getting to know children as individuals.
- Implicitly, Barry's values were very evident: the importance of personal qualities in a teacher and his/her relationship with children. I have been saying for the last 24 years that good teaching is about relationships between teacher and child. You agree and emphasise this. I have found an ally.

4. Activity-oriented:

- [My sense of Barry's values:] To encourage children to be active thinkers – to ask questions about their learning.
- [My sense of Barry's values:] The process of learning is more important than what is learnt. You have to engage the learner in their own learning if it is to be effective.
- Very interesting to note that Barry demonstrated in his questions and activities the ideas he was informing us of.

5. Contradictory/Dialectical (including dialectical unity):

- Bringing together thoughts and feelings – they don't have to be separate.
- I believe in the needs of the 3Rs. I also believe in fostering creative writing, drawing and PE, to produce more rounded educational opportunity.
- [My sense of Barry's values:] A commitment to enabling teachers to feel 'whole' in the job they do, rather than just doing what they can.

In none of the comments reproduced above, nor in the more extensive population of evaluation returns (unreproduced but retained) from which these have been drawn as a representative sample, am I able to trace any meaningful linear, cause-and-effect, *tool-for-result* route between my action and the reflection evidenced by the participants. None, therefore, is claimed. Within the Vygotskyan conceptualisation of

tool-and-result perhaps this would be neither feasible nor desirable. The whole is greater than the sum, and the whole reflects an infinitely complex, catalytic, generative series of interactions and transactions between myself as course presenter or facilitator, course participants (with all the various personal, political, educational and cultural histories we bring to this engagement), environment and ethos, etc.

This is, for me, new learning. My old learning had led me to believe that I could ensure 'successful learning' principally through focusing my energies on the quality and rigour of my arguments and evidence-base, and the technical 'efficiency' of my presentations. These were the modernist, positivist understandings I had received and accepted as outlined in Section 1 of this account. However the evaluative feedback I have received (and presented above and in Appendix 7) suggests, on the contrary, that beyond certain baseline presentational skills (e.g. of timekeeping, voice-projection, pace, use of audio-visual aids, content-audience match, etc.) only a relatively small part of the significant meanings (learning) taken away by participants can be attributable to my course content ('knowledge') and presentational technique. What has struck me over the course of my research is how *seldom* people comment on being convinced, impressed or *transformed* by the 'research evidence' underpinning an approach – even though 'evidence-base' (and I usually mean by this empirical evidence from within the hypothetico-deductive method) was, and to some extent remains, one of my most frequently invoked claims to credibility and legitimacy. What they do comment on, as already evidenced in this section, is the personal knowledge (by which I include insights, principles, values, beliefs, practices, etc.) *they* have constructed through dialogue with me and with others. *This* is for me where learning becomes most real, meaningful and inclusional as defined by Rayner (2005):

> *Inclusionality is an awareness of space and the variably permeable boundaries …*
> *that inseparably line it, as connective, reflective and co-creative, rather than*
> *divisive.*

It is where knowledge transcends any single 'knower,' and in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the dialectical unity of knowledge reflects the strength of its community of learners –

being simultaneously distributed and personalised, dispersed but not attenuated, directed but also reciprocal:

> *A culture in its very nature is a set of values, skills and ways of life that no one member of the society masters. Knowledge in this sense is like a rope, each strand of which extends no more than a few inches along its length, all being intertwined to give a solidity to the whole. The conduct of our educational system has been curiously blind to this interdependent nature of knowledge. We have 'teachers' and 'pupils,' 'experts' and 'laymen.' But the community of learning is somehow overlooked.* (Bruner, 1966, p.126)

I sent this passage to my friend and colleague Marie Huxtable, inviting her thoughts, and received this response (email dated 30 July 2006):

> *I like the analogy …. When I first started struggling with high ability ideas I did a talk where I used the image of a plait - with means, motives and opportunities as the strands. I think a 'challah' is better - that is a plaited bread - each strand is still distinct but impossible to separate from the other - each is the whole so to speak - and bread with its link with life I quite like as well.*

Marie's image resonated with me. Perhaps significant in her development of the analogy from rope to *challah* is the implication that the indivisibility of the breaded strands is most apparent when these are *baked*. Is the presentational or workshop content nothing but the raw materials, the doughy mix? Its planning and 'delivery' the plaiting? But does dialogue do the baking? Certainly the dialogical methods of Socrates, Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, Lipman, Vygotsky and my former teacher Dorian Haarhof see little merit in the dualistic constructions rejected by Bruner (above), preferring the dialectical unity of reciprocal meanings, co-constructed. I have aspired to these methods, as previously described in this research story. I have over time, and in response to feedback, become emboldened by the realisation that on occasion to replace the propositional, declarative, expert-speak mode of presentational style with one more dialogical, fallible and open to correction and provocation has carried fewer dangers than I'd feared, and provided more space for the living of such values

as *individual intellectual respect* and the conditions conducive to *generative-transformational giftedness*. Where once I believed I had a choice to make between a) a rationalist, deductive route to the teaching and learning dialectic, and b) a romantic, purely inductive alternative – or maybe c) a hybrid of the two – I now acknowledge the generative-transformational power of the relational, social element. It is an avenue well-advanced by Friedman (in Buber, 2002, pp.xvii-xviii):

> *The true teacher is not the one who pours information into the student's head as through a funnel – the old-fashioned "disciplined" approach – or the one who regards all potentialities as already existing within the student and needing only to be pumped up – the newer "progressive" approach. It is the one who fosters genuine mutual contact and mutual trust, who experiences the other side of the relationship, and who helps his pupils realize, through the selection of the effective world, what it can mean to be a man."*

I now see this power of fallibility in places where, hitherto, I might have seen only weaknesses. Most recently, for example, I was invited by Jack Whitehead to have a look at and to comment on a series of video clips of educators in interaction with others, in his current research into his own and others' practice, exploring the nature and possibilities of "world-quality standards of judgment." These clips were published on YouTube.[3] In an email dated 18 December 2006, I responded to a particular clip of Alan Rayner expanding on the implications of his concept of *inclusionality* as follows:

> *Dear Jack - Thank you for this posting, which I have just opened and found surprisingly affecting … The effect was slow and cumulative, but by the time I looked at the exchange between Eden and Alan, it seemed that something surprising was taking place … - Alan was living out inclusionality in his reflections on it (meta-inclusionality?): I was struck by how Alan began with a comment about human frailty being at the heart of human creativity - and then proceeded to speak*

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[3] http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/jwyoutubeimages2.htm, retrieved on 17 December 2006

falteringly, painfully, and fallibilistically about inclusionality (in response to Eden's gentle probes and provocations) in a way which mirrored beautifully his opening comment, and in a way that I haven't seen before. I see inclusionality made real in that exchange, and the creativity that isn't inhibited but is cultivated in that "frailty". "There is no conflict." [Alan's summary of his core message.] I see the gift of frailty there as a world-leading living standard in itself, and hope for ourselves in our imperfections. Thank you for sharing it.

Jack's response I found deeply encouraging:

Hi Barry - smiling with the pleasure of your sensitive and insightful responses to the video-clips. I think Alan would be so pleased to hear what you say and I'm wondering if it is OK to share your thoughts with him. I hadn't thought of his gift of frailty as being a world-leading living standard and I think he would feel so affirmed in hearing your response.[4]

The relational 'between' is the ontological reality – as explored not only in educational terms (the concept of inclusionality developed by Alan Rayner, the play of I~Thou, I~we which lies at the heart of much of Jack Whitehead's writing and that of his students, *cf*. www.actionresearch.net, Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006; and Farren's "web of betweenness," 2006), but also theologically (Buber, 1958, 2002), and in Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's children's picture-book, *God in Between* (Sasso, 1998). I provide further evidence of its significance in my research story, by referring to the transcript of a reflective observation made by a participant towards the end of a (videoed) DBL workshop in Harrogate, on 24 November 2005. Earlier that morning I had made a keynote presentation to open the conference; the workshop group was much smaller. I offer the observation in full:

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[4] Alan did indeed subsequently note (in an email to members of the BERA-e-forum) that he "felt *in a chord* with Barry's reflections".

One of the things you haven't mentioned, even in the work of Bruner there, is the notion of the relationship between that significant adult in the room, teacher, facilitator, whatever, and the children. You alluded to it. If the relationship hasn't been built effectively [pause] … and if I can talk about a real example: this morning I came because I have an interest in G&T but interestingly trying to avoid filling in this 5-10% form this LEA will send me and I wanted to try to find a justification for saying, 'Sorry, I haven't identified them for this particular problem because I don't know what your problem is that you're going to solve, and so there's the justification and you've paid for him to come and tell me that,' and … but interestingly I was signed up for a totally different workshop this morning and the relationship and the credibility of you as a presenter hooked me into this session because 'dilemma-based learning' was just another title to me, was another bandwagon coming past my school and I didn't want to hook to it because it might divert my school from what we were doing; so the relationship part of it for me as a learner was very important and I think it's probably the most important factor in anything we do with children – with regard to how we hook them into their learning.

I use this headteacher's observation to instance the creation of relationally dynamic epistemological standards of judgment – created in the process of living, clarifying and communicating the values I use to give meaning and purpose to my life. He focuses on the salience of "the relationship part of it" as being, for him, "the most important factor" in what we do as educators. Thayer-Bacon also focuses on the relational:

My project is one of analysis and critique, as well as redescription. What I offer is one pragmatist social feminist view, a relational perspective of knowing, embedded within a discussion of many other relational views. In Relational "(e)pistemologies," I seek to offer a feminist (e)pistemological theory that insists that knowers/subjects are fallible, that our criteria are corrigible (capable of being corrected), and that our standards are social constructed, and thus continually in need of critique and reconstruction. I offer a self-conscious and reflective

(e)pistemological theory, one that attempts to be adjustable and adaptable as people gain further in understanding. This (e)pistemology must be inclusive and open to others, because of its assumption of fallible knowers. And this (e)pistemology must be capable of being corrected because of its assumption that our criteria and standards are of this world, ones we, as fallible knowers, socially construct. (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p.7)

In this account I attempt to go beyond this, in creating relationally dynamic epistemological standards of judgment. How these relate specifically to the field of giftedness and my future role in this field, is the subject of the concluding section to this research story.

3.2: My claim to know my own educational development: mapping my future as a consultant in gifted education – a reconciliation, a renunciation, or a continuing creative tension?

In this section I attempt to summarise my position at this stage of my living theory action research enquiry. I articulate my reasons for avoiding a reconciliation with established orthodoxies in the field of giftedness, whilst at the same time seeing no compelling need to renounce the field or my involvement in it as a defunct or bankrupted domain of enquiry. Instead I seek to articulate a third way, in which the concept of giftedness might be transformed as a lived, fluid and inclusional process of gift-creation, rather than as a crystallised, static and distancing process of gift-identification. I acknowledge my current position as being in itself transient and transitional, and for this reason make use of the term *journeying* as a consistent metaphor in this section.

This thesis is an attempt to write a story of a journey of professional and personal *self-discovery*, the account of a cycle of reflection and action on this reflection, gathering of data and further reflection on these data in search of evidence, in an attempt to become the educator I aspire to be – living in my practice the values I espouse. I acknowledge *self-discovery* to be more than purely personal, however, and in this account one intention has been (following McClaren, 1997, p.96) to understand and to explain how various historical, educational, social and cultural forces have been written "on me, in me, and through me." Specifically, I try to understand and to explain how my experiences of doing philosophy with children and creating webs of meaning through Dilemma-Based Learning relate to my struggle to reconcile historical and contemporary concepts of giftedness with my values as an educator and as a person. In these reflections and in acting on these reflections, I

aspire to transform my initial understandings and applications of the concept of giftedness into understandings which can affect my practice, the practice of others, and through my writing and my work with other educators in the field, the practice of social formations.

Have I now reached a point at which I can honestly reconcile my values with my practice? If so, does this reconciliation involve much more than a habituation to prevailing orthodoxies and understandings and from my values acquiescence – or perhaps just the faintest, suppressible murmurings of discontent? Am I content in this journeying to seek an acceptable *definition* of the gifted child, from which my responsibility extends then to identify her, in order to provide adequately for her needs? Is this any kind of journey at all?

Or is there instead an imperative to abandon the journeying, seeing no promised land on the horizon, because I recognize that my values repudiate reconciliation either with the concept of *giftedness* itself or with the practices underpinning the concept? Does this amount to a resolve to denounce *giftedness* as a mythical *Neverland* – alluring yet necessarily elusive – a construct steeped in deeply idiosyncratic cultural references, and awaiting unmasking as home to an unclothed emperor/tyrant?

Or is there yet another staging post in this journey to rest my bike against – one not anticipated at the outset because it isn't marked on any known map? – "The map is not the territory" (Korzybski, 1931). To each in turn:

Reconciliation:

In all honesty, this self-study has given me no sense of reconciliation with established orthodoxies – still less a sense of resolution. At no point have I unearthed any insight which might permit a reconciliation of my values with the established 'truths' of giftedness as this term has come to be understood in the 20th century, and as it remains in the 21st. As a pragmatic-constructivist, perhaps this failure was inevitable because:

... truth is never final; it is an open process and not something to be attained, since it is relative to the norms currently accepted, and to the criteria temporarily established, by a group, a society or a culture. We know, for example, that each scientific community, each school of thought, accepts as "true" whatever suits it; however, sometimes their interpretations are contradictory, each justifying their perspective based on different and specific theoretical frameworks. (Daniel, in press)

The "norms currently accepted" (*ibid*.) in the UK in 2006, to which there has been surprisingly little dissent, are couched unambiguously in the language of propositional 'truth,' through which educators' energies are focused not on conceptual, holistic, ethical or moral exploration of the terms involved, but on the circular, self-perpetuating, technocratic, proceduralist concerns of identification, provision and 'product outcome.' We have *National Academies* and *Registers* to populate, cohorts to 'track' and 'monitor,' records to keep, Key Stage 2 SAT Level 5s and GCSE A and A* grades to work towards and to count. Little wonder, perhaps, that many teachers feel there is a gulf between their practice and their values – as evidenced by one (among many similar) of the evaluation comments recorded in the previous section: "I have to get results based on objectives. I am paid to do the opposite of what I believe – how sad is that?"

This is a situation familiar to Whitehead & McNiff (2006, p.26):

... we are deeply concerned with how teachers and other practitioners are systematically bullied by dominant forms of research and theory, and are persuaded to think that they cannot think for themselves or participate in public debates about education and the future of professional endeavours.

In rejecting the possibility of a reconciliation between my values and the currently established orthodoxies of giftedness, I believe this research story has a responsibility to offer an explanation for – if not an answer to – a perplexing question: just how does a system drawing on 20th century notions of fixed, actuarial definitions and labels, of *test-and-place*, of putting performance before learning, and all the related apparatus of *giftedness* described in Chapters 1 and 2, retain its dominance in a world

to which these constructs seem so ill-suited – a 21st century world of uncertainty, fluidity, inclusionality and change? Related questions: how can we possibly believe that a national register of gifted and talented children – initially for secondary-aged students but ultimately for all four to 19-year-olds – "will help schools to ensure their brightest pupils have the opportunity to reach their full potential" (*Times Educational Supplement*, 14 July 2006, p.12)? And how has this policy initiative been allowed to gather such extraordinary momentum?

In order to attempt a response to these questions, I assume here an interested and by no means impartial voice, trying to tell an *alternative story* (White & Epston, 1990) to that which currently remains in the ascendant:

1. *By suppressing dissenting voices.*

In July 2006, following the appearance of an article I'd written for an educational journal questioning national policy in gifted education (Hymer, 2005), I received a private e-mail from a highly-respected academic with considerable expertise in the field of gifted education:

> *… I am so pleased that you have raised this debate … It has been a field with such little real debate and I am really grateful that you have begun something that will hopefully rattle all our cages.*

I replied thanking her for her kind words and intellectually open attitude, but doubting that I'd succeed in raising a debate. The structures underpinning national policy in the field did not, and do not to me, seem designed for promoting genuine discussion: creating the illusion of academic open-mindedness and listening to think-tanks, but avoiding real dissent, the *DfES Gifted and Talented Unit*'s longstanding termly standing conferences are an invitation-only affair, permitting the exclusion of voices which might well share concerns (e.g. unacceptably frequent instances of inadequate challenge for students, including those designated as 'most able'), but which refuse to sign up uncritically to the prescribed solution (*identify, label, provide, test*).

I fail to find, both in DfES G&T policy more broadly and in the specific incarnation of the *National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth* (NAGTY), evidence of any real struggle with inconvenient research findings. This is not because these finding do not exist – as earlier sections of this account have detailed. Even within the hypothetico-deductive tradition of research, which one might imagine to be the preferred tradition of many civil servants and politicians (*cf.* the favourable post-publication response to Tooley & Darby, 1998, from OfSTED) it is possible to cite three decades' research on student motivation at the universities of Columbia and Stanford by Carol Dweck and her colleagues (Dweck, 1999, 2004, 2006), which findings cast serious doubt over current UK 'G&T' policy – being identified as gifted can be the kiss of death to intellectual self-confidence, intellectual risk-taking and the pursuit of true learning (as opposed to mere performance). Or White's (2006) scholarly linkage of current UK 'G&T' policy to the eugenicist ambitions of Francis Galton, Lewis Terman, Cyril Burt and others – which entailed as a first step identifying an intellectual elite and making special provision for them. Or the directions taken by many other eminent 21st century educational researchers, who see learning dispositions as being more educationally fruitful avenues of exploration than 20th century notions of fixed 'ability' or 'intelligence' (e.g. Williams & Wegerif, 2006). I know personally of one internationally-renowned academic who was dis-invited from giving a keynote presentation at a recent NAGTY conference, on the strength it seems of a too-discomforting paper published in a journal for school 'G&T coordinators.' Should we really prefer easy answers to awkward questions – especially in a field like giftedness?

2. *By exploiting societal aspirations and prejudices.*

I would hazard a guess, in the absence of data on the subject, that the majority of UK citizens would approve of national G&T policy as presented by ministers and NAGTY. It may appeal to a middle-England 'life-is-tough,' 'winners-and-losers,' 'what's-wrong-with-competition?' *weltanschauung*. These are sentiments conveyed by some panellists on a BBC Radio 4 panel programme, and also by a number of responses from the public (*Any Questions?* 14 July 2006). NAGTY is at pains to stress the distinctions between 'G&T' identification strategies and systems to which it has been

compared (e.g. the 11-plus examination), but there's a concatenation: the belief that we can ever accurately identify a child's abilities, at any stage of her life, and then go on to make predictive judgments which impact massively on her future life chances. If we could, how do we account for instance for the legions of hugely influential people who were school 'failures'? The policy is designed, in the words of Lord Adonis, to "stop the terrible waste of talent when children don't reach their full potential," (TES, *op cit*.) and to "ensure they are identified early and do not lose out because they come from a deprived background" (*ibid*.) Whilst the intentions may seem admirable, Adonis' argument stems, I believe, from three instrumental assumptions, all of them contestable: that we can ever know a child's full potential (can we?); that 'they' can be identified early (can we identify 'ability' independently of environmental context and past opportunity?); and that any register can be flexible enough to help navigate potential into performance (can truly flexible registers be administered by over-pressed teachers in an educationally meaningful way?). I suspect the answers to all three questions, based on current evidence, is 'no.' That, however, won't stop us believing the answers are 'yes.' Perhaps we prefer simple answers that accord with our aspirations and prejudices to complex ones that don't.

3. *By buying loyalty and allegiance to the established orthodoxy.*

National policy in the field of giftedness has had a pretty clear run to its present condition because, almost by definition, 'experts' are happy to pronounce from within their field of expertise – and few would choose to establish their reputations in a field in which they are profoundly ill at ease. And having built a reputation, status and a living, fewer still are prepared to bite the hands that feed them. There are, of course, many honourable exceptions to the above, and also many dedicated practitioners and academics in the field who subscribe honestly to the beliefs that underpin their work – although most of the inspirational educators with whom I have worked have strained their job descriptions to the limits – in accordance with their values and tacit expertise, they've needed to.

There are concerns shared within and outside the field of *giftedness* – that many children are bored, unchallenged, and unexcited by their educational diet, and that many teachers do not know how best to stimulate a passion for learning and discovery – especially within a system that seems to put performance before learning (Watkins, 2001). But to move from this shared recognition to a conviction that the answer lies in identification strategies, labels, cohorts and the apparatus of data-gathering, tracking and monitoring is, I believe, questionable. There is a dominant story (told by NAGTY, the DfES, some Local Authority interpretations, etc.) that one has to identify/label a child as G&T before one can adequately meet his/her needs. There is an alternative story too: I would suggest that many excellent schools and teachers (for example, the nine teachers whose practice was studied in depth by Hart *et al.*, 2004, or the practice of Hannaford, 2005) have been meeting the needs of their students for years, and without needing cohorts, labels or performance-led approaches such as acceleration in order to do this. They dispense with *a priori* identification procedures, and instead invest their energies in creating challenging, enriching, extending, enquiry-friendly learning environments for all their students – and being led by the unique student responses these conditions elicit. They know that for every student identified as gifted and receiving the resources that become her due, you will always be able to find another, equally deserving and able to benefit from the same provision but who lacks the high-status but double-edged 'gifted' designation (Freeman, 1980, 1991, 2001). This, however, is not an argument for identifying more thoroughly or widening access to NAGTY. On the contrary, it's an argument I believe for questioning a preoccupation with 'identification' or the current functions of NAGTY, burying the labels, and putting the considerable resources saved into teacher continuing professional development and inclusive, high-quality extension and enrichment opportunities – i.e. quality provision *in schools and communities*, so the 'gifted' do not need to be saved by summer schools miles from home.

In this alternative story there may well be an argument for retaining a *Gifted & Talented Education Unit* within the DfES, but giving it a new name and a wildly more imaginative and ambitious brief: to surrender an obsession with quantitative systems, summative record-keeping and number-crunching and instead to invest in quality.

This will involve seeking out ways of disseminating and resourcing approaches that are better suited to creating a critically-engaged and educated citizenry in a 21st century democracy, and a truly challenging, demanding curriculum for all – allowing us to be continually surprised by who responds to *gifted education*.

If we need the term, perhaps it's the education, not the children who are best seen as *gifted*. When it's the 'gifted children,' we will always be content to identify those who've already benefited from their opportunities. When it's their education, we can touch the hard-to-reach and the disadvantaged. This is not necessarily an idealistic story, based on a belief that all children are the same, or a call for dumbing-down education – it's the very opposite. Most of the people who have documented the advantages of responding radically and inspirationally to the needs of their students (for example, many of the names cited in this report, such as Susan Hart *et al.*) do so from outside the ability-garden, and have therefore failed to pay their entrance-fees to established conventions. The new understandings, the unknown species, and the robust hybrids, are missed.

Renunciation:

Given the barriers to *reconciliation* voiced above, *renunciation* might seem a plausible conclusion to draw from aspects of my research story. At its heart will be a recognition that my standards of judgment – *viz.* the extent to which I live in my practice the values and dispositions embodied in the terms *individual intellectual respect* and *generative-transformational giftedness* – are not well-met by adherence to dominant epistemologies in the field of giftedness, and may well be negated by them. A renunciation might seem particularly indicated on the grounds of *terminology*, for many reasons, including these:

- personal values which hold that "*labels are for jam jars, not children*" (Leyden, 2000);
- the evidence that "*Intelligence labels, good or bad, have undermining effects. Both teach children that their underlying intelligence can be readily judged from their performance*" (Dweck, 1999, p.121);

- anti-psychiatric, anti-pathogenic grounds as described by Illich (1976): the label once applied becomes the only 'reality,' and all perception is filtered through it and all action directed toward it, not the person or the 'truth' of the person's condition;

- within the postmodernist perspective of narrative therapy (e.g. White & Epston, 1990; Ingram & Perlesz, 2004; Crocket, 2004;), a sense that the invisible social 'controls' of linguistic terms have the potential to subjugate and oppress:

> *… if family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers, and professionals think of a person as 'having' a certain characteristic or problem, they exercise 'power' over him or her by 'performing' this knowledge with respect to that person. Thus, in the social domain, knowledge and power are inextricably interrelated.* (Tomm, 1990, p.viii)

Within the field of giftedness, the *power-over* stance illuminated in narrative therapeutic understandings is as much an issue for the child 'having' *giftedness*, as it is for the child 'lacking' it. For this reason, in response to an invitation to all parents of children attending my older daughter's secondary school to 'nominate' their children (with "evidence") for inclusion on the school's 'G&T Register' I replied (Hymer, 2006) as honestly as I could – requesting an opportunity to meet with the school's G&T coordinators in order to discuss alternative models for supporting high levels of challenge for students and, relatedly, to request that our daughter be excluded from any existing register:

> *We are as anxious about … being labelled as 'gifted' as we are about her being implicitly labelled 'ungifted.' In some situations she excels, in others she doesn't – much like any child or adult anywhere. The flaw is with the concept of ability in itself – terms like 'bright,' 'clever,' 'G&T,' and 'intelligent,' or euphemisms such as 'smart cookie' are usually well-intentioned, but they act insidiously to reinforce the belief that an individual's exceptional achievements are explained by 'her intelligence' – when there is no evidence for this belief. We are alert to the dangers of a child being identified (or even identifying herself) as 'gifted' – invariably on dodgy and sometimes spurious grounds, and innumerable pieces of*

research document the dangers of children being judged 'ungifted' relative to their peers. Does this happen at […]? You bet: it happened just yesterday. I have no idea what the criteria for being selected to take part in the Enterprising Activities Day were ('G&T' cohort? Excellent life and enterprise skills? Poor life and enterprise skills?) – and, I would suggest, neither do the students. What I do know, is that … told me when I picked her up from school yesterday, that "All the brainiest kids are doing an Enterprising Activities Day tomorrow. I'm not doing it, so I guess I'm not that brainy." When I asked her how she knew it was the "brainy" ones who'd been selected, she said "Because it's all the brightest kids, and [the teacher] told [two friends who'd been selected] that "It's because you're all the bright cookies." This may be reality or it may be children-talk, but apparently her French set was talking about little else – and in the absence of clear criteria for admission, children, like adults, will create their own explanations.

Please forgive the length of this piece – it in no way is intended to devalue the admirable efforts of yourselves and your colleagues in making […] the outstanding school that it is, and to creating the extension and enrichment opportunities that can make education magical. It is, however, intended to ask challenging questions about practices in a school I believe has the reputation, confidence and skills to transcend 20th century formulations of intelligence or giftedness (enshrined in NAGTY's constitution), and to explore 21st century routes to excellence and achievement. In so many ways, [the school] already manages this. Just one example from our own daughter's case: we know how much … has benefited from the opt-in opportunities she's had in music – none of which has needed her to be judged as "musically gifted." (ibid.)

To date, my wife and I have had no response to this letter, and in many respects, we did not expect one: ours is in all likelihood a minority view, and in asking the question, whose interests does the term *giftedness* serve?, the likely answer is, "many": all those for whom the term denotes positivistically some 'direct knowledge of the world,' and those whose livelihood, status, and sense of self-worth is, at least to some considerable extent, caught up in its supposed 'reality' and veracity. I include myself

in the latter list. Renunciation is for me intellectually tempting, but its practical consequences for someone in my position, potentially far-reaching. In choosing to reject a global renunciation of the field, as I have chosen to reject the prospect of *reconciliation* with the extant field, I must ask what my reluctance to repudiate is founded upon: sincere ontological and epistemological reservations, or rationalisations, pragmatism, compromise and craven self-interest?

A continuing creative tension:

Whilst recognising that there is a large part of me that would be reluctant to surrender all that my decade of involvement in the field of *giftedness* has given me at many levels, not least material, intellectual and social – *and not all of which can be evidenced as being congruent with my ontological and epistemological values* – this research journey has also revealed or created many things that would, for me, be lost and deeply-missed at the level of those same values. I attempted to summarise these in the conclusions to my published plea for a re-think around the concept of *giftedness* (Hymer, 2005, p.7):

> *Gifted and talented education, for all the problems inherent in the terminology, has provided the world of education with many rich signposts over the 20th century. It continues to do so. This article is not intended as an assault on its existence, even though I'd welcome changes to its nomenclature. Early signs of a possible shift in emphasis in DfES thinking from 'gifted and talented' to 'challenge and engagement' are to be welcomed and encouraged. We should certainly continue to invest heavily in the pursuit of excellence and achievement, confront anti-intellectual bigotry, and seek ways of raising aspirations within and without areas of deprivation.*

How then, do I reconcile my future practice with my values? I have attempted in this account to provide evidence of the extent to which my values can be lived through the practice of *Philosophy for Children* and *Dilemma-Based Learning* – neither of which is reliant on an affiliation to orthodox conceptualisations of giftedness, but both of which embody many of the elements which are germane to non-deterministic, inclusive conceptualisations in the field – concepts such as *challenge*, *personal enquiry*,

extension and *enrichment*, for instance. I believe these concepts to be at the heart of many of the naïve but insightful understandings of giftedness advanced by the children anticipating their experiences on a mixed-ability G&T Summer School (*cf*. 2.1 and Appendix 2), with all the apparently contradictory elements that these collective understandings entailed. I have documented the aetiology and the nature of my concerns with orthodox conceptualisations of *giftedness*, and suggested ways in which crystallised, objectivist, instrumentalist, dualistic, individualistic*,* pragmatic interpretations of the field might be supplanted by fluid, constructivist, social, relational, activity-oriented, dialectical interpretations – in particular the emergent concept of *generative-transformational giftedness*.

I contend further that my experience of the value and the emergence of *generative-transformational giftedness* when 'performing above myself,' in the *gaps* of dialogue and critical reflection with co-participants in conference presentations and workshops, can act as a model for the emergence of gift-creation generally, and that this provides a possibility for repudiating fixed, crystallised, norm-referenced understandings of giftedness, in favour of the fluid, constructivist interpretations described in the paragraph above.

From this socio-constructivist perspective, and drawing on Vygotskyan notions in particular, I argue that just as individuals build their knowledge through language and social interaction, so can gifts be *built, created or made* – rather than *identified, discovered or found*. This will in large measure be dependent on the social and relational element at the heart (in more than one sense) of *generative-transformational giftedness* – as socio-cognitive processes emerge through the activating and development of higher-order thinking skills, which in turn arise from the relationships a person sustains with his or her social environments (Mead, 1972).

In creating this research narrative I have come to realize that the *relational* has been seminal not only in my emergent arguments in recent years for a socio-constructivist understanding of *giftedness*, as in the above paragraph, but also in the conception and the practice of DBL and, especially *Philosophy for Children*. The relational in P4C

is embodied in the notion of *Caring Thinking* (one of its core elements, alongside *Critical, Creative* and *Collaborative*). Sharp (in press) has noted that,

> *Caring thinking expresses itself in prizing, esteeming, cherishing, healing, consoling, taking care of, nurturing, empathizing, sympathizing, valuing, appreciating, celebrating, responding to the other …. It tends to approach the 'other' (person or object or river or animal, etc.) from the inside … It is caring thinking that is responsible for the fostering of a 'relational consciousness' in children - rather than viewing things atomistically, the caring thinker tends to focus on the relationships between things - and this results in a deep understanding. … Relational consciousness is knowing and feeling oneself intimately connected with and part of everything that is, and coming to act and relate out of that awareness. It is experiencing oneself not as an atomistic ego, but as a self in relationship to the other. Some have called this consciousness the 'we-consciousness.' … For a long time we have lived under an illusion of separateness. We've lived as detached egos, unaware that we are part of a vast fabric of being, and communal oneness. Now we are learning from the new sciences that the universe has actually to be constructed as a 'we.' Everything in creation - oceans, whales, mountains, human, eagles, roses, giraffes, and viruses – is a dance of sub-atomic particles. Fields of energy flow and mingle together. They are all stitched into the cosmic quilt, which underlies and give rise to everything.*

This understanding of the relational 'we' is supported by Rayner's (2005) notion of inclusionality, identified earlier as "an awareness of space and the variably permeable boundaries … that inseparably line it, as connective, reflective and co-creative, rather than divisive." In my work with children and with adults, I strive to live this relational, inclusional 'we' in my practice facilitating P4C enquiries, and in my wider roles – as evidenced I hope by the comments reproduced earlier from participants in these experiences. The shift in my own thinking, in the process of carrying out this action research study, can be summarised in the following table – which I have constructed in the creation of a new course on gifted and talented education ("G&T2" – cf. www.osiriseducational.co.uk):

Traditional Conceptualisation	Alternative Conceptualisation
(e.g. DfES Excellence in Cities model)	**(e.g. G-T CReATe model)**
Concern for gift-identification – the earlier the better	Concern for gift-creation – the earlier the better
Emphasis on 'objective' data from past performances	Emphasis on creating opportunities for present and future learning
G&T cohorts and labels; distinct teaching and learning provision (often acceleration) on the grounds of ability and identification	No G&T cohorts or labels; inclusive initial provision, but extension opportunities on the grounds of interest and application
Emphasis on individual intelligence and the provenance of nature, genetics, background influences	Emphasis on the impact of social factors in learning, on motivation and distributed intelligence
Teacher as neutral, impartial arbiter, separate from and independent of individual students	Teacher as involved co-participant in the construction of gifts and talents
Co-ordinator role: administrator of systems for identification, tracking and monitoring	Co-ordinator role: peer-coach and co-learner, alert to new learning and teaching methodologies for dissemination and championing
Assumptions of linear progression in performance based on fixed ability	Assumptions of variable performance based on (e.g.) temporal-social, relational factors
Cognitive-emotional duality	Cognitive-emotional dialectical unity
Feeds entity-approach to intelligence and performance-led orientation	Feeds incremental-approach to intelligence and learning- or mastery-led orientation
Accountability through evidence of student performances and tracking and monitoring systems	Accountability through evidence of student learning, including 'soft data' (e.g. commitment, interest)

TABLE 3: Two models of giftedness, reflecting contrasting ontological and epistemological stances

The table reflects my current thinking, at the present stage of my ongoing enquiry. In this process of living, clarifying and communicating the meanings of an alternative

conceptualisation of giftedness are formed, I argue, living epistemological standards of judgement for a new, relationally dynamic epistemology of educational enquiry. In his reflections on an early draft of this report, Jack Whitehead made this observation:

> *When I think of your influence in the education of social formations I find myself focusing on creating wise learning opportunities within webs of meaning. I imagine that you are living this embodied value and use it as a living standard of judgment to account to yourself for the worthwhileness of what you are doing … I think you could affirm your thesis as a gift you have created and offered to the profession of education as a new relationally dynamic epistemology of educational enquiry.*
> (Email from Jack Whitehead, 29 June 2006)

It is a mark of my continuing ambivalence with the concept of *giftedness*, for its residual connotations of exclusivity, objectivity and determinism, that I find myself unable to respond to Jack's generous invitation to affirm this account as a 'gift.' As intimated at the outset, I will however ask you, the reader, to judge whether or not this account provides convincing evidence of my efforts to move in the direction of nurturing and affirming individuals' capacity for independent thought, and for the concept of generative-transformational giftedness which affirms gift-creation (rather than discovery or identification). For myself, anticipating the next stage of my journeying in the field of giftedness, I find myself paradoxically content to be at 'rest,' if only for a short time, in a state of creative *tension*. I am however increasingly able to see this tension as, like *frailty* identified earlier, something positive: because tension brings with it the prospect of change, its potential for fluidity gives it the character of that which is in essence generative and transformative. Williams (1976, p.13) sees tension as being coterminous with the universe itself, as *"the price of life …. It is when we refuse to recognize and welcome tensions which are life-giving that we fall a prey to tensions which are death-dealing. That is why it is necessary for us to see through our hypochondria, and welcome what is healthy when we feel it."*

Maybe it's OK not, ultimately, to know, but to remain in a state of tension, still thinking. For "To know is to kill …. Thinking is still alive." (Daignault, 1992, p.199)