

"Giftedness is a dodgy concept."

"I make my living as a consultant in gifted education."

How do I understand and communicate my values and beliefs in my work as an educator in the field of giftedness?

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I make a claim to know my own educational development (a claim to have generated theory), and to be in a position to influence my own future educational development, the development of others, and the development of social formations. I document my attempt to critique – and to contribute to a transformation of – dominant epistemologies in the field of gifted and talented education, and to describe and explain my own compromised relationship with this field of enquiry. The account draws ultimately – though not initially – on post-modernist psychological and philosophical insights, and the *living theory* action research approach to practitioner self-study (Whitehead, 1993; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). In it, I describe and explain the source of my dissatisfaction with traditional western, rationalist approaches to the field of gifted and talented education, with their instrumentalist, dualistic, individualistic, pragmatic, *tool-for-result* (cf. Vygotsky, 1978; Newman & Holzman, 1993), *knowing-centred* associations.

I articulate in narrative form the meanings of my embodied ontological values through their emergence in my practice – specifically in my practice of *philosophy with children*, in creating *webs of meaning* through dilemma-based learning, and in seeking to *unmask* (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984) the concept of giftedness – by asking whose interests the concept serves. In the process of living, clarifying and communicating the meanings of these practices are formed, I argue, living epistemological standards of judgement for a new, relationally dynamic epistemology of educational enquiry. I record also how through my professional activity, my reflections on and revisions of this activity, and the process of creating this account, I have moved in the direction of creating and living my core personal and educational values and realising the critical standards of judgment which are both consisting in and attendant on these values. These include the value of *individual intellectual respect* as a contributor to the creation of *generative-transformational giftedness* – i.e. giftedness which is co-constructed (not identified) in a social, relationally respectful, activity-oriented, dialectical, *tool-and-result*

(Vygotsky, 1978) manner and context. I make a claim to originality in scholarship in articulating the emergence of the value-laden concept of *generative-transformational giftedness* and its latent fecundity in and relevance to the field of gifted and talented education. To this end, I suggest an inclusional, non-dualistic alternative to the *identification* or *discovery* of an individual's gifts and talents by arguing that activity- and development-centred (not knowing-centred) *learning-leading-development* (Vygotsky, *ibid.*) environments lead not to the *identification* of gifts and talents but to their *creation*.

Finally, I ask that if this account is judged to be unconvincing, it will have been judged so "on criteria that I avow, not on criteria that I disown." (Quinn, 1997, pp.4-5)