

RELATING TO YOU

What is my intention in writing to you?

I want to share my learning in a way which contributes to your understanding of education.

Why do I think education is important?

I think of education as something which is good, as something which helps you and I to live better lives than we would without it.

Why bother with educational knowledge?

All of us have passed through a school curriculum which embodies our society's beliefs about educational knowledge. Increasing numbers are going on to experience educational knowledge in further and adult education and in universities. With such large numbers of our future citizens experiencing such knowledge it seems important to understand its nature and growth and to be able to justify its inclusion in a curriculum.

Why bother with educational theory?

One of the distinguishing features of a profession is a body of theory which can help to justify and improve its practices. I hold the view that educational theory is a form of dialogue which has profound implications for the future of humanity because of the values it holds and because it is embodied in our practical lives in our workplaces and wider society. In other words the educational theory I intend to show you is not simply an abstract and conceptual form of theory, it is a living theory embodied in practice. I place a high value on the educational theory of the teaching profession because it contains the values and understandings which constitute educative relationships with pupils and a possible, future society.

How am I going to share my understanding of education?

I will try to persuade you that the knowledge you encountered in your schooling was fundamentally flawed as educational knowledge because it did not include your own, conscious living 'I' in the construction of your own educational knowledge. The knowledge in schooling was constituted before it was presented to us. I believe that you, like me, were not encouraged to see that educational knowledge should be understood as our stories of our educational development. I am thinking of the educational development which shows that we are learning how to understand ourselves, each other and the world we live in and learning how to make our contribution to improving our world.

How will I try to persuade you that my educational knowledge is true?

First I will offer you a story of my educational development in a University. This may challenge your preconceptions of a University as somehow divorced from the moral and political questions of the day. In showing you my educational development I hope to captivate your imaginations. The story contains three original ideas. If they don't ring true to you life's experience then this is a fundamental challenge to their validity. I hope to engage

your feelings by inviting you to empathise with the values I am trying to live as fully as I can in my workplace and my experience of their negations.

What do you care about?

I imagine that you are like me in enjoying loving relationships, that you value yourself and will defend your integrity against violations by others. I imagine that you care about earning your living in the vocational sense that you want to do something worth while for yourself and others in your productive work. I imagine that you care about understanding yourself and others in relation to the world we live in. I imagine that you express anger if you are constrained not to ask questions and express your opinions freely and that you will act to overcome such violations. I feel that you care about injustice and seek to overcome it. I imagine that you experience pleasure and communion when someone else affirms and values you.

Will what I say be significant for you?

I think it will only be significant in the way I intend if I can communicate in a way which touches what you care about. I do not want you to feel that I am thrusting ideas at you. Neither do I want you to feel that I am trying to impose anything on you. To captivate your imagination and have some influence on both the way you see education and on the way you act, I think my work must be offered as an invitation to engage. To do this it must embrace your feelings, and relate to how you see yourself and with the vision you have for a better world. I am asking a lot for you to trust me sufficiently to be open to a relationship in which you will permit an engagement between your ways of interpreting the world and of interpreting your actions and my own.

I am hoping that what I have to show you about my educational development will justify the trust and captivate your imaginations.

How will I captivate your imagination?

By telling you a story which is entertaining with a serious intent. I want to make you laugh so that you can see how my laughter helped to reduce my anxiety and fear when being subjected to the abuse of power. Humour is part of the way I cope with the shocks of experiencing violations of trust, integrity, vocational commitment, truth, justice, freedom and democracy and has been helpful both in sustaining my persistence in the face of pressure and to my commitment to their fuller expression in my work. I also want to appeal to your curiosity, originality and desire for truth.

I think your curiosity will be engaged by three original ideas for answering your questions, 'How do I improve what I am doing?', and 'How do I live my values more fully?'. I also want you to feel a desire to respond to my invitation to test the truth of my claim that you are like me in experiencing yourself as a living contradiction in your social context. What I mean by this is that you are like me in holding certain values whilst at the same time experiencing their denial. The experience of this tension moves us to try to improve things by living our values as fully as possible.

What I have in mind are experiences which I think will captivate your imaginations because you care about the values being violated. As you value the freedom to question and express

opinions I resist the imposition of constraints on this freedom. As you value social justice and equal opportunities do share my resistance to those individuals and procedures which undermine them. As you value democratic decision making then do engage with my struggle to protect such procedures against authoritarian judgements and desires to dominate and control decision making. As you value truth you may recognise that those with the power to legitimate what counts as true sometimes abuse this power. See if I embody in my workplace support for the power of truth against the truth of power. In recognising that there is much learning to be done about how to protect these values and embody them more fully in our social practices, will you value my story because it is a contribution to such learning?

What are the three original ideas?

I have just given you the first one. It is the inclusion of your own 'I' as a living contradiction in answers to the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. I think your answers to such questions could re-vitalise education.

The second idea is related to the way in which you try to improve your work. If you do not recognise what I said above about experiencing yourself as a living contradiction and recognise what I am about to say about the way in which you have already improved your practice then I doubt if this book has much value. You see, I believe that you have already combined your capacities for action and reflection in a systematic approach to problem solving in which you will have wanted to improve something because you believe that your values could be lived more fully in your practice. I think you have already imagined ways forward, designed action plans, acted and gathered evidence on your actions, evaluated your actions in terms of their quality and effectiveness and modified your concerns, ideas and actions in the light of your evaluations.

The third idea concerns your description and explanation of your learning and educational development as you research your attempts to live your values more fully in your practice. I think your explanation is a living educational theory which, along with the theories of others, has profound implications for the future of humanity. I hope to convince you of the value of this idea by showing you its potential in the living accounts of other teachers, educators and managers.

What other ideas will you find in the text?

I am conscious of the anger of feminists in their understanding of the male dominated hierarchies of power and knowledge in our society. I identify with their sense of injustice partly because I have experienced the abuse of power in a male dominated regime of truth. I also see the urgent need for greater gender and racial equality. I try to move towards this equality through supporting the power of women's voices in their work as well as acknowledging their contributing to my own. These are expressed in the later part of the text.

In trying to ensure that my research is at the forefront of the field I attend seminars and conferences in the U.K. and abroad. Over the last twenty years I have witnessed a growing sense of crisis about the nature and growth of knowledge in the educational and social science research communities. Terms such as post-positivist, post-modernist and post-structuralist abound in the literature. They serve to stress the sense of crisis which appears when a research community moves beyond a particular paradigm and when no consensus

has emerged about an alternative position apart from the consensus that there no alternative has emerged!

I see my research as contributing to a new view of educational knowledge and educational theory. I think it embodies a form of rationality which has emerged from the dialectical tradition. I am thinking of a tradition which stresses educative conversations and processes of question and answer. A tradition which embraces contradictions and which engages with the social relations within which the knowledge is being produced and legitimated. It is also a form of moral enquiry which engages critically with its own justification in an aesthetics of existence. By this I mean that I see attempts by individuals to communicate the way in which they are giving a form to their lives as a form of art. The medium we are working on is ourselves. I love the way artists struggle to find authentic ways of communicating truths about what it means to be human. In seeing education as an art, I accept a responsibility for helping others to give a form to their own lives. Accounts of our own lives as educators do seem to be intimately related to those we teach. I mean this in the sense that in accounts of our educative relations we should surely expect our students to speak on their own behalf. I believe my students do.

What educational standards have I used to give a form and content to the book?

Part one is a description and explanation of my educational development in the enquiry, 'How do I improve my practice?' It is a story of my educational research as I attempt to reveal a new form of educational knowledge and educational theory. My educative relationships in this research include my work with pupils, students and teachers. My story also includes the theories of other researchers and experiences of contradictions in institutional power relates. The educational standards which I think give a form to my educational development and hence the story in this book include a commitment to hold myself publicly accountable for my productive work whilst sustaining a commitment to academic freedom, autonomy and integrity, social justice, truth and democratic forms of social order.

Part Two shows some of the influences of my teaching and tutoring in the integration of original ideas from my research in the lives and case studies of other teachers and researchers. The educational standards I use to justify the inclusion of the case studies are that the studies embody the above values and make their own unique contribution to the extension of educational knowledge.

Part Three is focused on examples of the educative relationships of three teacher researchers who are speaking for themselves. As their University supervisor I have a tutorial responsibility to support their educational enquiries. The educational standard I have used to justify their inclusion is perhaps the most significant in education. I think my educative relationship can be felt in their accounts in a way which shows that my primary concern is to respond to their educational needs rather than to impose my own conceptual frameworks.

Part Four is included because of the increasing pressure of market forces on my work in education. I don't want to be misunderstood. I am not against a productive life in industry and commerce. Indeed I value most highly my family's material well-being whilst feeling despondent at the suffering which millions experience in their poverty and lack of material resources. In particular I value the work of those who have provided access to the new forms of information technology. They have opened up great possibilities for enhancing

communication around the world. What I want to contribute to, through my productive life in education, is a quality of life which shares material well-being as widely as possible whilst ensuring that the above values constitute and enhance the quality of our social order.

Just before I begin my story there is a concern I want to share with you about using everyone's real name. My closest colleagues and friends have advised me to change the names of those individuals who were involved in recommendations to terminate my employment, in judgements denying my originality and in matters concerning my academic freedom. The most telling reason they gave was that my naming the individuals may be interpreted by you, the reader, as the act of an individual seeking revenge and would hence distract your attention away from evaluating the contribution of the work to educational knowledge and educational theory. The reason I am prepared to take this risk is because I respect the integrity and authenticity of the work you are about to read. At no point do I believe it is motivated by anti-educational values. I believe it will be experienced as an invitation to respond in a way which will help to take the educational enquiry forward rather than an attack upon any individual. Here is my story for you to judge.

BACKGROUND

The fact that you are reading this gives me some hope that you, like me, are life-affirming and want to live a good, pleasureable and productive life. I also think you must have experienced or be aware of the pleasure and energy released through the music, literature and drama which I experienced as a student in the 1960s. All the educational, economic and artistic ferment of this period included questions about the meaning of human existence. I don't think that I was unusual in thinking about the certainty of my death and asking questions about what was worthwhile doing in the life remaining. I imagine that you have done the same but with very different choices and outcomes. I recall that my choice of education was focused on my thinking that it was a worthwhile vocation because it offered the possibility of one's own continued learning. I could also help others to learn something significant about themselves and the world, to take conscious control over their own lives and to contribute to a more peaceful and productive world.

If you are making your choices in 1993 I know that they are more limited in the sense that in 1967 the economy was expanding, demand for graduates was high and we had a wide range of choice about where we worked. You may have had to be more practical and prudent than myself in that it was only after developing a sense of my vocation in education that I considered the need to earn money to live. I moved from Newcastle to take up my first teaching post in London in 1967. At the same time I married Joan, another teacher, and began my first job teaching at Langdon Park School in Tower Hamlets. You may recall that the Kray and Richardson Gangs were active in the area at this time and their rather violent ways had perhaps some influence on the quality of human relationships in the area.

One of my most memorable experiences was being pinned against the wall of the School by a gang leader called Big Kamara who informed me not too gently that he would slit my 'fuckin' throat' with his sharpened dog comb if I 'grassed' on his gang to the police. I have always blamed my predicament in this case on my Professor of Philosophy, Richard Peters. I had returned to the School after an early evening seminar with Peters on questions of the kind, 'What ought I to do?'. Peters would always answer that rationality and reason were the ways to overcome practical problems. I returned to the School to supervise a dance when I heard a dreadful racket coming from the front of the school. I asked myself Peters' question,

and answered that I must go and reason with whoever was creating the disturbance. Hence I found myself against the wall with the possibility of a rather limited life-span.

My response at the time went beyond my previous understanding of rationality. In response to the threat to slit my fuckin' throat, I answered with a kind of demonic energy that, *I've trained for five fuckin' years to teach you fuckin' bastards how to improve and make something of your fuckin' lives and I haven't come here to be fucked up by you fuckin' lot. So get out of my fuckin' way and I'll go to my fuckin' dance.* I still look back with some relieved amazement that the group parted, Big Karmara stepped back and I drove off, throat, life and limbs intact. As I drove away I remember thinking that perhaps my philosophy professor had got it wrong. Perhaps there was a different form of rationality in real life which I needed to understand!

Some 26 years later the only fundamental addition I would make to the above answer to the question of what am I working for, is related to my children, Rebecca and Jonathan. I recall vividly two significant experiences in the life-affirming decision to have children. The first emerged out of the earlier despair at facing the certainty of my death and feeling that there was no purpose to life. I suppose that we have all had to cope with both the feelings of being and nothingness. The life-affirming experience of the power of being came out of this despair with the understanding that I could create meaning and purpose for myself in whatever lifetime I had left. I am sure that my capacity to feel so whole-heartedly life affirming was influenced by my mother and father who provided, along with my brother Graham, a stable, caring and loving home-life. This life-affirming experience was strengthened when I fell in love with Joan.

Joan and I agreed to have a family, and she gave birth to Rebecca in 1975 and Jonathan in 1979. I feel a loving responsibility for them all which goes beyond my vocational commitment to education. Whilst Joan is economically independent, Rebecca and Jonathan are not. Part of my reason for working is to earn money to provide a secure material basis for their well-being. Whilst I have retained my sense of vocation in education, since moving to the University of Bath as a Lecturer in Education in 1973, I have continued to research questions about improving the quality and effectiveness of my practice. The rest of my story is concerned with my educational development as an educational researcher in the University of Bath as I attempt to contribute to knowledge of my subject, education.

A WORKING LIFE IN THE UNIVERSITY

The form of my story is the essence of my claim to have created a new form of educational knowledge. It is grounded in my commitment to live my values as fully as I can in my workplace and in the sense of existing as a living contradiction when my values are negated in practice. The story begins with a group of six teachers and their pupils as we worked together to improve the quality of the pupils' learning. The conversations show my interest in helping pupils to become more involved in their own learning and to help teachers to improve their practice and to understand the processes of improving pupils' learning. I then want you to experience the same kind of shock I experienced on receiving a letter terminating my employment and to identify with my experience of myself as a living contradiction. I am hoping that you will see, in the dialogical and dialectical form of my story a contribution to educational knowledge which contains the three original ideas described above and which is being created by a University Academic in the process of researching his own educational development.

A number of my students and colleagues in other institutions sometimes complain that they have to search through different publications to get a sense of the developmental nature of my writing. I hope this text helps. The story of my educational development is essentially a search for a new form of educational theory. My research programme can be followed through six of my papers published in 1977, 1980, 1985, 1989, 1991 and 1992. In this text my educational development is also located in its economic and political context. For example, the extracts from the 1977 text which follow locate my concerns with the professional development of teachers and with improving the quality of pupils' learning. Yet as I was producing these ideas I was being subjected to the pressure of the full authority of the University that my employment was to be terminated. In the 1980 and 1985 texts I set out my ideas on the need for school-based degrees to enhance the professionalism of teachers and explain the nature of a new form of educational knowledge which can be created by individuals from analyses of their own educational development. Yet at the time of writing these texts I was being subjected to the pressures of academic judgements on my research which denied my originality, the quality of my writing and my academic freedom to question the judgements of those examining my work. In 1989 I published my paper on Creating living educational theories from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'. You will see that this contains no mention of my experience in 1989 of having complaints made against me by two Professors of Education and being subjected to pressure from the Secretary and Registrar who claimed that my activities and writings were a challenge to the present and proper organisation of the University and not consistent with the duties the University wished me to pursue in teaching or research. What this experience finally did was to push me to reconstruct the story of my educational development to include these experiences. I published these accounts at the First and Second World Congresses on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management in Australia in 1990 and 1992. There is of course the paradox that without these pressures I cannot see how I would have made such a creative contribution to educational knowledge. I cannot however bring myself to thank the individuals responsible!

What all these pressures did was to enhance my understanding of the particular regime of truth within my workplace and the wider society. I came to understand something of the procedures which protect certain views against any challenge. I also came to understand and feel the pressures which could silence critics of dominant individuals and groups. You will see how far removed this growth of understanding was from my initial concern with helping teachers to improve the quality of pupils' learning. However it certainly helped me to understand what I had to do to gain academic legitimacy for teachers' claims to know their own professional development with their pupils.

The concern for educational knowledge and educational research methodology in my papers may lead you to think that I had lost contact with any interest in living educative relationships. I hope to remove any such thought in Part Two where I concentrate on the Action Research and Educational Theory Case Study Collection in the School of Education. Since my tutoring of Brian Green's M.A. dissertation in 1979 my research students have contributed their Ph.D., M.Phil., M.Ed., Advanced Diploma and Advanced Certificate programmes to the collection. Each one has acknowledged that they have used at least one of the original ideas from my research. They know the sustenance I have derived from their company, professionalism and research. I want you to know about this collection and something about its significance in relation to the work of authoritative researchers in the field. In relation to the story of my educational development it bears witness to the realisation

of a possibility I put forward in the 1980 paper below about the need to support school-based degrees for enhancing the professionalism of teachers.

In Part Three I return to my original focus on the quality of educative relationships through the work of three researchers, Erica Holley, Moira Laidlaw and Peggy Kok. I want to show how they have contributed to my learning about the nature of educative relationships in classrooms with colleagues and pupils, in the University with students and in my own educative relationships. Erica gives new meaning to the idea of accounting for oneself. Moira shows how she enabled a student to formulate her own question of the kind, 'How do I improve the quality of my pupils' learning. Peggy reflects back to me the conversations and reflections in which we both struggled to reconcile different educational values. She shows my educative relationship in action. There comes a moment in the conversations where I resist imposing my own view of the world on her and accept her right to create her own.

By refocussing on my original concern with the professional development of teachers and with improving the quality of learning of pupils and students I hope to continue to make a contribution to my subject, education. What I hope my story helps us not to forget, is that some people can use institutional procedures to abuse power and trust and to violate academic freedom and integrity. I hope that it also serves to stress the importance of keeping alive a commitment to resist such pressures and to help each other to live our values as fully as we can whenever such threats appear.

I think it would be foolish of me to omit from the story of my educational development a consideration of the direct influence of the market place which has been supported through legislation by Conservative Governments from 1979. So, in conclusion I offer you what I have learnt from a group of senior local authority managers I have tutored for two years on their action research programmes. You will see how they are learning to cope with the penetration of market forces into local government. I fear that I will have much to learn about this penetration over the next few years. This tension has stimulated my action planning for the future and my concluding call that we should be supporting the creation of a General Education Council to protect the professionalism of teachers and the values of education.

Whilst I do not deny the complexity of my life in education, I think my claim to know my educational development has a coherent form with clearly defined standards of judgement which you can use to test its validity. From the basis of 'I' as a living contradiction I will be offering you a systematic enquiry in which the meanings of my values are clarified and developed in the course of their emergence in practice. I will be showing you how my cognitive range and concerns are being extended through the enquiry as I try to support the power of truth against the truth of power. In explaining my educational development in terms of my values and the extensions in my cognitive range and concern I am offering you my personal educational theory as a new form of educational knowledge.

My academic colleagues at the University of Bath are making their acknowledged and scholarly contributions to knowledge in a way which will be recognised by academics throughout the world. They research. They present their papers at national and international conferences and publish their work in refereed journals. I do the same. Where I think my research is unique in its form and content is that I have systematically studied my own educational development in my workplace over the past twenty years.

Most academics I meet, value most highly research which is acknowledged as establishing a new theoretical perspective on their subject. When such perspectives are first proposed it is not unusual for them to be greeted with scepticism by some influential members of the relevant research community. I think my claim to know my own educational development can integrate such scepticism and transcend the power relations which sustain it.

As with any new form of knowledge it is outside the dominant frameworks and may at first appear alien to your way of thinking. For example it has a dialogical rather than a conceptual form. This in itself is unusual for a form of knowledge where different forms of knowledge are usually distinguished in terms of their conceptual frameworks and methods of validation. It is presented as a living rather than a linguistic form and embraces 'I' as a living contradiction. You may know Karl Popper's rejection of dialectical claims to knowledge on the grounds that they are based on nothing better than a loose and woolly way of speaking. He claimed that theories which contained contradictions were entirely useless as theories. His arguments rested on a two thousand year old tradition of Aristotelean logic which eliminated contradictions from correct thought because two mutually exclusive statements could not be true simultaneously. The alternative, dialectical tradition, embraces contradiction as its nucleus and in asking you to contribute to this tradition I am appealing to your own experience of existing as a living contradiction in questions of the kind, 'How do I live my values more fully in my practice?'. Whilst the tradition of formal logic has rejected dialectical claims to knowledge, dialectics can embrace and integrate propositional claims to knowledge in the way I will demonstrate below.

Thus my claim to have produced a new form of educational knowledge is grounded in my experience of living contradictions in the workplace. It is presented as a story of my educational development as I try, through my educational research, to reconstruct the theoretical base of my subject, education. The claim has a dialogical form which shows a growth in understanding within academic, economic and political contexts. Whilst it embodies the values which, together with the growth of understanding, constitute my development as educational you may think it falls short of my claim that it also represents a story of an individual's educational development as an aesthetics of existence. I say this because I think of education as close to a form of art in which individual artists are striving to give a form to their own existence in the face of the certainty of their death.

Perhaps I should say at the beginning of my narrative that it is a story of persistence in the face of pressure from some of my colleagues and from the institutional power relations they mobilised against me. The recognition by other colleagues that I had been subjected to such pressures came after some eighteen years in the University. It arrived in May 1991 from a Senate Working Party established to investigate claims that my academic freedom had been constrained. I will elaborate on this later.

I know that this might sound strange, but this pressure has contributed directly to the originality of my contributions to educational knowledge. Without this pressure I would not have been driven to think about what I did or to engage with such a focus on the ideas of other academics on power, rationality and academic freedom. This is not to say that I am grateful for the pressure! In the face of the pressures below I think you will see that I could easily have felt bitter and allowed feelings of disgust to permeate my life. I think that I have avoided this and mobilised my energies into making positive contributions to education, through my research and with my students.

I hope my story captivates your imagination because you see in it one valuable future for humanity. It shows a commitment to resist threats to integrity, freedom and justice. It includes a political struggle to resist a threat to my employment and economic well-being. It confronts bias, prejudice and inadequate assessment in judgements by one academic on the work of another. It integrates ideas on power, dialectics, methodology and epistemology. It also includes an account which shows how the disciplinary power of a University was transcended when it was mobilised against my research. Above all I hope you see that I have fulfilled one of my ambitions as an academic and that is to make an original contribution to knowledge of my subject, education. Here then is my story and claim to know my own educational development beginning with my first published work and a threat to my employment.