Chapter 2 Living-Educational-Theory praxis

In this chapter I offer an argument for Living-Educational-Theory (Living-Theory) praxis as a particular form of praxis that evolves through educational research within living-boundaries. The difficulty I have is to communicate a relationally-dynamic and multidimensional understanding in the form of a narrative, which by its nature is linear. I ask you to keep that in mind as I clarify my meanings of Living-Theory praxis.

I begin by introducing the notion of living-boundaries. By using the term 'living-boundary', I emphasise the notion of space where there are expressions of energy-flowing, life-affirming and life-enhancing values, *within* a boundary. There are many boundaries, such as between the individual and collective, between the world of the Academy and of practice, and the conceptual worlds of the social scientist and the educational researcher. These boundaries are often conceived of as places of separation to be transgressed, dissolved, moved, removed or defended. Rather than a metaphor of boundary, I offer a metaphor of a living-boundary *within* which gifts of knowledge can be co-created, offered and enjoyed freely, without imposition or expectation, but with the hope of contributing to evolving a better world to be. I use ~ to indicate where a space may be transformed as a living-boundary, for instance between theory and practice, expressed as theory~practice.

This thesis can be conceived of as a boundary between us where we can meet to transfer or exchange information or knowledge: a place for give and take. However, if we move to co-create, offer and enjoy understandings as gifts of knowledge educationally *within* the boundary, it is transformed as a living-boundary. A living-boundary is also a *living* space in the sense that it changes in response to the actions and intentions of those who form it.

Keeping the notion of living-boundaries in mind I clarify the distinction between educatio*nal* and education research and practice, the relationship between educational *research* and educational *practice*, and praxis as theory held together with practice and a moral intent. I am seeking to distinguish the purpose and forms of enquiry employed by social scientists and educationalists, which form their praxis, in an educationally helpful manner. An important shift in my thinking and practice has come from understanding these differences, and the possibility of enquiring within the living-boundaries they form. I offer an explanation with respect to enquiring as a Living-Theory researcher and the implications that follow from this.

Finally I clarify what I mean by Living-Theory praxis bringing together notions of Living-Educational-Theory research, praxis and living-boundaries as an original and significant contribution to the development of educational research.

Sections as signposts in this chapter

2.1 Living-boundaries

The notion of boundaries in psychology is common and it is this notion I am using to describe the interface between, for instance, others and myself, different worlds such as those of practitioners and academics, and different disciplines or ways of thinking. 'Interface' however conjures up an image of a defined surface. 'Interface' implies a meeting place that allows a flow of communication but it does not suggest a space where tensions might have a catalytically, co-creative and productive influence. A line is not a place of clear separation when you go *into* the boundary rather than being *at* it. I have tried to make this clearer in Figure 6. The line, appears as a place of disconnection, a clear this side or that. Look *into* the line, and the boundary, as a co-creative space, is distinguishable by the co-creative possibilities of black and white expressed together.

Figure 6 Moving from at a boundary to within a living- boundary

Those who enter the boundary between them to respectfully co-create, transform the boundary in the process to that of a living-boundary. I use the term 'living-boundary' to communicate a respectful and trustworthy space for the pooling of energy, for learning journeys or adventures to be embarked on cooperatively, collaboratively or alongside. A living-boundary is formed between people entering with a hope of co-creating new knowledge, which may have a generative and transformational influence on the persons and worlds that form the living-boundary.

The term 'living-boundary' suggests to me a space flowing with energy and a space for choice, which may have life- transforming implications, as expressed by Covey (2004):

> 'Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In those choices lies our growth and our happiness.' (p. 43)

I may not always be in a position to choose what I do. I, like everyone else, live and work with constraints and impositions I do not choose, but that is not to say I have to relinquish my responsibility for my response. I can choose to develop a story of blight or hope to explain what is happening to me. I can also choose to 'gently put aside' experiences, relationships or stories that carry blight. I take the phrase 'gently put aside' from Jack Whitehead in conversation. Problems and painful experiences are not ignored, denied or dismissed, but rather, 'gently putting them aside' to allow new possibilities to emerge. I liked the way Andrew Henon put it to me when we were talking. He explained it is not 'pain' that is the place of learning but where you go to as a consequence. I will return to 'pain' and stories that blight or offer hope and sources of tension and contradictions later, but first I want to explore more fully what the metaphor of living-boundaries can offer.

Sonia Hutchison is a member of the professional development group I support and facilitate with Jack Whitehead. Her representation (reproduced with her permission) of the pooling of energy, offers an image to represent some qualities of the space in a living-boundary.

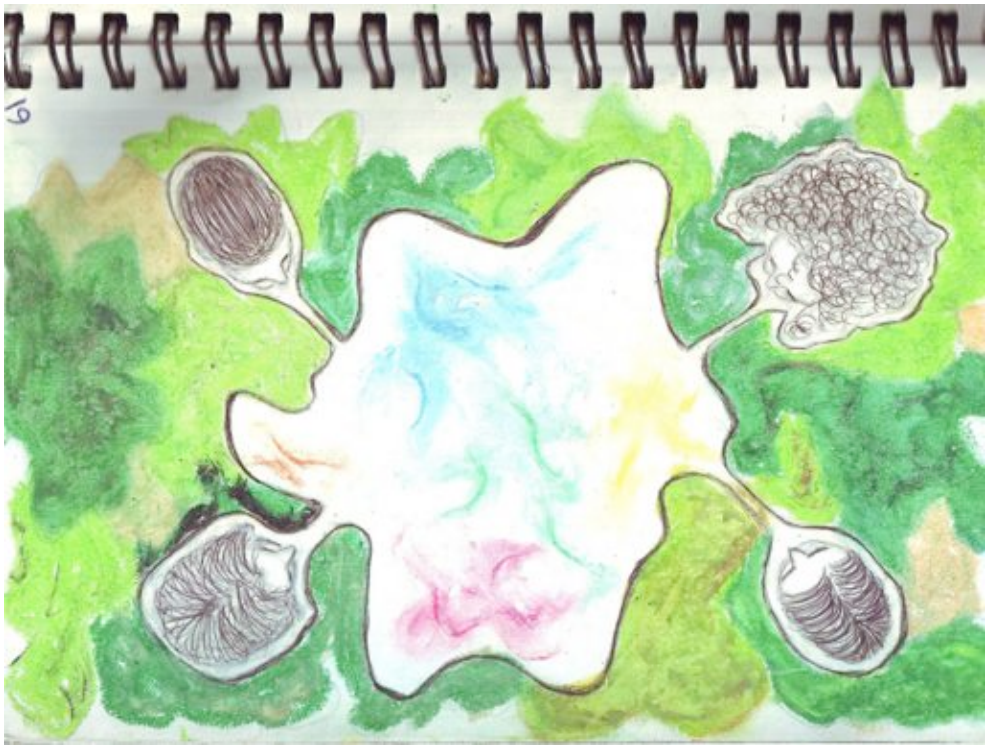

Figure 7 Sonia Hutchison's picture of pooling energy

Her image communicates a feeling to me of a vibrant flow and pooling of life-affirming and life-enhancing energy, without expectation or imposition. It feels similar to the notion of the ~ space described as an inclusional boundary in an i~we relationship, in the first paper I created with Jack Whitehead:

> In our use of i~we, we are doing more that representing a resistance to imposition. We are also acknowledging that something is created that is beyond the individual but is in the space between ~ it is what is formed at the inclusional boundaries between us, a place of meeting rather than separating, a space for co-creation rather than a void. (Whitehead and Huxtable, 2006)

The idea of an i*nclusional* boundary draws on Alan Rayner's work illustrated by the paper dance I referred to earlier. However, the hinge or tape that creates a living-boundary is not just the resolution of the problem caused by two poles, rather it is an active place of living learning. In our 2006 paper, we were beginning to explore the idea of meeting *in* the boundary rather than *at* the boundary. Eighteen months later Whitehead (2008d) presented a paper at the 'Cultures in Resistance' conference, and caught my imagination when he wrote:

> 'By the 'living boundaries of cultures in resistance' I am meaning that that there is something expressed in the boundary sustained by one culture that is a direct challenge to something in the other culture.'

Describing the boundaries as living emphasises that the space is flowing with hopeful, creative energy. Resistance *at* a boundary causes me to think of defending barriers, whereas resistance *in* a boundary gives me a sense of a space flowing with energy and creativity that carries hope and can be described as living. This brings to mind the metaphor of an elastic band, which when put under tension stores energy that can be released creatively. There is no tension and no energy without resistance. Whitehead's notion of experiencing self as a living contradiction and living a contradiction, acknowledges the tensions that a person experiences when their values are negated in practice. Living-Theory research focuses on acting to resolve a situation with energy that is life-affirming and life-enhancing. Energy that is creative rather than destructive. 'Boundaries' as a metaphor can be understood in many different ways. Eddy Spicer and James (2010) point to the difficulty this can cause:

> 'Describing social systems as bounded and social processes as bounding is to equate multidimensional social reality with two- or three-dimensional physical place. ... As Morgan (2007) highlights in the introduction to 'Images of Organisation', *"The use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervades how we understand our world generally"* (p. 4)…
>
> … Organisational boundaries are points of dissimilarity, distinction and interruption (Heracleous, 2004). They are variable, unclear and, to differing degrees, permeable (Weick, 1995) and are thus problematic and difficult to characterise (Paulsen & Hernes, 2003).'

Their use of two- or even three-dimensional physical boundaries, as a metaphor to denote an edge of an organisation, makes it difficult to use to develop generative and transformational understandings of a

multidimensional and changing social reality. Connelly and Clandinin (1999), show how the metaphor of a physical boundary can be useful but can also become problematic:

> 'A landscape metaphor helps us to see the possibilities of borders that divide aspects of professional knowledge. There are borders, dividers, spaces that demarcate one place from another…
>
> In schools, these borders, these places on the landscape, are made institutionally, and respected by the individuals who live their stories out within the institutions. Indeed, for most individuals, they are so taken for granted, so embodied in one's sense of living on the landscape, that they are not noticed. It is only when someone is new to the landscape or when something has changed about the landscape that we awaken to the borders. When new policies are enacted that somehow threaten the borders, threaten to change the nature of knowledge within each place on the landscape, or both, we become most awake to borders.
>
> Borders mark the dividing places.' (pp.103-104)

This shows how the metaphor can help us to communicate our understandings of what is happening and point to where problems and opportunities for change may occur. This quotation also illustrates how borders can be created, which inadvertently bring bounded worlds into existence with unintended consequences. Their description of 'almost impenetrable boundaries' (p.109) the introduction of a master timetable created in one school, is an example:

> '… what may appear on a curriculum planner's desk as a linear temporal structure of schooling is experienced by teachers and others as a cyclic temporal order.' (pp.104-105)

Connelly and Clandinin (ibid) then sum up the source of the unwitting collateral damage with long-term consequences for the emotional well-being of those involved:

> 'Given that we know that teacher knowledge is embodied and carries with it moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions, the difficulty of crossing and modifying borders is not surprising. A very large part of a school's moral and ethical life is constructed around adherence to temporal cycles and to the maintenance of their temporal boundaries. Teachers who do not start their classes on time, or students who come late, are judged to be not only in violation of school rules but morally wanting: lazy, inconsiderate of others, selfish, incompetent.' (p.105)

Our gaze and imaginations are directed to borders contextualised by the concept of landscape, which is tangible and three-dimensional. These borders in a landscape transform easily to become barriers that when erected elicit action to defend them. Similarly, metaphors can also transform

unnoticed from a means for sharing and creating generative and transformational understandings, to defining and confining thinking.

Lakoff (1993) sums up another reason why I am concerned to clarify the images and feelings that my metaphors evoke, and check that we share an understanding, when he writes, 'The metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason.' (p.208). The images, feelings, thoughts and reasons not only form a vehicle for *communicating* concepts but can slip to *informing* them as they are brought into being as the quotations above from Connelly and Clandinin (1999) show.

When I began to create the metaphor of living-boundaries I was trying to communicate and understand a sense of recognisable yet indefinable, fluid, multidimensional, co-creative and cooperative places, where gifts of knowledge could be freely offered and respected. Although I had an image of a boundary contextualised by a landscape, I imagined one that was distinguishable but undefined. I had an image of the snow-touched landscape of the 'no-man's land' at Christmas during the First World War, when troops left their trenches to share a few moments together as persons sharing a common humanity. The boundary, even though temporary, was distinguishable and offered a cooperative space for co-creation without expectation or imposition. Looking for an image that communicates the sense I had, I found Christmas Truce 1914 – A History Major's Holiday Gift (http://tinyurl.com/68m2u8j).

This seemed most apposite as someone who shares his story of 'reaching life long goals as a non- traditional student' offers it as a gift. Following one of the links I found a 7minute 40 seconds video uploaded in 2007:

'A tribute to our troops at Christmas and a memorial of the Christmas Truce of 1914. A project for Mr. Cutler's grade 6 class. 'Christmas in the Trenches' is sung by John McCutcheon'

Video 5 WW1 Christmas Truce 1914
uloaded by gail242000's
http://tinyurl.com/7hyysew

I thought about the class of children as I watched the images, listened to the music, lyrics and the accent of the singer that accompanies the video and read some of the postings such as this one:

> 'My Grandfather was there that night. Every Christmas he left our house at midnight and we could hear him singing in the cold remembering his war.

> Christmas 1968 I sang that song in Vietnam and felt the pain of grandfather.'

I could feel the hair standing on the back of my neck with a physical experience of an empathetic resonance with the gift of humanity those soldiers had co-created and offered in 1914, flowing across time, space and cultures.

I do not want to create metaphors of conflict, for instance boundaries as barriers to be defended or transgressed. Rather, as I have said before, I would like to use generative and transformational metaphors such as creative tension in living-boundaries with room for cooperation. In tension there is energy, and in that energy there is the potential for movement. It is not necessarily possible to pre-determine the direction of movement or that it will be transformational and generative – but I can hope, and I must challenge myself not to replicate the past but rather evolve a future. So I want to leave behind a notion of boundaries contextualised by a three-dimensional landscape for a notion of boundaries contextualised by a multidimensional cosmos where boundaries are obviously diffuse and 'traditional' understandings are set aside.

One of the living-boundaries within which my praxis evolves is between the worlds of the academic and the practitioner. It is within that boundary that my understanding of the distinction between what is educatio*nal* research and practice, and what is research and practice *in* education, is created and offered.

2.2 What is educational practice and research?

I first came across a distinction between 'educational psychology' and 'the psychology of education' when looking for a Masters programme when I was teaching. At that time the difference, as I understood it, was between completing a Masters course that qualified me to work as an educational psychologist and one that did not. I did not realise the profound difference until Jack Whitehead apprised me of a distinction between research in education and educational research. Educational psychology research appears to be the concern of the world of academia, while the work of an educational psychologist appears to be the concern of the world of practice. Rather than searching in either world for an answer to, "how can I improve my practice as an educational psychologist?" I am postulating more fertile ground may lay in a living-boundary between these two, often bounded, worlds, for me to research to evolve my living-theory praxis.

To understand a living-boundary means I have some understanding of the worlds that form it. So, I want first to explore the meaning I give to educational practice and then what I mean by educational research.

2.2.1 What is educational about my practice?

I have always conceived of my practice as that of an educational psychologist. This may seem straightforward but there is no unequivocal understanding of what the practice of an educational psychologist is or what distinguishes it from, for instance, the practice of a school, clinical or child psychologist. I believed it to be more than a reflection of the employing establishment or organisation but I was unclear about what distinguished my practice as educational.

When I began working for the Birmingham Child Guidance and School Psychology Service as an educational psychologist I tried to contribute to improving the learning of children and young people referred by a concerned adult, commonly a teacher. The child or young person did not refer to me; an adult referred them and often without their knowledge. This raises the issues as to who has the problems; to whom have educational psychologist responsibility; and what should be the nature of support and why. These important problems I believe the profession still has not resolved, but I digress.

I tried to devise approaches that teachers could use to help children acquire and apply, quickly and painlessly various skills, usually literacy, numeracy or social skills. Teachers, parents and I, understood success in terms of the rate of skill acquisition that could be measured. For instance, an increase in a score on a reading test would be taken as indicative of a child progressing in learning to read. No assessment was made of whether the child was finding reading or learning more pleasurable or was developing their own strategies to improve their learning. Everyone was delighted when a child did show pleasure in developing reading skills but that was not the purpose of the intervention. I cannot remember a situation where a teacher asked for support to improve their intervention for a child who read fluently but hated reading, or for a student who was getting good grades but had no apparent pleasure in learning for him or herself.

It began to dawn on me that effective instruction and teaching to objectives could increase a test score but often skills were not generalised or adapted to deal with other challenges as described by Haring et al.'s learning hierarchy (1978). Further, it did not necessarily enable the child to become a more confident, happy and independent learner or person. For instance, young people in Observation and Assessment Centres for young offenders were taught social skills. Good instruction could improve how they behaved within a small group setting but they did not often demonstrate more competent or appropriate social behaviour outside the centre or show they had developed as more community spirited citizens.

I also became increasingly concerned that children and young people appeared to be less confident and took less responsibility for their learning and life as a result of intervention. They learned specific skills but did not seem able to learn in a classroom without an adult by their side. I have heard a similar concern increasingly expressed in recent years by teachers and

tutors alike in primary, secondary and higher education settings. Irrespective of the setting they complain that an increasing number of learners take no responsibility for their learning, and show no initiative when faced with even a slightly novel problem or task. I have also heard pupils and students complaining when they have not been told exactly what and how to learn, or when they do not find the lessons 'fun'. From my own experience of providing workshops I have found a disturbing number of teachers behaving similarly.

These were just a few of the concerns I was recognising when I began to take an interest in the development of 'high ability' in B&NES 20 years later. My interest in high ability focussed me on what was educational about education and the difference I wanted to make through my practice. It took me some time to understand what was 'educational' about educational psychology and the connection with why and how I have increasingly sought to resolve the tensions I experience in doing what I believe to be 'right', amongst the ever-growing constraints and limitations arising from Government impositions and controls since the mid 1970s in England.

I am not suggesting that as an educational psychologist I should not contribute to developing effective and efficient instruction or enabling learners to enjoy learning in school. What I am saying is that I now realise, and am able to articulate, what more I could and should contribute if my practice is to be understood as educational. I began to explore this in a paper (Huxtable, 2006b) presented to the BERA 2006 annual conference on the role of an educatio*nal* psychologist. My thinking has progressed since then but sometimes a short trip along memory lane can help clarify the present. This is what I wrote five years ago in 2006:

> 'When I started this description might have served to describe what I thought I was doing:
>
> > …applying psychological theories, research and techniques to help children and young people who may have learning difficulties, emotional or behavioural problems. (based on the Association of Educational Psychologists definition of Educational Psychology)
>
> Through writing this paper I now understand and research my practice as a senior educational psychologist:
>
> > '… working within the education system with the educational intent of engaging with others to generate and research their own living educational psychological theories, so we might each influence our own learning, the learning of others and the social formations in which we live and work'
>
> I am currently understanding educational psychology as:-

> ‘comprising a living body of knowledge, skills, understandings and values concerning how, why, when, where and what humans learn, expressed and researched with an educational intent through the generation of living educational theories and practice.’

I draw on the language and knowledge base of education research to improve instruction, training and schooling but need to be clear how I use them to improve educationa*l* relationships, space and opportunities. For instance, when children first begin school they are proficient at acquiring a variety of highly complex skills and a vast range of concrete and conceptual information. Some have acquired more of some aspects than others but none-the-less young persons have an amazing facility to acquire skills and information and to learn. However, ‘learning’ has many meanings as eloquently expressed by Biesta (2006), a philosopher in education, when he writes:

> ‘Learning theorists of both an individualistic and a sociocultural bent have developed a range of accounts of how learning – or more precisely, how the *process* of learning – takes place. Although they differ in their description and explanation of the process, for example, by focusing on processes in the brain or legitimate peripheral participation, many of such accounts assume that learning has to do with the acquisition of something “external,” something that existed before the act of learning and that, as a result of learning, becomes the possession of the learner.’ (p. 26)

I am distinguishing learning as a process of creation and not simply one of acquisition. The creative learning process I am particularly concerned with is educational, that is, learning concerned with what it is for a person to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life, a life that expresses their best intent informed by their values. I have qualified ‘values’ as those that are life-affirming and life-enhancing as I realise that some people have values that give meaning and purpose to their lives that are only self-serving, with no concern for the well-being or well-becoming of other people, or creating a world where all might have the opportunity to flourish. I will return to ‘values’ when I clarify my understandings of praxis and Living-Educational-Theory. If my practice is to be understood as educational it should contribute towards the growth of an educated person. I understand an educated person to be someone who knows themselves and what it is for them to live a loving, satisfying, productive, and worthwhile life for themselves and others.

Education concerns the whole person not just a bit of them. There is often an implied separation of head, heart and body in schooling as Robinson (2006) points out in his ‘schools kill creativity’ TED talk.

> ‘We all have bodies, don’t we? Did I miss a meeting? (Laughter) Truthfully, what happens is, as children grow up, we start to educate

> them progressively from the waist up. And then we focus on their heads. And slightly to one side.'

The laughter from his audience suggests that they recognise that 'a true word is often said in jest'. Academics in education seem to often face a contradiction when expected to generate great thoughts cleansed of the messiness of human functioning. Practitioners also often appear to disconnect the head but, rather than venerate it as an academic does, would rather discard it, declaring, "I don't have time for all that theory stuff" or "Just tell me what to do I don't have time to think". This seems to me somewhat perverse, when they say they want their students to think and take responsibility for their learning. The result is a narrowing focus by schools, on the standards and related high-stakes tests set by Governments, rather than on expanding the educational experience they offer their pupils/students.

The pressures created by the increasing emphasis placed on the outcome of high-stakes tests, have almost eliminated space, time and opportunity in schools for learners to create and offer valued knowledge, in an area of their own interest. This in effect disenfranchises people from their own learning and lives. The study by Amrein and Berliner (2002) in the USA exemplifies the argument surrounding high-stakes tests:

> 'Although test scores on state-administered tests usually increase after high-stakes testing policies are implemented, the evidence presented here suggests that in these instances students are learning the content of the state-administered test and perhaps little else. This learning does not, however, appear to have any meaningful carryover effect. ' (p.57)

And similarly their conclusion on the negating effects:

> 'Substantial evidence exists that high-stakes tests do create the negative, unintended consequences about which critics worry and that make high-stakes high school graduation exams objectionable. It is quite possible that the adverse consequences of high-stakes tests outweigh the benefits that advocates claim they have since even the intended benefits, for example increased academic achievement, of these tests are hard to corroborate. ' (p.3)

Mansell (2007) in Britain and Sahlberg (2010) in Finland also offer very persuasive arguments concerning the damage that such use of testing has on educational experiences. Borland (2003) makes the argument that many make as to the control that this form of monitoring exerts:

> 'In education, according to Susan Gallagher (1999), hierarchical observation is used as a technology of power when educators assume an "aloof and objective position from which they see students more clearly in both a figurative sense and a literal one" (p.77).

> One way of doing this is through psychometrics, using measurement as a way to control students not only by quantifying and ranking them, but also by reminding them that they are constantly being observed and measured. This technology of power has emerged in contemporary times in a particularly virulent form in the hands of educational bureaucrats and politicians who use the so-called standards movement – wholesale standardized testing – as a way of exercising control over educators and students, especially marginalized students... In this case, as Foucault (1995) held was the norm in modern life, one's internal knowledge of being observed and judged, not the external power of the state or its symbolic trappings, is the medium through which power and control are enacted.' (pp.108-109).

He makes an important point – the effect is on the educators *and* students, and is contrary to an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian form of learning that is educational. I know, with a visceral sense of knowing, what he means. I can still feel the same stomach curling angst that I might not 'measure up' that I felt every Friday as a child, when faced with the class spelling test, as I had when summoned to present a report of my work to a 'scrutiny and overview panel' held by the local authority that employed me.

Pring (2000) describes educational practice to be understood dynamically and relationally:

> 'However, no such transactions can be considered in isolation from others, that is, forming a programme of activities that together constitute an 'educational practice'. By a 'practice' I mean a collection of different activities that are united in some common purpose, embody certain values and make each of the component activities intelligible.' (p.27)

The difficulties seem to arise where the educator loses sight of the educational intent of what they are doing. Pring identifies, as I have, that the same activities may be seen differently:

> 'Two sets of activities might, on the surface, appear to be very similar; one might be tempted to say they are the same educational practice. But further probing, revealing different explanations, purposes and values, might suggest the very opposite. Moreover, what appears to be effective within an educational practice, defined in one way, might prove to be ineffective when it is defined in another. Thus, rote learning of historical dates might seem highly effective within an educational practice where the capacity to repeat such dates is seen as part of a broader worthwhile activity, but highly ineffective when the purpose of learning history includes a care for and a love of the subject.' (p.28)

The situation is more problematic when one activity can negate the other. For instance, in the desire to raise test scores, the love of learning as process and the educational purpose can be destroyed. Perversely, education as an

educational experience with a focus on passion-led learning and enhancing the sophistication of learner's abilities to research, to create, and to offer knowledge as a gift, can at the same time improve test scores.

As I progressed my enquiry into 'high ability' learning, there has been increasing pressure on schools by the Government to comply with the standards agenda, which served to make the issue more obvious to me. I knew that I could not understand the efficacy of what I was doing in terms of grades. I heard of students who had A*s grades, went to prestigious universities, and subsequently were so stressed their mental health suffered to the extent they had breakdowns. So, I was becoming clear about what was *not* educational about their experience, but that still left me puzzling over what in education *was* educational. I began to realise it was to do with trying to understand the child or young person and enabling them to recognise and give expression to their best intent. I began to clarify my thinking when I wrote on 4 October 2005 (personal notes):

> Why do I do what I do? I want children to grow as people who are comfortable in their own skin, knowing themselves, liking themselves, at peace with themselves, knowing what they want to work on, to improve, and to have the courage to change and accept their own stumbling and that of other people as part of the journey.
>
> I believe that an individual learns what they see themselves capable of learning and what is of value to them. The striving for excellence seems to carry with it a hope of personal fulfilment and when that personal ambition coincides with the needs of others, carries with it a hope for the progression of all of us and 'twice affirmation' for the individual.
>
> I believe people (young and old) grow their understandings and create valued knowledge through dialogue with themselves and others.

How does this insight help me to improve what I am doing? That came with understanding how to research my educational practice to improve it.

2.2.2 What is educational about educational research?

When I first launched forth on an MPhil/PhD many years ago I began by trying to employ the 'scientific method' I was familiar with as a psychologist. I developed a research question to explore and started with a will to create 'matched groups', 'probes' to measure change in competence of the learners, and forced- choice questionnaires to assess the thinking of the teachers. However, the further I progressed, the more I realised that I could not research what I was interested in, in any meaningful way. I eventually abandoned this it when I moved jobs.

I had learned about some of the flaws in approaches to research used by educational psychologists. For instance, I struggled to find subjects for my groups, even though I was looking for teachers experienced in DISTAR

(Direct Instruction System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading, a trademarked program of SRA/McGraw-Hill, a commercial publishing company) or similar programmes, which were popular at the time in the second largest city in England. I struggled to find 'subjects' for my groups, not because of a limited pool to draw on, but because the notion of a matched group design in educational research is inappropriate. By the time I had begun to apply some simple criteria to selecting teachers for my 'matched' groups, such as teaching experience, the demographics of their school and pupils, their competence and experience with objectives- based teaching, I was down to a group size of one.

I know that each person is unique and the inter-relationship between each person's ecology of being, and that of others, is dynamic, continually evolving and highly complex. However, 'matched groups' research design is based on the assumption that there are common factors with simple relationships. What is more, the assumption is that the discrete and specific relationships crucial to every person's learning, have been identified, and those not under examination can, and have been, controlled for. This does not equate with what I know of human's learning. I see each person as insatiably curious, and. I hear their curiosity expressed through the questions they ask, such as, "What is over the hill?", "What is it to love?" and "Who am I?", and their struggle, initially to construct answers they can believe in, and later to construct answers that are well reasoned as well as reasonable.

I can remember vividly seeing my son doing this when very young. In his pushchair, too young to talk, he stretched out his hand to a bush we were passing. We stopped, and with a delicacy of touch and intensity of concentration of an artist painting a hair, he explored. Not the grab I had expected but with the tip of his third finger he touched the surface. I obviously have no idea what sense he was making of what he was doing, but there was no doubt that he was exploring meaningfully and with pleasure. With an adult's eyes I had thought he was exploring the leaf but I now realise I was taking for granted where he was coming from: he may have been exploring the sensation of his finger tip approaching a surface, the feeling of the colour, or the texture of a speck of dust… The only thing I can feel certain about now is that there was something between his gaze and his touch that still causes me to believe that he was delighting in creating understandings of his world and himself in and of that world. I made assumptions and until now had not recognised how many. Those unwitting assumptions influence the questions I ask, the manner of their asking, and the responses that I construct, and all are intimately interwoven.

As the question is influenced by the answer, the answer is strongly influenced, if not determined, by the question that is asked (Gadamer, 2004, Collingwood, 1991). It is one of the reasons I am attracted to Living-Theory research. There is an explicit acknowledgement that the question arises through the responses created, not in a static link but through a creative, dynamic, responsive-receptive process, which includes the inter-relationship with the complex ecologies of self, other and community.

An approach to research in education, with predetermined hypothesis, matched groups, pre- and post- 'test' and statistical analysis of results, gives rise to questions that do not come near to what is of educational interest or to describing a scientific process as Medawar (1969) explains:

> 'If the purpose of scientific methodology is to prescribe or expound a system of enquiry or even a code of practice for scientific behaviour, then scientists seem to be able to get on very well without it.' (p.8)

Such research is about determining whether an answer is right or not right. The question in the hypothesis is of the form, "Do children's test scores increase if they are taught in this way?" In some respects the hypothesis is not a question but a pre-statement of an answer with the intention of showing it to be 'true' or not 'true'. The question does not integrate the educational intent of education, for instance, "As I teach children to read how do I help them learn to become emancipated in their own learning and life?" Yet all questions concerned with improving practice and provision in education should surely be concerned with the contribution the educator is making, to the learner's ability to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life.

The usual concern of research in education is to develop theories that can be generally applied to explain learning. This is one 'slippage' that I believe has damaging implications in education. Having offered an explanation of one small specific aspect of past learning of a few people, it is taken that the theory applied will 'predict' all future learning of all people. Description of what has been learned by a group is used to define how future learning will occur, and to prescribe an individual person's learning trajectory and life. That is the basis of categorising children, notions of 'best practice', many national strategies, targets and added-value indicators.

As I reflected on my practice and research, I recognised it was possible to improve instructional techniques but damage the educational experience of a child. Researching cost effective programmes to achieve short-term gains in skill acquisition, behaviours or attitudes does not include researching collateral damage to long-term educational goals. It is not that I find the results of research in education using social science methodology and methods uninteresting or not useful. What I am saying is that they should be used with care. While some of the methods have their uses, such methodologies are not appropriate to explore and create responses to educational questions. Knowing what does not work however does not help me to know what might be more useful. I like the way Medawar (1969) put it:

> 'The exposure and castigation of error does not propel science forward, though it may clear a number of obstacles from its path. To prove that pigs cannot fly is not to devise a machine that does so.' (p.7)

As an educational psychologist I was continually faced with irresolvable questions: “How did I know whether I was making a difference that enhanced the lives of children?”, “How could I improve the advice I gave concerning individual children?” and “How could I contribute to improving the educational experience of children and young people?” I was aware that I could never know, let alone explain, someone else’s life, but I could on occasions help them realise what they already knew, and develop and test their own explanations. This is the basis of a model for clarifying concerns and interventions that I developed as part of a referral and service delivery system described in Levey and Mallon, 1984, and Levey et al. 1986. Therapies such as solution-focussed therapy rest on a similar set of assumptions. I had not made the leap of imagination to realise that this could enable me to research to improve my practice and evaluate my work.

I became aware of action research but I did not find anything that was fundamentally different from many of the approaches I had already been working with. In 2004 I had the good fortune to be introduced to Jack Whitehead by a teacher I was working with. I began to realise that Living-Theory research offered me a way forward as an educational psychologist wanting to research to improve my practice. I moved in thinking from taking and applying research to improve instruction, to researching my educational practice to improve it.

It is unfortunate that ‘education’ is a term that is now used without reference to what is ‘educational’ about education. The 115th issue (Summer of 2011) of BERA *Research Intelligence*, demonstrates the common confusion between education research and educational research. Most articles variously use the terms without distinction, ignoring the debate that has been on-going in the Association and elsewhere for years. I believe this to be one source of misunderstandings that abound. In clarifying the distinction I make between education research and educational research, I am not intending to imply that one form of research is more important than another. Rather I am setting the scene for this thesis as a contribution to educational research and epistemology.

Whitty (2005) made this distinction between educational research and education research:

> ‘In this paper, I have so far used the broad term education research to characterize the whole field, but it may be that within that field we should reserve the term educational research for work that is consciously geared towards improving policy and practice…’ (pp.13-14)

I think there is something more that distinguishes educational research from research in education than the politics of power between ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ research. Pring (2000) having made a distinction between research in education concerned with the disciplines and what is educational, says that he sees educational practice as concerned with values:

> '… what makes this *educational* practice is the set of values which it embodies – the intrinsic worth of the activities themselves, the personal qualities which are enhanced, the appropriate way of proceeding (given the values that one has and given the nature of the activity).
>
> … The *practice* of teaching embodies certain values – the importance of that which is to be learnt, the respect of the learner (how he or she thinks), the respect for evidence and the acknowledgement of contrary viewpoints.' (p.135)

However, Pring appears to be talking about educational practice denoted by values that are reified, impersonal and which do not communicate the personal and emotional commitment that is inherent in what is educational about education. He hints at this earlier in the same paper:

> 'Central to educational research, therefore, is the attempt to make sense of the activities, policies and institutions which, through the organization of learning, help to transform the capacities of people to live a fuller and more distinctively human life. Such research needs to attend to what is distinctive of *being a person* – and of being one in a more developed sense. It needs to recognize that the 'what' and the 'how' of *learning* those distinctively human capacities and understandings are by no means simple – they need to be analysed carefully. And *a fortiori 'teaching'*, through which that learning is brought about, will reflect that complexity.' (p.17)

While Pring recognises the importance of research recognising, 'the 'what' and the 'how' of *learning'*, he makes no reference to the 'why' of the person doing the learning. This might account for Pring's reference to values giving no sense of the living reality of 'being a person' as a unique individual learning to live their own life as fully as possible, rather than an abstract 'distinctively human life'.

Elliott (2009) claims in 1978 to have:

> '… coined a distinction between 'Research on Education' and Educational Research'. I was drawing attention to the difference between viewing research into teaching and learning as a form of ethical inquiry aimed at realizing the educational good, and viewing it as a way of constructing knowledge about teaching and learning that is detached from the researcher's own personal constructs of educational value. *Educational Research*, I argued is carried out with the practical intention of changing a situation to make it more educationally worthwhile.' (p.28)

However, although making reference indirectly to values in citing the ethical nature of educational inquiry and referring to the 'educational good', the connection with the persons involved as contributing to understanding what is 'educationally worthwhile' is severed. I prefer Whitehead's (1989a) notion of educational research as research concerned with learning that

enhances the ability of a person to live their ontological energy-flowing values as fully as they can. The embodied values Whitehead is concerned with are values that give meaning and purpose to an individual's life, and are clarified and evolved in the process of researching and theorising their educational practice. He distinguishes between education research and educational research with respect to the disciplines as Pring does, but goes further to distinguish what is educational research by reference to the nature of values and the theory generated.

2.2.3 A question of ethics

The essential features of ethical guidelines from BERA, BPS and HPC related to my professional practice are to have as my overarching concern the well-being and well-becoming of all those I work with. Through my years working as an educational psychologist I am keenly aware of the complexity of recognising and resolving problems when to act for the well-becoming of one can be to act against the well-being of another. Such considerations are beyond the various guidance documents and the expectation of organisations for compliance. The challenge in a Living-Theory research account is primarily not to show how ethical guidelines are followed; rather it is to enable the reader to understand how research as ethical practice is at the heart of Living-Theory research whilst being consistent with ethical guidelines.

As the BPS (2010) states, 'Thinking about ethics should pervade all professional activity. Ethics can be defined as the science of morals or rules of behaviour.' (p.6) Living-Theory research is therefore a profoundly ethical form of research and is what I understand it is to be a professional practitioner in the field of education. Living-Theory researchers hold themselves to account for the influence they are having in the learning and lives of others as well as the social formations we are all part of. Ethical research and practice is at the heart of Living-Theory research, rather than at the periphery, as is the case with some other forms of research as implied by point 12 (p.5) of the BERA (2011) ethical guidelines, 'Researchers engaged in action research must consider the extent to which their own reflective research impinges on others,'

The BERA (2011) ethical guidelines are concerned predominantly with third party, social science research, as is the BPS[16] `(2010) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, whereas Living-Theory research is a form of self-study, practitioner research. The Living-Theory researcher researches their own practice to improve it, researching questions of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' They clarify their values as they emerge, identify and seek to address contradictions in order to enhance their educational influence. An essential aspect of the research process is the creation of accounts by the researcher, which include their values-based explanations and standards by which to judge their practice, tested against Habermas's (1976) criteria of validity, and to make their accounts public. Again the exhortation of the BERA guidelines in point 40 (p.9), '… the obligation on

[16] BPS – British Psychology Society

researchers to ensure that their findings are placed in the public domain and within reasonable reach of educational practitioners and policy makers, parents, pupils and the wider public.' is integral to this form of research.

This thesis, the papers I have presented, the books I have contributed to and the material I have made available on my website, are examples of my response to the expectation of a Living-Theory researcher to make their work public, or as it is put in the BERA ethical guidelines point 51 (p.10), 'Educational researchers must endeavour to communicate their findings, and the practical significance of their research, in a clear, straightforward fashion and in language judged appropriate to the intended audience.'

Through my research I hold myself responsible to the community, my employer and my profession, to work to improve the quality of education experienced by children and young people. In researching to improve my practice as an educational psychologist I hold in mind the statement by the BPS (2011) (my emphasis):

> 'Ethics guidelines are necessary to clarify the conditions under which psychological research can take place. However, as stated in the Code of Ethics and Conduct, '... no Code can replace the need for psychologists to use their professional and ethical judgement' (2009, p.4, h). Fundamentally, '**thinking is not optional'** (2009, p.5, k).' (p.4))

Thinking about the various expressions of ethical practice and research I do not believe it is sufficient for me to be satisfied that I am simply compliant. For instance, the research communicated through this thesis is conducted by me as an educational psychologist employed by a local authority. As such I ensure that those who work with me are aware of the need to work with the well-being of children and young people sharply in focus. This takes me beyond some of the BERA ethical guidelines. For instance, point 29 (p.8) states:

> 'Researchers who judge that the effect of the agreements they have made with participants, on confidentiality and anonymity, will allow the continuation of illegal behaviour, which has come to light in the course of the research, must carefully consider making disclosure to the appropriate authorities. If the behaviour is likely to be harmful to the participants or to others, the researchers must also consider disclosure. Insofar as it does not undermine or obviate the disclosure, researchers must apprise the participants or their guardians or responsible others of their intentions and reasons for disclosure.'

In accord with the HPC[17] (2007) *Standards of conduct, performance and ethics* it is an integral part of my practice as an educational psychologist to make it clear to children, young people and adults I work with that I can not,

[17] HPC – Health Professions Council. A board that all educational psychologists must register with to be able to call themselves educational psychologists.

and would not, keep from disclosing to the relevant authorities any information about something that may be putting the well-being of a child or young person at risk. There are clear procedures within the local authority and I ensure that my practice is informed by the latest requirements but also continually challenge myself and my colleagues to take whatever further measures that may help to ensure the well-being of those we are working with.

The data I collect concerning my practice is often in the form of video, images, emails and feedback forms. Permission to use such data is sought from parents as a matter of course before the opportunities directly involving children and young people I am responsible for, such as the APEX Saturday workshops, the collaborative, creative enquiries, and the APEX Summer Opportunities, for instance video 15 and video 16. At other times, for instance at meetings, I ask for permission verbally and ensure those who do not want to be on video are not in view. Where this could interrupt the flow of the meeting I have kept the video camera only on me, for instance in video 18. Young people are often keen for video to be made public but irrespective only first names of children and young people are used, for instance video 13 and video 14.

2.3 Praxis

To summarise, I understand educational research and practice to be values-based, creative processes, where exploration, questions and responses are dynamically interrelated and offer generative and transformational possibilities. It is the practitioner-researchers' values, beliefs, theories and practice, as well as their activities that are researched. In contributing to the evolution of educational research, practice and knowledge, I go beyond the challenge that Snow made in her 2001 Presidential Address to the American Educational Research Association:

> 'The… challenge is to enhance the value of personal knowledge and personal experience for practice. Good teachers possess a wealth of 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.' (Snow, 2001 p.9)

In creating a living-theory thesis, I do not offer a basis for rejecting personal anecdote. Rather I offer a contribution to the evolution of an educational knowledge base where an account of personal knowledge, in the form of a living-theory, can be recognised as a valid and legitimate form of knowledge by the worlds of the Academy, schools, those concerned with education and national policy makers. I also offer my research as a contribution to a new, educational epistemology that was called for by Schön (1995).

I have indicated a dynamic relationship between educational theory and educational practice as I have clarified my understanding of educational

research. A relationship between theory and practice with a moral purpose is indicated in some notions of praxis.

I remember coming across the idea of praxis in Je Kan Adler-Collins' doctoral thesis (Adler-Collins, 2007). I liked the idea of communicating a concept of theory and practice held together in one word. 'Praxis' has various meanings as Goff (2011) illustrates in her editorial note introducing the *Future Praxis* special issue of ALARJ:

> '"Praxis" has origins in both Medieval Latin and Greek. Aristotle saw praxis as being practical knowledge that led to action incorporating ethics, politics and economics. In the action research "field", Fals-Borda (1991) saw praxis incorporating investigative with ideological and political practices; "the mere asking of a question in the field carries with it the commitment to act" (p.157). Reason and Bradbury (2008) see praxis as changing the relationship between knowledge and practice to provide "a new model of social science of the 21st century" (8). Referencing Kemmis they emphasise the subjectivity of experience and inter-relationships within which our understanding of action become evident.' (p.2)

Praxis is often taken to include a moral imperative but that is not always clear in the literature. Freire (1972) defines praxis as, 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.' (p.79). Similarly Zuber-Skerritt (2001) defines praxis as, '… the interdependence and integration – not separation – of theory and practice, research and development, thought and action.' (p.15). While simple, these do not communicate the importance of values-based explanations, which I believe are core to an educator's praxis. Carr and Kemmis (1986) provide a description of praxis that articulates these notions more explicitly:

> In *praxis*, thought and action (or theory and practice), are dialectically related. They are to be understood as *mutually constitutive*, as in a process of interaction which is a continual reconstruction of thought and action in the living historical process which evidences itself in every real social situation. Neither thought nor action is pre-eminent. In *poietike*, by contrast, thought (a guiding idea or *eidos*) is pre-eminent, guiding and directing action; theory directs practice. In *praxis*, the ideas which guide action are just as subject to change as action is; the only fixed element is *phronesis*, the disposition to act truly and rightly. (p.34)

However, they do not tackle what it is for an individual to account for their practice as they 'act truly and rightly'. Elliott (2009) also talks at length about praxis in similar terms. However, I am not clear as to what the educational values are that form his educational theory, or the standards by which he judges practice as having changed situations for the better.

So, there are two points I particularly want to associate with my understanding of praxis. First, that theory and practice are held together. Not as theory applied or action theorised but in a dynamic relationship, where

praxis is created in the living-boundary between theory and practice. I want to go beyond the importance that Carr and Kemmis, and others give to dialectical relationships in their notion of praxis, to bring into focus, 'a relationally-dynamic awareness of space and boundaries' (Rayner, 2005) and educational responsibility. Second, the theory which action is explained by, and the standards by which practice is judged, are grounded in the ontological values of the researcher. To make this clear I have begun to use a notion of 'Living-Educational-Theory (or Living-Theory) praxis'. To clarify what I mean by Living-Theory praxis I begin by describing Living-Theory and the implications of researching to create and offer living-theory accounts.

2.4 Living-Educational-Theory and living-educational-theories

I have said earlier that I use capitals to distinguish Living-Theory research from an individual's living-theory. In doing so I am pointing to Living-Theory as an identifiable research methodology and method. In informal discussion concern has been expressed that by identifying Living-Theory research in those terms it may become reified and lose connection with the unique living-theories created by researchers. I disagree. Living-Educational-Theory research is established as legitimate academic research with a coherent philosophical underpinning and epistemology, which practitioner-researchers can draw on and contribute to.

I understand Living-Theory research to hold theory and practice together with a moral imperative, and in that sense it can be understood as a form of praxis. It also has many features in common with some approaches to action research. However, in action research the emphasis is most often on practice and reflection, and not on the researcher as an influential person with embodied, ontological values generating theory, as this quote from Carr and Kemmis (1986) illustrates:

> 'Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.' (p.162)

A Living-Theory researcher goes beyond simply employing a self-reflective form of enquiry to do what Carr and Kemmis want to do, improve the rationality, justice and understanding of situated practice.

Living-Theory is a form of self-study practitioner research whereby the researcher researches questions that are important to them and in the process generates values-based explanations for their educational influence in learning, their own, other people's and of social formations (Whitehead, 1993). They do this by clarifying their values, as they emerge and evolve in the process of enquiry, which form their explanatory principles and living standards of judgement in valid accounts of their practice. The values are those that are ontological, energy-flowing, life-affirming and life-enhancing,

and as Crompton (2010) describes, are a 'better source of motivation for engaging in bigger-than-self problems than other values' (p.9). Crompton, drawing on Schwartz's work, puts forward two classes of values:

> 'Intrinsic values include the value placed on a sense of community, affiliation to friends and family, and self-development. Extrinsic values, on the other hand, are values that are contingent upon the perceptions of others – they relate to envy of 'higher' social strata, admiration of material wealth, or power.' (pp. 9-10)

He argues these act in opposition, and:

> 'Intrinsic values are associated with concern about bigger-than-self problems, and with corresponding behaviours to help address these problems. Extrinsic values, on the other hand, are associated with lower levels of concern about bigger-than-self problems and lower motivation to adopt behaviours in line with such concern.' (p. 10)

In the process of researching to create knowledge of the world, knowledge of improving educational practice in the case of professional educators, the Living-Theory researcher also creates knowledge of self and self in and of the world. The researcher comes to know themselves, the person they are and want to be making a contribution to a world worth living in. The self is studied not as an egotistical exercise or a form of therapy. It is a study of embodied expressions of ontological values that enable the researcher to understand how they are in and of the world in the act of trying to improve it. In the process the researcher brings imagined possibilities of a better future into being in the present. The educational influence of Living-Theory research is not just in learning but also in life, as knowledge is created of self and self in and of the world in the process of creating knowledge of practice/the world.

As Americans Bullough and Pinnegar (2004) said, 'The consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research.' (p. 319). Similarly to understand self-study research as practice in a British context requires an understanding of the ontological values that form the explanatory principles and living standards of judgment of the practitioner offered in an account of their educational theories. Living-educational-theories are:

> '… the explanations that individuals produce for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live. I usually call such explanations **living educational theories** to distinguish the explanations **created** by individual practitioner-researchers from the explanations **derived** from theories of education (Whitehead, 1989). In the creation of a living theory an individual explains their present practice and influence in terms of an evaluation of the past and an intention to create something better in the future that has yet to be realised in practice.' (Whitehead, 2011, Bergen Keynote)

This quotation brings together the key features that distinguish Living-Theory research and shows an internal consistency to expressions of inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian values which is missing in other work, as illustrated by this quotation from Pring (2000):

> 'One remains ignorant and powerless unless, through learning, one acquires the concepts and knowledge which dispel that ignorance and enable one to understand oneself and others, and one's obligations and responsibilities. Learning is essential to becoming fully a person. Through learning one acquires the ideals which ennoble and motivate, the standards by which one might evaluate one's own performances and those of others. Adolescence, in particular, is a period in which young people seek to find their distinctive identities – the sort of persons they are or might become, the ideals that are worth striving for, the qualities that they wish to be respected for, the talents that need to be developed, the kind of relationship in which they will find enrichment, the style of life that is worth pursuing.' (p. 19)

The learning demanded of a Living-Theory researcher is empowering and transformational because the individual accepts their responsibility for having an educational influence in their own learning, and dispels their ignorance through the struggle to not simply acquire knowledge but to create and offer knowledge of the world and self in and of the world as a gift. By accepting their educational responsibility for themselves, they clarify and evolve the values that give their life meaning and purpose, and understand the living standards by which they evaluate their life as loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile. I will return to this throughout the thesis, as it underpins the development of inclusive, educational gifted and talented theory, practice and provision, and Living-Theory TASC as a method of enquiry for learners of all ages. The learning demanded of a Living-Theory researcher offers possibilities to people concerned with the transformation of learning and lives as an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian process, and not just those identified as professional educators.

As my research is educational I need to evolve an educational methodology. Dadds and Hart (2001, p. 166) refer to this as methodological inventiveness. They point out that how practitioners choose to research, and their sense of control over this, can be as important to their sense of identity within the research as their research outcomes:

> 'No methodology is, or should be, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques.' (p. 169)

I have often found methodology and methods confused in the literature. I understand the term methodology to describe the underlying ontological, epistemological, logical, philosophical, assumptions of the research, which should be coherent and internally consistent, and which inform the choice of the methods and understanding of the research. The methodology makes a reasoned and reasonable connection between the why, the what, and the

how of the research. I understand the term method to be a tool or procedure. Whitehead helpfully distinguishes between an individual's living-theory, Living-Theory as a method and Living-Theory as a methodology:

> 'A distinction can be made between the uniqueness of each individual's living theory and a living theory methodology that can be used to distinguish a theory as a living theory. It is sometimes useful for researchers to be able to identify paradigmatic ideas that can be used to identify the research as belonging to a particular community of enquiry. In using the idea of a living theory methodology I want to stress that this includes the unique contribution of an individual's methodological inventiveness in the creation of a living theory, rather than referring to some overarching set of principles to which each individual's methodology has to conform, in an impositional sense of the word. There are however distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology that include 'I' as a living contradiction, the use of action reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence.' (Whitehead, 2009b),

Whitehead (2011) draws on propositional, dialectic and living logics, to provide a coherent rationale for understanding values and energy as explanatory principles, which emerge through the enquiry and the development of accounts that communicate them. Serper (2011) is mistaken in his criticism of Living-Theory in saying that it is concerned with epistemology at the expense of ontology. As Whitehead and McNiff (2006) point out it is not a case of one or the other, Living-Theory is concerned with both.

The researcher may be sharing an enquiry with another person, a group, or a community. However, unlike other forms of collaborative or cooperative enquiry the individual 'i' is not subsumed within, or subordinated to, the collective 'we'. Each person retains their educational responsibility for themselves and towards others and co-creates in the living-boundary between self~other. Erica Holly, a Masters student, expresses this when she wrote to her tutor:

> 'You offer acceptance of me for what I am and push at the boundaries of what I could become. You accept ideas, puzzlement and confusion from me as part of a process of me coming to understand but the understanding reached seems always a new understanding for us both. I think I've seen our work as collaborative parallelism.' (personal email)

Through researching their practice to improve and explain their educational influence, a Living-Theory researcher can come to recognise the educational significance of what they are doing and the standards by which to judge improvement. Medawar (1969) makes this point in relation to psychoanalysts:

> '…it was perhaps a premonition of what the results of such an enquiry might be that has led modern psychoanalysts to dismiss as somewhat vulgar the idea that the chief purpose of psychoanalytic treatment is to effect a cure. No: its purpose is rather to give the patient a new and deeper understanding of himself and of the nature of his relationship to his fellow men.' (p. 6)

I believe the purpose of education is more than to just bring a student to a new and deeper understanding of him/herself and of the nature of his/her relationship to other people. It is also to enable them to take action to continually enhance their educational influence in their own learning and life and that of others. The emancipating purpose of education can be understood, in part, as students are enabled to develop the means by which s/he may continue to develop throughout their lives those abilities to enhance the well-being of us all. Shaull put it well in his foreword (pp. 9-14) to Freire's (1972) *'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'*:

> 'There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society.' (p. 14)

Living-Theory research is educational and a self-study of a person's presence in the world that is generative and transformational in the process of researching to improve it. It is:

- Inclusive - Through the cooperative engagement with others, in the process of creating their living-theories, each researcher develops and offers, talents, expertise and knowledge that are recognised and valued. The unique 'i' is valued as distinct from 'you' but not discrete within 'we'

- Emancipating – The researcher as learner is empowered to accept and express their responsibility for the educational influence they have in their own learning and life, that of others and the social formations they are part of

- Egalitarian – Power to create, contribute and benefit from talents and knowledge is by each and all and expressed within an i~we, i~you relationship.

I learned many years ago from my son's Aikido teacher, that 'with control comes power': control and power over self to be the influence in self and the world you want to be. I believe power and control can come with learning to extend your self a loving recognition, developing respectful connectedness within self and expressing an educational responsibility to

presence your self to yourself, or as Ghandi might have put it, being as much as you can be the change you want to see in the world.

Noffke (1997) criticises Living-Theory on the grounds that:

> 'The process of personal transformation through the examination of practice and self-reflection may be a necessary part of social change, especially in education; it is however, not sufficient.' (p. 329)

The generative and transformational influence a person has through their way of being, on others and on social formations is however far more complex than Noffke suggests, as the paper by Fowler and Christakis (2008) on the 'Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network' demonstrates:

> 'More generally, conceptions of health and concerns for the well-being of both individuals and populations are increasingly broadening to include diverse "quality of life" attributes, including happiness. Most important from our perspective is the recognition that people are embedded in social networks and that the health and well-being of one person affects the health and well-being of others. This fundamental fact of existence provides a conceptual justification for the specialty of public health. Human happiness is not merely the province of isolated individuals.' (p.8)

Many living-educational-theories, as well as mine, include explanations of educational influence in the learning of socio-cultural formations and answer Noffke's criticism by contributing to an educational epistemology.

Before moving on to Living-Theory praxis I want to summarise what I believe distinguishes Living-Educational-Theory research and methodology. A Living-Theory methodology is a form of knowledge-creating self-study research of practice to improve practice, where the researcher:

- Accepts responsibility for their practice
- Researches their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations, to improve it
- Recognises that their educational influence comes from the expression of their embodied knowledge and values
- Identifies where and how they are a living contradiction, and/or living a contradiction in terms of their life-affirming and life-enhancing values, to improve their practice
- Studies their self, not an egotistical, self-serving self, or 'I', but a loving 'i', intending to enhance their contribution to making this a better world to be
- Clarifies and evolves their embodied knowledge and values. Values are understood to be those energy-flowing values that are life-affirming and life-enhancing and give meaning and purpose to life the researcher's life and work
- Evaluates and offers a theory to account for their practice with their values as living standards of judgement and explanatory principles

- Draws on the knowledge created and offered by others, for instance in the various disciplines or other fields of enquiry, to enhance their research-practice
- Creates and offers reasoned and reasonable accounts as valid educational explanations of educational influence in learning
- Offers multimedia narratives to communicate the relationally-dynamic nature of energy-flowing values

Living-Theory research offers explanations of educational influence in the learning of self, other and social formations. It is a process, which has a generative and transformational influence not only in what is created in the living-boundary but also on the 'worlds' that form the boundary. However, it does not explicitly attend to the ~ space, the living-boundary, in the i~you or i~we, and explain the process by which values, theory and practice emerge and evolve as they are clarified there.

2.5 Living-Educational-Theory praxis

I have understood praxis to be about doing what is right according to an impersonal criterion. Living-Theory praxis is about accepting *my* responsibility to offer valid, values-based, generative and transformational, explanations of the best life I can live for self and others. Values are what I believe to be important and give meaning and purpose to my life, and beliefs are what I believe to be true. Values and beliefs are not always aligned. A person can express a *value* of inclusion – all people are equally of value - and a *belief* that ability is innate and therefore some people are born to lead and others to follow. I find such inconsistencies as challenging as finding that I am not living my values in practice.

Living-theory praxis is concerned with recognising and resolving generatively and transformationally such inconsistencies and contradictions. In evolving Living-Theory praxis beliefs and ontological and social values, are researched as they are expressed and evolved within the complex ecologies of living-boundaries and the worlds that form them, such as between i~we and Academy~world-of-practice.

My living-theory praxis research is peppered with social, cultural and historical fragments, stressed by expectations and relationships with power, and buffeted by the ebbs and flows of local demands, as Lee and Rochon (2009) describe in the invitation to submissions for the 2010 AERA annual meeting, which had the theme, *Understanding Complex Ecologies in a Changing World:*

> 'These complex ecologies include people's participation within and across multiple settings, from families to peer and intergenerational social networks, to schools and a variety of community organizations; and participation within and across these settings may be either physical or virtual. Our attempts to understand and influence such learning often try to strip away complexity for presumed efficiency…'

Retaining the complexity while enabling understanding is important in the evolution of accounts of living-theory praxis. Accounts are valid research narratives created not only to communicate with others, but as integral to the research process. I recognise that different narratives can be created and offered. MacLure (1996) emphasises the importance of including stories of ruin and not just creating smooth stories of self. I am not denying or dismissing the many occasions I fail in terms of what I set out to accomplish. However, reliving those moments as stories of ruin serves to remind me of the pain I experienced. This makes it emotionally challenging to subsequently chose the 'path less travelled' (from The Road Not Taken, a poem by Robert Frost).

When I can stand back from the hustle of 'doing' in the systematic phase of my research, reflect and 'meet with Triumph and Disaster, And treat those two impostors just the same (from 'If', a poem by Rudyard Kipling) I hope to create accounts with generative, transformational and educational possibilities rather than amplifying and recycling past pain. Maree (2006), from the field of counselling, offers an example - I have substituted 'educator' and 'student' for 'counsellor' and 'client':

> 'In telling their stories, students come into closer contact with their life experiences. Furthermore, telling expresses meaning and makes that meaning evident to both [student] and [educator]. As [students] tell their stories, their lives start to add up. Story by story, they build the architecture of a larger narrative. Slowly they begin to consolidate narrative lines as they recognise the repetition of themes and, in due course, identify the underlying logic of the progression. As they make implicit meanings more evident, they evoke wider dimensions of meaning; then they may elaborate and revise these dimensions of meaning to push back constraints and open new space for living. This revised narrative states what they already know about themselves and reorganises it into a life portrait that honours intuition, stirs the imagination and reveals intention. At the beginning of counselling, many [students] are strangers in their own lives. At the end, they are able to use work to become more wholes as they infuse their projects with their own purpose and plans.' (p. 2)

This is not an easy or comfortable process. Leigh (2002) foregrounds the issues and offers a life-enhancing response:

> 'Frequent introspective analysis, and mindful design of behaviours intended to achieve progress towards expertise, inevitably involves some difficulty and even perhaps pain. Sporting contexts use the mantra of 'no pain, no gain' to indicate this factor. In teaching/learning contexts a frequent refrain in my own repertoire of 'teaching themes' is this:
>
> > Their question: 'Is pain essential for learning?'
> >
> > My answer: 'No, it is not *essential* – you can acquire a lot of knowledge without much difficulty. But if you wish to

> transform how you think and perform as an adult educator, then it is eventually *inevitable* that there will be pain.'
>
> That is, the extent of any desired progress from 'novice' to 'expert' will be determined, in part, by your capacity to absorb the 'pain' of learning from mistakes, enjoying successes and understanding how they were achieved (this time!) and what just might bring similar results on a future occasion.
>
> 'Progress' – that is – is a journey, and is continuing. There is no 'perfect' place called 'expert facilitation' – just as there is no 'hell' called 'bad facilitation' and there are many 'purgatories' (also euphemistically called 'learning moments') as we recognise that we did not quite do what we intended and did not get what we had hoped.' (p. 11)

Brad Paisley also reminds me that not all mistakes need be associated with pain or are stories of 'ruin' when he sings, 'Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.' (The chorus to 'Some Mistakes', accessed from http://artists.letssingit.com/brad-paisley-lyrics-some-mistakes-vbrwqm5). I know I have repeated what appeared to have been mistakes, not because they were fun, or I have not learned, but sometimes what appears to be a mistake may be a mistimed 'success'. I take some heart from the response that even those with worldwide reputations like John Lennon have to face:

> 'Originally released in 1971, "Imagine" is every bit as poignant today as it was when it was first written as an anti-war song (Vietnam). Because of what was believed to be its Communist message, the song was fairly controversial; it wasn't even released in the UK as a single until 1975. A 2002 Guinness World Records poll lists this song as Britain's second favorite single of all time ("Bohemian Rhapsody" took top honors)'. 'http://television.gearlive.com/tvenvy/article/q107-glees-imagine-hits-the-right-note/

I have been puzzled as to how it is that some people tell generative and transformational stories to account for their life while others, with similar experiences, tell defeating stories that blight their life and that of others. Why do they change their narratives? Berne (1964) in 'Games People Play' tells some of the common, blighting stories and shows how these become self-fulfilling prophecies. Dweck's (2000) work on self-theories attracts me for the same reason and I will amplify on that in Chapter 6 when introduce 'inclusive gifted and talented educational theories'.

Bookshops are lined with books on how to live a happy life and most detail stories that are energising, productive and bring a sense of fulfilment and pleasure to the teller and sometimes to others. They offer acres of words on how to develop generative stories but I wonder how often readers do more than simply read the books. What is not addressed is having learnt to tell stories of blight, why do people change? It is not easy changing and the immediate emotional and other consequences can be devastating. It takes

you to unchartered waters and people often prefer swimming in the same pond even if it is infested with piranha– the devil they know being better than the angel they don't. But still some people manage to change themselves and many apparently unremarkable people have remarkable stories to tell. I find them fascinating, inspiring and educational and this is another reason that I am taken with accounts of developing living-theory praxis. They offer me insights into people's motivations and journeys.

Occasionally I find a book where the author recognizes their own story and the moments of 'shifting' from one form of narrative to another. Ralston's (2004) book, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place', is such an example. He was a rock climber who, when trapped on a mountainside, hacked off his hand to release himself and save his life. It was not the description of his courageous act to save himself or even his account of his life that caught my attention but it was this quotation from John Krakauer's,'*Into the Wild'* that he refers to as reading like a manifesto:

> 'So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their solution because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conserveratism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, hence there is no greater joy than to have and endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun.' (Ralston, 2004, p.73)

Ralston seems to recognise this curious contradiction that is prevalent and the drive that for him resolved it; the love for life as he felt it most fully expressed. The vision of that life fully expressed might differ from one person to another but having and experiencing it inside and recognising it seems to be something that those who enjoy life to the fullest, and make the greatest contribution to their own well-being and well-becoming and that of others, have in common. It seems to provide a glowing ember inside them that not only sustains them through the most horrendous times but help them grow in adversity.

The brief account that Landau (2007) gives as her personal narrative, '*Through suffering to joy and meaning'*, shows what I mean. The learning she took from her time in a concentration camp during World War II sustained and inspired her work. She identifies the points of learning herself in her text. For instance, she recounts the time her mother pushed her into a niche in a wall to protect her when the soldiers raided their house to violate the women:

> 'Years later I discovered the many different ways I used to remain sane in the niche in the rock. Today I teach children always to look for at least one more way to see things and to solve problems. Because there is no frame, narrow and small though it might be, in which thre are no alternatives.' (p.214)

She learnt from a professor of Art History in the camp who shared his love of art and learning and the lives of others like herself who had suffered and survived with integrity:

> ‘Many years later at the Uffizi in Florence, in front of this picture, I remembered his legacy and promised him and me to go his way: to enrich and beautify the lives of curious chidren.’ (p.214)

She was reminded years later by a man who as a child in the camp she had spoken to and shared a smile with when he was in despair as others avoided him for fear of contagion,

> ‘I was glad that I had helped that desperate child. Who according to him, got strength from my smile.’ (p.214)

When helping a soldier in the Yom Kippur War, the only survivor of the tank he was in:.

> ‘I sat down, held his hand and tried to remember what I had studied, what I knew about how to help him. From my brain I received no answer, but from the depth of my guts came the words: “You feel guilty that you are alive and your friends had to die”. He turned his head and asked “How do you know?” I told him, “Because I too feel guilty that I survived the Shoah [Holocaust] and my friend did not”. He pressed my hand.’:
>
> ‘And suddenly I understood that my suffering had some sense. That from my suffering I could help a young man.’ (p.215)

Her conclusion seems to bring it all together when she writes:

> ‘At all ages the common challenge is to find new alternatives within their own frame, as I discovered in my childhood in that niche in the rock… *Existential creativity is not only to burst limits, but to find alternatives within the limits.* I am a partner in my destiny, in my life’ (p. 215).

I do like that phrase – that is what I want to do – *enable children and young people to become active, influential partners in their destinies and their lives.* Many people seem to accept the role of sleeping partner and become a stranger in their own life and a victim to the blighting narratives they create.

Erica Landau was director of The Young Persons’ Institute for the Promotion of Creativity and Excellence in Tel Aviv when she wrote this piece. She seems to have found a place to express her values, the knowledge she has created over her life and her embodied theories, as fully as she can through her work. Sternberg (1998) might describe this as an example of wisdom. He gives his definition of wisdom as:

> ‘… the application of tacit knowledge as mediated by values toward the goal of achieving a common good…’

How you look at things, the stories you tell yourself to describe and explain what happens in your life, and your ability to recognise and generatively transform your narratives, and your embedded and embodied theories, seem to be key to living a life which contributes to your own sense of well-being and well-becoming and that of others.

The acquisition of skills, information, or whatever competences or even confidence is needed seems to be the secondary problem. It is finding your dream and passion and being prepared to commit time, energy and yourself to realising them that seems to be key. There are many accounts of people who have found ways round, over or through difficulties, learnt skills they never previously thought they could, found the resources they lacked and found ways of dealing with their personal demons when they have that distant focus held clearly and resolutely. One such example is Babar Ali, who at 16 years of age became a Head-teacher of a school in India he established, transforming the lives of hundreds of children poorer than him.

Video 6 Babar Ali, India, world's youngest Head-teacher

The 2minutes 47 seconds video of the BBC news report http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8299780.stm needs to be seen to understand what he has achieved by following his life-affirming and life-enhancing passion. I am not familiar with life in West Bengal and it was watching this short video clip that enabled me to literally see what is possible in the most challenging of circumstances by someone who truly lives their values.

The possibility of understanding in practice, more about what influences learning and the influential stories that we each tell to account for our lives has kept me enthralled with psychology and education. It is what has led me to develop my living-theory praxis research with a focus on improving inclusive gifted and talented education.

I want to open children and young people to possibilities they might want to explore and to enable them to develop enthusiasms, skills and understandings, which will enable them to become self-developing. That is

why I think it important not to just enable others to create their living-theory accounts but to enable them to learn how to create them for themselves. That is why I have wanted to learn how to support educators on the Masters programme and to find a way of describing and explaining Living-Theory research so others could also engage in Living-Theory research to improve their praxis in living-boundaries. I do not want to impose. I do want to invite them into the living-boundary between us. There I want to stimulate imaginations and the desire and ability of others to improve their own educational influence in their own learning. This is problematic because sometimes people will only venture along a path they have already trodden.

In my experience many people appear to find untrodden paths scary, insecure places inhabited with the demons of past failures. Evolving Living-Theory praxis requires courage to 'gently put aside' the narratives of blight to research within living-boundaries. Living-Theory praxis research necessarily includes not just researching my beliefs and theories of education but also my living-educational-theory clarified as it emerges from within living-boundaries. In the process the individual enhances their own educational influence in learning and the contribution they make to their own wellbeing and that of others.

2.6 Postscript

I have clarified what I mean by educational research and the influence that coming to that understanding has had on my thinking and practice. I then went on to describe what I have understood of praxis; theory and practice held together, moulded by a moral imperative. The moral imperative however is an abstraction, whereas Living-theory research develops a form of praxis formed and informed by the researcher's 'real' lived and living ontological values that give meaning and purpose to their lives. In Living-Theory praxis research, these values are clarified in their emergence in living-boundaries as explanatory principles and living standards of what it is to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life enhancing the researchers own learning and life, that of other people and that of social formations. Living-Theory praxis makes explicit the integration of the creation of knowledge of the world with knowledge of self in and of the world, in living-boundaries, informed and formed in a relational dynamic mediated by ontological, energy-flowing life-affirming and life-enhancing values.

It might be argued that Living-Theory praxis is a tautology. However, while Living-Theory may express a particular form of understanding of praxis, not all praxis may be in the form of a living-educational-theory. So, in the same way I talk of ' a gift freely offered' to emphasis that what I offer is done so without expectation or obligation, I talk of Living-Educational-Theory praxis to emphasise that:

- My praxis as a living-theory is a form of self-study where 'i' is not an egotistical 'I' or a discrete entity. 'i' is a recognition of a person as real and they have an influence by being

- An account of praxis communicates how the researcher hold themselves to account for their educational influence and for having an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian influence that enhances well-being and well-becoming of each and all
- It includes an explanation of how they give full expression to their educational responsibility for themselves and towards other people and communities
- The embodied knowledge and values of the researcher are clarified and evolve as they emerge and are articulated through the process of rigorous and valid enquiry in living-boundaries
- The life-affirming and life-enhancing ontological and social values of the researcher/s form the explanatory principles and living standards of judgment of educational influence in learning and life of self, other and social formations
- Praxis is created in the living-boundary, the ~ space in, for instance, i~we and the Academy~the-world-of-the-practitioner

To communicate my living-theory praxis generatively and transformationally to others and myself, I need to find forms of representation that contribute to a relationally-dynamic and multidimensional form of research and enhance the communication of energy-flowing values. I deal with this in further detail as the thesis progresses.

The purpose of Living-Theory praxis as self-study is not to research an egotistical, discrete 'I'. The purpose is to recognise, value, and make visible the individual, unique contribution each person makes to their own lives and that of other people in living-boundaries. The living-boundaries are those between worlds such as Academia and practice and those in the i~we relationship where 'i' is recognised and valued as distinct but not discrete. A living-boundary is one within which something of mutuality and co-creation might be expressed without violating the 'worlds' forming the boundary.

In the next chapter, I clarify the meanings of my values from within living-boundaries as they form the basis of my practice, my explanations of educational influence and my living standards of judgment.