

Preamble

‘We must learn to feel addressed by a book, by the human being behind it, as if a person spoke directly to us. A good book or essay or poem is not primarily an object to be put to use, or an object of experience: it is the voice of You speaking to me, requiring a response’ (Buber, 1970, prologue p.39)

I also take Quinn’s (1997) notion of decentring seriously:

‘It is the achievement whereby I learn what it is that you need to hear or experience in order to share what is in my mind, whether it be a question, an idea or a supportive anecdote.’ (p.86)

To share what is in my mind with you, so you might feel addressed, I first need to have some sense of who you are and why you might be reading this. I am writing thinking of you reading as:

1. An academic judging whether my thesis:
 - a. Makes an original and significant contribution to knowledge
 - b. Gives evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement
 - c. Contains material worthy of peer-reviewed publication
 - d. Is satisfactory in its literary and/or technical presentation and structure
 - e. Demonstrates an understanding of the context of the research.

and/or as:

2. A professional educator and/or a person who shares my passion for improving education and curious to see if there is anything to be learned from the narrative of my learning and research.

I am thinking that you may be more familiar with research rooted in the traditions of the social science disciplines, and with reading texts. However, this is not a traditional thesis: it is a Living-Educational-Theory thesis presented as a multimedia narrative and I am asking you to engage in a particular way. I am asking you to engage critically and analytically, modes of thinking I assume you are very familiar with. I am *also* asking you to engage creatively through your imagination and emotions. By asking you to engage in this way I want you to appreciate the relationally-dynamic nature of my values, imbued with energy that is life-affirming and life-enhancing, as well as the more traditional academic qualities of my work. I hope that in the process this stimulates some thoughts or indicates paths to explore, which might contribute to your own knowledge-creating ventures.

The way I research conforms to ethical principles such as those set out in the BERA¹ (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* the BPS²

¹ BERA – British Educational Research Association

² BPS – British Psychological Society

(2010) *Code of Human Research Ethics* and (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and the HPC³ (2007) *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics*. As Living-Theory research has at its heart a concern to practice ethically by making explicit the usually implicit embodied values of the practitioner researcher, identifying contradictions in practice and developing ways to improve. My research reflects the multidimensional and relationally-dynamic nature of learning, life and enquiry. I want my thesis to communicate this organic and evolving process – the living nature of educational knowledge. Whitehead, who originated Living-Theory (Whitehead, 1989a), expressed this well in his presidential address to BERA in 1988 (Whitehead, 1989b):

‘I hope that you can now see why I characterise the approach as a living approach to educational theory. It is to distinguish it from a linguistic approach which is contained within propositional relationships and captured texts on library shelves. In contrast to this I am proposing an organic view of educational theory which is living in the public conversations of those constituting professional practice. It is thus growing in the living relationship between teachers, pupils and professional researchers and embodied within their forms of life.’ (p. 9)

I see the relationship between me as writer, and you as reader, in the same light. The interface may be through text or a multimedia narrative on a library shelf, or on the web. Nonetheless, it is a living process that exists in a relationship between human beings, no matter how transitory or mediated, which occurs in a living-boundary, in this case between you, the thesis and me.

At this point it might help if I briefly introduce myself. I created this thesis while working as a senior educational psychologist in an English Local Authority, developing and coordinating a project known as APEX⁴. My work responded to my employer’s inclusive vision statement, and rested on my belief that each person is unique and capable of making a valuable contribution to improving their own well-being and well-becoming, and that of others.

I give primacy to my educational responsibility as I research my practice to improve it. By educational responsibility, I mean my responsibility to enhance educational experiences of children and young persons so that each may improve their ability to bring themselves into their own presence, and live a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile for themselves and others. As you engage with this thesis I would like you to hold this responsibility in sharp focus.

I find ‘an academic voice’, which is traditionally impersonal, does not communicate the warm inter- and intra- personal, energy-flowing, qualities

³ HPC – Health Professions Council

⁴ APEX the acronym that came from the title of the project - ALL are Able Pupils Extending Opportunities

of love, humanity and humour, I believe should be the central tenets of education, particularly of the young. It is important to me that my research and practice communicate these qualities to you. I will periodically, throughout this account, use ‘persons’ in the place of ‘people’ to remind you and myself that I am concerned with individuals, each with their own unique contribution to make to enhance their own lives and all our lives. To keep the connection between the thesis and the lived experience of my work and practice I ask you to hold this collage (Figure 1) in mind.



Figure 1 Collage communicating human qualities such as vitality and humour

Figure 1 is a collage of photographs I have selected from the workshops I have organised for children, young people and adults as part of APEX⁵. By bringing this collage into the thesis I am not simply trying to give a window into the world of my work; I am trying to communicate human qualities such as vitality, humour, warmth, love, curiosity, creativity, surprise, enquiry, pride, interconnectedness, sustained effort, a vibrant flow of a loving life-affirming and life-enhancing energy. I ask you to hold the feelings of pleasure and energy that I hope these pictures evoke as you engage with this thesis. These living human qualities and values, so poorly communicated through simple words on a page, are what distinguish the knowledge I seek to offer as educational.

⁵ Written permission to use images of children and young people participating in all APEX activities, for publicity, evaluation and presentation, is always sought from parents of all participants prior to the events. On the rare occasion a child or young person appears to be uneasy about photographs or video being taken of them or their work when an explanation is given to them personally, care is taken not to include them.