

# **Jack Whitehead**

# **Validations**

Forewords by Jean McNiff and Moira Laidlaw  
Introduction by Robyn Pound

Compiled by Robyn Pound, Moira Laidlaw, Marie Huxtable

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## Foreword by Jean McNiff

So, Jack,

Here we are at another transition point, the end of one set of practices within an institution, which you are already turning into a new set of practices outside the institution, yet still within the Academy, as it links with the real world of work-based practices. It is a time of looking back, and forward, of taking stock of how what has happened has shaped the future, a future we are already inhabiting as the present, and finding ways of transforming it into an even better one. The stories in this book tell how you have influenced the learning of people so that they can engage in their own transformational practices and take control of their lives, to bring their improved understandings into their practices and in turn exercise their educational influences in other people's learning. You do indeed hold a special place in all our lives.

What makes you special, in my book, is that you stand up for what you believe in, for ideas and how these are embodied in and lived out in the lives of people; and you encourage them to do the same. What makes you special for me is that you are one of the few people in my life who has been prepared to stand up for me, who has actually been prepared to fight for me. I remember the experience of my transfer meeting from MPhil to PhD – which you were not allowed to attend – when seven men interrogated me yet did not give me a chance actually to explain what I was doing in my study programme, and their final recommendation that I should write up for an MPhil and re-register for a PhD at a later date. And the next day I came back to the University and met you, and you were red with fury and looking for someone's jugular. I remember you talking animatedly with the then (I think) Director of Research, who wonderfully took the trouble to talk with all seven members of the transfer committee, and arrange to reconvene the meeting. It took six months to do this, and it happened. You were allowed to be present, but did not actually say a word during the proceedings, but were there, always there, as I sailed through.

I remember that dreadful review of *Teaching as Learning*, when the book was identified as dangerous because practitioners would like it too much (the author took several pages in a refereed journal to trash it), and you were the

one who wrote the response and got it published and the ideas legitimated. And all through the traumas and battles – yours and mine and ours and other people’s – of trying to get the ideas around, the always readiness to respond to an email or a phone call, the outrageous enthusiasm for when things began to go right and the sheer joy of celebration when ideas were recognised as valuable and began to be taken up by individuals and groups in institutions. How many others have you fought for, always encouraged, never let down? They are here, in this book, with their stories of how you stood up for them, fought for them, lifted them by the hand when times got rough, and encouraged them to stand on their own feet and go forward again, enriched by the experience.

It’s now almost crest of the wave time for the ideas, Jack, and you are riding it all the way. It’s been nearly thirty years for us: I first visited with you in Bath in 1980 and we have been working together one way or another ever since. A lot of ink has flown through the printers since then, and there is plenty more to come. So here’s to the next thirty years. May you continue as educational warrior, stupendous champion, and kind friend. May your house always be warm and your computer hot. May love and happiness be yours, as you have brought love and happiness to so many others, as you are about to read in this book of validations. And may you continue to develop what began as your one-person Academy into an Academy for the World, a world that holds so much more promise because you are in it.

Thank you, Jack.

I will now drop you a line to check whether you are free next Wednesday for a chat about some new ideas.

Love,

Jean  
and all of us.



## Foreword by Moira Laidlaw

Dear Jack.

Many times in my action research career I have tried to stand back and see how you do what you do. You should know! I've sent you enough drafts in our work together! There has been an abiding fascination for me in coming to terms with your artistry. I always sensed, right from the beginning in 1988, that there would be something significant I could learn from you in order to improve the quality of my own educative relationships, insights, theorising and practice. It was fascinating – in a way a work of art is fascinating. To my mind, you are a great artist, and quite incomparable!

To become engaged in someone's enquiry, you only had to recognise the enthusiasm for the life-force in the enquirer to be able to see how that enthusiasm might democratise and free the world. It's taken me twenty years to understand that particular aspect of your gift. As Robyn said in looking over an earlier draft of this, Jack, your encouragement is like water for plants! I so agree.

Sometimes it's blissful to become absorbed simply in the art of watching. Over the years I was to watch not only how you helped me in my watchfulness – how you encouraged my particular kind of creativity – but to be a privileged witness to how you extended that openness and welcome to all others in their unique enquiries when they came to your door, metaphorically or literally.

I believe to an artist, you become a gallery-goer and art-enthusiast. To a musician, you learn to appreciate counterpoint. To a poet you try harder to understand nuance. To a scientist you revel in conceptualisation and theories - all until the moments of crisis, when you become a listener who absorbs fear, disharmony, stagnation, cul-de-sacs, and gives back hope. Again, as Robyn put it, you inspire the ability to live with chaos until it becomes clear.

What also seems to characterise your abilities as an educator is your genuine interest in people. Having formidable psychological insight (you once told me, had you not been an educator, you might have become a psychotherapist) you 'treat' each individual as an individual, with talents and gifts, with problems

and quirks, all possessing hope and fascination. You do not, however, allow yourself to become embroiled in the psyche as a psychotherapist must. You resist that appeal, in order to main intact *educational* boundaries for yourself and to allow others to create their own. It's a matter of balance, proportion and appropriateness.

Anyway, when you've sown the seed of welcome, you open your door and wait. Sometimes you wait for years (as you did for me and several others I could name!) for that spark, that individual inspiration that transforms a routine enquiry into art as a response to the life-force. So another quality you possess is that you see something significant coming sometimes long before the researcher themselves sees it. Robyn says she believes you consider anyone to be capable of creativity, simply because they are human. You also see when you listen, with that wonderful quality of absorption only you, of anyone I know, possess. You recognise that something is likely to emerge. I doubt you quite know when it will emerge, but you see it coming. And you wait, and tinker, and shape and enthuse and delight, und challenge and charm, and breathe life into us all. Our living fully is you living fully.

And here I have crystallised the beautiful gift of *hope for the other* that saturates your methods. Their hope is your hope. It's an intoxicating gift you have there, Jack!

Another outstanding facet of your abilities lies, I believe, in the power of your belief in the other, which feeds and nurtures, until the other believes in themselves. I know no one who has worked with you as a living theorist who doesn't comment at some time on your capacity to generate and regenerate self-insight, motivation, self-confidence and development.

Having been on the receiving end of your optimism, your tremendous belly-laughing joie de vivre, your sometimes whacky sense of humour, singular vision, occasionally annoying focus on rigour and validity (and videos Robyn adds, in the belief that you can capture the intangible!), your tremendous capacity to listen, to remember what has been said sometimes years before (and being held to account for it too, which can be quite irritating) – amongst all that there is also a capacity at work that sees the place of an enquiry in the development of a paradigm.

Quick to recognise the ingenuity of the other and to hold it in trust and hope for the future, you nurture the individual, but with a sense also of our enquiry's dialectics with living theorising and with conceptual theories, and with our developing relationships with the world. You occupy the position, I believe, of a consummate artist whose inspiration is fragments (individuals), but whose passion lies in the whole and wholeness. You are urged on to complete something, intangible unknowable, but imperative for an artist. It's that dialectic that keeps you going, I reckon, because you will insist on going wider, reaching further, if we are concentrating on too narrow a sphere. And our growth is your growth.

This is not to relegate individuals to any kind of lesser status in your 'scheme of things', but in watching you over twenty years I have seen the passion you hold for theory, how your eyes light up in that delicious sense of anticipation when something slots into place, or when it's going to. I have seen some of those marvellous moments when you know more completely than the enquirer what the enquiry is about, because you hold together the one and the many. You are the greatest dialectician I have ever met, and far more interesting than any of the ones I've ever read about! I believe with Robyn, that, in her words, the climate you create is so inspiring that the whole group takes responsibility for itself and acts co-operatively.

Words cannot grasp entirely anyone's individual genius, but I hope these words point towards it. An ostensive definition or some such nonsense!

With love, Jack,  
And, as others keep insisting too...  
Thanks!

Moira xxx



P.s. Dean Tian Fengjun sent me this picture. I think it says it all!



## How 'Validations' came about

Dear Jack ,

As the final academic term of 2008-2009 drew to a close you reminded us that your 65<sup>th</sup> birthday marked the end of your work in its current form with Bath University. I knew I was not alone in experiencing deep appreciation for your quiet assurances and the liberation gifted by living theory action research. I wondered how the end of this era would be marked. Moira, thinking along similar lines, agreed that asking your fellow researchers for their experiences and binding them together as a book was worth a try. It would be a surprise present, Marie suggested and Jean agreed to write a foreword.

Not having access to your contact list we constructed our own and asked people to disseminate the request with this letter:

*Dear research colleagues,*

*Jack Whitehead retires at the end of the summer this year. He has influenced the lives of so many people and changed the face of educational research. 'Bringing the embodied knowledge of practitioners into the public domain so that it can be widely shared'.*

*Moira and I wanted to produce something meaningful to mark his retirement and wondered if you would like to contribute. We suggest a collection of writings from people who have researched with him all bound together would mark our thoughts about him and the contribution he has made. What do you think?*

*If you would like to contribute to this tribute we suggest a short piece of not more than 1000 words explaining what Jack and living theory means to you. Pictures are welcome but unfortunately we cannot accommodate videos. Please send to me at [robyn\\_pound@yahoo.com](mailto:robyn_pound@yahoo.com) or Moira Laidlaw at [moiralaidlaw@hotmail.com](mailto:moiralaidlaw@hotmail.com) by July 20th so he can collate and bind it for him. Our list of email addresses has many gaps because we do not have access to his contact list. Please can you pass this on to anyone else you think would be interested.*

*Any other suggestions are welcome.*

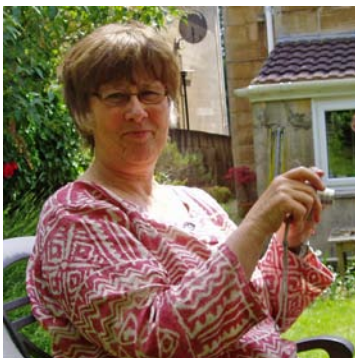
*Robyn Pound and Moira Laidlaw*

Joan reminded us that you are not 'retiring', never will, and are antagonistic even to use of the 'R' word. Of course! Silly us! Marie helped reword the invitation to, *'the end of your tenured contract with the University of Bath at the end of the summer this year'*. She also suggested we could have DVDs in a pocket at the back so you could put them on the web, and she provided many of the photos. Like a terrier she tracked contact addresses.

Expressions of interest promising contributions arrived in a kind of e-storm from all over the world. Fifty six submissions tumbled in like growing treasure and frequently moved us to tears. These are researchers spanning your 40+ year journey in education. The similarities of experience, unique but similar in every piece, offer validations of both living theory as methodology and you Jack, as practitioner. The submissions included in this book are evidence of an ***I-Jack*** relationship widely experienced.

We apologise to the hundreds of other friends and fellow researchers who would have liked to contribute but our inability to contact them or the short time span define the responses presented in alphabetical order here. The contributors know you are likely to put these on the web. You will find a pocket at the back for extra notes and a DVD.

Robyn Pound  
August 2009



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## **Jack's standards of judgement validated by colleague friends**

## Contributors

Aymer	Cathy	Kisiewicz	Morag
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D'Arcy	Pat	McDermott	Kevin
Delong	Jacqueline	McNiff	Jean
Delpont	Alette	Mellett	Peter
Eames	Kevin	Mills	Ruth
Formby	Claire	Mussett	Mary
Foster	Don	Naidoo	Marion
Geller	Anat	Olivier	Tilla
Gjøtterud	Sigrid	Pound	Robyn
Glover	Amy	Punia	Ram
Gurney	Mary	Rawal	Swaroop
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Huxtable	Marie	Tian	Fengjun
Hymer	Barry	Wallace	Belle
Jones	Chris	Walton	Joan
Jones	Jocelyn	Walton	Chris
Kemp	Kate	Wood	Leslie
King	Ronald		



*Dear Jack*

*My most poignant memory of being at Bath was the supervision group where you, Michael and Lawrence sat with me and 'held' me emotionally while I remembered my recently deceased father. At one point you reminded me to breathe. Your inspiration has been with me throughout my time at Bath and beyond. You gave me the confidence and self-belief that helped me to finish my thesis especially when the going got tough. At one point in the group I asked you to bear me in mind. I had only meant over the vacation period but typically you thought that I meant forever and I am very grateful to you because I continue to feel your mindfulness at all times. It is this quality that you bring to all your relationships that ensures that we all love and admire you. I will continue to treasure your bearing me in mind. I wish you joy in this new phase of your life.*

*Love and thoughts*

*Cathy Aymer*

## Tribute to Jack, on his (theoretical!) retirement

Tena koe, te Rangatira (greetings to the Chief)

Where do I start? My visit to Bath in 1994, newly enrolled in my PhD studies, on teacher exchange for three months to Norwich. I had encountered Jack's writing, and made an appointment to visit while in the area. Initial impressions: considerable energy, a black leather jacket, welcoming vibes to an unknown from the other side of the world, the poster on the wall reading "Subvert the dominant paradigm!" *Right up this Kiwi's alley.* The purchase of "The Growth of Educational Knowledge" and its wisdom. The honesty around the clash of cultures included in the book. Attending the Monday evening group – from memory, that night it met in Jack's own home, and Moira Laidlaw was there, among others.

Subsequent contact, via email, over years, with both Jack and members of the Monday evening group. How I valued that contact with like-minded researchers, when struggling with an action research thesis located in my own narrow polytechnic context. The encouragement; the dialogue; the enrichment with visits from both Moira and Jean; haven't got you to present here in New Zealand yet Jack but surely the time is now?

The things I treasure about Jack: his constant, provocative encouragement of others to extend the boundaries of their thinking; his prodigious energy and commitment in the face of often derogatory or dismissive institutional and personal responses; his amazing ability to pick up nuggets of gold from lots of people's different writing and to connect up the dots; his valuing of input from our part of the world, whether pakeha (non-Māori) or Māori. Thank you, my friend; I look forward to continued contact regardless of your 'retirement'!

I conclude with a proverb (whakatauaiki) cited by my Māori co-worker Andrea Elliott - Hohepa on a project we're just concluding together. It's an encouragement for us all to do our little bit, and I think encapsulates Jack's encouragement of us all to do just that. (A kahikatea is a very tall tree!) *He iti te kōpara ka rērere i te puhi o te kahikatea.* Though the bellbird is small, it can reach the crown of the kahikatea.

With love, Pip

Educational consultant and researcher, New Zealand

## Jack

Jack you have contributed to my development as a teacher in so many ways it is hard to encapsulate. Foremost you have restored that sense of being valued as a person in an educational system in which I and others have often felt devalued. The consequence has been that you have given me a sense of worth and value as a teacher to continue and to take risks in developing new paths that open up learning. The students with whom I have worked have benefited directly and indirectly as learners and as people from your insights. It has been in the generous acknowledgement of the other that you have provided a space for myself and the students to grow.

Your vast knowledge which we have so often tapped into has set us all on different paths of discovery, which has enabled myself and each student to go with confidence in new directions. Your unwavering encouragement and open approach to ideas has enabled those of us on the Extended Project to reach into areas that otherwise might have been closed. The opportunity for school students to give a lecture at a university theatre has allowed them to face new challenges which all have risen to and left with a inner confidence of what they can achieve.

Your holistic approach to tutoring has enabled a context to be given to work which otherwise might have been lacking and has allowed personal values, experiences and humour to be part of the learning process which is both enriching and deepening. Your Tuesday evening seminars have been a reflective oasis and have provided a creative space for thoughts and ideas - an opportunity rarely found in the school day.

Your all embracing and inclusive approach is infectious and allows each individual to find their own unique space from which to grow. This in turn has become an underpinning characteristic of the Extended Project which I believe now has its own life affirming energy which is being transferred from one group of students to the next.

Below are just a few of the comments that the students would like to pass on to you in recognition of your contribution to them as students and people.

'We have all appreciated the opportunity to work with your insight into learning and people and we have enclosed a few quotes to represent our appreciation of your work with us at Wellsway:

*'Your open minded approach was inspirational.'* Jack Cooper

*'You always seemed really enthusiastic about everyone's research.'* Fiona Stainer

*'You are always good at thinking up different pathways for each individual.'* Caroline Hughes

*'Your approach to writing made our essays more personal.'* Jo Mitchell

*'Your enthusiasm is infectious and encouraged us to be enthusiastic about our projects'.* Isaac Palmer

*'You made sure we are comfortable with the people we are working with'.*

Jenny Harbour - Psychology student from the Action Research Day for Wellsway. Psychology students.

This a small thank you for a very significant contribution.

With all our love

Sally



Dear Jack

Your connection to values that seek and identify that which is best about us humans; our humanity, is a gift to the world. Your ability to notice value in me, to identify it and to help me find words to describe what I was saying without words, to theorise and validate it, has been transformational to my life and the lives of those I work with. I will always be deeply grateful to you Jack and do my best to continue to live by values that enable us to transcend the limitations of division while celebrating the richness of difference. I hope that I am able to contribute to understanding and practice that will help us find more peaceful, equitable and sustainable ways of living on this planet. Your warmth and personal embodiment as well as your intellectual and academic work has been of huge significance in this.

Enjoy your life Jack.

Eden

## Jack Whitehead. Where we meet.

A man forged in the fire pit of bullies, who chooses to stay and rise.  
A cool judge of the fudge that we know that we make for the prize  
of calling ourselves Doctors.

Not the bone-sawing, blood-letting type,  
nor the mind-bending, soul-searching type,  
but the digging type, the sifting and sorting and juggling type,  
the fiddling, grand contradictory type  
who journey with words,  
and struggle with how the life fits the work and the work fits the life.  
These doctors take many moons to emerge,  
they find themselves buried in rooms  
filled with papers and fluff and find after all that it's never enough  
they must make a video, do a dance, track back,  
upload all their thoughts, re-edit, track back  
unpick every seam, carve anew, re-attack  
resist the temptation to buy a new Mac.

They dream of the place where simplicity beckons,  
where complexity nods and simplicity holds.  
Then they know that it's done, cause it's done, there's no more.

Really it's all as old as the core  
New ways of seeing prove old ways of being.  
Bit of a contradiction that.

With love, as always.  
Madeline  
July 21 2009

*Dear Jack,*

*I wanted to contribute something to this book which would be of value to you, and short of a finished assignment, I couldn't think what would really express what I wanted to say that would connect with you.*

*Then today I received this message on a card from one of the Year 6 children who is moving to secondary school at the end of term.*

*'Thank you for being my teacher, you have helped me think about things deeper than I could have imagined and I will take your influence on with me''*

*And those are also the words I would like to offer to you from me.*

*There are two things in particular I think I most value:*

- *Firstly I would particularly like to thank you for the respectful way you are willing to engage with my ideas, and also to offer your own ideas in an equal exchange.*
- *Secondly, for the way you create such an educational space for thinking to happen, and for such diversity of thoughts to be generated. It provides a real opportunity for me to think collaboratively and formulate ideas.*

*With the help of you and others I find that I am able to 'think about things deeper than I could have imagined'*

*With my thanks,*

*Louise*

## **Recollections about Jack**

from Pat D’Arcy

Whenever I call Jack to mind, I can see him in his black leather jacket, smiling broadly, with red cheeks and twinkly eyes. I am quite sure that a similar picture is evoked in the minds of all his friends and students. I cannot recall a single instance when he looked bored or irritated or detached from whatever group he happened to be with. Not that he dominated any of those conversations - in fact (surprisingly. I often thought) he was an extremely good listener, always ready to take a genuinely active interest in what others had to say about whatever topic was under discussion.

I first met Jack in the mid seventies when I was on a part-time secondment from the Schools Council Writing across the Curriculum Project. The Bath University School of Education was still based in the centre of town, where Habitat now stands. I think in those days it was on the first floor over a Jaeger shop. Anyway, Jack had just recently joined the department and I know that we discovered within minutes of meeting - or so it seems - how many convictions we shared about giving students confidence to engage actively in their own learning.

In 1976 I moved back into what could fairly be described as a ‘bog standard’ Sec. Mod. as Head of the English Department and I can tell you it wasn’t an easy ride! But in my second year there, I had given my 4th (Y10) group the freedom, in the summer term, to make independent decisions about their own writing and reading in four out of five of their time-tabled lessons. It worked well - they were enjoying themselves and so was I. I talked enthusiastically to Jack about their commitment and I remember him coming out to Stonehouse to video one of our sessions where pupils were working on their own or in pairs. I have just realised that even in those days, he was keen to capture visual as well as oral evidence of how learning happens.

Then later, in the eighties, when I was an English Adviser, I had the pleasure of co-tutoring with him, two groups of Wiltshire primary/secondary teachers for Academic Diplomas, based on an Action Research approach to teaching and learning in their own classrooms. All of us learnt a great deal from that

shared experience. Not surprisingly, many of us became close friends and whenever we meet now for a drink and a chat, Jack is always spoken of with much affection.

Later still, when, thankfully, I had escaped the burden of having to teach - or inspect - according to the dictat of the National Curriculum and the ghastly SATs, I had the opportunity instead, of conducting my own Action Research investigation into 'what characterises a genuinely meaningful response on the part of teachers to the stories written by their children and students, 5-16'. This was a wonderful way of spending the first few years of my own retirement as I was able to involve many of the primary and secondary teachers with whom I had worked in the previous decade, which I now look back to as a kind of golden age, when we were able to make discoveries together of how to create effective contexts for learning.

I also had the privilege of having Jack as my supervisor throughout that period. He was always quite unstinting with the time that he gave, sitting knee to knee in his incredibly untidy office, drinking coffee and clarifying our insights through lively dialectic - I guess that's the word Jack would use! It would be an understatement to say that we didn't always see eye to eye(!) but I certainly have Jack to thank for enabling me to produce a Ph.D thesis that did not require any further amendments.

Although my recollections have been written in the past tense, all is certainly not yet over. I am sure that the future will be just as active for Jack on his global travels, inspiring other educators to engage not just the minds but also the hearts of their students, as it has always been in the past for everyone who has contributed to this anthology. So thank you, Jack, once again, for your support as a colleague and for your valued friendship. with love,

Pat



**As seen by many research colleagues**

## Dear Jack

July 20, 2009

We met in Toronto, Ontario in February of 1996 at the Act Reflect Revise conference. Over lunch you talked me into starting my PhD studies with you despite my concerns over the distance between us and over my total lack of expertise in the use of technology. After we corresponded by email and you convinced me that I could be a scholar, I started my studies in September of that year. During the early months of email dialogue you encouraged me to write about my practical world and steered me away from the theoreticians and thus I will never forget my first day in your office in Bath.

Amidst the incredible piles of coffee cups and paraphernalia, papers, books and videotapes, you laid out a pile of books for me to read and you rushed out to a meeting. One of these books was Martin Buber's very small, very innocuous-looking book, *I and Thou*. By the time you returned from your meeting, with your usual life-affirming energy, I was ready to pack my bags and go home since I was incapable of reading even one small intellectual book pertaining to educational philosophy. I think I said something of the sort because you guffawed with such strength, I thought you would attract the entire department to see how amusing a discussion of Buber could be. You consoled me by showing me the important bits and by distracting me to a more accessible text.

As I watch my own students now I can see that amazing transformation that occurs from the initial writing to the scholarly dialogue and the amazing work that they produce. The academic language that presents such a barrier to getting teachers in classrooms to read academic papers can be bridged by the very process that you taught me and I teach my students: start with their own embodied knowledge and then bring in the academic theory to support them to investigate and theorize about their own practice.

You have made me into a techie geek. In 1996 I didn't even know how to 'cut and paste' let alone use the internet as a research tool. You taught me that. Every year there is new technology that rises like the phoenix demanding new learning from digital media to uploading clips to Youtube. I am a MAC convert now owning two of them, although none are as big as Big Bertha! You taught me to use the video camera to collect data of educational influence. More students in the M.Ed. cohorts are now using video to represent their way of knowing and their embodied knowledge.

With your encouragement I have attended and usually presented at AERA every year since 1996 in New York. Because I have no access to conference accounts,

every year I think it will be my last and then I write submissions, thinking if they don't get accepted, I won't attend and once more I'm off to share my learning, a responsibility that you take very seriously as demonstrated in your continuing learning and writing and your exhortations to us all to build that critical mass of living educational theorists and extend the knowledgebase of teaching and learning by action researchers.

The battles that you have fought, the rejections you have endured, the abusive attitudes that you have confronted, have created a space in the Academy for insider practitioners like my students and me. We are all in your debt. You epitomize one person's capacity to continually learn and to influence positively the learning of others and the learning of social formations.

You taught me to clarify my values and recognize when I am a living contradiction; to use my values as standards to evaluate my educational influence; to see my values as the screen for making educational decisions; to reflect on my work and life in a systematic way. This cycle of learning and improvement is so embedded in my being that there is no escape from it and no rest from its demanding presence. I think I thank you for that!

I think that my body of knowledge that has emerged since the completion of my doctoral work is becoming more significant than the original work at Bath in 2002. Some evidence of this resides in the amazing research conducted by my students as they teach me to be a better teacher; some evidence resides in the papers we have co-written and/or you have encouraged and supported me to write. How often have you graciously responded to the multitude of Dear Jack emails asking for help?

I know that you are not retiring, only changing physical contexts. Your indefatigable passion for social justice will challenge you to continue improving the world of teaching and learning. I hope to continue as part of that vision for a better world and to send you more Dear Jack messages.

I did eventually read Buber's work as my confidence grew in reading theoretical works where the academic language of epistemology and ontology was pervasive. I sum up this letter with my favourite line that sums up your influence on me and on my students, "he will be guided by the recognition of values which is in his glance as an educator" (Buber, 1947, p. 122).

With love,  
Jackie

## **I first met Jack twenty-five years ago,**

when I was starting my MPhil at Bath University. Previously, I had been working with a group of teachers in Wiltshire (led by Pat D’Arcy, the English adviser at that time) who were exploring their understanding of learning, discussing possibilities for developing their teaching, and publishing accounts of their classroom practice. Encouraged by Pat, some members of the group put together a proposal for a classroom-based research project, which we brought to a number of HEIs, only to be met by a blank wall of indifference. It wouldn’t be proper research, would it, if it was carried out by teachers investigating their own classroom practice? Where would be the statistical data, the control groups and the other paraphernalia of the dominant research paradigm at that time?

Luckily for us, Bath University took a chance on our proposal, so, in conjunction with Andy Larter, another teacher from Pat’s group, I began investigating my classroom practice in 1984 and we were quickly channelled in the direction of Jack Whitehead. Jack understood immediately what we were trying to do and, although he was not our supervisor, gave his time and support to us with characteristic generosity. He encouraged us in what we were doing, and got us thinking about the nature and significance of teachers’ practical knowledge in relation to the positivist research paradigm which was then dominant. When we went to BERA conference with Jack for the first time, however, we became aware of the strength of the opposition to action research, based on the view that, well, it’s possibly good professional development for those involved in it, but it’s not really meaningful research which could be taken seriously by universities.

The research landscape is totally different now, though, and action research is funded by the Training and Development Agency at Masters level, with action research PhDs accredited with equanimity by Bath University and others. Jack’s part in this transformation cannot be overstated, I think, as he lived out his values by drawing on his erudition, his intellectual perspicacity, and his sheer bloody-mindedness, refusing to bow down before ‘the truth of power’. However, it’s not simply as an internationally-respected academic that so many people know him. My daughters, when they were young, used to refer

to him as ‘the man with the big laugh’, since, every time Jack laughed, the cups and plates on the dresser in our dining room shook and rattled. And Jack laughs a lot.

He was always great company at conferences, too, and I remember one time in Nottingham, when Jack insisted on being taken by Andy Larter, Erica Holley and myself to a pub which was reputed to brew the strongest beer in the country. To get there, we had to take a taxi from Nottingham University, and navigate by OS map into the wilds of the Nottinghamshire Leicestershire border, down a dirt track which ended by a system of locks on the Grand Union Canal. Unfortunately, the particular brew we were looking for was off that night, and we sat in the lounge bar while the resident musician noodled away on the electric organ, treating us to cover versions of the Tom Jones songbook, as well as to other standards delivered in the club style. Finally, we couldn’t stand it any longer, and moved into the comparative quiet of the saloon bar, where, as Andy pointed out, we gradually became aware of Jack’s disappointment at being taken away from the lounge; he’d actually been enjoying the music!

Overall, then, Jack isn’t just an outstanding academic with a deserved international reputation based on his tenacity, integrity and depth of scholarly knowledge. His influence changed my understanding of practical wisdom in education, certainly. But beyond all that, in the process of living out his values, he embodies a depth of humanity and sensitivity to others that has put him in touch with such a wide range of individuals in their understandings and interactions. He’s a man whose truth has passed the test of time, and it’s been great knowing him and working with him.

Kevin

### ***What Jack and living theory means to me***

*Jack probably doesn't know it but he is a significant person in my life. How fortunate I was to have Jack as my tutor when I started the Masters programme in 2005 even though I didn't understand what he was talking about for at least a year! Luckily, two years later I was beginning to "get it" and I told Jack so in this email quote:*

*Tuesday evenings have become very important to me. They remind me that teaching is my vocation, they enable me to share excitements and concerns about the children I teach, they allow me to give and receive support and they challenge and stimulate my thinking and learning. Perhaps most importantly of all, you, Jack have helped me to believe in the value and worth of my embodied knowledge, of my story. (Formby, 2007)*

*Claire Formby (sent with love)*

## **The idea that Jack Whitehead would retire is clearly a complete nonsense.**

Over the years there have been many who sought to block Jack's path with challenges to his research and research approach. They have all been brushed aside and his work has – and he would hate to acknowledge this – become almost universally accepted. He will brush aside the potential barrier of age with the same *sangfroid* and continue to inspire those who really care about education.

Jack played an important role in several aspects of my life. He helped me develop my thinking about Resource-based learning and the importance of helping pupils to learn rather than being vessels to be filled by teachers. He helped me to significantly improve my writing skills and, more importantly, to have the courage to ditch redundant information. I will never forget spending months on a particular section of my thesis only to be told by Jack that it was interesting and well written but not relevant to the case I was trying to make. He was right, and it went into the bin. But most significantly – something I am sure applies to many who have had the privilege of working with Jack – he helped me to question what I was doing and how I could improve it. It is a lesson I have never forgotten. Whether the improvements I have made would necessarily please him is altogether another matter!

The work goes on, retirement or not. Continue to enjoy.



**DON FOSTER**

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*Lib Dem Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport*

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