

Self discovery

Lifelong

Humanity

Living Legacies

Absence of testimony

'They' become 'Us'



'What is a Living Legacy?'

Catherine Forester

There are pivotal moments in our lives; moments that can change our direction, our aspirations, our hearts and minds; even our spirits and whoever we construe ourselves to be. One such moment marked the start of my love affair with teaching. I went to train as a teacher to acquire paid work with some status and security in France where I wanted to live.



However, this was the very act that would transform my life. In going to be a teacher I discovered my real, life-long passion and love: teaching – being of service – being alive. This did not happen gradually.

It was as immediate as love at first sight. I simply walked in on my first teaching practice, on my first day, into my first classroom, my first class and, there it was, a sense of being, being present, being now, being vital; combined with an involuntary requirement to reach deeply into my own humanity to work with intuition, understanding, compassion, empathy and love.

Likewise, the story of 'living legacies' encapsulates another pivotal moment. It is the story of the moment I glimpsed my fate foretold in the lives of my contemporaries who, like me, without significant senior position or academic regard, were leaving the profession. Some left readily, time-served, fulfilled, looking towards new horizons but others left heads-low, hearts-broken, spirits depleted. However, what they all shared, beyond the brief handshake of thanks, was the absence of testimony to their professional, academic and personal journeys. Like hands removed from water, they left no lasting imprint that they had been there, experiencing a poverty of indifference and an absence of regard, rather than, celebrations of unique and reflective lives. With the passing of time, and, in my case, the deterioration of health, there was a moment when 'they' became 'us'. This is a moment, at present, that few can avoid. Also, it is the moment where the knowledge game we have grown-up with and imparted to our students, starts to play us.



Recently I met a mature woman undertaking undergraduate research into whether or not feminism had impacted upon the small, rural community structures she lives in. Her research was narrative based. Yet, when I asked her if she would include her own narrative, she laughed nervously, even blushed, and dismissed her own story as 'uninteresting'.



So many of us have struggled all our adult lives to improve the world and in so doing the lives of today's children, tomorrow's adults. To do so we have drawn heavily on external sources of knowledge, insight and reliable generalisation, all too often, ignoring the authenticity and richness of our own experience and resulting 'knowing'.

Yet, in our practice, again and again, theories have been tried, tested, refined and re-hypothesised. Yes, we embody the totality of years of enquiry, study, reflective practice and knowledge chiselled into every aspect of our beings.

Moreover, we practice infused with the conscious awareness that each and every one of our students/participants/clients are exceptional and valuable. However, when we look at ourselves, we dismiss the essential 'I', overlooking our personal connection and unique place in the chain of the 'flourishing humanity' we seek to serve.

A 'living legacy' is the unique testimony of an individual practitioner providing a positive bridge between the past and the future. As I see it, within each one of us, is realised the sum of our past academic, professional and personal knowledge.

The present is the 'sum'. If each sum represented a candle what light of knowledge the totality of these candles could emit from the past to shine for future generations of educators and students. Yet, at present, each 'I' shines separately; alone in the dark of its own extinguishing. So, with the hope of my own 'living legacy', comes the dream that the idea has taken on an independent life that will find expression again and again in the creative and unique legacies of others – including those of today's students, tomorrow's teachers.

Narrative

'Self' Excluded

Struggle

Insight

Authenticity

Knowing

Negated 'I'

Living Legacy

Light



Passionate teacher

Reflective practitioner

Lover of education

For thirty years

However, in describing the genesis of the idea, I would deny the very essence of 'living legacies' if I did not acknowledge those whose preceding work nourished the field in which it is seeded. They are legion; all part of the chain of 'flourishing humanity' that connects the loving, hope-filled values, aspirations and struggles across many disciplines and practices.

Some I have only met in reading their inspirational words and I hesitate from naming one over another. Nevertheless, there are three people without whom the idea of 'living legacies' would have been still-born. These are, Professor Jack Whitehead, whose work on 'living theory' parented the idea; Dr Joan Walton, whose work at Hope University Liverpool, guided and 'scaffold' its delivery; and, Dr Marie Huxtable, who adopted it at its public birth in May 2011 at York St. John's Conference on 'Values and Virtue in Practice' and has done so much to nourish its infancy. Their part in the birth and development of the idea highlights what is possible when the light from one candle is supported and strengthened by others.

Passionate teacher, reflective practitioner and lover of education for the best part of thirty years.

You can see a video of Catherine in conversation with Jack Whitehead see <http://youtu.be/jCsuLoo33XA>