

← In Research
Intelligence, 2009,
107, 25-26



How do we contribute to an educational knowledge base?

A response to Whitehead and a challenge to BERJ

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As an educator, my lived and living educational values form the explanatory principles of my practice and my living standards of judgment in appraising my work.

They are at the core of my being, and are unconsciously expressed in what I do and the way I am. I do not exist in isolation and my values are relationally dynamic being held, formed and re-formed in that complex space between self and other/s. To communicate, those values and the educational influence I am having, requires a form of representation beyond the possibilities offered by traditional academic writing.

I agree with Whitehead (RI105) in responding to Bruce Ferguson (RI102), Laidlaw (RI104) and Adler-Colins (RI104) that enhanced by the diversity of global cultures, what counts as educational knowledge in the Western Academy is gradually transforming. I also agree that, '...the forms of representations used in BERJ are too limited to communicate the energy flowing, explanatory principles that can explain educational influences in learning' (Whitehead, 2008a, p.29); new forms are needed which can help us to communicate our understandings and contribute to an educational knowledge base.

My work in an English local authority, coordinating and developing inclusive gifted and talented educational theory and practice, contributes to the realisation of the local authority's inclusive values expressed in the statement, "We want all Children and Young People to do better in life than they ever thought they could. We will give children and young people the help that they need to do this".

Education is concerned not with inanimate objects with predefined potentials and fixed relationships, but with emancipating a person, as learner, to improve her/his own wellbeing and wellbecoming and that of us all. My research, and that of the educators with whom I work, is therefore concerned with describing and explaining how we are improving educational contexts, spaces and relationships, which particularly relate to enhancing the educational experiences of each unique person in our school system.

BERJ in its present form cannot help develop the educational knowledge-base that we, and other educational researchers, are generating in terms of our energy-flowing and values-laden explanatory principles. As Eisner (2005) said:

Human beings are, after all, sentient beings whose lives are pervaded by complex and subtle forms of affect. To try to comprehend the ways in which people function and the meanings the events in their lives have for them and to neglect either seeing or portraying those events and meanings is to distort and limit what can be known about them. (p. 116)

I agree with Whitehead that the BERJ needs to grow into a form in which the representations of these very human qualities that educational research is concerned with can be communicated and understood.

Quinn (1997) talks of the need to decentre: 'Decentring is a vital idea. 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)

My living educational values are dynamic and relational and are not adequately communicated through 'fixed' forms of representation. For me to 'decentre' and communicate I ask you to read first the following text and see what sense you make of it. Then read again while engaging with the still image and recognising where your understanding is enabled as your focus moves between the people and the space and the text. Finally I ask you to engage with the text as you watch the video clip with an awareness of where you are pausing and scrutinising a still image, moving the cursor back and forth and replaying sections of the video, re-reading text, and moving between the text, stills and video. It's complicated. How we make sense and create understandings is complicated. I find it helpful to use Rayner's (2005) notion of inclusionality; a dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as receptive, responsive and co-creational.



"My living educational values are dynamic and relational and are not adequately communicated through 'fixed' forms of representation."

What follows is part of a video narrative in which I try ostensibly to clarify the meanings of my educational values of, a loving recognition, a respectful connectedness, and an educational responsibility, as an example.

The context is a day when children and teachers have come together for a day as co-learners, facilitated by a mathematician and an educator, to experience what it is to enquire as a mathematician.

So, to begin.

The video, for which ethical permissions were sought and given is on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ck_ECxcaEc

I have watched this 6-minute video many times and each time there is something special about it, particularly in the relationship between Louise (teacher) and Louis (pupil in the foreground). If, using Jack Whitehead's technique (Whitehead, 2008b), you run the cursor back and forward you may share with me a sense of the flow of a respectful connectedness between them. Each is respectful of the emotional, physical and personal boundaries of each other and the >>

other two children. There is sensitivity between adult and children not to impose but to offer and invite. The space between them changes in a flowing 'dance' as they move – *back* to invite, *in* to engage. Louise's loving recognition of Louis, appreciating and valuing his intense desire to share, to inform, to engage the group and particularly Louise, in creating an understanding. I see her loving recognition of Louis as she enables him to express his educational responsibility towards her in his desire to bring her to a point of understanding that satisfies her. In that, Louise is expressing her educational responsibility towards Louis.

I believe that in allowing Louis to bring her to an understanding Louis deepens his own understanding of mathematics and of himself as valued knowledge co-creator. I see Louis expressing a loving recognition of Louise. He does not engage her as authority, teacher or adult, but as the person she is, inquisitive, keen to understand, to enjoy the learning that emerges from uncertainty and the pleasure of being the educator she wants to be sharing a creative and productive space. The space between Louise and Louis is energised by their shared commitment to extending the other's understanding and the pleasure of being in good company.

I see in this brief clip Louise working to connect with the best intent of the other in mind, to help them understand, express and develop accordingly. (An expression of a person's best intent may not always be in their best interest; for instance, Korczak's (Lifton, 1989) best intent was expressed as he chose to accompany the children to the concentration camp and death.) The relationship requires trust, so the child can feel secure that the educator is trying to understand what their best intent might be and to learn, from and with them, as to how they might reach the point of determining their own path to live the life they want to live, mindful of their own best interests and that of others.

This is where I ask you to re-read the above engaging with the still image and text and then with the video and text. I ask you to consider as you do so whether the educational qualities, which I am researching, are communicated more fully as you engage interactively with the multimedia narrative rather than the traditional text alone.

I believe that I have communicated more of the relationally dynamic qualities of my educational research through inviting you to engage with me in this brief interactive, multimedia narrative, than would otherwise have been possible. I may be wrong but I cannot test my claim in the current form of the BERJ. The e-version of RI, as Whitehead illustrated, is taking advantage of 21st technology, which will influence the educational epistemological transformations going on around the world. Can BERJ evolve a form that can build on this lead? As a contribution to answering this question I do hope that you will find it possible to participate in the keynote symposium at the BERA 09 Conference on Explicating A New Epistemology For Educational Knowledge With Educational Responsibility (Huxtable, 2009).

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