

## Chapter 8 What have I learned and what now?

The narrative has been, by necessity linear. In this chapter, I bring together my learning journeys to make more explicit the multidimensional and relationally- dynamic nature of my evolving living-theory praxis as a learning adventure. This takes the current leg of my learning journey towards its conclusion.

This journey has been an effort to free myself of my own ignorance. I want to borrow this quote from Nelson Mandela as my inspiration to take the time in this final chapter to rest and look with gentle eyes back over the journey shared:

‘I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.’

Sections as signposts in this chapter:

- 8.1 Have I told a good story well?
- 8.2 What are the main points of my learning?
- 8.3 And...?

### 8.1 Have I told a good story well?

This self-study has drawn insights from a number of approaches to educational research. It included multimedia narratives to explicate the meanings of the relationally-dynamic energy-flowing values and understandings that constitute the explanatory principles of educational influences and living standards of judgment in this thesis.

In creating this account I have held these criteria in focus:

- a) Have I clarified my educational practice, which is multidimensional, and relationally-dynamic?
- b) Have I clarified the values that give purpose and meaning to my life, which form my explanatory principles of my practice and my evaluative criteria?
- c) Have I shown how my recognition of my values has emerged through the organic and systematic phases of my living research?
- d) Am I clearer about what it is for me to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life, and the criteria that I use to make such judgments?
- e) Have I presenced myself and others through my research – extended a loving recognition to myself and others, understood in practice

what it is to develop respectful connectedness with others, and express my educational responsibility towards myself and others as fully as I can. Am I more aware of the best intent, aptitudes, and developing and developed talents of myself and others and the gifts others and I create and want to offer and accept?

- f) In my explanations, have I provided sufficient evidence of my educational influence in my own learning, the learning of others, and the learning of social formations and how I intend to continually improve my praxis?
- g) Does my form of communication carry life-enhancing, life-affirming, and good-humoured energy and respond to Schön's (1995) call for a new epistemology?
- h) Does this thesis make an original and significant contribution to educational knowledge, which emancipates learners in their own lives and learning and enhances their life-chances, well-being and well-becoming and the contribution they make to that of others and to an inclusive, egalitarian society?

To understand my response is not to understand simply the transformation of the words but the growth in the unarticulated, as Polanyi (1967) said, 'we can know more than we can tell' (p.4). So I have used image, both still and moving, as well as text, to communicate. In doing so I respond to Schön's (1995) call for different forms of representing educational knowledge.

In creating and offering my living-theory of my professional practice, I claim to be making an original contribution to educational knowledge. I have done this through making explicit my relationally-dynamic, life-affirming ontological values as explanatory principles and living standards of judgment, which can be used to validate and legitimate my embodied educational knowledge in the Academy.

The significance of this thesis is in the contribution it makes to an educational knowledge base of practice, theory and systemic influence, and the development of an educational epistemology.

This concludes a chapter in my lifelong story of coming to know how I might improve what it is I am doing as a professional in education while living my values as fully as I can. Through researching my practice to create the account of my living-theory I now understand my practice as an educator, creating educational relationships, space and opportunities, which enable a person's learning, and what it is for them to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life, while gaining the confidence and competences to realise their evolving aspirations.

I have contextualised my practice as a senior educational psychologist with a systemic responsibility to evolve and implement an inclusive local authority programme that contributes to improving the educational experience of each child and young person developing and offering talents, expertise and knowledge as gifts. To do so I have necessarily dealt with the education of adults, particularly those concerned with enhancing the educational experiences of the young.

I have given an account of what I understand of what it is to be a professional educator, contributing to the evolution of social formations that are inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian.

I have come to understand a Living-Theory research approach to improving my practice, which enables me to hold myself to account within contexts that on occasions I find antithetical to my values and understandings. I have called my research method Living-Theory TASC.

I have shown why I believe that as a person finds a passion, works with it and values the knowledge they create of the world, themselves, and themselves in the world, which they offer as gifts to themselves and others, they experience what it is to live a life that has meaning and purpose, and can learn to live a more life-affirming and life-enhancing life. I have shown the living meanings I give to contributing to improving educational theory, practice and provision, that enhance the opportunities for each child and young person to find a passion for knowledge creation, become fully emancipated in their learning and life, and come to know what they want to do, which will enable them to live a life that is loving, satisfying, productive and worth living for themselves and others.

I have offered a description and explanation of my practice, improving the understanding, creation and enhancement of educational relationships, space and opportunities, for knowledge-creating enquiry that is informed by living values, which support the development and systemic influence of *inclusive* gifted and talented *educational* theory, practice and provision. I have shown how this is based on the following pedagogical assumptions that everyone is capable of:

- Being an expert in their own learning
- Developing and enhancing talents
- Creating and offering knowledge of themselves and the world as a gift, to enhance their own well-being and well-becoming and that of others
- Understanding what it is that forms their explanatory principles and standards by which they judge their unique life as satisfying, productive and worthwhile and living their lives accordingly

What remains is to ask you – have I told a ‘good story’ well?

- Is my story understandable? Do you know what I have done, why I have done what I have done and how I hold myself to account?
- Is my story believable? Do I provide enough evidence to support my claims to know my practice and that I do seek to live as fully as I can the values that give meaning and purpose to my life?
- Are my educational values and the normative contexts of my work clear?
- Do I offer a well-reasoned and reasonable, explanation of why I do what I do?

- In reading this thesis has your imagination been stimulated and contributed anything to your educational journey, as you seek to improve your educational contexts and relationships?
- Does this thesis meet the criteria for the award of a doctorate by the University of Bath: presenting educational research at the leading edge of the field, providing evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement about the evolution of my living-theory of my practice and inclusive gifted and talented educational theory and practice, and material that is worthy of publication?
- Does this thesis encourage further research, study and implementation/practice of the ideas discussed herein?

## **8.2 What are the main points of my learning?**

Through this thesis I have been communicating the nature of the educational relationships, space and opportunities that I try to form within living-boundaries in the complex ecology of my work and being by clarifying:

- My evolving living-theory praxis enabling individuals to come to know more of what they want to do during their life, and gain the confidence and develop the talents which will enable them to live a life that is loving, satisfying, productive and worth living for themselves and others
- What I mean by developing in living-boundaries inclusive, collaborative, creative educational relationships space and opportunities that flow with ontological energy-flowing values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility (flavoured with good humour)
- How I am contributing to the evolution of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society, by contributing to improving the educational (that is values-based) experience of each learner

In the process of creating this account I have begun to clarify some of the main points of my learning and summarise them here. This is not intended as a definitive or defining list of what I have learned. At best these are visible nodules I can spot in the vibrant, living landscape of my experiences as I gaze from the temporary tussock of today. Neither the order nor the brevity of my reflections is intended to imply a hierarchy of importance to my musings: it merely serves to demonstrate the limitations of the linearity of this form of communication and the constraints of a doctoral thesis with a word count.

So what have I learned? I have learned:

- To recognise the complexity of the intra and inter personal ecologies of my being and context within which I work and live
- How to represent and account for my work in a manner that opens up generative and transformational educational possibilities for further enquiry

- What motivates me, the ontological and societal values that give meaning and purpose to my life
- What my living-theory praxis is, and that I can offer an explanation for what I do which satisfies me and others as reasoned and reasonable
- To engage with notions of gifts and talents as educational constructs to enhance the quality of educational contexts
- How to develop a coherent, rational and reasonable approach to researching to improve my practice which embraces the organic as well as the systematic nature of my research
- That a lot of what I do is developed in living-boundaries
- To develop forms of educational evaluation and accountability that are generative and transformational
- How to engage with national strategies and dominant forms of knowledge in living-boundaries with values-based practice so the energy is generative and transformational, life-affirming and life-enhancing
- How to describe and explain the process of my research which is multidimensional and relationally-dynamic
- To research in a manner that conforms to the ethical principles set out in the 2011 BERA ethical guidelines which is authentic and educational

I have learned through the process of creating an account of my living-theory research that I have an educational influence in learning, where I have:

- Encouraged and supported educators and learners to engage in educational research and create and offer their gifts of educational knowledge to others through creating and offering accounts, presenting at meetings and posting on the web
- Contributed to children and young people experiencing passions for learning through developing the APEX Summer and Saturday programme and inclusive, creative, collaborative enquiry workshops
- Contributed to the experience of school as educational by encouraging and supporting teachers and other educators to open and enhance opportunities for their pupils and students to create, offer and accept knowledge of self, the world and themselves in and of the world, and develop generative and transformational responses to national government policies, strategies and expectations
- Extended access to opportunities in living-boundaries for learners to develop and enhance talents that will be of use to them to create and offer their gifts in their remunerated or directed (curriculum related) work
- Recognised where I am living a contradiction, and tried to live my values more fully and develop my values-based praxis through living-research

On this journey I have come closer to understanding why I have travelled the path I have. Ideas are not rarefied, disembodied ghosts for me. They are

abstractions but with a close connection with a sense of people as human individuals, each unique but with commonalities of being human. We are all different, but we are each expressions of a common humanity, which is visceral and emotional as well as intellectual. Maybe that is what attracted me to educational psychology and not to other branches of psychology, why I did not stay as a teacher, or try to embark on an academic career. I like the intellectual struggle and theorising that is concerned with what it is to be human making the world a better place to be in, in practice.

When I began this research, my questions focused on what I could do to improve my practice, which supported children and young people to learn to live loving lives that they would judge satisfying, productive and worthwhile. The inevitable question is – what is it to live a loving, satisfying and productive, worthwhile life? For each person this will be different, their responses being informed by their lives and the sense they choose to make of them. I like this quote from Kagan (1998) as it offers ‘gift’ to communicate the essence of the purpose of education and contributes to the development of a language of education (Biesta, 2006):

‘Life is a gift. Like all great gifts, it is not an object but an opportunity. It is an opportunity to create self by making active choices about who ...’ (p. 14)

Through the choices I have made, am I clearer about what this means to me? Yes. Am I clear? No. I think, for me, this is going to be a lifelong question. My response continues to evolve as I learn to presence self, attend more carefully to others, extend them a loving recognition through respectful connectedness and give expression to my educational responsibility.

I am part of ‘others’ in an i~we relationship and so my focus is on the creation of my gifts with others in mind. I offer gifts in an open-handed way with the hope, but not expectation, that others will find them of value. In developing my practice and offering my living-theory of inclusive gifted and talented education, I feel I am living a productive life. I believe that developing values-based practice contributes to making this a better world to be in, and so enables me to feel that my life is worthwhile.

Am I clearer about what it is for me to live a satisfying life? A little. This was an equally important part of my question, but also the most personal. Whereas in understanding my life as productive I hold myself and others in mind, but my focus is on the other, in understanding what it is to live a satisfying life, I still hold myself and others together, but my focus is within myself.

Learning what it is to live a life that feels ‘satisfying’, that makes a life feel well-lived, does not often seem to be addressed in school. With CPD so closely-linked with institutional and organisational development plans and performance management, there are rarer places where educators expect to address such issues themselves. For children and young people there is the occasional lip-service paid through sessions on personal, social, health and education, citizenship, career counselling, and so on. However, these are a

long way from supporting the young to develop a full and life-affirming, life-enhancing understanding of themselves, the lives they want to live and the world they want to bring into being.

However, I see what it means to live a satisfying life in the educational relationships where an educator expresses their educational values via their practice. I see and feel this in the video clips I offered in Chapters 3 (pages 86 - 118) where I narrate my values. I hear and feel it in this 1min 10 sec clip of Nigel Harrisson (Inclusion Manager and my line manager at the time) at the BERA 2006 conference explaining the loving values that are at the heart of his practice.



**Video 21 Nigel Harrisson at BERA 2006 talking of his loving values.**

**1min <http://tinyurl.com/3hyvv7g>**

I feel this when I meet people who have a vocation that is also their paid employment. I hear and see it in the account of Professor Pausch (Pausch and Zaslou, 2008) in his Carnegie Mellon University, Last Lecture. This truly was his last lecture as he was suffering from terminal cancer. The video, ‘The Last Lecture: Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams, is over an hour long so you might not watch all of it. If you do, I think you will find it rewarding as a living-theory account, which carries the energy and passion of a man who loves himself as he loves others, and offered as a gift to his children who will grow up without him. Even watching the first few moments communicates the energy, the passion and the pleasure of a man who has recognised his life as not only productive but is also deeply satisfying – ‘living life well and living life fully’.



**Video 22 Randy Pausch's Last Lecture: Really Living Your Childhood Dreams. 76 mins [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5\\_MqicxSo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5_MqicxSo)**

Am I clearer about the criteria by which I judge my life as satisfying? For me this is about being able to work at what I believe in, for my work to be critically engaged with by those I respect, and to feel that I am making a contribution that carries hope of improving life in general and education in particular. It is about putting my unique pebble on the pile which enhances well-being and well-becoming. I have also learnt that the criteria are formed, informed and re-formed by what I choose to learn from experiencing life. Sometimes criteria are crystal clear, sometimes ephemeral and evasive. I have also come to appreciate that what satisfies one person does not necessarily satisfy another and it is difficult for me to listen carefully to their intent and not to what I conceive as being in their best interest.

In trying to lovingly recognise the other, I do so with respect for what they feel is private, what it is that stays within the bubble of the moment. I extend to myself the same respect. This brings the inherent difficulties of clarifying educational standards for improving practice, into focus. How do others and I presence self in an educational account which is authentic, useful and does not violate private boundaries?

Fromm's (1957/1995) book, *The Art of Loving* is premised on love being an art that requires knowledge and effort. He writes:

‘Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of *being loved*, rather than that of *loving*, of one's capacity to love.’ (p.1)

I am not sure that these are separate. A loving recognition offered as a gift by the educator, free of expectations of the person to whom it is offered requires knowledge and effort, so does accepting such a gift. To accept openly as a gift what another offers of their self is hard, to offer and accept such a gift to and from myself is no less difficult - but equally can be learnt. Does it have to be learnt? Can I offer to others what I cannot offer and accept myself? Which takes me back to the quotation of Hillel I wrote in the introduction:

‘If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself, what am ‘I’? And if not now, when?’

The educational journeys and adventure of my evolving practice have been multidimensional. I have meandered through swamps and glades of jasmine ‘where there be dragons’ of intellectual challenge to thrill and excite. I have staggered along paths riven by vortices of self-doubt and confusion. There have been moments where my vision has been crystal clear and a harmonious life-affirming energy has flowed through me, where ‘I am because we are’ and I feel at one with the world. There have been many times when I have desperately searched for glimpses of hope and humour to sustain me in the looking-glass world of targets, and best value, where the more I do, the less I achieve of value.

Quinn (1997) makes an interesting distinction between academic and intellectual challenge in schools, ‘The ‘academic’ refers to the conventions of a subject, its procedures, and formal material; the ‘intellectual’ refers to the exercise of intelligence.’ (p.7) In doing so he throws into relief the importance of understanding the difference and redressing the balance. He illustrates how absurdly challenging academic hurdles are set for learners in schools while the intellectual demands are often trivial. He focuses on how educators might improve the critical thinking skills of their pupils, help them recognise when their thinking is being manipulated, and practice confidently and rationally expressing themselves, when faced with such pressures. In my terms he is providing type 2 learning opportunities for developing skills, understandings and the necessary behaviours to argue rationally. He demonstrates very well that the intellectual abilities of young children are far in advance of what is expected and what is possible given a quality educational context and relationship with a reflective practitioner researching to improve their values-based practice. Although he overtly points to a close relationship between cognition and affection,

‘The connection I see between cognition and affection is so close that I do not value any cognitive achievement that is not seen by the achiever to rest on feelings. All values, including truth itself, exist in an important respect as response to our feeling needs, responses to the need for regularity (Popper, 1972, p.230), (p.121) to the interrogation of common sense (Pring, 1976), to intellectual Eros (Elliot, 1975, p.66) and to the joy of discovery (Whitehead, 1917, p.3).’ (p.122)

He does not make the connection with the educational process of enabling the learner to recognise and give expression to their embodied, evolving, ontological values, which form their explanatory principles and standards by which they explain and judge their lives as well lived.

I have created this thesis as a multimedia narrative to ostensibly and iteratively communicate a sense of a living, multifaceted, relationally-dynamic and multidimensional educational learning journey to improve educational practice, and that educational journeys and practices are concerned with more than simply academic or intellectual progress. Educational matters are concerned with the multidimensional, dynamic, inter- and intra-relationships of head, heart and body of individuals and communities, and energy-flowing values, which give meaning and purpose

to life. What I have tried to communicate is the complexity those educational matters hold within the evolution of living-theory praxis.

The last point of my learning has been to move from asking, “what is education?” or, “what is an educated person” to asking, “what is the outcome, the purpose of education for children and young persons and how can I improve my educational influence in their learning?” My current response concerns what I can do to improve practice that enables young learners to launch with confidence on a life-long journey of learning what it is for them to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others, able to fashion, value and add their pebble to the pile – when I am no longer employed as a senior educational psychologist leading APEX in a local authority.

I ask you to dwell for a moment, and reflect on your own educational practice and the explanations you give for your influence in improving educational learning. Does what I have said about the personal, emotional and intellectual attributes needed to thrive rather than survive, communicate and resonate with you and influence your practice?

### 8.3 And...?

What now? How do I contribute to the educational experience of children and young people learning to live loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives for themselves and others, to improve the well-being and well-becoming of each and all.

The **values** that provide explanatory principles and living standards of judgment of my practice, and provide the basis of evaluation and accountability, are those of ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility and inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian social values.

My future work rests on the **belief** that each person is capable of:

- Being an expert in their own learning and enhancing their expertise;
- Developing and offering talents as life-enhancing gifts;
- Creating, offering and accepting knowledge of the world, of themselves, and of themselves in and of the world, a gift, to enhance their own well-being and well-becoming and that of others;
- Coming to know and evolve their own living educational theory

My future **activity** is concerned with enabling educational relationships, space and opportunities for children, young people and adults of the education community to develop and offer as gifts, talents, expertise and knowledge: knowledge of the world, them selves and them selves in and of the world.

The space and opportunities can be distinguished as those that are primarily concerned with enhancing:

1. Playful enquiry

2. Objectives-led learning
3. Passion-led research (such as the Living Values Improving Practice Cooperatively CPD project and the Masters modules for educators <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/huxtable/LLCCPD/Home.html> )
4. A culture of living citizenship, (Coombs and Potts, 2011) which enables and supports people of all ages as learners to:
  - Ask and answer ‘good’ questions
  - Make links between the apparently unrelated
  - Go beyond the given
  - Search for and construct meaning
  - Interact meaningfully with society
  - Contribute to and benefit from their own learning and that of others
  - Knowing themselves make personal choices and research personal passions
  - Do things differently

Perhaps Schön (1995) should offer the final word, ‘Hence the proper test of a round of inquiry is not only “have I solved the problem? But “do I like the new problems I’ve created?”’ (p.31). My answer? My answer is yes. I like the latest iteration of the problem I have:

‘How do I contribute to each child and young person developing and enhancing talents, expertise and knowledge as gifts to evolve responses life-long for themselves to the question, ‘how do I live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life, creating, valuing, offering and accepting gifts which contribute to the well-being and well-becoming of myself and others as fully as I can?’