response

The Inclusional Nature of Living Educational Theory: A Receptive Response to Whitehead

Alan Rayner, University of Bath

Selective and Natural Inclusional Modes of Generalisation

Jack Whitehead (*RI 105*) has recently warned against the danger of regarding 'educational' research and theory as a particular subsection, whose role is to enhance policy and practice, of more general 'education' research and theory.

I wish to agree with Whitehead by saying that, if anything, the relation between 'educational' and 'education' research should be viewed the other way around, i.e. with 'educational' being regarded as *more general* in both its philosophical approach and practical implications. I do this on the basis of a contrast between the kind of generalisation that follows from abstract rationality, which currently underpins most conventional education research, and that which flows from what Whitehead recognises as the more comprehensive 'natural inclusional' approach (see Rayner, 2006) of 'living' educational theory.

> "Let us teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish."

Rationalistic generalisation is anything but general in its applicability because it is based on the *removal* – not comprehensive inclusion – of natural variety by a process of selective elimination. Its intention is to simplify everything by reducing the diversity of unique local perspectives available from an all-round view of an arena to the conformity of a single consensus view or 'lowest common denominator'. An idealised objective 'norm', 'mean' or 'median', detached from the subjective perception of the observer is hence defined, all departures from which are regarded as random 'noise', 'deviation' or 'error'. But with this reduction, something, or, rather, *somewhere*, vital to evolutionary and educational understanding gets thrown out as 'bathwater', leaving the 'baby' of 'unique self-identity' stranded in naked isolation. What goes missing is the dynamic context of natural energy flow that inextricably includes and both influences and is influenced by the observer.

The objective exclusion of the observer from the observed is based on an unrealistically discontinuous logical premise that has held sway in rationalistic thinking for millennia – the notion that matter can be isolated from space and that space is an absence of presence or 'nothingness', uninvolved in natural creativity. The fallacy in this premise is obvious when it is appreciated that form without space would consist of a dimensionless, static, point-mass, and space without form would be featureless. Nature, so far as our senses and scientific enquiries have allowed us to detect, is neither of these.

Inclusional generalisation, by contrast, is based on the understanding of all natural form as flow-form – an energetic configuration of space in figure and figure in space, such that space, as a receptive (non-resistive) presence, is not assumed to be discontinuous (i.e. to stop at discrete boundary limits). This view is consistent with scientific observation and makes consistent sense (free from internal contradiction).

Whereas rationalistic generalisation is based on *abstraction* of matter from space, which has the effect of substituting the unnatural dynamics of discrete material bodies in a convenient but non-existent fixed reference frame with x, y, z and t co-ordinates, inclusional generalisation is based on *non-abstraction*. Inclusionally, all natural presence, including that which cannot be divided or defined within finite limits (i.e. the receptive 'nothingness' of 'space') is taken into consideration.

What has all this got to do with the difference between educational and education theories? Jack Whitehead (2008) speaks of living educational theories being generated to explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. This is very clearly *not* an approach that objectively distances teacher from student, or student from student, but includes both and all in a mutual and co-creative learning process without fear or favour. It corresponds with the evolutionary process that I have described as 'natural inclusion' (Rayner 2006). This is the co-creative, fluid dynamic transformation of all through all in receptive spatial context, which contrasts with Darwin's description of 'natural selection' – an oxymoron based on rationalistic generalisation – as 'the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life'. Current objective testing of standards of performance continues to be based all too obviously on the latter. What kind of difference would it make to move on to a more inclusional approach?

From cruelty to kindness: the living logic and language of inclusional generalisation and educational theory

The way we use language both expresses and reinforces the way we think. On the basis of rationalistic abstraction, Richard Dawkins (1989) has urged: "If you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals co-operate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish." Perhaps, however, the real need is to stop using rationalistic logic and language to teach ourselves, as Dawkins does, that we are 'competitive survival machines' and to recognise instead what Ted Lumley (2008) has described as 'the natural inclusion of nurture'.

The logic and language of inclusional generalisation differs *qualitatively* from the logic and language of rationalistic generalisation, in a way that can radically change human attitudes in the workplace, in the classroom and in our everyday relationships with one another and the natural world. Rationalistic logic and language defines every 'thing' as a discrete material figure – an 'object' or 'subject' – that can be isolated from the space it includes and is included in. This habit perpetuates the illusion that matter both excludes and occupies space, and resultant logic of opposition of one thing to another, which lies at the root of human conflict and cruelty.

Inclusional and educational language involves a move on from the harshly definitive 'language of illusion' to a kinder, more permissive and alive 'language of allusion' that identifies natural flow-forms in terms of their *dynamic relational qualities*, not as categorical quantities. The intention is to evoke, enliven and evolve the possibilities of diverse meanings, not unrealistically to narrow and nail them down for all time.

The living language of inclusionality and educational theory needs therefore to avoid convenient but potentially misleading word-bytes and metaphors that imply stasis, fixture, time-framing, objectification, sequential cause and effect, closure and prescription. Where possible, these are replaced by expressions that imply fluidity, openness, circulation, improvisation and the inextricability from one another of time, space, energy and matter. Such use of language that doesn't stamp its authority on the receiver is one example of the kind of 'inclusional educational practice' that stems from the principle of 'sense and sensibility', in place of rationalistic 'pride and prejudice'. But it can require some care and patience both to speak and to hear this way in a culture increasingly accustomed to the 'digital language' that gains an unnaturally strident clarity by losing its soulful undercurrent.

Inclusional logic and language could hence help us to develop a 'natural philosophy of kindness' (cf. Phillips and Taylor, 2009) that we can use in the general educational theory and practice that enhances our own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations.

References

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Rayner, A.D.M. (2006) *Natural Inclusion – How to Evolve Good Neighbourhood.* Retrieved 6 January 2009 from www.inclusional-research.org/naturalinclusion.php

For further exploration of natural inclusionality, please visit www.inclusionality.org

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