

**How do I improve my educational practice as I support educators who are developing inclusive and inclusional theory and practice of gifts and talents whilst responding to national developments?**

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**Abstract**

The English government, in implementing its ‘gifted and talented’ strategy, promotes theory and practice within a traditional conceptual framework formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that defines and categorises children, often with unintended life-long consequences for the individual.

Educators responding to government demands, while maintaining a commitment to practice rooted in inclusive educational values, experience considerable tension. One way of resolving these contradictions is to re-conceptualise gifted and talented educational theory and practice to connect to, and reflect, the egalitarian and emancipatory values of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The author is a senior educational psychologist with responsibility for developing and co-ordinating gifted and talented educational provision in a local authority. Employing a Living Theory methodology (Whitehead, 1989) she offers an analysis of some of her work relating to:

- Pupil’s voice in their own lives and learning
- Inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice
- Inclusional pedagogies
- Systemic responses to government strategies

She clarifies her educational values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and an educational responsibility towards others, which emerge through her practitioner-research. These ontological values form explanatory principles and inclusional living standards of judgment and contribute to a new epistemology of educational knowledge.

**Introduction**

What I want to test through this paper is my claim to be offering a form of educational theory that can be directly related to the process of improving practice, which makes a significant contribution to,

- The development and implementation of government policy on gifted and talented education by showing how the talents of each individual pupil and teacher can be expressed and developed in the production of gifts and can

- have a catalytic influence in the generation of educational knowledge for improving practice.
- The development of a new epistemology for educational knowledge by offering new inclusional living standards of judgment in gifted and talented education

To ask the question, ‘how do I improve my educational practice?’ makes the implicit assumptions that I both know what my educational practice is, can give a reasoned and reasonable account for what I do and the standards by which I evaluate it. I will therefore offer an analysis of some of my work to explicate and explain my educational values as explanatory principles and as inclusional living standards of judgement. I will particularly focus on what I am doing to improve my support to educators developing their practice with respect to,

- Pupil’s voice in their own lives and learning
- Inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice
- Inclusional pedagogies
- Systemic responses to government strategies

I hope that my paper communicates my understanding of my practice as an expression of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and an educational responsibility towards the educators, children and young people, in my local authority, both as ontological values as explanatory principles and as living standards of judgment.

## **Background**

I am a senior educational psychologist coordinating and developing inclusive ‘gifted and talented’ educational provision in a small English local authority. The authority is considered high attaining and rarely qualifies for government funding connected with under-attainment or social disadvantage. The work has grown out of a project I began while in the school psychology service in the mid 1990’s and has evolved through a multiplicity of inter-weaving cycles of action and reflection, alongside a growing national focus on ‘gifted and talented’ education, inclusion, personalisation of learning and learning beyond the given curriculum (extended schools).

I bring to my work a personal commitment to the inclusive and un-limiting sentiments expressed in my own local authority’s vision:

*‘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’ (Bath and North East Somerset Local Authority, 2005)*

I see my prime role is one of educator and the predominant purpose of an educator is to open the imaginations of individuals to the various possibilities of their living satisfying and productive lives, so they can make and act on informed decisions as to what they want to do to improve what they are doing.

I believe each individual is the only one who can determine whether their life is satisfying and productive, and they do so according to his or her own living values as

standards by which to make such judgements. When I refer to living values as standards of judgment I do so with reference to Laidlaw (1996) who developed the notion of ‘living’ standards of judgement in creating her living theory. ‘Living theory’ originated with Whitehead (1989); living theories being the explanations produced by individuals for their educational influence in their own learning and in the learning of others and social formations.

These are guiding principles I keep in focus as I seek to develop and improve my contribution to the realisation of my local authority’s vision and supporting schools and teachers to respond generatively to the national gifted and talented education strategy . Current details of some of my work can be found on <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/apex>. An overview of my work is provided by this picture of my work plan,



I will not go into detail here about the rationale underpinning my work; in broad terms my activities are guided by consideration for three types of learning opportunities

based on Renzulli's (1985) work; those which broaden experience, those with planned learning outcomes and those which offer an opportunity to behave as an expert pursuing an enquiry with a question of personal interest, in a disciplined manner, within a time frame and with a valued outcome, and developing a supportive culture, and appropriate forms of monitoring and evaluation.

There is now a national initiative to raise the profile and improve the quality of gifted and talented education in all schools. The predecessor to the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced at the end of 2006 that all schools would be expected to have a strategy and policy to improve gifted and talented education. In January 2007 I sent an email to schools summarising the latest governmental department position and in that context described the key points of my work, which would be driving the development of the program of support to schools and teachers responding to the expectations of the DCSF. I wrote:

*'My focus in coordinating APEX is to contribute to the development of an inclusive educational understanding of the creation of gifts and talents through supporting educators and schools to research answers to two questions:*

- How am I/how is my school, helping all pupils generate, reveal, develop and share their gifts and talents?*
- How am I/how is my school, improving my/its practice and contributing to an educational environment of quality.'*

The gift I wish to create and offer through this paper is a way of working educationally given the constraints and impositions of the 'system'. I am coming to understand 'working educationally' to include recognising the other, what it is they are wanting to do, the talents they are developing and the gifts they may wish to create and offer others, which will enhance their sense of well-being and that of others. I am also understanding 'working educationally' to include helping others recognise the values that give meaning and purpose to their lives and which enable them to describe the quality of the life they are living and wish to live as satisfying and productive. I seek to connect children and adults to opportunities to develop their recognition, valuing and learning transformationally about themselves. It also concerns bringing people into receptive~responsive contact with other people, ideas and contexts, which might help them develop their talents and enhance their gifts in creation and offering to others and recognising, valuing and engaging creatively with those of other people.

Following Hymer (2007) I see inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented education enabling all learners, irrespective of age, to develop their ability to understand and live lives they find satisfying and productive by focusing on enabling them to develop their talents and create and freely offer their valued gifts, which in the case of educators are educational gifts.

### **Inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented education**

It is possible to be inclusive but not with a sense of inclusionality. It is not possible to 'be' inclusional and not be inclusive. That is why I include both when I talk of my work. I will clarify the distinction I am making between 'inclusive' and 'inclusional'.

### *Inclusive gifted and talented education*

I work from the premise that all people hold within themselves the possibility of living a satisfying and productive life and the ability to make a valued and valuable contribution to their own life and the lives of others. I believe there is no predetermined limit as to what that contribution might be. I do not mean that I believe everyone is able to achieve anything they might choose. Rather I believe it is not possible to predict what they might achieve during their lifetime given opportunity and their determined inclination and commitment to realising their aspirations. This premise leads me to turn my attention from trying to make sense of the traditionally inspired gifted and talented national strategy, rooted in values and beliefs Galton and others of bygone eras (White, 2006), to supporting the research based development of inclusive educational theory and practice reflecting values of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

By 'inclusive' I mean an educational context where all are valued and there is an intention to enable all to benefit from, and contribute to, their own learning and that of others as fully as possible. That is not to say that everyone can participate in all educational spaces, irrespective of what they bring to the space. A simple example is an advanced diving class; it is a learning space open to those with the prerequisite skills, a desire to improve their diving, an intention to learn from the instructor and the others in the class and the ability to behave in a manner that will not endanger themselves or anyone else. Such a space is not open to those who can't swim, want personal tuition, or cannot or will not behave safely.

While White (2006) asserts that there are no solid grounds for innate differences in IQ or the traditional subject-based curriculum, which underpin the national gifted and talented strategy, and traces the roots of traditional notions of intelligence to Galton, whose theories reflect the values and beliefs of his 19th century world of empire and class, Freeman (2002) points out that the concepts are not universally accepted:

*“The major cultural dichotomy affecting educational provision for the gifted and talented is between the largely Eastern perception - ‘all children have gifted potential’ - and the largely Western one - ‘only some children have gifted potential’.* (p.9)

Sternberg (1998) in his observation about the different conception of intelligence and its relationship with wisdom also shows that a large part of the world already operates with a different way of thinking:

*‘Interestingly, the conception of wisdom proposed here is substantially closer to Chinese conceptions of intelligence than to many European and American conceptions of intelligence (Yang & Sternberg, 1997a, 1997b). Indeed, one of the words used in Chinese to characterize intelligence is the same as the word used to characterize wisdom.’* (p.360)

Professor Moira Laidlaw, Ningxia University, helped me with this further when she reflected on this quotation from Sternberg:

*'Yes, it's 智慧 with the first character meaning knowledge, but it's put with 慧 which has connotations of feeling: this shape at the bottom: 心 literally means heart. In Chinese there are words like 想 that mean think and feel. In fact sometimes, Chinese have huge difficulties differentiating,' Personal correspondence 11<sup>th</sup> August 2008*

While Eastern concepts of intelligence may be seen as expressing inclusive values they might also be seen to be expressing inclusional ways of being.

### *Inclusional gifted and talented education*

The Eastern logic and ways of being are similar to those that I have come to understand as inclusional. A living logic (Whitehead, 2004), while new to the Western Academy, is familiar to those coming from many Eastern traditions (Punia, 2004). I am here accepting Marcuse's (1964, p.105) idea of logic as 'a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational'.

When I talk of 'inclusional' I am working with Rayner's (2004) idea of inclusionality as a dynamic relational awareness of space and boundaries, which are connective, reflexive and co-creative.

I understand gifts and talents inclusionally, not as the defining categories of traditional theory and practice but as living educational concepts: dynamic, evolving, inter-relational and based on values. Ikeda (2004) expresses something of this kind in this extract,

*'There are many kinds of talent... Without doubt, you possess your special jewel, your own unique talent. In the same way, each of us has a mission that only we can fulfil. That mission will not be found somewhere far away, in doing something special or extraordinary. Even those people who seem to have led great lives have really only done what they felt they had to do in order to truly be themselves.*

*We realize our purpose in life by doing our very best where we are right at this moment, by thinking about what we can do to improve the lives of those right around us.'* (p. 4)

Enhancing the possibility of people recognising and giving expression to their unique contribution through crafting, valuing and offering their gifts is, I believe, at the heart of quality educational contexts. Biesta (2006) clarifies this further when he writes:

*'...the second conception of learning is educationally the more significant, if it is conceded that education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their "coming into the world" as unique, singular beings.'* (p. 27)

The possibility of living a satisfying and productive life seems to me to be influenced by a person finding the point of passion for what they can bring into the world that is

of worth, for themselves and others; there is an act of creation over time with more than just self in mind. The worth is something to do with the investment of something very personal; time, energy, resources, consideration, love, effort, a willingness to endure...

When I talk of gifts I think of something I have created, crafted, developed with another in mind; the investment of something of me and an attempt to go beyond the shell of the other person, to think about the person inside; what would be meaningful, of worth, to them that I would like to offer. This connection with the other person is woven into the bringing forth and manner of giving of that gift and in the anticipation of the valuing of the other... I feel pleasure when I offer a gift that is accepted and valued and disappointment when it is not. The magnitude of the feeling both negative and positive seems to be related to the effort I have put in, invested of myself, even though I would like to be able to offer without expectation; to offer freely. For me to offer freely I have a hope, but not an expectation, that my gift will be accepted and valued. The valuing of the other is something to do with what they do with it, the use they make of it emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially... What worth is a gift, no matter how extraordinary if not offered to, or valued by, anyone – not even myself?

I see my educational responsibility towards the other as enabling them to afford themselves a loving recognition, to develop respectful connectedness with others, develop their talents to create gifts they value and to offer them, without 'fear or veneer' (thanks to Belle Wallace for this phrase) and to be open to those of others.

### **Inclusional pedagogy**

I am taking pedagogy to refer to the art, science or theory of teaching, which concerns education and not simply schooling, a distinction that Mark Twain makes when he is reputed to have said, 'I have never let my schooling interfere with my education'.

Adler-Collins (2007), building on the idea of 'a pedagogy of the unique' first offered by Farren (2005), introduces the notion of 'inclusional pedagogy' in his doctoral thesis, 'My narrative of my life-long journey of learning as I pedagogise my curriculum of the reflective healing nurse within a Japanese University: Developing an inclusional pedagogy of the unique.' And I am working with his clarification when he writes, 'I am using my understanding of my pedagogy as a natural extension of my ontology and epistemology.' (p.299)

In creating and offering an educational gift freely as an educator I am working with an idea of an inclusional pedagogy, which Adler-Collins (2007) describes as creating a space for informed listening, which acknowledges the differences of the other as a celebration of diversity and the boundaries that are permeable and dynamic:

*'My space, as a space, needs to be both bounded and open, bounded in the sense that it can take on the charge/energy/association of being associated with study as opposed to being unbounded as in social activities, and open in the sense that students can develop a feeling of ownership and of belonging in the space.'* (p.293)

## **The catalytic influence of educational gifts**

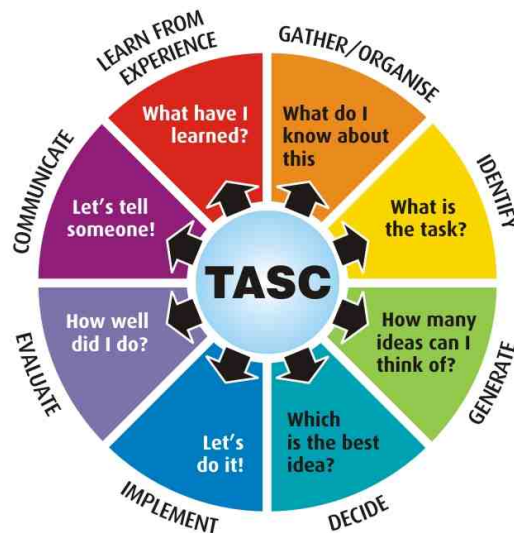
I see a 'gift' as one offered freely, not in order to gain furtherance in some form of the person offering the gift but offered with the hope that of making a contribution to the wellbeing or well-becoming of others. That is not to say there is not a sense of self affirmation in the creation and offering of something they value, or that a gift accepted and which proves to be valuable, as well as valued, is not affirming or may even bring with it personal gain, but rather that is not the prime intention. The idea of catalytic validity is useful in extending my thinking about gifts in general and educational gifts in particular.

*'Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process re-orientes, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it, a process Freire terms conscientization. ... The argument for catalytic validity lies not only within recognition of the reality-altering impact of the research process, but also in the desire to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination through research participation.'* (Lather, 1991, p. 68)

### *The catalytic influence of an educational gift from Belle Wallace*

Belle Wallace has developed TASC (Thinking in a Social Context) (Wallace, 2006) internationally over years from beginnings in South Africa. TASC is a form of enquiry and research that is content free and has been used by 6 and 60 year olds. I have invited Belle many times to run sessions in the local authority and many teachers are now working with TASC to enhance the educational quality of their classroom practice.

At the National Association of Able Children in Education (NACE) conference, October 2005, Belle Wallace we took time out to talk over what we had been doing. I had begun to get to know Jack Whitehead and his work on Living Theory (Whitehead, 1989) at the time and was feeling the connection of not only his work with Belle's but also his passion as an educator with educational values that chimed with hers and mine. The similarities between TASC and Whitehead's particular action research cycle can be seen from these two summaries,



- 1) What do I want to improve?
- 2) Why do I feel that something could be improved in what I am doing? (This is concerned with what really matters to me in terms of the values that give meaning and purpose in my life. These are the explanatory principles that explain why I do what I do.)
- 3) What could I do that might improve what I am doing? (Imagining possibilities and choosing one of them to act on in an action plan)
- 4) As I am acting what data will I collect to enable me to judge my educational influence in my professional context as I answer my question?
- 5) As I evaluate the educational influences of my actions in my own learning and the learning of others who might be willing to help me to strengthen the validity of my explanation of my learning about my influence with responses to questions such as:
  - i) Is my explanation as comprehensible as it could be?
  - ii) Could I improve the evidential basis of my claims to know what I am doing?
  - iii) Does my explanation include an awareness of historical and cultural influences in what I am doing and draw on the most advanced social theories of the day?
  - iv) Am I showing that I am committed to the values that I claim to be living by?
- 6) In the light of the evaluation it is often the case that the concerns, action plans and actions are modified and the process of improvement and Educational knowledge-creation continues.

<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/arplanner.htm>

Belle shared with me some of the photos she had taken to illustrate her work and was trying to decide which to use for the afternoon workshop. Many of the photos excited me but one in particular struck me because of the physical response of Belle as she talked to me about it. She communicated with her whole body as well as her words the passion she has for education and the values she holds. I was very mindful of Jack's phrases 'the flow of life affirming energy' and 'embodied knowledge' as I looked at Belle as we talked about the photo. I thought that if I was able to show the photo to Jack he would have a sense of what Belle was communicating to me and that it might contribute to his thinking at that time. Belle gave me the photo and later got permission for Jack to use it in a Keynote he was preparing. The catalytic influence in the generation of educational knowledge for improving practice is evidenced by Jack's response to the photo in his Keynote for the Act, Reflect, Revise III Conference, Brantford Ontario, 2005:

*'Such affirmations and visual narratives can be understood in a conversation between myself and Marie Huxtable. Marie is a psychologist working on educational projects in the Bath and North East Somerset local authority, the equivalent of your School Board. The affirmations of inclusionality felt and understood by Marie Huxtable and me are focused on our responses to the expressions in the eyes, face, body and hands of the pupil below as she shows what she has been working on, to the photographer Belle Wallace. Belle Wallace is currently President of the National Association for Able Children in Education (in the UK) and you can access her biography at [http://www.nace.co.uk/home.htm?tasc\\_biography.htm~mainFrame](http://www.nace.co.uk/home.htm?tasc_biography.htm~mainFrame) We both felt a flow of life-affirming energy in our responses to the image and with each other. We recognised this flow of energy between us and affirm that it carries our hope for the future of humanity and our own. For us, the way the pupil shows Belle what she had produced carries two affirmations. There is the affirmation from the pupil that what has been produced is a source of pleasure and satisfaction. There is the affirmation from Belle and ourselves that we are seeking to enable ourselves and others to feel this quality of pleasure and satisfaction in what we and others are producing. I am associating such affirmations with what I mean by living a productive life in education.'* 11<sup>th</sup> Aug 2008 retrieved from <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/monday/arrkey05dr1.htm>

Jack has added information about TASC to his website, <http://www.actionresearch.net>

*'There are many different approaches to the creation of living educational theories using action reflection cycles. One that I particularly like because of its attractive visual presentation includes the Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) wheel generated by Belle Wallace.'*

There is a flow of influence as Belle has brought Jack Whitehead's work on values and Living Theory into the journal she edits, 'Gifted and Talented Education International', and through that into a space where the relevance of his work was hitherto unrecognized.



This is the photo taken by Belle. This child's gift is not an abstraction; it is the crafting of the artifact, the child's intention, the connection between herself and Belle that you can see in her eyes, her smile, the way she is, and in the pleasure flowing between the child and Belle at that moment when the gift is first offered, accepted and valued.

It feels to me there is a space between Belle and the child, where both are attending carefully to the learners' voice,

which at that moment, the others in the class are not invited into. I think that an attempt to participate would have been an intrusion which would have been resisted or resented, whereas if someone quietly moved alongside they would have shared the moment of pleasure and in so doing added to the pleasure of Belle and the girl and their own. Their contribution would have been valued as they offered a respectful, connection. I will return to what I mean by '*respectful* connection' later. I am using this as an example of many moments I have had in a classroom and other educational contexts. I do not intend to project my own feelings and interpretation onto Belle and the child but rather to show you how I accept and value the educational gift that Belle offered me and the catalytic influence it has had in the development of my inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice.

Gifts for me have something to do with offering a contribution to the wellbeing and well-becoming of others within which is an expression of the unique self, which carries a pleasure of recognition and connection. It feels like something that is inherent in being human. One of the first things we do in life is to enjoy the pleasure of wanting to give something that is received with pleasure. I have been invited to play the 'ta (thank-you)' game' so often with toddlers, as you must have been; they pass you something which you receive with overt delight and you are expected to offer it back with pleasure. Or the 'peep o' game where you hide your eyes and see their delight when you surprise one another with eye contact; the gift is in the moment, co-created in the receptive, responsive (thank you Alan Rayner) flow of connection between you both. In some ways it is not personal, there is no recognition of the individual uniqueness of the other, it is an expression of a human desire to make contact, to reach out and touch and be touched by, emotionally, physically, intellectually... the other as a fellow human being. In that I see a respectful connectedness which requires a mutual trust that boundaries and spaces will not be violated.

#### *The catalytic influence of an educational gift from Joy Mounter*

I have worked with Joy for many years since I introduced TASC to a cluster of schools. Subsequently Joy began working with Jack Whitehead in a Masters group, which I had asked him to set up. She brought this photograph into her educational enquiry, which she titled, '*How can I live my personal theory of education in the classroom to promote self reflection as a learner?*' She wrote,

*I want children to be enthusiastic learners, surprised by what they can achieve and have the language and self confidence to challenge their own thinking and learning. We have begun that journey as a class together.*

*'This picture for me holds so much emotion and joy. It describes the journey to emotional learning and celebration in my classroom. The moment when two children shared their joy of learning and success at solving a problem with each other spontaneously.*

*For me this is the assignment, 'the whole world in a grain of sand', a single moment.'*(Mounter, 2006).



In this photograph, taken by Joy Mounter in her class, the boy has just learnt something he has been struggling with. The moment is shared and appreciated by the girl who expresses her delight with a hug. In this moment I see the pleasure of loving recognition and respectful connectedness between the children, the children and Joy. I also see this between these two children and Joy as part of the educational community she

has created in the classroom. It is not just the physical boundaries that are relaxed but the emotional ones and I can feel the space charged with the emotional energy of pleasure given expression. Joy does not intrude but is included with the history of her relationship with the children. The boy in the background, smiling at the two, is also not intruding into the space created between the children in the fore-ground but is included in the wider space, with spaces and boundaries neither fixed or discrete. This moment is evidence of the quality of an inclusional gifted and talented educational space that Joy has created, and is, as she put it herself, 'the whole world in a grain of sand'.

In creating and researching to improve an inclusional educational space where all children explore and develop their talents and have the opportunity to learn what it is to create, value, offer and accept gifts in the neighborhood of the classroom and school, Joy is contributing to developing inclusional pedagogies and inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice.

The catalytic influence in the generation of educational knowledge in improving practice is evidenced by the responses to the masters accounts that Joy has offered as educational gifts on Jack Whitehead's website, <http://www.actionresearch.net>. The influence of Joy's educational gift can be heard on the video of Whitehead's keynote presentation for the International Conference of Teacher Research on Combining Voices in Teacher Research, New York, 28 March 2008; '*Combining Voices In Living Educational Theories That Are Freely Given In Teacher Research.*' On the video you can here the responses of the audience to the video of the children creating their own theory of their own learning (Mounter, 2006). In those responses the

children's voices are heard when they had asked Joy, 'how do we get adults to listen to us?' Further evidence is provided by the invitation Joy received from a commissioning editor of a Canadian journal to write an article as he had seen her accounts on Whitehead's website.

### **Supporting educators responding to the government gifted and talented education strategy**

An example of work that could fit under all organizing considerations of my work is the Masters group at the University of Bath, tutored by Jack Whitehead, which he restarted in response to my request. The units offered through the programme were extended specifically to support teachers wishing to develop gifted and talented educational theory and practice which expressed their values as an authentic and meaningful response to the national gifted and talented education strategy.

The aims of the additional unit are to critically analyse and evaluate:

- different perspectives on the concepts of gifts and talents in educational contexts
- school and central and local government policies on gifted and talented education and inter-related policies and strategies such as personalisation of learning, inclusion and Every Child Matters.
- the validity of an inclusive and inclusional approach to gifted and talented education
- the basis on which valid judgments on the educational influence on pupils developing gifts and talents can be made
- the educational influences of teachers with responsibility for gifted and talented education on the development other teachers and on the learning of their pupils
- an attempt to contribute to the knowledge base of effective practice in the field through action research..

Further details of the unit can be accessed from

<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/G&TinEd12&9.htm>

The accounts of the first two teachers, Ros Hurford and Vicky Tucker, have now been successfully submitted for accreditation by the University of Bath and were awarded merits. These accounts can be retrieved from

<http://www.actionresearch.net/mastermod.shtml> Evidence of the educational influence that I want to have when I wrote, 'the predominant purpose of an educator is to open the imaginations of individuals to the various possibilities of their living satisfying and productive lives, so they can make informed decisions as to what they want to do to improve what they are doing', can be found within these accounts.

For instance, I see this expressed in the title of Ros Hurford's account 'How does using philosophy and creative thinking enable me to recognise and develop inclusive gifts and talents in my pupils?' and the first few lines of her introduction;

*'In this assignment it is my intention to show how using philosophy and creative thinking with junior school children has enabled me to identify gifts and talents*

*that I might otherwise have been unaware of; the impact this has had on the children concerned in terms of their own awareness of themselves as learners, and to question where this fits into current policies about gifted and talented education.'*

And in Vicky Tucker's title, 'A response as to how my involvement with the Gifted and Talented programme initiated by Bath and North East Somerset has made me re-assess my living educational values and beliefs, thus influencing my delivery and provision for the SEBD students with whom I work' and these extracts from her introduction

*'The question I have to ask myself is how anything I have learned from my experiences working with Gifted and Talented students can possibly relate to my work with these 14 to 16 year old SEBD students. In this enquiry I am seeking to show a valid representation of my educational influence in the development of my students' gifts and talents as well as my own.'*

And conclusion

*'Although this particular account has concluded the journey for knowledge and educational influence continues and will continue throughout my life.*

*The story will continue!'*

### **Inclusional Living Standards of Judgment in Gifted and Talented Education: Loving Recognition; Respectful Connectedness and Educational Responsibility**

Over the years I have sought to develop invitational, inclusive and inclusional educational spaces, relationships and conversations. My narrative, a description that holds my explanation, of an event on 16th July 2008, is a practical realisation of my educational practice, which offers an example of a generative response to government strategies. The intent behind developing a generative response (Huxtable, 2008) is to use the energy government expectations provide to generate activity, which is hopeful and productive in terms of giving living expression to educational values through practice.

In the context of my work plan I saw the day as offering a learning opportunity that contributed to the programme of support to teachers with responsibility to lead the development of their school's response to the DCSF gifted and talented strategy, broaden the experience of children, young people and educators of a living theory approach to action research, enhance the skills and understandings which are expressions of a loving recognition and respectful connectedness and contribute to a sense of being in a supportive educational culture where people are showing an educational responsibility towards others.

The learning opportunity on 16th July 2008 was titled, 'Up Close and Personal Learning About What Matters to me: A Collaborative, Creative, Enquiry Day For children, young people and educators able and willing to work collaboratively for a day'.

The purpose of the day was describe on the flier with the intention of attracting those people who would enjoy the day and find the opportunities it offered pleasurable and educationally productive; ‘We will focus on your learning and developing and improving your enquiry plan. During the afternoon, we will introduce the use of video, multi media, stories, blogging, and other forms of data for improving educational judgments. We will leave the day having improved our learning by working to develop our own enquiries and helping other people to develop theirs. Our day together will focus on sharing what really matters to each of us, how we might improve our own learning and contribute to the learning of each other. We will be improving our learning through an action research approach similar to TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context).’

The details of the person leading the day were written, to attract teachers in local schools in the context of the groundwork developed through other aspects of my work, such as the Master’s group; ‘Jack Whitehead (University of Bath) will be facilitating the day. He is well known for his books with Jean McNiff on action research. Internationally people in public services and business are using his innovative, creative approach to ask and research their answers to questions of the form, ‘how can I improve what I am doing?’ Details of his work on <http://www.actionresearch.net>.’

The flier was drafted and redrafted many times with the help of Jack, colleagues from the school improvement and inclusion teams and administration support. Each ‘group’ of people has a different language and as I am not fluently ‘multi-lingual’, some would say I am not a fluent mono-linguist either, I try to make up for my limitations by working as closely as possible with those who have the language which communicates to different groups of educators.

The setting was chosen with care. I wanted somewhere that felt comfortable but would offer participants an experience of participating in generative conversations and learning in an attractive and prestigious space where they felt valued. I never know how many I will get to an event and wanted somewhere that could hold potentially large numbers but within the constraints of a very limited budget. As I work for Bath and North East Somerset I was able to use the Banqueting Room in the Guildhall in Bath, which I felt was attractive, prestigious and communicated a valuing of participants, as you can see in this photograph taken on the day.



I believe people need to feel valued in their learning and part of that is communicated by the quality of the space and refreshments; in my culture, like many, inviting someone in to your home usually includes an appreciative ritual involving food and drink. So refreshments were arranged with that in mind.

Invitations, by way of fliers, were sent out via email, school post, meetings, the masters groups and personally with the result that 80 adults, children and young people participated on the day. Others told me they would have like to join us but little things like a trip to France got in the way.

The participants included children from KS1 and KS2 and young people from KS3 and KS4, teachers, assistants and head-teachers, local authority staff such as advisers, consultant, a specialist language teacher, senior inclusion officer, school psychologist, deputy director of children's services and some from other education establishments and organisations such as a college and NACE.

Creating opportunities for people to become familiar with, and develop the confidence to educationally be in such spaces have been consistent 'themes' to my work. Bringing people into educational spaces, relationships and conversations where each can feel appreciated and valued as a contributor as well as a 'beneficiary' have also been themes. One of the reasons I was excited by 16<sup>th</sup> July was that in the Banqueting Room it felt like a nodal point. Someone once said that it felt to them as though I created a pallet of opportunities. On that day it felt as though many of the 'pools of colour' from that pallet flowed together and had a physical representation through the participants.

Most of the participants on 16<sup>th</sup> July had been involved in one way or another with APEX at some time. For instance many of the children and young people had taken part in the APEX Saturday workshops, summer holiday modules, collaborative enquiries or the leading programme. Many of the adults are working on the Masters programme with Jack Whitehead or the weekly improving practice conversation with him at the local authority offices, participate in the leading programme or the collaborative enquiries, contribute to the APEX workshops and modules, have engaged in a course or conference I have organised or become acquainted with work I have introduced such as TASC, Philosophy for Children (P4C), Pupils Attitude to Self and School (P.A.S.S., an online questionnaire). Although I was not acquainted with everyone who came to 16<sup>th</sup> July I felt a personal connection with each person.

The day began gently with refreshments and people settling with a wide variety of unfamiliar people into an unfamiliar and, potentially daunting, space. I knew that many of the adults present (including myself) and the children and young people, would feel anxious and uncomfortable but I wanted to offer an opportunity for participants to learn to hold those feelings as creative tensions. Giving careful attention to, what is generally described as, hospitality is more important than simply seeing to people's basic needs. It is paying careful attention to participants as integral to a loving recognition of each of them as individual people.

I started by going round with a microphone and inviting people to say who they were or where they were from. I wanted to enable participants to not only know who else was there but to hear their own voice and to begin to give them some shared

ownership of the day and the space. It is interesting that what I didn't do was actually to introduce the key speaker and leader of the day properly. With hindsight I can give this reason, or rationalisation. I had wanted to stress Whitehead's international reputation on the flier as it is often the standing of the speaker that communicates the value and importance of the 'event' and attracts educators. On the day, that was communicated more vividly, especially to the children and young people to whom reputations mean little, by being in the Banqueting Room, and it was Jack I wanted adults and children to feel comfortable with and connect with, not to feel distanced by his reputation.

In moving through the space with an awareness of dynamic and flowing boundaries and an intention to invite people to begin to make respectful connections I am starting to describe something of inclusive practice and *inclusional* practice. The video clip, where time is compressed from hours to seconds, communicates something of the dynamic nature of the space and boundaries experienced in the Banqueting Room that day.

In sharing something of his passion and values and his experiences of the Banqueting Room, both as a space associated for him with feelings of elation when he was elected a councillor and despair when he lost his seat, Jack offered a loving recognition of himself as an invitation to others to do the same. He then invited participants to talk and listen to a partner about what really matters to them, what they each really cared about.

He communicates very clearly in words, tone, and his movements that this is an opportunity to open boundaries so people might begin to receive and express a loving recognition and respectful connectedness... you can hear and see him communicate this very clearly, in this clip, 'talk about what you feel matters to you... the other person just listening to you... listen very attentively as the other person is speaking just to see if you can actually feel some of the other things the other person cares about because a lot of today is about your values and what makes your life meaningful and what gives it purpose.'

The emails I received shortly after give some indication of whether the day did what it was intended to do. I present them as written (except to change names to anonymise them) as, for me, the informal nature of them reflects the warm personal connections made.

Extract from email 1 from primary school teacher 16<sup>th</sup> July 08

Just a quick email to thank you both for today. It really was a privilege to spend time listening to children from different schools in our small groups and as a whole. The children were so thoughtful and their messages so clear. There was something very moving about it and I think you've started something now!

We all particularly enjoyed the morning sessions and on the walk back to school Sabrina said that she would have liked to do "some posters or something creative" this afternoon to help them with their thinking about what they want to improve at school, so I thought I would pass that feedback on to you both.

Some of the children in our group wrote down questions they would like to follow up. These were:

- How can I use the digi blues (children's video cameras) more to improve my learning? Matthew Yr 5
- How can I bring competition back into sport at school? Natalie Yr 5
- How can I help myself to join my handwriting before I go to the Juniors? Catherine Yr 2

Extract from email 2 from primary head teacher 17<sup>th</sup> July

'2 of our girls did a power point presentation to the FULL GOVERNING BODY of our school starting with.....WE are passionate about school dinners! STUNNING, AMAZING,SIMPLY INSPIRING! Governors were very surprised but liked the fact that the girls did it! It will be followed through in Sept!!!!!!  
... The presentation the children did was...wait for it... the VERY NEXT DAY on the Thursday! That is how inspired they were!!!!'

Extract from email 3, secondary school teacher, 17<sup>th</sup> July

Hi

Many thanx for your support and the students got a lot out of this. They came up with some great ideas and I think they felt a bit more empowered to move forward and take the risk of trying to make a change. They all agreed that they got stuck with how to implement their ideas. I have spoken to the head and he loves the ideas the boys came up with. He would like to offer them a forum so they can have a dialogue with the staff on how to improve lessons for the academically able. The 'I question' they want to use is 'what can I do to help improve the teaching/delivery of lessons'. They were under no doubt that disruptive behaviour came from "boring" lessons. However they did not feel they had the power or the skills to tell the teachers how to teach/deliver their lesson.

It may be worth an approach from the outside and for someone to come in and act as a facilitator for the form - a bit like student council -but with a focus on teaching and learning. The difficulty is pulling staff in that do not want to change (these are the ones that really need to hear it), but as you suggested, start small with the willing and the others will smell the success and energy and want to join in.

I will email my essay as it stands when the holidays start. I need to get together all my evidence and knuckle down so it makes sense.

A massive thanx for your continued faith in me. I will get this assignment done - even if it is never counted as part of the Masters. I have learnt a lot over the last few years and I owe it to a few people to tell the story and get it communicated. The day was very helpful to me as it helped me take a step forward and the whole cycle part of the action research is getting even clearer. I know where I am going, just need the time and space to get there.

I hope you can feel the energy, enthusiasm and productive action the day generated through the first two emails. The last email I believe shows some of what I mean by 'an educational responsibility towards the other'. The teacher is expressing her educational responsibility towards her pupils in helping them contribute to improving their own learning, that of others in school and to influence the school organisationally by taking what they want to do to the head-teacher in a way that he has been able to respond to generatively. She has shown her educational responsibility towards herself where she asserts her intention to getting her assignment done in a way that is of value to herself and which pleases her. Finally she shows a recognition, and appreciation, of the educational responsibility Jack Whitehead, her course tutor, and I have shown towards her, by enabling her to give a lived expression to what it is she wants to do, which will improve her educational practice.

## **Conclusion**

I have tried to clarify what I mean by developing inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory and practice, described the educational gifts of educators, how I seek to enhance their catalytic validity, and how I am supporting educators developing their talents to create, value and offer their educational gifts whilst responding to the national gifted and talented education strategy.

I hope that my paper communicates my understanding of my practice as an expression of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and my educational responsibility towards the educators, children and young people, in my authority, both as ontological values as explanatory principles and as living standards of judgment.

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