Emotional issues in education: reframing learning theory through participatory action research or The function of feelings in learning: a paradigm shift?

Jennifer Anne Hawkins
PhD by research, Manchester Metropolitan University


United Kingdom government initiatives (e.g. Every Child Matters - Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2006) state that the emotional wellbeing of children strongly influences their learning at school. In 2000 as a former secondary main and special needs teacher living in the U.K., I set out to improve my understanding of how feelings affected learning. I looked for ways to help fill a gap in knowledge due to a lack of participatory-based research about ‘emotional intelligence’ in relation to learning theory. I ended up by suggesting my own theory about the function of feelings in learning

Introduction

In action researching, I used my experience as an English and Art teacher. I found out about my own problems and strengths as well as supporting other people. I discussed the function and effects of feelings in learning and eventually recommended a revision of official educational policy and professional theory. I sourced my argument by listening to and working with participants over a period of seven years. I used a variety of qualitative data, evaluating and demonstrating significant strategies for teaching and learning. My research investigated some problems in motivating learners in education. It recorded teenage school refusers’ and primary pupils’ feelings about learning. It also recorded the feelings of teachers about teaching. I eventually came to the conclusion that feelings are an intrinsic means of logical thought. I also concluded that more serious educational time should be given to their consideration e.g. in gaining pupil and teacher feedback and in providing suitable contexts for their use in learning. I recorded learners’ feelings in each of the three phases by direct feedback and observation. I helped school refusers re-engage in education (phase 1), I reflected on my own learning and mentored other teachers (phase 2) and I undertook an educational evaluation of a creative learning project for primary pupils (phase 3). Throughout these phases I recorded emotional responses during the process of learning. My thesis discusses how learning theories relate to the narratives and findings of these three phases of data collection through a comprehensive literature review. Unfortunately there is only room for a brief outline of the research and its conclusions in this initial paper. The table following gives a diagram of the processes of data collection, which evidenced my research.

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS: What effects do feelings have on learning? Do feelings have a function in cognition?

Phase 1 - tutoring 12 school refusers aged 15 –16
Question: "Emotional blocks: what do they tell us about the learning process?" (given that emotional blocks are defined as barriers to learning, which are 'apparently' inexplicable.)
Methods: Narrative - ethnography- participatory action research - mentoring skills - grounded theory - psycho-social interpretation
Data: Speech transcription, work records with written feeling responses, teaching notes, observations, letters and forms from and reports to the Local Education Authority, reflective summaries, critical points lists and models
Analysis: thematic

Phase 2a - the researcher’s learning process
Question: “How do feelings affect my learning and teaching?”
Data: Autobiography from the perspective of a child, observational autobiography from the perspective of an adult, autobiographical notes and memories, biography and psychological analysis of significant others, reviews and observations on literature, lists of significant and critical points, symbolic modelling using pictorial symbols, researchers reflexive, retrospective, summarised diary
Analysis: thematic

Phase 2b - mentoring 8 teachers aged 25 – 55
Question: “How do feelings affect other teachers’ learning and teaching?”
Methods: Narrative - participatory action research - mentoring skills - symbolic models using pictorial symbols
Data: mentoring records, symbolic models, autobiographical writing, participant and researcher summaries, on the spot speech transcription
Analysis: thematic

Phase 3 - evaluating an arts festival project with 6 city primary schools
Question: How can creative learning (given that it involves feelings) evidence and illustrate types of positive contexts, which promote cognition?
Methods: narrative - ethnographic- participatory action research - communities of practice - mentoring skills - project modelling
Data: questionnaires, interview notes, project models, evaluation summaries by researcher and participants, observational notes and summaries
Analysis: thematic in relation to conducive learning contexts, learning through feelings.

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
My questions were formed and reformed during various action cycles of research. In phase 1, I set out to discover reasons why local teenagers were disaffected with education. This has become a major problem in British education, which in spite of many initiatives has not been sufficiently understood or remedied. I home tutored 12 school-refusers aged 15-16. (2000-04). My education authority had chosen these twelve young people for me to tutor, because they refused to go to school during their final two years of compulsory education. None of the students were excluded for bad behaviour and all of them appeared to have ability. Other avenues of help had failed to get them back to full time attendance at school. I had the following aims in undertaking the work. These developed from 'intuition' into some form of concrete expression during the researching and teaching process. I recorded pupils comments and points of view and made observations. I found serious environmental problems e.g. parents who had suffered in childhood and had problems in parenting; parents with mental illness; unstable parental relationships/divorce; bullying; illness; traumatic events: bereavement, sexual abuse, separation from siblings, attempted suicide and schools who were disinterested.

Phase 2a involved reflecting upon my own emotional blocks to learning undertaken through various auto-ethnographic writings. The data produced in phase 2a consisted of various autobiographical writings produced over the seven-year period, which contributed my own personal and professional learning experiences (2000-07). Redrafting my previously written summaries of my learning allowed me to make my own teacher and learner contributions. In using auto-ethnography I subjected myself to a similar, though more in depth scrutiny than I gave my participants. My own learning problems stemmed (amongst other things) from having had elderly inadequate parents, a mother with a personality disorder, and low self-esteem due to bullying at school and as an adult having had a partner who committed suicide. This process can be viewed as a process of phenomenological reduction, which underpins the research (Bruzina 2004). In phase 2b I engaged 8 other teachers’ interest in talking about the role of their own and pupils' feelings in teaching and learning. This led us to share experiences and contribute data for discussion. Teachers revealed childhood influences on their career choice and current and past difficulties and anger with educational management in carrying out their work. This sometimes led to resignation from teaching.

In phase 3, I was contracted to evaluate a primary arts festival in a large commercial theatre, government funded to promote creative work in six city primary schools (2006). I was asked to educationally evaluate the work in fulfilling the organisers’ aims. I collected data from teachers, artists and pupils working with feelings creatively in cross-curricula projects through the arts. This work provided data for a logical progression of my previous research into the function of feelings in learning, and gave me the opportunity to research more positive aspects of feelings than emotional difficulties. I found it possible to gain evaluation data by accessing pupils', creative educator's and teachers' feelings about the work. I tried a 'narrative network' approach to collecting educational data recording opinions. I found this a useful method of educational evaluation. The resulting report provided me with an opportunity to evidence the usefulness of working with feelings in motivational contexts as recommended in educational literature (Gilbert 2002). I have used this data to evidence conducive and motivational learning contexts, learning strategies and

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
competences or intelligences involving feelings (referring to educational literature). This analysis also evidences the motivational impact of cross-curricular learning methods.

**A new theoretical perspective**

There are indications in the current educational climate that the time is ripe for a "new conception of intelligence in education" as called for by Robinson (2006). My research data and analysis triggered a new theoretical understanding about the function of feelings in learning. I have come to the conclusion that there should be a paradigm shift in the way we perceive learning and cognition processes. The central concept in this change of perception is that *feelings are not only end products but a means of logical thought.* Throughout my research I found nothing to contradict this idea and much to support it. The acceptance of feelings as an intrinsic and logical means of learning changed my attitude to both learning and teaching in fundamental ways. I was able accept other people's feelings as a valid and vital part of their thinking process. As a result, my learning, teaching and educational evaluation skills improved (as evidenced by my data and analysis). Historically there are some parallels with other such shifts in perception. Darwin's theory of evolution is a possible example (1859 ed. Burrow 1968). This theory was in some senses also a statement of the obvious, could not be proved in every totally sequential detail and went against received wisdom. Darwin proved his theory by observation and by default i.e. he found nothing to disprove it. It was a 'practical' theory, however, which was supported by subsequent research and at the time was a great benefit to the progression of knowledge by changing fundamental attitudes.

As science advances, Greenfield (2007) warns the teaching profession, parents, and society at large to be aware of potential problems and possibilities and to engage in an open discussion of the issues in education. This is a debate, in which it seems reasonable to include young people, since they represent the future of humanity. Learners need to learn to reflect and explore using human values and feelings, being aware of and reflecting on possible subconscious influences and multi-modal parallel frames of reference. This involves respecting and understanding other people's points of view, considering critically and connecting parallel strings of logic. In this way it is more likely balanced decisions will be made and mistaken ones corrected or at least alleviated. Environments may to some extent be created and manipulated to students’ likely educational advantage or disadvantage to promote this. These will (as they have always done) in any case, to some extent evolve haphazardly over time through incidental pressures e.g. new technology, economics and politics. Greenfield states that creativity, imagination and individuality are our hope for the future (2007). I would like to add 'individual responsibility' to the list. In this, learning reflection, acceptance of human flaws and limitations, informed consideration and intelligent management of feelings is essential. Otherwise in the future even more so than in the past, hasty decisions where new technology is concerned, may result in drastic and irreversible consequences for society.

Sylwester explores possible teaching viewpoints (Sylwester 2003 p. 97). He wonders if it is always wise to 'sugar-coat' learning and thinks that sometimes we should 'simply level with students that some culturally important cognitive capabilities require conscious effort and practice to develop? Conversely, classroom

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
misbehaviour tends to emerge out of factually driven memorising assignments that require solitary sustained effort and precision." This confusion of teaching stances illustrates well the tendency of some in the teaching profession to make generalisations, trying to explain and excuse current agendas. Instead, I believe we should be promoting 'meaningful' learning by looking at specific pupil feedback, subject content, context and materials at the 'point of delivery.' My research demonstrates that staff and pupil feelings constitute meaningful feedback, which requires respectful attention if learning is to proceed. It is evident that this feedback is readily available and accessible only requiring positive attention and intelligent use.

Fortunately there are some hopeful signs that this may be starting to be appreciated by those in a position to affect change. Waters, the relatively new director of the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency has as his aim "to develop a modern, world-class curriculum that will inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for the future" (Waters 2007). He understands this to mean enabling teachers to present the curriculum in ways, which are meaningful to pupils. With this view in mind he says that "people in schools need to set understandings of their children alongside the learning they should meet to create learning that is irresistible." I find that my research fits in with and supports his Big Curriculum and National Curriculum ideas. This curriculum aims to incorporate subject knowledge within a 'whole world' view that acknowledges learner choice, pupil perspectives and utilises teachers' professional skills in engaging pupils' interest. This makes sense because cohorts of pupils, when they attain adulthood have a diverse range of existing and future career prospects and occupations to embark on. These include writing, factual, fictional and creative; art of all kinds from product design to fine arts and crafts; music, composing and performing from pop music to classical; inventing through all the branches of engineering, mathematics, science and medicine. Then there are the service sectors of communications, media, information technology, teaching, nursing, commercial and banking services, medicine, and economics, marketing and selling. All of them use subjective intelligence to some extent, to logical and material effect, in communicating with others within diverse environments. They all involve feelings in learning on some level and motivation is key in all of them.

Similarly Waters says that the idea, which has been assumed of late, that there are three main categories of pupil, is incredibly simplistic e.g. gifted and talented, ordinary and special needs. He lists amongst others refugee, asylum seeker, disabled, traveller, carer, pregnant, self-harmer, twin, only child, one parent, two parents. He points out that pupils can be in several of these categories simultaneously. He recommends building on learning beyond school and his approach includes all learners. This seems to me a much more pragmatic and 'real world' approach to education. In some ways the new curriculum plan provides a template within which learners, including teachers can engage in action research in diverse ways, provided of course that practical, organisational and financial support is given.

My learning and teaching journey

This thesis has consisted of a personal search for meaning as I have shifted my frames of reference within my own action research. There have been several parallel lines of enquiry with connections between them e.g. my role as a learner and my role as a teacher, my participants sharing of their own thoughts. There have also been

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
consecutive areas of enquiry following a 'logical' progression e.g. the three phases of the research. There has been a reiterative current of ideas flowing around throughout, which has been informed by methodological, theoretical resources and my own experience. All of this indicates that I (and my participants also to some extent) have been involved in a process of phenomenological reduction (Bruzina 2004). Through this process my mind has developed some 'fresh' patterns of thought not previously developed within it. I have also actually used my own learning experience to inform my work.

I started out wondering about motivations to learn, but my own 'surprisingly' strong interest and motivation to research this subject only became understandable to me, through interactive enquiry. In other words I went out, found participants and searched for and reflected on meaning in my own way. In the process my mind has made some transformations to those meanings, but I don't believe it is itself transformed to any great degree. I cannot hold my entire thesis in my head, after all. It seems more likely that processing (and conceptual) skills around this subject area have been improved. I have come to believe it is processing skills in action, which need to be worked on in learning. Factual knowledge though necessary to some extent is less important. It is only useful as material with which to make meaning. These conclusions and the view that feelings have a function in learning are supported by the individual learning events reported through the rest of the participant data. My own and my participants' sensations and feelings interacting with established schemas and current environments profoundly affected our learning. They hindered, they enabled and they evidenced our learning.

Development of the research questions

I started out with the question: "Emotional blocks: what do they tell us about the learning process?" (Given that emotional blocks are defined as barriers to learning, which are 'apparently' inexplicable.) My participants in phase 1 were 12 school refusers. I thought it would be a useful thing to use my skills to 'help' them. However, there were two other fundamental questions, which were intriguing me and rose to the forefront of my mind during my action research. These were: "What effects do feelings have on learning?" and "Do feelings have a function in cognition?" In phase 2 it became a logical development to ask myself (as well as positioning myself as the researcher) “How do feelings affect my learning and teaching?” and then to look at “How do feelings affect other teachers’ learning and teaching?” I decided then to investigate 'positive' aspects of feelings in learning through artistic projects with primary school children. In phase 3 the question was only fully framed after I had collected the data. "How can creative learning (given it involves feelings) evidence and illustrate types of 'feeling interactive' contexts, which promote cognition?" Towards the end of my research I found that I had enough evidence and confidence to ask the next logical questions "What function might feelings have in learning?" "Can learning theory be reframed to incorporate feelings?" However, although I believe I have made progress, I can only claim to have made a start on answering these questions.

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
Limitations of the research

My research was very much governed by pragmatic considerations. It depended on the lucky circumstance that I was qualified, had experience and was financially independent. I was also interested in particular areas of teaching which were suitable for the purpose e.g. special needs, English language and the arts. Possible limitations were often counterbalanced by possible advantages. My participants have been relatively small in number, but this has allowed more in depth reflection on individual learning situations and events. Participants were in many respects randomly chosen by availability, but this prevented me from anticipating and planning for specific data, thus contributing to validity. My contact with participants over time has been limited and I have not always been able to find out about subsequent learning development. However, this ad hoc contact is in accord with and arises from real teaching situations.

The research will have been affected in some ways by my own personal limitations such as different attitudes and deficiencies, but also skills and strengths e.g. my ignorance and lack of confidence at certain points and my artistic abilities and empathy with fellow learners. The research very much depended on participants' individual behaviours, personalities, situations and perceptions and on my own, but again these could be seen as strengths. Methods and formats of data collection may sometimes have been restrictive in some regard, but some participants were able to communicate much that was spontaneous and unexpected. All of us have moved on and changed during and since the data was collected, but the accumulated evidence of our observations gives an authentic record of some of our feelings about learning during given time.

Choices in the research

The choices I have made in methods have often been practical. I deliberately chose to use data formats, which fitted 'naturally' into learning contexts and processes and adapted them as necessary. As far as I was able I did not prescribe or limit responses in collecting data, but I did briefly explain my focus of interest at the outset. I deliberately chose a participatory approach, which enabled me to learn about my participants' points of view. I also tentatively crosschecked their comments with possible environmental influences and behaviours. I avoided being judgemental. I was surprised at how easy it was to engage participants' interest in the research. I took what was said incidentally as potentially serious data and often found it to be so. My decision to look at 'feeling interactive contexts' through the primary arts festival arose from my interest in the arts and my action-researcher mentoring job. It was only as my job of evaluator unfolded that I appreciated that this was indeed a very productive context for my research. Through most of my research I felt my way intuitively and connections between ideas developed during the process. It was the action research process itself, which was the main focus, although there was a parallel reading of methods and theory, which must have informed and influenced it.

Although I am a teacher and not a professional psychologist, in researching across the domains of education and psychology I have adhered to the Code of Ethics of the British Psychological Society (2006). In this personal judgements in consideration of participant data are allowed for, provided the general principle of 'do unto others as
you would be done by' is applied (p. 6). In doing this research it has been my aim to increase understanding of the types of problems, which hinder learning without causing further difficulties for individuals. I also had to ensure, that my own integrity was not compromised, by insisting on an adult presence nearby, whenever tutoring in pupils' homes. My own perspective as a former young person (and adult) with problems has undoubtedly facilitated my respect for my participants. However, I have been mindful that many of these problems are different to mine for a whole range of individual and complex reasons. Reporting verbatim what participants wrote and said has helped to counteract misinterpretation and has informed my conclusions. Placing myself in context in the research may also aid the reader in considering the work.

Outcomes of the research for teachers

At the start of my research I set out in aim one to discover some reasons why some local students’ labelled as school refusers were disaffected with education. As a teacher I discovered that accepting pupils' feelings and feedback as a valid means of thought development had a practical value. It could reveal their position in the learning process at any given point and provide a record of progress useful for assessment and the planning of a suitable teaching curriculum. In phase 1 I found that accepting pupils' feelings provided some practical solutions to enabling learning, in spite of significant the environmental disadvantages mentioned previously.

My second aim was to evaluate my own feelings about learning and teaching using a reflexive, ethnographic qualitative research method. In Phase 2a I examined my own learning during the research period. I considered the role of subconscious schema, their effect upon my life, behaviour and cognitive development. I used my research to evidence the role of feelings in my own learning process. My fifth aim on transfer to PhD of looking at other teachers’ feelings about learning and teaching through mentoring them was recorded in Phase 2b. The reflections and feelings of volunteer teachers gave me some comparisons with my own experiences. This included their opinions about underachievement, their concerns and dissatisfactions with the current system. In my learning and mentoring role I developed a fresh conception and respect for feelings as 'logical' expressions of learning.

I fulfilled my third aim to explore the potential to inform and illustrate significant strategies for professional practice and theory without being prescriptive in Phase 3. In phase 3 I evaluated a primary schools' arts festival involving a variety of cross-curricular projects carried out by creative professionals, pupils and their teachers. I recorded teachers and pupil feelings in a project involving an educational community of practice by creating a participative narrative network. The data showed how acknowledging subjective feedback enriched everyone's learning at all levels and produced useful reflective and reflexive data.

My fourth aim of dissemination has been achieved to some extent through sharing my findings during the research process. I found that educational approaches could aid re-engagement e.g. giving choice, positive regard, reflecting on feedback. Participants’ opinions and feeling responses could benefit the research. These could enlighten and inform. My research showed that participants were just as interested (and often more so) in making sense of their lives. They made an authentic contribution to this research, without having to be tricked and observed 'objectively' (observations were

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
based on my interactions with them). Unexpected feedback from participants also gave new information, which informed my teaching and also my research. The incorporation of other points of view balanced and gave increased authenticity to the research conclusions. For example I discovered that environmental factors were of enormous importance to learning in all three phases of my research. From a personal point of view I found the experience rewarding and satisfying in that my skills gained over the years found resolution in the approval of my learner peers (of all ages). We delighted in sharing and appreciating our achievements of all kinds in the learning process on many levels. My personal experience in researching has been cathartic and my personal emotional problems largely resolved. I have been able to achieve all of my aims to some degree.

Implications for educational policy

My research suggests that there needs to be more general awareness that emotional factors are important for learning. This involves appreciating that enjoyment on many levels is integral to the process. There are strategies for enabling this, which involve feedback from individuals at every level. Personal emotional dilemmas, traumatic experiences, difficulties and preoccupations affect a person's ability to engage with learning. People are often inclined towards forgetfulness, confusion and avoidance, when facing feelings arising from painful unresolved feelings and emotional dilemmas. There are strategies by which these can be alleviated, including providing enjoyable and positive learning contexts. Teaching and learning are multi-dimensional, dynamic, complex activities. A change of attitudes towards the nature of learning to accommodate its affective aspects might facilitate a sea change and an improvement in 'efficiency'. In this the various micro-, meso- and exosystems involved in education need to be reconsidered along with their ecological effects in the light of participant feedback (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 8). Learning stands at the core of society's culture, survival, renewal, progress and happiness through the production and circulation of new knowledge. For example school refusers and under achievers, with ability but lacking qualifications, may not make their full potential contribution to the world. They may have difficulty gaining employment with likely long-term financial costs to and detrimental behavioural effect on society (management training and funding implications).

Teachers

- Teachers' awareness of possible issues and consideration of their own learning history/problems aids empathy and effectiveness (implications for training and funding).
- Teachers' own feelings of empathy and empowerment to act are important in motivating them to teach (management training and funding implications).
- Teachers would benefit from appropriate peer, management and independent mentoring systems. These could give emotional support in facing difficult teaching situations, aid reflexive professional development and help to adjust the system more efficiently to current social and curriculum needs. Teachers need support in coping with pupils' problems. Teaching is a highly stressful job. Peer group support time should be allowed for and possibly sabbaticals.
- Poor management, a lack of respect and financial support for teachers' professional opinions, own teaching initiatives and research findings tends to

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
lead to their disaffection and eventual resignation even where they are doing a
good job and are clearly needed. The teachers I mentored appeared to have a
vocation to teach. They found the job intrinsically rewarding, but were
restricted by a lack of support and respect for their dedication and expertise.
Some of them had left jobs due to being managed badly.

- Unrealistic and inappropriate expectations for preparation and evidencing by
  'ticking boxes' using general performance criteria, which do not allow for
different situations cause teachers to become disillusioned and de-motivated.
Their imposition, without justification ignores and dismisses more
complicated issues about trusting professional judgement, developing teacher
skills and motivating pupils to lasting effect.

- Most teaching involves action research on some level e.g. experimenting with
  appropriate responses to learners in different situations and at different ability
levels and finding ways to incorporate new aspects of knowledge. Tabor finds
"the space needs to be created for this to happen. The creation of this space
would enable teachers to develop intellectually and professionally in ways that
are rarely possible in the present climate and would benefit their institutions
in terms of development and dissemination of good practice" (Tabor 2007).
Teachers’ feelings are often based in sound professional judgements, which
they have not had time to reflect on and elucidate.

- An 'open' approach with a respect for the value of feelings is enabling in
helping pupils to come to terms with and readjust to their situations. Teachers
may be taught this method through various levels of 'person centred'
counselling skills training. Teaching involves complicated unconscious
'emotional intelligence' intuitive skills developed through work. An awareness
of this can be developed consciously through training. Consideration of
methods, ethics and the social context are important components of teaching
and researching for learning.

- Different types of solicited and unsolicited observational pupil feedback are
useful as part of the ongoing teaching, learning and planning process e.g.
insights may be gained in assessing productive learning avenues. Learning is a
personal, idiosyncratic process and therefore the process of self-discovery is a
valuable learning method in itself.

Parents and families

- The community outside school should be considered in curriculum planning
  e.g. family learning and extended school learning projects.
- Educating and supporting parents in supporting and educating their children
  may be a credible option for future educational policy and vice versa.
- Educational management, related agencies and support workers would benefit
  from training in the practical benefits of those non-judgmental affective
  aspects of learning approaches which are relevant (training and funding
  implications).
- Questions about coercion and co-operation require careful consideration on
  humanitarian and practical grounds through engagement and research with the
  individuals involved e.g. family learning, therapy and prosecution of parents
  (management training and funding implications).

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
Pupils

- Children and young people should be listened to and given a voice.
- Some learning problems may be hard for others to understand since they appear to be illogical from the outside, but when understood are not. There is a range of complex environmental problems affecting school refusers and underachievers. It is not sufficient (or practical) to claim that these pupils are just badly behaved or defiant of authority. All of the environmental factors I found were totally outside pupils' control. Some pupils were experiencing several of these simultaneously.
- A non-judgmental attitude is practical in approaching these pupils, since their problems are complex and not obvious.

Future research possibilities

- The whole field of emotional aspects of learning is ripe for more reflexive observational evidencing and research (funding implications). For example - researching and mentoring adults in further education who were school refusers; researching and mentoring parents.
- Teacher research should be funded as a priority, because it has the potential to act as a significant source of teacher and academic professional renewal and development, which is likely to contribute to greater efficiency.
- Knowledge, insight and understanding can be gained through practitioner research. An awareness of differentiation due to pupils' varying abilities and individual social backgrounds is required in modern teaching.
- Reflexivity should be generally considered to be an integral part of educational research.

Conclusion

In doing this research I found that feelings are intrinsically entwined in the learning process and that learning provided a suitable context for researching their effects and function. Opportunities to communicate and study feelings provide information about:

- The function and effects of feelings in various situations.
- Conducive and non-conducive environments for learning.
- Ways of working with feelings to make meaning and improve our understandings of realities.
- The developmental possibilities and effects of being more aware of subjective thought.

My work involved observing and considering first-hand evidence of feelings in learning. This necessitated to some extent enlisting and engaging participants interest in the task. In this way the research process was phenomenological in looking at some of the participants' points of view (both teenagers and adults) and supporting them in their own inquiries and development. In this also I drew my own phenomenological conclusions, aiming as far as I was able at an open-minded pursuit and re-assessment of my professional knowledge about the learning process.

This research is based on real teaching observations and interactions with individuals, including consideration of my own learning problems. I questioned my own, my

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk
participants' and other people's implicit assumptions. Many of these assumptions are endemic, prejudicial, discriminatory, subversive, de-motivational, hidden and unchallenged within the current educational system. Their effect on school refusers, under achievers and even teachers is to waste them as a human resource with a potentially serious long-term cost to society. It seems to me that if affective aspects of cognition were officially recognised, considered and worked with at all levels in the current education system; learning could be more efficiently enabled. Simply – human feelings matter in learning processes, whether we understand and/or agree with them or not. Feelings expressed in this research certainly reveal "the remarkable potential of human beings to respond constructively to an ecologically compatible milieu once it is made available" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 7).

References

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2006 Good Practice: The National Healthy Schools Standard www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/SfCC/goodpractice/nhss/ accessed 09.06.06
http://www.ted.com/tedtalks/tedtalksplayer.cfm?key=ken_robinson&gclid=CojXxvu9ocCFTtMAdRQfUwA&flashEnabled=1 accessed 05.10.06

This document was added to the Education-line collection on 17 March 2011

Email – hawkinsj@edgehill.ac.uk