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## **Transforming teaching and learning through living-theory Action Research in a Culture of Inquiry**

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### **Abstract**

In this article, I focus on making explicit the embodied knowledge of educators and seek to incite the social imagination to create educational research that creates attitudinal, behavioural, and social transformational learning opportunities in a way that challenges the status quo of education. Data is drawn from 1996 to 2013 in my years as a superintendent of schools in a school district of 30,000 students in Ontario, Canada, from which I retired in 2007, and as I completed my PhD at Bath, UK with Jack Whitehead from 1996-2002 and continued post-doctoral inquiry until the present. During much of that same time I was an adjunct professor at Brock University. With the informal teacher research in the school district and with the formal research programmes at the university, the methodology that I encouraged and supported was Jack's living-theory as I created a culture-of-Inquiry in which it could flourish. Working in collaboration with my three much-loved colleagues in this issue in a space where energy-flowing values have created a synergetic resonance, has inspired my life and work.

**Keywords:** transformation; culture of inquiry; living theory action research

## 1. Purpose

When I use the language of Culture of Inquiry, I am meaning the creation of a safe, supportive space where students and teachers are enabled to make explicit their values and make themselves accountable for living according to those values. They learn to recognize when they are not living according to their espoused values and are what Jack Whitehead calls *living contradictions*. Action-reflection cycles based on asking questions like “How can I improve my teaching of these children?” become as natural as breathing. Experiencing values such as *loving kindness* and *loved into learning* in this democratic, non-hierarchical environment and recognition of their embodied knowledge, encourage students and teachers to take responsibility for their own learning. When I use the language of a culture-of-inquiry I am meaning the unique living and embodied expressions of this culture in the individual’s practice. The language of a culture-of-inquiry draws on the language of a Culture of Inquiry.

In this article I want to focus clearly on the genesis and evolution of a culture-of-inquiry. In my doctoral work, I discovered that one of my values was building a culture of inquiry, reflection and scholarship (DeLong, 2002). Through the experience of working with educators in a variety of positions and particularly as I supported them to conduct action research, the nature of a culture-of-inquiry became more clear. This process took great steps forward as I worked with masters cohort students. My original understandings in my thesis have been continuously evolving in terms of my inquiry with the assistance of others. In my own learning and in that of my students, a safe, democratic learning environment is essential for enabling us to be vulnerable and open to honest and respectful critique in order to improve our teaching and learning.

In my post-doctoral inquiries, more emphasis has been placed on the use of multi-media and visual narratives in order to communicate more clearly and precisely the energy-flowing values that resonate in our relationships than is possible with printed words alone. I continue to live with an imperative to assist professional educators to generate living-theories in a culture of inquiry to improve practice, generate new knowledge and accredit their embodied knowledge.

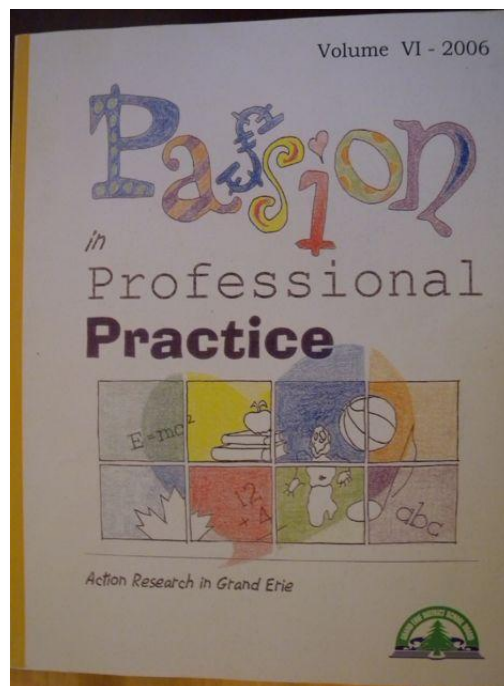
## 2. Background

Our data, as a group, are drawn from the descriptions and explanations of the action research of all four researchers. My data have been drawn from my master’s students’ theses and my lectures and presentations and my doctoral work. A fuller description is located in the Introductory article.

The data collection for this paper began as many questions emerged in my teaching practice about how to make learning more meaningful for students and how to become a better teacher. Several leadership roles (union leader, learning resource teacher, curriculum coordinator, principal, superintendent and university professor) in my career were dedicated to improving professional development experiences for teachers. During my term as principal (1988-94) the issue became even more significant as I watched my staff spend hundreds of hours (no exaggeration) in workshop sessions intended to improve their teaching practice and ending up being what can be called “Spray and Pray” with little transfer to actual practice.

In 1995, Dr. Linda Grant Executive Officer with the Ontario Public School Teachers' Association, inspired by a visit to Jack Whitehead in Bath, UK, started an action research project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education in six Ontario school districts to implement a new curriculum (of which I was one of the authors): mine was one of them. From that beginning, I and teachers like Lori Barkans (Barkans, MacDonald & Morgan, 1996) and Cheryl Black (2001) learned to conduct action research to improve our practice and in 1996 at a conference in Toronto, Jack Whitehead asked me to study with him at the University of Bath. At the time, the internet was in its infancy, Paris, Ontario and Bath UK were 5500 kilometres apart and I was a single mother working full time as superintendent and leader of a large action research project. "No problem", says Jack, "We'll make the technology work for us."

With Jack's encouragement and support, my action research focused on the emerging recognition that two values were significant in my thinking about improving education: through valuing the other and through building a culture-of-inquiry, reflection and scholarship (Delong, 2002). This emergence came about by analyzing the nature of my relationships and influence with colleagues as I went about my work and asking others to help me with answering the question, "How can I improve my practice as a Superintendent of Schools and create my own living-educational-theory?" It encompassed, as well, my respect for the role of modelling and my value of integrity. If I was asking teachers and administrators in the district to engage in research to improve their practice, it was incumbent upon me to model the process. "Walk the talk" as the saying goes. As Covey (1990) explains in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, the real key to your influence is your example, your actual conduct. Your example flows naturally out of your values and your character, or the kind of person you truly are-not what others say you are or what you may want others to think you are (p. 238).



**Image 1.** Passion in Professional Practice, Volume 1

During the years 1996-2007 as I built a culture- of-inquiry, reflection and scholarship, data accumulated in my own thesis and in the school district teachers' informal (not for credit) action research outlined in seven volumes of *Passion In Professional Practice* [http://schools.gedsb.net/ar/passion/pppi/1\\_Into\\_TOC.pdf](http://schools.gedsb.net/ar/passion/pppi/1_Into_TOC.pdf) that I supported and edited. Director of Education for the Grand Erie District School Board, Peter C. Moffatt, articulated his empathetic resonance for professional passion on page 3 of the first volume (2001):

The highest form of professionalism is the on-going, self-generated pursuit of improvement and excellence. Teachers and administrators who are involved in action research demonstrate and develop that professional passion. The rewards of this professional activity are improved student learning and personal engagement and growth. Through the posing of important questions, the collection and analysis of classroom and school based data, the articulation and presentation of results, the sharing of those results and the posing of new, important questions, teachers and administrators take control of their own job satisfaction. They can support their classroom practices and they improve classroom learning.

It is with a great deal of pride that I congratulate the professionals of Grand Erie who have contributed to this collection. I congratulate them for their writing, for the influence that they have had on education, and on their achievement of the highest professional status. Their passion makes a difference! (Moffatt, 2001, p. 3)

The action research supported in a culture-of-inquiry implemented by the many leaders that worked as part of teams in the Brant County Board Of Education and later the Grand Erie District School Board was shared in a kit (DeLong & Wideman, 1997) including a journal on the 6-board project as well as a video of teachers in our district sharing their action research experience and later the text, *Action Research For Teaching Excellence* (DeLong, Black & Wideman, 2005). In building that culture of inquiry, I was inspired by and supported by Director, Peter Moffatt and my PhD supervisor, Jack Whitehead. Both encouraged me in my practical day-to-day work and in my practitioner insider research.

### **3. Unveiling embodied knowledge**

While my passion for improving teaching and learning has encompassed a lifetime in education both as teacher and learner (which I am convinced occurs symbiotically), a committed focus on a pathway to improving the educational experience became more clear in 1995 when I was introduced to the living educational theory approach to action research. As I share in a paper (DeLong, 2001), as I worked in a variety of professional development leadership roles I had looked for the solution to the conundrum of integrating the knowledge inherent in professional development programs into regular practice in the classroom. I wanted to address the perennial question asked by education researchers: "How do we get teachers to read and use education research and bridge the gap between education research and classroom practice?"

Through my action research I experienced a significant transformation in my understandings. What I had failed to comprehend was that in order for teachers to embrace the knowledge of others, their embodied knowledge needed to be respected by themselves and others. As a result of my own experience working with Jack I recognized that teachers would not read and think about the theory of academics until they themselves had an appreciation for, an understanding of and a confidence in their own embodied knowledge:

As I watch my own students now I can see the transformation that occurs from the initial writing to the scholarly dialogue and the amazing work that they produce. The academic language that presents such a barrier to getting teachers in classrooms to read academic papers can be bridged by the very process that Jack taught me and I teach my students: start with their own embodied knowledge and then bring in the academic theory to support them to investigate and theorize about their own practice (Delong, 2009, p. 23).

For education research to be of practical value for teachers, I felt that they needed to experience the research process themselves through the data collection and analysis of their own teaching practice so that it became educational and not just about the disciplines of education. Then, they were more inclined to read, think about and integrate the research of others into their practice as evidenced in "Passion in Professional Practice."

During the course of my thesis I unveiled what I thought was a prerequisite space, a Culture of Inquiry, for educators to influence themselves, others and social formations. This Culture of Inquiry space is an environment for giving voice to teachers. I frequently exhort them not to allow others to speak for them, to represent their embodied knowledge for and by themselves. I invite them into a Culture of Inquiry, a culture of love and support and encouragement, to unveil their embodied knowledge and create their own living-educational-theories. The passion that I feel for encouraging teachers to create knowledge can be seen in the following video-clip.



**Video 1.** Empathetic resonance (<http://youtu.be/gqECy86hzxA>)

In the 3:11 minute video-clip, I am contributing to an international panel at an International Conference of Teacher Research. I am responding to a question about my support for teacher-research in the Grand Erie District School Board in Ontario. The process of empathetic resonance involves moving the cursor along the clip and responding to

moments in which the viewer experiences the greatest flow of energy from the speaker. For example, as the cursor is moved backwards and forwards around the moment at 2:49 minutes, I am talking about the “SWAT” team arriving to support a teacher in her research. Both Jack and I claim that the image above ([at 2:49 minutes](#)) shows me expressing my life-affirming energy and valuing of an embodied expression of a culture-of-inquiry in which several individuals are responding to the needs of another. The expression of my life-affirming energy at 2:49 minutes was evoked through my response to a question about the support I am giving for teacher-research. The responses of others appear attracted into an inclusive space with me and they experience a pooling of a flow of their own life-affirming energies. If we try to communicate the experience of my presencing this flow of life-affirming energy with the words, “flow of life-affirming energy” without the visual data, we (Jackie, Jack, Liz and Cathy) are claiming that something vital about the meaning is lost.

I believe, and evidence from others confirms (Griffin, 2011; Campbell, 2011), that this expression of life-affirming energy invites people to join in and to pool their own. In addition to my passion, there are practical supports like time release from class, money for resources and local and international conferences, frequent learning sessions with district and international presenters, small group network meetings and publication of their work. These resources were available to teachers and administrators because of my way of relating to systemic influences, my political nous, which allowed me to find funding for supporting action research in Grand Erie through my work as a Superintendent of Schools.

Jack and I gathered and analyzed data for 10 papers, one as early as the year after I started my studies (DeLong & Whitehead, 1997), and presented them at AERA and the International Conference of Teacher Research (ICTR): the data includes my publications and conference presentations between 1997-2013 at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml> and at <http://www.spanglefish.com/ActionResearchCanada/> which document extensions and transformations in my understandings from a deepening understanding of my embodied knowledge and the nature of my influence as well as the challenges of collaborative writing and presenting in what was in the beginning a very intimidating academic environment. One paper presented at ICTR became part of a book (Whitehead & DeLong, 2003). The road to encouraging the unveiling of embodied knowledge is through building a community in which trust and respect are inherent.

#### **4. Building trust and respect**

One of my learnings into the nature and improvement of my life as a superintendent and later as university professor was that quality relationships can be deepened and strengthened through a willingness to let others into my world and let down the walls of protection to expose my vulnerabilities. Sustained trust is at the heart of my educational relationships and essential to the creating of a culture-of-inquiry where human flourishing can thrive. My commitment to build trust and respect focused on the power of rational argument not on the power of position. As part of trust building, the process of establishing democratic evaluations started when, as superintendent, I asked the principals in my family of schools to chair my evaluation process to elicit critical feedback on how I might improve.

In addition to my practice since 2008 to videotape my lessons and review them for data to improve my teaching, in 2010, while I was teaching the Research methods course to the Bluewater masters cohort, I asked the group of 19 to provide an evaluation of my teaching. I sat in the middle of the circle with the video camera on me and they provided me with some very concrete suggestions for improvement.

It was a difficult process to experience but I had spent time preparing myself as much as I could. Being able to absorb the suggestions afterward by reviewing the videotape of the event was essential to retaining all of the information and making significant changes in my practice. I was modelling a process that I hoped might be adopted in their own way by the members of the group.

A full description and explanation of the process is contained in Jack's and my 2011 AERA paper: Transforming educational knowledge through making explicit the embodied knowledge of educators for the public good:



**Image 2.** Transforming educational knowledge (Delong & Whitehead, 2011)

With all of these clips, I feel the pleasure of being in this culture-of-Inquiry in a community of shared learning and yet there is some tension associated with the process of democratic evaluation, as I expressed to Liz: I knew it would be hard on some people and to be honest it was hard on me. You don't do that lightly. You think about it and you have to be sure that you're ready for it.

Nonetheless, I love these individuals and they have articulated that they feel that love coming from me. I want to improve my learning as well as theirs. I trust that they will be respectful in the articulation of their concerns. Learning opportunities for the students and me are provided in this creative space as we engage in critical evaluation.

Subsequently, I asked Liz to reflect on this process to receive critical evaluation. She confirmed that it had been an effective way to elicit information to improve my practice:



**Video 2.** Reflection on critical evaluation video (<http://youtu.be/FQIXQFN3rEk>)

Based on the many times that I have received and reviewed democratic and critical evaluations, this quality of evaluation is forthcoming only after time has been invested, a Culture of Inquiry built and a value of loving kindness established. I believe that I have become more receptive to the critique as I have revealed more of myself in order to build closer relationships and made explicit my values to which I ask to be held accountable.

While I had deliberately worked to build a Culture of Inquiry, to create a community of co-learners who appreciated the embodied knowledge of each person in the group in the Bluewater masters cohort in 2010 and 2011, it was a critical event when Cathy felt safe to reveal her vulnerability. As Liz says: Her story was heart wrenching but it was her courage and willingness to trust and be vulnerable that created a gateway for all of us to become a loving community where we could discover and share our stories. In our Skype conversation on March 31, Cathy articulates, “My willingness to expose my own vulnerability was a direct result of you modelling that yourself.”

In response to this modelling, in an email Cathy Griffin says the following:

Watching you invite our criticism of your practice with the intention of improving your own practice was a transformative experience for me. This was the first step towards me realizing that vulnerability is strength and pretending to be perfect is a weakness.

...Taking part in your democratic evaluation and then watching you publicly make changes to your practice and continue to ask for feedback has had more impact on the way I live my life (and teach) than any other professional or personal development to date. (Griffin, C., email, August 16, 2013)

As a result of my modelling this process of evaluation, Cathy Griffin shared her experience in asking her grade 6-7, age 11-12, students to give her concrete information on how she could teach them better.



Describing and explaining the nature of your influence on yourself, on others and on social formations, particularly for leadership positions where evaluative information is not always readily available, can be a challenging task. The critical feedback required to determine your effectiveness can be acquired through the assistance of others, of critical friends, of willing evaluators in a culture-of-inquiry.

## 5. Praxis

I see praxis as the ethical base between theory and practice and the process of putting theoretical knowledge into practice. Praxis lies in the living ethical principles between theory and practice stressing the values base through extending my understanding of the evolving nature of a culture-of-inquiry.

Living-educational-theory is a form of praxis in which there is a need for continuous action reflection cycles to conceptualize and evolve the meanings of what is being learned from experience. I encourage and support students to recognize, appreciate and share their embodied knowledge and walk beside them as co-researchers as we learn together and enhance our educational influences on self, others and the social formations in which we live, work and research with the hope of contributing to the greater good and the future of humanity.

For example, in this issue we submit this research based on our individual and joint research as a contribution to educational knowledge. To improve, I am constantly asking others whether from within this group or from my audience in my presentations for evaluation of my work. As a group, we will be evaluating the quality of this contribution and continuing with both our collaborative inquiry and individual inquiries using that information to improve our practice.

In the writing and discussion of this paper, my understanding of both a Culture of Inquiry and a culture-of-inquiry increased through the experience of my students as co-researchers and within the safe environment and relational dynamic of the synergetic resonance that distinguished our collaborative work.

## 6. Students as co-researchers

I am continuously gathering and analyzing data to uncover a direct line from my life and work through those I influence to making improvements in teaching and learning in the classrooms. During the process of working with masters students living in what I intend is a non-hierarchical culture and modelling that in valuing their embodied knowledge, I moved from facilitating their research to working with them as co-researchers. Because of my democratic view of the world and because of the rapid expansion of the culture-of-inquiry in Grand Erie as evidenced in eight volumes of *Passion In Professional Practice* (seven informal research; one formal, master's research), teachers as co-researchers became our sustainability and sustained support in the district.

Leaders like Cheryl Black and Heather Knill-Griesser, whom I tutored in the beginning, inspired network groups, led action research learning sessions and presented with me at conferences. Both started as teacher-researchers and continued as school administrator

researchers, continuing the research on their roles as vice-principals, principals and curriculum consultants. They were both co-editors of *Passion In Professional Practice*, on the editorial board of *The Ontario Action Researcher*, active with me in the Ontario Research Council. They were in my masters classes and completed their masters degrees in the first Brantford-Brock cohort (2001). They were seminal in extending the systemic influence of action research in the school district (Black, Delong & Knill-Griesser, 2002).

Cheryl, a friend for over 25 years, was part of my PhD study and continues to be a critical friend helping me to validate my claims to know. She was one of the early adopters of using the videocamera to review and improve practice. It was in a clip of one of her classes that Jack and I were able to see the close and respectful relationship between her and a student in her music classes (Black, 1998).

She and I were co-researchers and presenters at ICTR in Magog, Quebec (Black & Delong, 1999), in Baton Rouge (Black & Delong, 2000) and with Jack and I in Evanston, Illinois in 2003. She and I also presented at AERA in New Orleans. In her master's thesis, *Managing Transitions*, she says:

The significance of this inquiry has been to substantiate my claim that my espoused values are evident in my professional practice, to facilitate the development of my own professional standards of practice based on my personal values and to add to the professional knowledge base of practitioner- researchers. (Black, 2001)

In the Bluewater Masters cohort, I taught 3 courses and supervised 7 final action research projects. Of those seven, three of the teachers engaged with their students at a variety of age levels in action research. Liz (Campbell, 2011) worked with grade 12's; Cathy (Griffin, 2011) worked with grade 6's; and Tawnya Schlosser (2011) engaged her Grade 3 students in answering the question: How can I work with my students as Co-Researchers? :

#### Abstract

The investigator in this action research study and her Grade 2–3 students set out as co-researchers to investigate how the use of peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) might improve students' reading skills, particularly for students labelled as "struggling" readers. Student data were captured through formal reading assessments, independent reading conferences, class discussions, teacher and student journals, and parent-approved photographs and videotape. The project first developed 4 class-wide reading goals from which each student selected a personal goal. Students then created an independent action plan to reach that goal and subsequently named indicators demonstrating their plan was successful. Students reflected on their learning journey through oral discussions and written journals, and presented their work to the class at the end of the action research cycle. All students experienced reading growth during the study and became much more reflective and aware of their own thinking process as evidenced in their descriptions of personal projects. Students enjoyed taking charge of their own learning, developed confidence in their abilities, and were able to suggest ways in which to improve and expand their learning. (Schlosser, 2011)

This paper is an example of my work with Cathy and Liz as co-researchers.

My students are my teachers as they inspire me to be better:

I think that my body of knowledge that has emerged since the completion of my doctoral work is becoming more significant than the original work at Bath in 2002. Some evidence of this resides in the amazing research conducted by my students as they teach me to be a better teacher; some evidence resides in the papers we have co-written and/or you have encouraged and supported me to write. (DeLong, 2009, p. 24)

Living-theory research thriving in a culture of inquiry can only be sustained through the broadening of supports across school systems.

## **7. Influencing social formations inside my district and beyond: A living legacy**

As I continue my action-reflection cycles, it is my intention to attempt to track the nature of my influence from within the classroom, across a school system and through my master of education students to their students. I am most moved by evidence of improved teaching and learning in classrooms and schools. I begin when Lori Barkans was one of the first group of 5 action researchers in my school district in 1996 and follow my influence on her from supporting her as she progressed in her career positions to teaching her in the masters cohort in Brantford in 2011 and now to a recent SKYPE conversation where she articulates my systemic influence. Second, I will draw on the work of Liz and Cathy in their master's classes, in their classrooms and in our SKYPE conversations to provide evidence of my claim to have influenced them.

As Lori Barkans, at the time a young grade 2 teachers, wrote about her first action research project:

It has become a source of great amusement to each of us that we volunteered so readily for such a mammoth undertaking without even fully understanding the meaning of the words 'Action Research'. We did not feel any pressure when being given one hour to decide if we were interested in this unique project. All we knew was that it would be an opportunity to explore new options and, hopefully, improve the quality of the education that we were able to offer to our students (Barkans, MacDonald, & Morgan, 1996. p. 23).

The values that Lori shares in her first project were apparent in increasingly challenging leadership positions in education and I was fortunate to provide encouragement and support for her those changes. In 2011, I taught her masters cohort their spring course Data-Based Decision-making, a course where I developed my teaching model and shared it in an AERA 2012 paper (DeLong & Whitehead, 2012).

On November 28, 2012, Tim Pugh, a colleague and friend who was teaching an undergraduate course to concurrent teacher education students, asked Corrie Way, Jelena Magliaro, Lori and I to share our thoughts on leadership with his class. In her assigned 5 minutes to address Tim's questions, we hear Lori talk about the nature of my influence in the school system. We also see and hear as she continues to conduct action research and her passion for improving schools and learning.



**Video 3.** Sharing meanings with video ([http://youtu.be/92w1aR8Wn\\_o](http://youtu.be/92w1aR8Wn_o))

I transcribed this section to capture the actual words but note how much more information is available from seeing Lori's facial expressions and from moving the cursor along to see her life-affirming energy and passion. In terms of analysis, in this dialogue, it seems clear that Lori recognizes the influence that I have had on her life, of others and of social formations, as well as her continuing use of action research:

You know I'm here because of what Jackie taught me, not only about myself but about what I do. And, in fact, I had a moment like that last week where we saw a TED video and they were talking about what makes people successful and one of the things listed was 'passion' She talks about living according to your values, about hearing teacher's voices, about working collaboratively on inquiry, about the importance of trust and care and passion: "that discovery, that reflective practice, that process of trying something: is it working? is it not? how do we know? what are we going to do if it isn't and where are we going to go next because the journey is continuous and constant and, man, if you haven't got the passion for that, then it's a tough row. (L. Barkans, personal communication, March 25, 2013)

We share the same value of becoming a learner along with our colleagues and students:

You have to be prepared to jump in and say, I'm going to learn with you... I'm going to research with you... We're going to learn together about how to make this happen in our school. And I care about our kids and I care about you and I care about the process that we are going to follow to get there. (L. Barkans, personal communication, March 25, 2013)

As Hattie (2009) claims: "the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching and when students become their own teachers" (p. 22).

In this dialogue, it seems clear that Lori recognizes the influence that I have had on her life and that of others: “You know I’m here because of what Jackie taught me, not only about myself but about what I do.” And, in fact, I had a moment like that last week where we saw a TED video and they were talking about what makes people successful and one of the things listed was ‘passion’ ... She talks about living according to your values, about hearing teacher’s voices, about working collaboratively on inquiry, about the importance of trust and care and passion.



**Video 4.** Passion in making a difference (<http://youtu.be/aCtbSVcqUvA>)

In this video clip of Lori, moving the cursor along we see and hear the passion she feels for making a difference in the lives of teachers and children.

Other data that provide evidence of systemic influence resides in my finding bits of money out of various budgets in my portfolio as superintendent to support action research projects to eventually convincing my colleagues of a need for a budget line item for classroom research. This is no victory narrative in that after its existence for 4 years, it was subsequently removed because of budget constraints. While this was a setback, the process of improvement is on a broken front. In my role, it was important to always retain a relational understanding of political contexts in order to sustain my living legacy of creating living theories in cultures of inquiry.

When I see/hear in the work of my colleagues the same values, intentions and actions that I hold, I feel like I am experiencing some of my legacy. Cathy talks about the nature of the culture of inquiry that we have built together and she has created in her grade 6 classroom that supports her to live according to her values:

They truly are in everything I am trying to do. Although my values of Authenticity, Trust and Love are my own values they are very much influenced by Jackie (and vicariously through her

by Jack) and Liz as I identified them through conversation with them as my validation group through my MEd. I have this process, the living-educational-theory through which I am continually trying to live my values. (C. Griffin, personal communication, March 25, 2013)

Furthermore, as you see in her article in this issue, Cathy Griffin has taken the pedagogical model of the culture of inquiry engaging students as co-learners and co-evaluators and refined and improved it so that they are growing in their confidence of understanding how they learn. As a refinement of my modeling of democratic evaluation, Cathy is asking for and receiving democratic evaluations of her teaching so that she can become more responsive to their needs.

Through Liz's evidence-based narratives explaining her energy-flowing values and her value of loving kindness which I now try to live more deliberately, Liz has allowed me to share in her refinement of a culture-of-inquiry with high school students. In Liz's classroom, high school students provided data from their written action research papers and videos uploaded to YouTube that show that they were able to influence their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations.

I believe that there is space for creativity in the gap between the ministry or university-mandated and the taught/learned curriculum. If time is committed to positive, enabling relationships, more effective learning occurs.

## 8. The living curriculum

For a student reluctant to acknowledge that her embodied knowledge as a teacher, school and system administrator was as valued as that of the theoreticians in the academy, Jack was relentless in his pressure and support in order that I came to see the extent of my knowledge. He was clear that writing narratives was only a beginning: the explanation was the significant contribution and my life could be explained in terms of living according to my values for the purpose of improving myself and the world around me. He introduced the theories of others only after I came to trust my own ways of knowing (Belenky, et al., 1986) and acknowledging my energy-flowing values. His modelling of this process guided me with my own students.

Power is a significant theme in understanding the modus operandi of schooling. The processes of professional development and teacher training, and indeed teaching, still cling to the mental model (Senge, 1995) of a hierarchy of educators as the gatekeepers of temple of knowledge to which students can be admitted. In my research and in that of my students, the embodied knowledge of each of us is valued and unique. Once that value is held, teachers and students can be co-learners and knowledge creators in a living curriculum and a culture rich with creativity and exploration.

Data of my commitment to providing a safe and comfortable space are evident in the pedagogical model that I developed over several years and shared at AERA 2012 (DeLong & Whitehead, 2012). In the video-clips of my masters classes, the first item on the plan for the day is "Comfort that includes personal, physical, social, political and academic issues of the day or of prior classes". With comfort on these levels, a Culture of Inquiry can flourish. Here is a visual as evidence of this practice:



**Image 3.** My practice

The data on my commitment to creating democratic, inquiry-based classroom environments with living curricula resides in the voices of others, in this case Cheryl Black, a teacher that I mentored and supported in her action research who later became a student and co-researcher.

When Cheryl Black presented her paper “Valuing The Student Voice in Improving My Practice” at the Ontario Educational Research Council (OERC) on December 3, 1999, I felt my educative influence as she said:

This group of students and I, are partners in the learning process and I now feel accountable to them for the quality of work I do.” She was also submitting to democratic evaluation with her students and together they were creating an environment for sharing and learning: Somewhere in the midst of our daily routine, my students have found the confidence to be honest with me, and, somewhere in the same place, I have found the courage to be honest with my students. We have all grown and been changed by our connections. Some might argue that the time we spend building relationships in our classroom would have been better spent in more structured learning, however, Glasser (1993) believes that “the better we know someone and the more we like about what we know, the harder we will work for that person (DeLong, 2002).

In the persistent pressure on teachers from various political bodies to implement the given curriculum to improve test scores so that they can win elections, it is amazing that they manage to stay connected to students. Having said that, I know that every day teachers like Cheryl, Lori, Liz and Cathy focus on the needs of students first and are going beyond the given to create the living curriculum. The idea of a Culture-of-Inquiry came about as a result of coming to recognize that students who are safe, comfortable, respected and loved learn more of the intended curriculum and faster. With the emphasis on “covering the curriculum,” it takes courage to see that the front-end time invested in relationships with students and their wellness can pay dividends (to use economic rationalist language) in terms of their learning. As opposed to dwelling on the small bits within the curriculum but by focusing on the big ideas that connect to the lives of the learners, most of the expectations/outcomes can be integrated (Drake, 1997). Data on inquiry-based learning in my work and in that of my students included in this journal issue demonstrate that students learning in a living curriculum experience more meaningful learning to enrich their lives and

environments and at the same time learn all of the essential requirements of the written curriculum.

At a later point in the Video 3 of Tim's class (see above), demonstrates how this knowledge comes to be helpful for recognizing leadership attributes. The discussion moves on to applying for leadership positions and Julie Lomax asks about preparation for interviews: I am explaining the importance of telling stories that are focused on what the person is actually doing (rather than what an individual might do!). [See 27 seconds from the beginning](#) of Video 4 for the expression of the passion of the focus on what the person is actually doing. I think that it is really important to emphasize the importance of individuals exploring their responsibility for living their values as fully as they can.

While the disciplines of education are essential to the process of long term learning, without relationships like being loved into learning, less learning for life can occur.

### **Loved into learning**

During the analysis of my effectiveness as a superintendent, a theme appeared that ran through the responses of many of my colleagues: What they experienced, as I experienced with Jack, was a consistent message of "Having faith in them" which gave them the courage to attempt practices, roles and research that they would not otherwise have envisioned themselves doing. This "faith in them" has been strengthened into the embodied expression of "being loved into learning," by Liz Campbell, a more accurate assessment of my intentions. Both Liz and Cathy Griffin, within their master's degree programmes that I supervised, acknowledge my educational influence as including being loved into learning. I had not thought about this concept, only that I love them and wished with all my heart that they would have positive, challenging and scholarly learning experiences in a supportive environment.

I accepted the validity of this response from both Liz and Cathy and included, within my own explanation of my educational influence, my embodied expressions of contributing to the creation of a culture-of-Inquiry. (DeLong & Whitehead, 2012).

It is not expected that you would look at entire Video 5 of Jackie, Liz and Jack in a conversation about our inquiry and presentation for AERA but you will see in the transcribed section below what is meant by "loved into learning" (Jack has also used this extract in his contribution and we include it to emphasise its significance). [From 11:14 to 12:33 minutes](#), the conversation consists of:

Jack: Your phrase, "loved into learning": you experienced this being "loved into learning" with Jackie and possibly some of the other participants on the masters program.

Liz is nodding and smiling.

Jack (11:34): Could I just check that: It seemed very important because I don't think Jackie and myself have focused on Jackie's influence in those terms yet it seemed really important to you that you had experienced that "loved into learning" that you were able then to communicate, I think, to your own students.



Liz (12:01): That's exactly the point I was trying to make, Jack, and I have written about it before in different pieces in my masters and in something I did in your class, Jackie.  
Jackie: Yes.

Liz: I don't know if I actually called it 'Loved into Learning' but that is my concise way of explaining what happened.



**Video 5.** Loved into learning (<http://youtu.be/5MPXeJMc0gU>)

I will try to live more fully this clarification of my ontology-loved into learning.

## 9. Endpiece

It is important to emphasize that my current understanding of a culture of inquiry has evolved and improved through the contributions of my colleagues and students: students such as: Cheryl Black (2001), Heather Knill-Griesser (2001), Lori Barkans (Delong, 2002) and Ruth Mills (2009) and, as you can see in this paper, Cathy Griffin (2013) and Liz Campbell (2013). By taking the risk to be vulnerable in our master's class, Cathy validated the importance of the culture I'd created and by giving me the language to understand the essence of a culture-of-inquiry Liz moved my understanding along immensely. When Liz described her experience in my classroom as being loved into learning, it influenced my own awareness of what I was doing. I could see and acknowledge an important recognition of my influence.

I believe that the epistemological significance of this inclusion is highlighted in the way that Liz and Cathy have integrated this way of being (ontological) within their standards of judgment (epistemological) for evaluating their contributions to educational knowledge as they explain their educational influences in learning. And most recently, Jack's deeper

understanding as evident in this issue has enabled me to clarify my meanings. Thus my original understanding in my doctoral thesis has been continuing to evolve in terms of my inquiry and with others. I believe that by making it public that we are raising this Culture of Inquiry as an epistemological value and standard of judgment in the nature of the knowledge that we are creating and bringing into the Academy.

As I said, through translator Miwa Takeuchi, to the audience of Japanese school district leaders, graduate students and university professors on November 9th, 2013 at Japan Women's University in Tokyo, Japan:

One of the challenges of this Living-Theory action research process is that each researcher must find his/her own way, be methodologically inventive (Dadds & Hart, 2001). I have shared how my colleagues and I have done it: it can inform what you want to do but cannot be replicated.

I believe that I have shared the importance of the leader in modeling, encouraging and supporting the action research process in a relational dynamic. This process requires time, trust and courage: it has enabled me and others to flourish in Cultures of Inquiry. The teachers and students that I have highlighted in this address are speaking in their own voices and conducting and publishing their own action research: they are, in every way, exemplary. I think that you can see in the visual data the massive potential of technology to improve teaching and learning. I hope that you can see that living theory action research is no short-lived idea-it has longevity, sustainability and critical mass.

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## About the Author

**Jackie Delong:** At the time of conducting this research and writing this paper, I have been teaching for Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario, Canada as an adjunct professor and working as educational consultant currently preparing for a November conference in Tokyo at Japan Women's University. In a school district career over 33 years, I held a variety of school district positions from teacher to superintendent and supported teachers and administrators to conduct action research on their practice in order to improve teaching and learning. I edited and published this informal (not for credit) research in seven volumes of *Passion in Professional Practice* (2001-2007) and created a repository for this and masters-accredited research on <http://www.spanglefish.com/ActionResearchCanada>. Since 2002, when I graduated with my living-educational-theory doctorate from the University of Bath, I have taught masters courses in a cohort model and worked with others like Jack, Liz and Cathy to further refine our understanding of a culture of inquiry and its potential to improve teaching and learning. Working with these three much respected colleagues in creating this paper, I have endeavoured to analyze past learnings and current efforts in encouraging and supporting students and colleagues in comprehending the nature of our influence in improving the social order over time. In turning the camera on myself I have explored the use of multi-media to generate knowledge about my influence and in our SKYPE conferences we, as a community of learners, have created a culture of inquiry in order to explain our educational influence to transcend the constraints of poverty.