

Developing Talents to Create and Offer Knowledge of the Self and the World as Educational Gifts*

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*The views expressed in the paper are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the local authority's.

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Abstract

I work as a senior educational psychologist in a small English authority developing and coordinating programmes intended to improve inclusive, personalised gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision for the benefit of all learners. I am concerned with issues I believe are fundamental and critical to all education: to create offer, and accept knowledge of the self and the world as gifts; to be responsible for ones own learning, and to use the knowledge to enhance the wellbeing of the greater community.

Through the creation and offering of this multimedia living theory account as a gift I test the validity of my claim that I can hold myself publically accountable for improving my practice. I use an ecological, living approach to evaluation to inform and form my evolving creative educational practice.

In this paper I describe some of the complex ecology in which my work is located, clarify what I mean by creative educational practice, transformational CPD (Continuing Professional Development), and an ecological, living approach to accountability and describe and explain creative educational practice that exemplifies inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented education with an example of work with a teacher on the professional Masters programme. I conclude with what I have learned from creating this account.

I have learned how recognising the confusions and contradictions of explicit and implicit values in national strategies helps me work with what it offers to the development of creative educational practice.

I have deepened my understanding of theory, practice and provision that supports teachers and young people to develop and enhance their talents to create and offer their unique gifts as valued and valuable contributions to evolving a humane and sustainable world.

Keywords: Creative Practice; Inclusive Education; Inclusional Practice; Gifts; Talents.

Introduction

I work to improve inclusive, personalised education as a senior educational psychologist developing and coordinating APEX (All are Able Pupils Extending Opportunities) in a small English local authority.

I understand education to be distinguished by educational values that form explanatory principles and living standards of judgement of practice. Educational values are ontological, those that give purpose and meaning to a person's life. My understanding of the basic purpose of personalised education is to enhance the unique constellation of abilities of each person to live a loving, satisfying, productive, worthwhile life.

As an educator in the English education system my self-identified task is to enable children and young persons to have an increasing educational influence in their own learning and lives. My educational intent is to contribute to children and young people evolving the sophistication of their learning which helps them: come to know the person they are and want to be; recognise and enhance the talents they have developed and those they need to develop for creating, offering and accepting gifts; and envisioning the gifts of knowledge of the world to which they might commit themselves to creating and offering during their lifetime.

I do not have a professional responsibility for the education of particular pupils or students as a teacher has, and I rarely work directly with children and young people. My contribution is more concerned with developing educational relationships, spaces and opportunities to enhance the educational influence of educators in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the schools, communities and organisations in which they work. The success or otherwise of my work can be recognised in the contribution I make to educators developing their talents to create knowledge of creative educational practice, by researching to improve their practice and offering the knowledge they create as educational gifts by making their accounts public.

Creating and making public valued knowledge of the world as a gift, with the intention of enhancing the wellbeing and wellbecoming of all, is something I believe we all have a responsibility to do. (I say wellbecoming as well as wellbeing as sometimes we must look beyond the current place of being and endure some discomfort in order to move towards a better future for us all.) This is one of my moral imperatives and comprises an important part of my understanding of what it is to live a loving, productive, worthwhile life.

I understand knowledge to comprise theory and practice, an explanation together with a description of the phenomena, experience or observation. As Quinn (1997) says: 'good practice without theory is blind and good theory without practice is sterile' (p.3).

The values that have emerged as I have worked on this paper are explanatory principles that I use in explaining why I do what I do. As I clarify their meanings in the course of their emergence in practice, they form living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) I use in accounting to myself for the work I do and in evaluating the validity of my contributions to educational knowledge (Whitehead, 1989). They include: emancipating the individual in their learning and life and enhancing the ability of the individual to make their unique, valued and valuable contribution to evolving a humane and sustainable world.

My practice is underpinned by ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, societal values of emancipation, egalitarianism, inclusion and democracy and my belief that everyone is capable of:

- Being an expert in their own learning;
- Developing and enhancing talents;
- Creating and offering valued and valuable knowledge of themselves and the world as a gift, which can enhance personal and communal wellbeing and wellbecoming.

To be clear, I use inclusive and inclusional to communicate two different ideas:

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....

The Eastern logic and ways of being are similar to those that I have come to understand as inclusional. A living logic, 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. (Huxtable, 2008)

I believe I can show improvement in my inclusive and inclusional educational practice with reference to my own living standards of judgment, those of my employer and some of those expressed in national strategies. The multiple dimensions of the process are dynamically inter-related and form a complex ecology. Through the creation of this multimedia living theory account I want to test the validity of my claim that I can hold myself publically accountable for improving my practice with an approach to evaluation, which helps to inform and form my evolving practice, rather than justifying what has gone.

In this paper I will:

- a) Describe some of the complex ecology in which my work is located;
- b) Clarify what I mean by creative educational practice, transformational CPD (Continuing Professional Development), an ecological, living approach to accountability
- c) Describe and explain creative educational practice that exemplifies inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented education;
- d) Conclude with what I have learned from creating this account.

Some of the complex ecology in which my work is located

I live and work in a complex ecology (Lee & Rochon, 2009) comprising diverse, dynamically inter-related intra and inter personal and socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts. I work, for instance, in an English education system, with socio-cultural and socio-historical roots in medieval Western Europe (White, 2006) and propositional forms of logic,

flowering in a 21st century multicultural, international world with the possibilities opened by a living logic (Whitehead, 2008a).

I experience the tensions of developing educational relationships, spaces and opportunities practice within the hegemony of national strategies designed to improve schools by developing more measures of the un-measurable and new ways to categorise persons. (I will occasionally use 'persons' rather than 'people' in this paper as a reminder that my focus is on enhancing the unique contribution of individuals and emancipating them in their own learning, lives and communities.) A House of Lords committee recently pointed to the damage caused to improving educational practice by the proliferation of such regulations: 'Able, brilliant and skilled professionals do not thrive in an environment where much of their energies are absorbed by the need to comply with a raft of detailed requirements...' (House of Lords, 2009, p.15)

I believe that it is possible to show improvement in educational practice and for me to hold myself publically to account but it requires the development of different forms of accountability, such as multimedia narratives (Huxtable, 2009), to offer valid and rigorous evidence of what is a relationally dynamic, values rooted process.

The local context of my work is illustrated by my employer'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).

My contribution to realising this vision is through my role developing and coordinating inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision in the local authority.

One such contribution is the transformational CPD (Continuing Professional Development) offered by the professional Masters programme with Jack Whitehead I was instrumental in establishing. The programme supports teachers and other educators developing their talents to create and offer knowledge of the self and the world as educational gifts, through researching to improve their creative educational practice. The programme comprises access to weekly meetings with other educators, email conversations, online resources, personal tutorials and workplace visits according to personal need. Participants are supported to develop their research for accreditation as an 'Educational Enquiry', 'Understanding Learners and Learning', 'Gifts, Talents and Education', 'Research Methods' and a dissertation. Their accredited work is made public as a gift to the knowledge base of education on <http://www.actionresearch.net>. I say more in the next section.

The narrative I will focus on in this paper is of the creative educational practice and research of one member of the programme, Sally Cartwright. Sally is a very experienced, well-qualified, senior teacher at a local secondary school. She has successfully submitted two educational enquiries, (Cartwright, 2008a, 2009a), the 'Gifts, Talents and Education' unit (Cartwright, 2008b) and the 'Understanding Learners and Learning' unit (Cartwright, 2009b) and is currently working on the 'Research Methods' unit. It is in the narrative of Sally's engagement in the educational relationships, spaces and opportunities I have created, and the influence that has had on her evolving creative educational practice that I can understand my own.

Creative educational practice, transformational CPD (Continuing Professional Development), and an ecological, living approach to accountability

If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got. For us to prepare our young people to contribute to an as yet unimagined future, a directing principle in education has therefore to be improving ability to create knowledge of self and the world. Without that ability we can never progress beyond what already is to what might be.

Medawar (1969) identifies the creative process in scientific enquiry and the emotional angst that evokes in many with uncreative consequences for practice:

It is in the *generation* of scientific knowledge, not in its interpretation or in a retrospective analysis of 'the data', that scientists are oppressed by the fear of error. It is a truism to say that a 'good' experiment is precisely that which spares us the exertion of thinking: the better it is, the less we have to worry about its interpretation, about what it 'really' means. (pp.14-15)

Creative educational practice, educational practice that is creative, is distinguished by the relationships, spaces and opportunities that support and challenge the learner to explore new territory, (which may also be uncharted by their teacher or experts in the field), to exert themselves to think, to create meaning and to create knowledge and offer it as a gift to themselves and others.

I believe that we create and offer knowledge most effectively when we have a personal investment to create knowledge as gifts, valued by the creator and as an expression of the creator's personal interests, passions and uniqueness and ontological values. As a gift it is offered freely, with the hope, but not the expectation, of appreciation or use.

Transformational CPD is an expression of the tutor or course leaders creative educational practice and the students taking responsibility for their learning, and their commitment to enhancing established talents and developing new ones for the creation, offering and accepting knowledge as educational gifts. Transformational CPD exemplifies the learning teachers, as educators want to engage their pupils in, a process of knowledge co-creation not simply of transmission and acquisition.

With this in mind I asked Jack Whitehead to establish a Masters programme. I believed that teachers engaging with living theory and a group tutored by him would enjoy an unusual CPD opportunity where they would be valued as creators of knowledge and would be supported to enhance and transform their learning and practice. I say unusual because the predominant model of CPD is of training, with prevailing wisdoms delivered to teachers to apply. Through engaging in this transformational CPD, which is educational as well as instructional, I believed that teachers would be enabled to develop and enhance their talents to research to improve their creative educational practice and make their contribution to the educational knowledge base of the profession.

The accounts of the knowledge teachers on the programme have created of themselves and their practice is valued by Jack making their accredited accounts public on <http://www.actionresearch.net/mastermod.shtml>. I have learned from this that one way of valuing people as knowledge creator is through making their knowledge public as educational gifts in a valued space. I have therefore added links to their accounts from the local authority site <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/apex> and am looking to do the same for children and young people on the widening learning website <http://www.livinglearning.org.uk> which is being developed in collaboration with the 14-19 strategy Adviser. Taking into account student requests, the University of Bath is now making moves to emulate Jack's practice by making public on their own website some successful assignments from professional MA programmes.

A simple actuarial form of accountability such as test scores can be used to justify some procedures but are inadequate, and potentially counter productive, for evaluating creative educational practice and transformational CPD, which are values based relationally dynamic processes within a complex ecology. Biesta (2008) makes a similar point in relation to research and the limitations of evidence-based research:

Research can only tell us what has worked in a particular situation, not what will work in any future situation. The role of the educational professional in this process is not to translate general rules into particular lines of action. It is rather to use research findings to make one's problem solving more intelligent. This not only involves deliberation and judgment about the means and techniques of education; it involves at the very same time deliberation and judgment about the ends of education — and this in a strict and conjugate relation with deliberation and judgment about the means. (pp.20-21)

As an educator I can see, in creating and making public living theory accounts of my work, the possibility of developing an ecological, living approach to accountability. This approach generates insights that informs and forms my work in a living dynamic while holding myself to account in the conjugate relationship between practice and educational ends. I make these accounts public with the intention of improving my educational influence in the complex ecology of my own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations in which I live and work.

Creative educational practice that exemplifies inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented education

I will be drawing on the videos of Sally Cartwright and her students addressing a meeting of senior educators and managers with responsibility for implementing the national 14-19 strategy in the local authority. They were asked to tell the audience what they learned from working on their AS (Advanced Subsidiary level) Extended Project qualification. Two of the students had been in the pilot group and had been awarded the qualification; the others are in the second group half way through their course.

You might want to take the time to look at these four videos of the full presentation here (which can be accessed from http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=68BFC36A0791E85F) and return to them periodically as you engage with the text. They are each less than 10 minutes long. I hope in

doing so the relational dynamic I am alluding to will become clearer. Besides which, each student says something unique to them about their learning and the knowledge they are creating about themselves and the world. I find watching and listening to them re-energises me with a hope for education and I would like you to enjoy that inspiring feeling too.

I am suggesting that you also 'look' at the video in a particular way in order to 'see and experience', the relationally dynamic flow of energy with values. I have learnt two methods for 'looking' to 'see and experience', the relationally dynamic flows of energy and values from Jack Whitehead (Whitehead, 2008b), which I invite you to try for yourself here.

First, in QuickTime run the cursor back and forth, back and forth, over the video as you focus in your mind on the values being expressed; it is difficult to describe exactly how to engage but the best analogy I can make is with Claxton's advice on how to 'see' a stereoscopic image by looking with a 'soft focus'. There is something in the rhythm of moving back and forth in QuickTime that allows the aesthetic to be appreciated of the dynamic embodied expression of values of an individual, between people and within a space.

The second of Jack's methods I have used is to 'look' to 'see and experience' an 'empathetic resonance' which is the way he has more recently described it:

I like the idea of empathetic resonance and will use the words in relation to video-clips for sharing meanings of the expression of energy-flowing values. I know I'll be using the words in a different way to Sardello, but Sardello's writings introduced me to the idea. (J. Whitehead, personal communication, July 13, 2009).

As you move the cursor back and forth, back and forth, stop where you feel that moment of empathetic resonance. You can test for yourself the validity of video and image with your narrative as a form of communicable evidence of educational values being expressed in practice as I am doing here. I have tried to clarify these techniques further in an article in Research Intelligence (Huxtable, 2009).

To return to Sally; she had been part of the pilot phase of the AS Extended Project. The support she developed for her students has been influenced by her work with me and the Masters programme, as can be surmised from her accounts (access from <http://actionresearch.net/mastermod.shtml>) and this email after the presentations (an evaluated part of the qualification) by the first group of students at the university:

Hi Marie

Many thanks for organising the meeting tonight. Who would have thought that first cup of coffee you got for me in Keynsham would have enabled those students to be there tonight - which I found to be a very exciting process. They seemed to grow as learners in front of my eyes.

Many thanks (S. Cartwright, personal communication, March 12, 2008)

The various qualifications and formal assessments already in existence are primarily concerned with how well pupils can be shown to have engaged with predetermined content and processes. The AS Extended Project offers a creative educational opportunity for teachers to focus on their practice as educator rather than simply as instructor:

The new Extended Project Qualification is both a free-standing qualification, and is a compulsory part of the [Diploma](#) at Level 3 and the [AQA Bacc](#).

It offers students a free project choice, so they can explore in depth

- an aspect of a subject they are studying, or
- a topic in which they have a personal interest.

The topic for the project is chosen by the student and agreed by the student's teacher, who then acts as his or her supervisor. The student has to show that they can

- plan
- deliver, and
- present

an extended piece of work at Level 3 of the [National Qualifications Framework](#). (AQA Website)

The awarding body, AQA, has awarded four A*s and one A to the students in the pilot group for their work. Four students have been offered places at Oxford or Cambridge and the fifth has a place at a university of their choice. However, what Sally achieved was much more educationally significant than indicated by students being awarded high grades or a place at a prestigious university.

I saw a teacher with the courage and professionalism to accept and express her professional responsibility as an educator to improving the educational experience of her students. Sally seizes the possibilities offered by a national initiative as a creative educational opportunity. Martina Clerkin (2009) demonstrates a similar quality of educational responsibility when working with the possibilities offered by the current enthusiasm for AfL (Assessment for Learning) by the Irish education policy makers.

The AQA outline what is expected of the teacher, which could be interpreted as the teacher 'delivering' as a good instructor: 'Teachers will deliver a taught element including research skills and advise on project management. They will also supervise and support students as they carry out their project. Projects will be marked internally to strict criteria' (Department for Children, Schools and Families).

The qualification opens the door but it is how the teacher interprets their role and responsibilities, their skills and understandings of research and their pedagogy that they bring to it, that makes this important beyond simply an opportunity for project-based learning. Sally takes this as an opportunity to be the educator she wants to be, developing creative educational relationships, spaces and opportunities for, and with, her students. She enables them to develop talents to create and offer knowledge of themselves and the world as gifts to themselves and others. I heard this professionalism being expressed by Sally where she talks on the video about how she works with the AQA specifications and accepts her responsibility to make decisions in the educational interest of her students.

The traditional social science approach to research would be to define the title or question as a precursor to researching, which is frequently an accumulation of prevailing knowledge, rather than a process of creating knowledge. The creative educational approach Sally takes, influenced by her engagement with the Masters programme, recognises the emergence and clarification of her students' questions through the research process as a creative, living, relationally-dynamic educational process, respecting the student as the creator of valued knowledge. She does not deny the usefulness of the learning offered by

others but she recognises and respects the considerable amount of knowledge her students bring with them and supports them to explore uncharted territory.

The quality of the experience of the young people engaged with Sally on the AS Extended Project can be understood as educationally very significant. The significance is in the pleasure the young people express in feeling recognised and engaged with as valued creators of knowledge. In short, they recognise they are becoming emancipated in their learning and life and creating and offering valued knowledge of the world, which is a reflection of Sally's educational values expressed in her practice.

In the clip (below) of Sally, Simon and Louise describe their research process. I think you can see in the still pictures (below) something of what I mean by a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility. As you engage with the video can you see these values expressed and sense the energy flow that shows them? I see them:

- Respected as responsible for their own learning, allowed and encouraged to creatively explore and make decisions about their learning without the predetermining constraints of other people's agendas.
- Recognising and valuing the educational influence each person was having in their own learning and lives and in that of others,
- Sharing their enthusiasm for knowledge creating research and their pleasure of being part of a community where they are taken seriously by their teachers and themselves as creators of valued and valuable knowledge, about the world and themselves.
- Growing in their understanding of themselves, their values and how they want to contribute to their own and other's wellbeing and wellbecoming.

I would ask you to read the following transcript and then watch the video looking for the evidence of educational influence in learning of Sally and the young people. I ask you to use the techniques described above to 'look' to 'see and experience' the flow of energy that carries the pleasure these young people share in offering the gift of their learning and educational experience.

Simon (0:00): Last year when I took the Extended Project, I took Maths, Further Maths, Physics, Geography and the Extended Project and so as I did something as I already said about space, my essay title was 'why is it proving so difficult to do a manned mission to Mars'. So it was fitting with my physics but the first thing I really gained from it was in terms of what we know as our learning journey, which as far as I understand is consultant speak for what we learn in terms of our skills, is it's significant independent study at an intense rate. When I did GCSE I did my Geography GCSE at home because I couldn't choose between Geography and History so I did both and this is the first time I have ever done anything really intense. At GCSE my teacher would give me something every week to do and say do these exercises whereas with this I had to choose myself. So I had to you know be very strict. By the time the holidays I said right today I'm going to ion drives, tomorrow thermo-nuclear drives and I'd really have to have a strict regime for myself. That was very helpful and it came up at my university interview and I've been lucky enough to con my way into Oxford to study physics and it came in useful during the interview and it's something I want to carry on.



Figure 1. AS Extended Project as a life enhancing educational experience
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMpaltNH7kg>)

The second thing from the project, which is communicating to a lay audience. So as I said, with Louise it was that particular issue was about artificial gravity, which isn't the most dinner party worthy of conversations, but it was a struggle to get it to be understood but eventually by the last draft everyone in the group understood it and it was a skill to be able to look at a scientific idea that I understood and put it into lay terms so that none of the meaning is lost so it's as simple as possible but not simpler as I understand Einstein put it and I want to carry that forward and in later life I would love to be in science media and doing lectures to an audience like Brian Cox or Marcus du Sautoy and that kind of thing I hope will be very useful to me.

The last big thing I got from it was the actual research side of things. We've already mentioned, Isaac mentioned about the huge range of sources. When I was going round university open days my questions to the head of department was, do you know anything about space, kind of thing, and I had a couple of people email me back and I had a very nice professor at Leeds University who I had a conversation with and she sent me some notes on planetary dynamics that I used in the essay. And in addition to that I used the internet, I used books, I used journals, I used a lecture I went to and having to reference all of that using the Harvard Referencing System that I think is a key life skill that I've learnt. Certainly in geography essays I now incorporate it. And I'm very glad to have done the Extended Project even if it was just for that. If I gained nothing else from it just the referencing skill I would be pleased that I'd done it because it is such a useful thing. Obviously I've enjoyed it so much that now in Year 13 I'm doing an Open University module. So I'm a bit of a learning addict now. It's Mrs Cartwright's fault, I'm determined to rid myself of all free time. In addition to the skills it is hugely enjoyable. I mean in terms of my learning journey the end result is that I enjoy it and the destination was worth the journey.



Figure 2. 'The destination was worth the journey' (Simon)

Louise (3:00): Well everyone's learning journey is completely different and I gained two skills for me which are the most important. The first one is as part of my research for my project I actually contacted who lived in East Berlin when the Wall was up and because I was studying German it meant that I could communicate with her in German. I carried out over the internet an interview asking her questions and then she gave me all her comments but they were in German so I had to translate them and incorporate them into my essay. So that for me was a really important skill; the ability to translate. And also that wasn't my only source in German I used a wide range of German sources, from German books and German newspaper articles that were on the internet. So that for me was really important because I had never really done that before using sources in a foreign language to such a degree. So that's definitely helped me with the course work in my French and German that I'm doing at the moment. It means I can look at foreign language sources with a lot more confidence than I had before.



Figure 3. 'So for me it has definitely changed my life' (Louise)

The second thing for me is public speaking because before I started the Extended Project I hadn't done any public speaking at all and the thought of standing up and giving a public presentation just made me feel sick to be honest but as part of the project we've done quite a few presentations. We've attended another conference, we gave the presentation for the actual project itself and just talking to people about the project has just given me so much

more confidence with standing up in front of an audience and speaking and telling them about my experiences. So for me that has been a huge step and given me a lot more confidence when I went for my university interviews because Simon's got into Oxford and I've got into Cambridge and definitely doing the Extended Project has definitely helped me because I don't think I would have had the confidence to go into my interview and be able to talk to the interviewer if I hadn't done the Extended Project. So for me it has definitely changed my life.



Figure 4. 'So thank you Mrs Cartwright'

Simon (5:04): Just to finish what Louise said it came in very useful in my interview as I had a copy with me and when they mentioned it I just slammed it on the desk and left it for them and they had a read through and seeing I got into Oxford it worked, so thank you Mrs Cartwright.

Respecting students as responsible for their own learning

Sally at the beginning of the presentation expressed her emancipating educational values, 'You put your students in the driving seat of the learning and they totally drive the content. What you do as a member of staff is to guide them through the learning and study skills... for me it is enabling students to think outside the box, its very much driven by them.'

In watching the video I can feel the students' delight at being recognised as responsible for their learning and their pleasure in accepting the responsibility. You can see in the video Simon and Louise talking of the skills of project management they had to learn and the self-discipline of establishing work routines and juggling demands, which they recognised would serve them well beyond school. This wasn't forced on them. They used them all as they expressed their responsibility for their own learning.

Students researching to create knowledge and being part of a community

The students do not just choose 'a topic' and just find out what is already known. They are supported to enquire and question in a disciplined creative manner to create knowledge, which they value and that communicates. A high level of scholarship and

commitment to create an artefact, which communicates effectively, is required. As Sally said: 'The exam board doesn't want anything which isn't finished. They have to complete it.'

I can see the young people doing this as they communicate a confidence and a passion for what they were doing. They were enjoying themselves as learners, in good company and appreciating the educational influence they were having in their own learning and that of others.

Their enthusiasm for learning was fed by being encouraged to wander and explore extensively, way off the tracks that their usual schoolwork either allows or encourages. They were finding that unfettered journey exciting and were changing their focus of their current enquiry as a result. They didn't talk of 'blind alleys' when their exploration didn't eventually appear to come into their enquiry. There were no blind alleys but places they explored they might return to some other time.

Students recognising and valuing educational influence

In attending carefully to the video I can see evidence of the students and Sally recognising and valuing the educational influence they have in their own learning in and in the learning of each other. They repeatedly emphasise the importance to them of the research community where they learnt to listen to, learn from, and challenge themselves and others as they create new possibilities.

Growing in their understanding of themselves, their values and how they want to contribute to their own and other's wellbeing and well becoming

I like the quote from Denise Shekerjian (1990) at the start of her book, *'Uncommon Genius'*: 'Everyone has an aptitude for something. The trick is to recognise it, to honour it, to work with it' (p.1).

I believe that you never know what you can do until you've done it and that does not mean that it is necessarily easy. Quite the converse; things are easy when they have already been mastered, discovered, or created. To go to somewhere new in your learning requires a commitment, effort and determination to challenge yourself. I believe education should open people's eyes to themselves, to get a taste and confidence to explore and be open to 'life's possibilities' as they do so.

The students did not just find working with Sally on their extended projects simply of exchange use – just being of use with their application to university or with their intended higher studies– they communicated a growing understanding, pleasure and enthusiasm for their subject, for learning and knowledge creation. Some had clearly been influenced by what they intended to do at university. Others started with their interest and were inspired by their peers to connect with a subject that they were studying in school to create an academic orientated enquiry, which they found opened them to new and unexpected possibilities that excited them. Through the process they also learn about themselves; these can be moments of epiphany or quieter moments, which contribute to their sense of wellbeing and wellbecoming in community.

What I have learned from creating this account.

I have found that recognising the confusions and contradictions of explicit and implicit values in national strategies helps me work with what it offers to the development of creative educational practice. The national gifted and talented strategy is a good example. 'Gifted' and 'talented' are values laden words and the current focus on gifted and talented education is an implicit statement of the contradictions in societal values. There is the unspoken undercurrent of individualism and elitism, values associated with earlier eras. This is at odds with the explicit values of emancipation in a democratic, inclusive society of the 21st century which holds hope for humans progressing a humane world to see a 22nd century.

An example of the implications of these very different values can be understood in the conflict between the resulting pedagogies. One is underpinned by the belief that the ability to create valuable knowledge is the prerogative of a few special individuals (gifted and talented people), while the majority of persons (who are therefore not gifted and talented) have only the capacity to acquire, to a greater or lesser extent, what has been created for them. The other pedagogy rests on the belief that all persons are capable of developing and enhancing talents to create and offer, valued, and potentially valuable, knowledge as gifts to improve their own lives and that of others. I subscribe to the latter and look for examples of practice in the national strategies I can work with creatively that can be useful as an expression of those values.

Through my work developing and coordinating inclusive and inclusionary gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision, I hope to contribute to the possibilities of enhancing the quality of the educational experience that educators can offer to all children and young people, which emancipates them in their learning and life and enhances their ability to make their unique contribution to evolving a better world.

The narrative of creative educational practice I have offered here is not simply of importance to those who are working with the national 14-19 strategy. I would like to put this in the context of the influential possibilities opened by developing creative educational practice with all in the learning community, from the oldest adult to youngest child. Children as young as 7 have been asking where there is a place for the valuing of their learning in school. Teachers like Joy Mounter, researching her question, 'Can children carry out action research about learning, creating their own learning theory?' (Mounter, 2007) <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/joymounterull.htm> shows what is possible; the voices of her pupils have been attended to by educators internationally when Joy was asked to write about her work with her pupils for an American journal when the editor found her Masters assignment on Jack's site.

I am coming to understand more about how Sally has worked with the AS Extended Project to open the possibility for the young people to have the knowledge they create, which is of importance to them, legitimated with an accredited award. Sally values her students as creators of valued knowledge and recognises them for the unique person they are. She is respectful of herself and her students; the abilities, knowledge, enthusiasms, skills, curiosities... that each brings into the space, and facilitates the opening of those respectful channels of connectedness. She expresses her educational responsibility towards, but not for her students, by working with their best intent of curious enquiry rather than their short-term interests, which might be served by keeping an exam grade in sharp focus.

I see this reflecting the possibility I have opened for educators to have their knowledge legitimated and accredited by bringing them into the transformational CPD offered by the Masters programme tutored by Jack who expresses through his creative educational practice, a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility. In supporting Sally and her students and other educators on the Masters programme and making their knowledge public on the web I hope to enable them to feel affirmed by seeing that others value their knowledge and to spread the influence of their research narratives of improving creative educational practice.

In this multimedia narrative of the learning of Sally and her students I have offered an exemplar of the creative educational practice I am seeking to enhance and spread through the educational relationships, spaces and opportunities I create and the support I give educators to creatively engage. I have tried to show you Sally and her students creating, offering and accepting knowledge about the world and themselves, the person they are and want to become, which enhances their own wellbeing and well becoming and that of others. Through offering their gift publically through presentations, which are now on YouTube, their educational gift has the possibility of influencing socio-cultural formations locally, nationally and internationally.

I have tried to show you how and why I believe I have had an educational influence in their learning through inviting and supporting Sally to engage with the Masters group I was instrumental in establishing. Have I offered you sufficient evidence of my creative educational practice contributing to emancipating individuals in their learning and life and enhancing the ability of individuals to make their unique, valued and valuable contribution to evolving a humane and sustainable world?

In this paper I have sought to hold myself publically accountable for improving my practice by creating this multimedia living theory account as an ecological, living approach to accountability. I have tried to communicate why I do what I do and what I want to emerge from the educational relationships, spaces and opportunities I create, invite into and support creative engagement with. This account forms an illustrative 'outcome indicator' of my work developing and co-ordinating inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision. I offer it as an educational gift in the hope that this ecological, living approach to holding myself to account might not only improve my own practice but might contribute to that of others.

Through the creation of this multimedia living theory account I wanted to test the validity of my claim that I can hold myself publically accountable for improving my practice with an approach to evaluation, which helps to inform and form my evolving practice, rather than justifying what has gone. Have I done so?

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