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## **Evolving a living-educational-theory within the living boundaries of cultures- of-inquiry**

Jack Whitehead

### **Jack Whitehead**

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and the University of  
Cumbria*

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### **Abstract**

In this paper I use data collected between my master's degree (1970-72) and the video-conversations in the preparation of this paper in 2013. I analyse this data in terms of the evolution of my living-educational-theory in which I integrate new insights about a culture of inquiry using the categories in the first paper in this issue of EJOLTS. These categories emerged initially in the conversations between Liz Campbell and Cathy Griffin as they emerged with Jacqueline Delong's (2002) original work on a culture of inquiry.

**Keywords:** living-educational-theory; living boundaries;  
cultures of inquiry; multi-media narrative

## 1. Purpose

My purpose is to deepen, extend and share my understandings of living-educational-theories with the integration of new insights about the nature of cultures of inquiry. This purpose is related to Donald Schön's (1995) analysis of the need for a new epistemology for the new scholarship of teaching. Schön believed that this new epistemology would emerge from action research. This paper is intended as an original contribution to this new epistemology with living standards of judgment that are being clarified and evolved through their emergence in this cooperative enquiry as we work and research together, responding to the open review process, in creating the December 2013 issue of EJOLTs.

## 2. Background

The data collection for this paper began during research for my master's dissertation in 1972 on "A preliminary investigation of the process through which adolescents acquire scientific understanding." During the master's degree I was teaching full time as the Head of Science at Erkenwald Comprehensive School in London where the Inspectorate had provided me with a video camera and recorder to experiment with its educational potential. I videotaped a lesson in which I believed that I had established enquiry learning with my pupils in which I encouraged them to ask their own questions. The video introduced me to the experience of existing as a living contradiction in the sense that my "I" held together certain values together with the experience of negating them in my practice. I could see on the video that I was giving my pupils their questions rather than encouraging them to formulate their own. I introduced I as a living contradiction into my educational research and many others have acknowledged how valuable they have found their own recognition of existing as living contradictions in their practice.

The data includes two evaluation reports from 1976 (Whitehead, [1976a](#); [1976b](#)). I produced the reports for a Mixed Ability Exercise in Science, which involved me working with six teachers over 12 months to improve learning with 11-14 year olds in mixed ability science groups. This was one of the first local curriculum development projects to be funded by The Schools Council in the UK. The first report was written in traditional academic language, drawing on the most advanced theories of the day. The problem was that the teachers I was working with explained that they could not see themselves in the report and asked me to produce a report in which they could see what they had been doing. The second report is a major transformation. The teachers recognised themselves in it. In the report I had explicated for the first time my understanding of action-reflection (AR) cycles for enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' (See page 9). The report was validated in the sense that it was submitted to a validation group of some 3-8 peers with questions derived from Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity of comprehensibility, truthfulness, rightness and authenticity.

The data includes all my publications and dialectical analysis in my 1999 doctoral thesis on "How do I improve my practice? Creating a new discipline of educational enquiry" ([Whitehead, 1999](#)). It includes my publications and conference presentations between 2000-2013 at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>, which document extensions, and transformations in my understandings from dialectical to inclusional ways of being, doing and knowing. Here is the latest analysis in the evolution of my living-educational-theory as I

integrate insights from the growth of my understanding of cultures of inquiry in my co-operative learning with Jacqueline Delong, Liz Campbell and Cathy Griffin.

My concern is that I want to extend the influence of living-educational-theories because I see them carrying hope for the future of humanity. I also want to continue to evolve my own living-educational-theory as I continue with my inquiry, “How do I improve what I am doing?” In this evolution I am seeking to extend the influence of living-educational-theories through enhancing my own understanding and spreading the influence of cultures of inquiry. I am enhancing my own learning about cultures of inquiry, through this co-operative inquiry, with the integration of the following insights within my understandings.

## 2.1. Loved into learning

We do not want to overload you with all the material in the following video, but we hope that you will access [11:14 to 12:33 minutes](#) of Jackie, Liz and Jack in a conversation about our inquiry and presentation for AERA at:



**Video 1.** Loved into Learning A (<http://youtu.be/5MPXeJMc0gU>)

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. (L. Campbell, J. DeLong, J. Whitehead, personal communication, December 30, 2012)

I was introduced to the idea of being loved into learning in a conversation where Cathy and Liz explained Jackie’s influence in their learning for their master’s degree in terms of being loved into learning.



**Video 2.** Loved into learning B (<http://youtu.be/qcDSqryJ6Jg>)

The image above at [1:35 minutes](#) of the 9:45 minute clip above is taken where we are talking about being loved into learning. As I move the cursor backwards and forwards [around 1:35 minutes](#) I experience the empathetic resonance (Huxtable, 2009) of Liz’s, Cathy’s, Jackie’s and my own energy-flowing value of “being loved into learning.” To communicate my embodied expression of meaning I need both the visual data showing the expressions above and my linguistic expression of being loved into learning. I am now bringing this meaning into my understanding of a culture of inquiry. Liz and Cathy also brought into Jackie’s awareness the quality of “loving into learning” they experienced in Jackie’s tutoring. Jackie acknowledges this transformation in her own awareness in Paper Three below.

## Praxis

While praxis can sometimes refer to the process of putting theoretical knowledge into practice, I see a living-educational-theory as a form of praxis in which there is a need for continuous evolving narratives to conceptualize and evolve the meanings of what is being learned from experience in order to enhance the educational influences in one's own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, work and research.

For example in the Video 2 Jackie is explaining to me a contribution I could make to this paper. This is grounded in her concern to improve the contribution of the paper to educational knowledge. She explains the possibility she has in mind and I show that I have understood this possibility and agreed to act on it. This "Part One from Jack Whitehead" is the result of my acting on the action plan. On Sunday 31st March we will be evaluating this contribution in terms of the quality of its contribution and continuing with both our collaborative inquiry and my personal enquiry, "How do I improve what I am doing?"

In preparing this paper with recorded Skype conversations I became aware of an extension in my cognitive range and concern in my praxis as I experienced the mutual but different educational influences that each individual was having in the learning of the others. I became aware of the importance of understanding my learning within the relational dynamic of the creative and critical conversations that distinguished our culture of inquiry.

## 3. Students as co-researchers

Because I have learnt something significant from all the students I have tutored for their master's degrees and supervised for their doctoral degrees I see them as co-researchers. For example, Jacqueline Delong, introduced me to the idea of a *culture-of-inquiry* and the evolution of this idea is extending and transforming my living-educational-theory. Many of the doctoral research programmes I have supervised to successful completion can be accessed at: <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> and some of the master's units and dissertations I have tutored can be accessed at: <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>.

A recent issue of "Gifted Education International" (2013) contains some of these successfully completed writings with a focus on living-educational-theories as transformational continuing professional development (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2013). Two of the latest living-theory doctoral successes are those of Keith Kinsella (2012) and Marie Huxtable (2012).

Keith Kinsella introduced me to the idea of *presencing developmental possibilities* and *presencing empathetic responsiveness*. I can now recognise and name these qualities in my own educational practices where I use empathetic responsiveness in presencing developmental opportunities for students who have yet to see such possibilities from themselves. I see Jackie's response to me in the above video in terms of empathetic responsiveness in presencing developmental opportunities in her suggestions to enhance my contribution to this paper.

Marie Huxtable introduced me to the personal values of loving recognition and respectful connectedness and helped to reinforce my value of educational responsibility. Marie also reinforced my social values of equality, emancipation and inclusion.

In my educational relationships with those I tutor and supervise I include an educational responsibility that distinguishes my relationship with my students as co-researchers, from the mutuality of equal partners in co-researching. I see this educational responsibility in terms of what Buber refers to as the special humility of the educator:

If this educator should ever believe that for the sake of education he has to practice selection and arrangement, then he will be guided by another criterion than that of inclination, however legitimate this may be in its own sphere; he will be guided by the recognition of values which is in his glance as an educator. But even then his selection remains suspended, under constant correction by the special humility of the educator for whom the life and particular being of all his pupils is the decisive factor to which his "hierarchical" recognition is subordinated. (Buber, 1947, p. 122)

In my relationships with students I accept an educational responsibility to express the special humanity of the educator "for whom the life and particular being of all his students is the decisive factor to which is 'hierarchical recognition is subordinated'." (ibid)

#### 4. Building trust and respect

Buber also influenced my recognition of the centrality of trust at the heart of my educational relationships:

The relation in education is one of pure dialogue... Trust, trust in the world, because this human being exists – that is the most inward achievement of the relation in education. Because this human being exists, meaninglessness, however hard pressed you are by it, cannot be the real truth. Because this human being exists, in the darkness the light lies hidden, in fear salvation, and in the callousness of one's fellow-men the great Love. (Buber, 1947, pp. 125-126)

My belief that I have sustained trust at the heart of my educational relationships, since encountering the ideas of Buber at the age of 23, in 1967, is supported by a gift I received on my 65th Birthday. This coincided with the ending of my tenured contract of the University of Bath (1973-2009). The gift was Jack Whitehead: Validations (see <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jackvalidationsb.htm>), edited by Robyn Pound, Moira Laidlaw and Marie Huxtable. It contained reflections by many of my former students on the nature of my educational influence in their learning. I think that this is strong evidence that I sustained the expression of trust in the other and that the relationships described in the book are distinguished by mutual respect. My main intention in my educational relationships can be understood in terms of making public and evolving the embodied knowledge of the other in their living-educational-theories. In my writings I also acknowledge that I have learnt something significant from the original contributions to knowledge of every living theory doctorate I have supervised to successful completion.



## 5. Unveiling embodied knowledge

My focus on making public or unveiling and evolving the embodied knowledge of practitioners began in 1971 with my rejection of the disciplines approach to educational theory. The disciplines approach held that educational theory was constituted by the disciplines of the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. The proponents of this approach believed that the practical principles I used to explain my educational influence were regarded at best as pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more fundamental justification (Hirst, 1983, p. 18). My alternative to the disciplines approach was to ground educational theory in the explanations that individual practitioners produced to explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, work and research. I called these explanations living-educational-theories. I did not reject insights from the disciplines of education in the creation of a living-educational-theory. I integrated insights from the disciplines within the creation of a living theory.

In 1973, after six years teaching science in secondary schools I moved to the University of Bath as a Lecturer in Education with the intention of contributing to this reconstruction of educational theory. I saw my task as making public and evolving my own embodied knowledge as an educator and helping others to do this same. The publications listed in the section Background (above), document my original contributions to educational theory as I made public and evolved my embodied knowledge and learnt from others as I supported them to do the same. The original contributions include placing “I” as a living contradiction in enquiries of the kind, “How do I improve what I am doing?” They include the clarification and communication of meanings of energy-flowing values through action-reflection cycles, as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence in learning. They include the use of empathetic resonance with digital visual data to clarify and communicate the meanings of relationally dynamic, energy-flowing values in living standards of judgment for evaluating the validity of contributions to educational knowledge in living-theories.

In creating a living-educational-theory through unveiling and evolving an individual’s embodied knowledge, each individual creates their own living curriculum.

## 6. The living curriculum

I distinguish a *given curriculum* from a *living curriculum*. In teaching science to my students in secondary schools, tutoring students for their masters degrees and supervising students for their doctoral degrees, I expressed a commitment to engage with the given curriculum whilst encouraging students to exercise their own methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 166) in creating their own living curriculum in the sense of creating the course of their lives. In secondary school this meant doing what I could to enable the students to pass examinations based on a given syllabus and curriculum, with the best grades possible, whilst encouraging enquiry learning with questions that the students formed for themselves, whenever I could. With my masters’ students the given curriculum was laid down by the University Senate with clear criteria for assessment, including an engagement with ideas in academic journals and textbooks. Using an action research approach I supported my



masters' students in meeting the University criteria whilst producing their own living educational theories with their energy-flowing values in their living curriculum. With my doctoral students I emphasised the importance of engaging critically with the ideas of others whilst focusing on the university requirement of a doctoral thesis to make an original and significant contribution to knowledge. Each doctoral thesis at <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> has met this requirement as individuals explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, work and research.

## 7. Influencing self, others and social Formations: A living legacy

My emphasis on the importance of explaining educational influences in learning is reinforced by Said's reference to the work of Valéry:

No word comes easier or oftener to the critic's pen than the word influence, and no vaguer notion can be found among all the vague notions that compose the phantom armory of aesthetics. Yet there is nothing in the critical field that should be of greater philosophical interest or prove more rewarding to analysis than the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another. (Said, 1997, p. 15)

By focusing on "influence" I wanted to avoid the impression of trying to establish a causal connection between what I did and another's learning of the kind, "If I do this then that will happen." I wanted to emphasise that an explanation of educational influence in learning involved an intentional relationship in which what is learnt requires a creative response from the other or oneself.

My focus on influencing social formations evolved with Jacqueline Delong's influence as I began to recognise the importance of having systemic influences through the development of cultures-of-inquiry. My early research and supervision focused on the development of explanations of educational influences in learning of self and other in particular sites - the social formation of particular organisations. Since 2000 my research has focused increasingly on an engagement with systemic influences in developing cultures-of-inquiry that can support and extend the influence of living-educational-theories that carry hope for the future of humanity. My present interest in explaining educational influences in the learning of social formations, continues to emphasise the importance of each individual generating their own living-educational-theory within which it is important to deepen and extend one's sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings of the "automatisms of the *habitus*":

...paradoxically, social science makes greatest use of the language of rules precisely in the cases where it is most totally inadequate, that is, in analysing social formations in which, because of the constancy of the objective conditions over time, rules have a particularly small part to play in the determination of practices, which is largely entrusted to the automatisms of the *habitus*. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 145)

A living-educational-theory engages with a desire to contribute to educational influences in the learning of social formations and to produce living legacies that can have a sustaining and sustained influence in a culture of inquiry. The desire to produce a living

legacy, is related to sustaining one's motivation in continuing to contribute to education, with the faith that life is worthwhile and the hope that one's values carry hope for the future of humanity. I first heard the idea of a *living legacy* from Catherine Forester - an Ed.D. student at Liverpool Hope University (Forester, 2013, p. 4). The idea of "Living Legacies" provided a title for a text edited by Andrew Henon (2012), a socially engaged artist, on "APEX Living Legacies: Stories creating futures" (see <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/apex/livinglegacies2012.pdf>):

A 'living legacy' is the unique testimony of an individual practitioner providing a positive bridge between the past and the future. As I see it, within each one of us, is realised the sum of our past academic, professional and personal knowledge.

The present is the 'sum'. If each sum represented a candle what light of knowledge the totality of these candles could emit from the past to shine for future generations of educators and students. Yet, at present, each 'I' shines separately; alone in the dark of its own extinguishing. So, with the hope of my own 'living legacy', comes the dream that the idea has taken on an independent life that will find expression again and again in the creative and unique legacies of others – including those of today's students, tomorrow's teachers.

However, in describing the genesis of the idea, I would deny the very essence of 'living legacies' if I did not acknowledge those whose preceding work nourished the field in which it is seeded. They are legion; all part of the chain of 'flourishing humanity' that connects the loving, hope-filled values, aspirations and struggles across many disciplines and practices. (Forester, 2013, pp. 4-5).

My hope of contributing to a living legacy through this presentation is grounded in the inclusion and public expression of a pooling of loving and life-affirming energy in a culture of inquiry. I was introduced to the idea of a pooling of life-affirming energy by Sonia Hutchison (2012, p. 11) the Director of a Care Giving Network in the UK. I see the recognition of the significance of expressing and sustaining a pooling of life-affirming energy within a culture of inquiry, together with the commitment to sustain this pooling of energy within a co-operative inquiry, as perhaps our most important contribution to educational knowledge and to our living legacies in this issue of EJOLTS.

My interest in understanding sociohistorical and sociocultural influences and integrating implications of these understandings in what one is doing to improve practice extends into influencing social formations outside the classroom.

## **8. Influencing social formations outside the classroom**

Social formations outside the classroom can have profound influences on what goes on inside classrooms. External accountability processes such as those operated by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in the UK can often deny the educational values that teachers are seeking to live in the living curriculum. Perhaps the most significant external influence can be seen in the global financial crisis that resulted from unregulated banking. Greece has been particularly badly affected by this crisis in the pay, conditions and employment of teachers as well as other citizens. Countries such as Norway and Canada, which do not have unregulated banking sectors, are weathering the global crisis with many of their social welfare and educational provisions intact.

I have been seeking to influence social formations outside the classroom with numerous workshops, keynotes and conference presentations in different countries (see <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>). Here are some details of my Mandela Day Lecture<sup>1</sup> (Whitehead, 2011) that explains my present thinking on influencing social formations outside the classroom:



**Video 3.** Jack Whitehead's 2011 Mandela Day Lecture at Durban University of Technology on the 18th July 2011 (<http://youtu.be/Pm-MTNeXXBY>)

There is a [9 minute section between 48:04 - 57:04 minutes](#) where the audience are discussing in pairs what really matters to them.

The Mandela day lecture at Durban University of Technology is being offered in collaboration with the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF) and I first want to thank the organizers of the 2011 Mandela Day for the pleasure and privilege of presenting this Lecture.

Nelson Mandela is recognized globally as an individual who inspires tolerance and humanity. He is also a symbol for enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for the future of humanity. To stress the importance in the Lecture of connecting directly to Nelson Mandela I am starting with this 1:36 minute clip of Nelson Mandela talking about an Ubuntu way of being.

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<sup>1</sup> News of Nelson Mandela's death on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013 was announced as this issue was being prepared for publication and we wish to affirm our recognition and belief that the values of Nelson Mandela, as a global citizen, carry hope for the future of humanity and are values that we hold ourselves accountable to in generating our living-educational-theories with our cultures-of-inquiry.



**Video 4:** [Nelson Mandela and Ubuntu](#) (Canonical, 2006)

Mandela Day is also a call for action to take responsibility for our individual influences in the world:

*"Mandela Day 2011*

*Mandela Day is a call to action for people everywhere to take responsibility for making the world a better place, one small step at a time, just as Nelson Mandela did.*

*Nelson Mandela spent more than 67 years serving his community, his country, and the world at large. On Mandela Day people are called to devote just 67 minutes of their time to changing the world for the better, in a small gesture of solidarity with humanity, and in a small step towards a continuous, global movement for good."*  
([http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/foundation/mandela-day/category/mandela\\_day\\_2010/](http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/foundation/mandela-day/category/mandela_day_2010/))

Paper Six of this issue of EJOLTS includes intentions to contribute to creating a world in which values that carry hope for the future of humanity are being lived more fully than they are today. In the evolution of my living-educational-theory I am deepening and extending my practical activities within the living boundaries of cultures-of-inquiry that carry these energy-flowing values. The pooling of life-affirming energy with the values that carry this hope for humanity has been at the heart of this cooperative production of EJOLTS.

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## About the Author

**Jack Whitehead:** In March 2013 I was appointed for five years as a Visiting Professor at the University of Cumbria in the UK and continue with my Adjunct Professor's appointment at Liverpool Hope University until February 2014. These appointments follow my 36 years as a Lecturer in Education at the University of Bath (1973-2009) and my research continues to focus on the original idea of generating living educational theories and on extending their influence. By a living-educational-theory I mean an individual's explanation for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work. Contributing cooperatively in the production of this paper marks a creative phase in my research in which I am extending my understandings of relational and energy-flowing explanatory principles that include gendered awareness. I also explore the potentials of multi-media narratives that include multi-participant SKYPE conversations for producing valid explanations of educational influence that can transcend issues of poverty in forms of representation for educational researchers.