

# **How are we co-creating living standards of judgement in action-researching our professional practices?**

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## **Abstract**

The presentation will focus on the co-creation of the living standards of judgement of action researchers as they enquire into living their moral/ethical values as fully as they can in their workplaces. Whitehead, as the supervisor of Huxtable's research degree and Huxtable as a Senior Educational Psychologist, will explore the implications of their co-enquiry, "*How do I respond receptively to Marie Huxtable's enquiry, 'How do I improve my practice as a senior educational psychologist working in B&NES while researching my practice for a research degree?'*" in terms of the co-creation of new living standards of judgement in action research.

## **Introduction**

As professional educators and educational researchers we love what we do in the sense that we are energized by the educational processes of learning. We feel an energizing flow of pleasure in living productive lives as we support others in enhancing their own learning as they develop their own values, skills and understandings and as we improve our own. Our desires to research and explain our educational influences in learning are connected to the questions we ask of ourselves and each other that are related to improving what we are doing in our professional practices.

In working and researching together we are aware of our shared commitment to respecting the individual identity and integrity of the other while recognizing that we are engaged in a process of co-creating knowledge in interconnecting and branching channels of communication with each other and with others. Hence, following Murray (who first used we~i in personal correspondence), we use i~we to communicate a relationship in which an individual's identity co-exists with a social relationship to the other(s). As part of our desire to support Black Cultural Renewal (Aymer 2005), we will be using the term Ubuntu from African cosmology and, following Murray, to mean who we are, what we know and what we do.

In explaining the educational influences of our values in learning we think of our values, as ontological expressions of life-affirming energy that give meaning and purpose to our lives. In the process of clarifying the meanings of these values, in the course of their emergence through enquiry, we produce the living epistemological standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of our claims to know the educational influences in our own learning and in the learning of others.

Our use of multi-media representations of what we are doing and learning, enable us to communicate our understandings of our educational influences. We explain these influences in our own and in each others' learning through the expression of our inclusional ways of being. By inclusionality, following Rayner (2006), we mean a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries that is connective, reflexive and co-creative. The explanations of their educational influences in learning of individuals who are living with an inclusional perspective need living standards of judgement to judge the validity of explanations. We use the term living educational theory to distinguish these explanations from explanations generated from propositional theories that abide by the Aristotelean Laws of Contradiction and Excluded Middle. Our inclusional explanations will be shown to move beyond limitations of formal and dialectical logics in the co-creation of valid explanations of educational influences in learning that constitute our living educational theories.

In generating our living educational theories of our own learning we will focus on communicating the meanings of our co-created living standards of equality in power relations, life-affirming energy and loving passion for education, enquiry learning and a receptively responsive systemic influence in the education of social formations.

## Contexts

Marie works as a senior educational psychologist in Bath & North East Somerset. She is researching her educational practices for a research degree, with Jack as co-researcher and supervisor, while seeking to contribute to improvements in the quality of educational provision with teachers and students in schools in Bath and North East Somerset. Jack works as a Lecturer in Education in the University of Bath. He is seeking to contribute to the advancement of educational knowledge through his original work on the nature of educational theory and their living standards of judgment.

Our sociocultural contexts in the University and the Local Authority flow with the power relations that support normative judgements about what counts as valid knowledge and what counts as the standards of judgement that can be used to hold ourselves accountable in our workplaces and wider society for what we do. In the Academy the logical premises of rationalistic enquiry are dominant. Following Rayner we are persuaded of the need to develop the logical premise of inclusional enquiry and to explore the meanings of the living standards of judgement that emerge through such enquiries:

*The logical premise of inclusional enquiry is that natural form is primarily fluid dynamic (space-including) and hence non-linear, continually transforming (simultaneously and reciprocally receptive and responsive), and not completely definable at any scale. (Rayner, e-mail correspondence 24/05/06)*

Because of the relationally dynamic awareness of inclusional enquiry we will be using the term *i~we* to mean an inclusional relationship in which both I and We exist together.

### **The significance of *i~we* in our explanations**

The title of this paper contains *i~we* and we feel the need to explain the meaning of this term because of its significance in the creation of our relationally dynamic standards of judgement.

For the 33 years of his research programme into the nature of educational theory, Jack has focused on enquiries, grounded in professional contexts, of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' He believes that individuals can speak for themselves and in his own enquiry has resisted speaking for others through the use of 'we'. The resistance to 'we' has also been because of a desire not to impose his meanings on another. Marie shares this concern. We use *i~we* to emphasise a relationship in which the 'I' is not violated by the imposition of an inappropriate 'We'. Where we use 'we' we have checked with each other that this is appropriate in the sense that we feel our meanings are shared.

In our use of *i~we*, we are doing more than representing a resistance to imposition. We are also acknowledging that something is created that is beyond the individual but is in the space between ~ it is what is formed at the inclusional boundaries between us, a place of meeting rather than separating, a space for cocreation rather than a void. To communicate

this relational quality of being, we draw on Cathy Aymer's living in Ubuntu and her ideas in her doctoral thesis on Seeking Knowledge for Black Cultural Renewal. In a research seminar on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2006 at the University of Bath we felt the presence and flow of Cathy's living Ubuntu and identified with her expression of empathy with the numbers of young black men, unemployed, in prison and receiving mental health service support. We believe that bringing Cathy's understanding of Ubuntu as a sociocultural influence could do much to transform this situation. We are working for such sociocultural transformations through the creation and dissemination through web-space of living educational theories that share these insights.

In working together to explain the educational influences of our values in our own learning and in the learning of others we have engaged in our individual reflections to show the transformational nature of our learning. We have shared these reflections with each other and with others. Images have played an important part in the co-creation of our shared meanings. Images such as one of an infant school pupil about which we wrote:

The affirmations of inclusionality felt and understood by both of us are focused on our responses to the expressions in the eyes, face, body and hands of the pupil above as she shows what she has been working on, to the photographer. We both felt a flow of life-affirming energy in our responses to the image and with each other. Ethical permissions have been given for our use of the images. We recognised this flow of energy between us and affirm that it carries our hope for the future of humanity and our own. For us, the way the pupil shows Belle what she had produced carries two affirmations. There is the affirmation from the pupil that what has been produced is a source of pleasure and satisfaction and which she is seeking to share and engage the other with. We are associating such affirmations with what we mean by our living standards of a productive life in education.

### **Our inclusional educational relationships**

The way we have constructed this paper is intended to show the living dynamic of our inclusional educational relationship that is grounded in a quality of inclusionality of equality in power relations that both of us hold in relation to our values of humanity. Within this quality of inclusionality we are aware of and resistant to Jack's move into a supervisor~supervised relationship that can be defined by the unequal power relations associated with the regime of truth of a University in relation to a registered research student. Marie has written something about her feelings of resistance about Jack's move into a supervisor~supervised relationship.

*'Supervisor' is an unfortunate word as it suggests a power relationship and that is not the relationship which I have understood – when we have communicated I do not hear you saying responsible for but responsible towards, which is not the over seeing power position implied by 'supervisor'.*

The inclusional quality of a power relation of equality is our first co-created living standard of judgement.

Marie will now focus on her question in the context of a 10 minute video-clip of her practice:

*'How do I improve my practice as a senior educational psychologist working in B&NES while researching my practice for a research degree?'*

Marie is explaining to colleagues her concern with the way 'targets' form a 'basket of indicators'. Marie is explaining what she thinks is missing from the present 'standards' in terms of the values she believes to be vital to education. You can access the clip from:

<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/marie/mhjwclip1.mov>

Seeing ourselves as others see us has been important in our co-creation of our living standards of judgement. We have clarified for ourselves and with each other the meanings of our living standards in the course of their emergence in our enquiries through conversation and the following reflections:

**Marie's reflections on a conversation that includes standards of judgment of equality in power relations, enquiry learning and a loving passion for education in learning and knowledge-creation.**

Through the process of creating this joint paper we experimented to learn more about what it is to be in the i~we relationship of equality of power relations and the space between. This has required a sensitivity, a trust, and a commitment to try to listen and understand and creatively connect behind the words of self and the other; an expression of values such as inclusionality and a passion for education which Jack expands on later.

As I look at the clip of myself in this conversation café I am trying to see myself with the eyes of another as I seek to enquire with, rather than simply to communicate to, others. Jack took the video, so in one sense I am seeing myself through his eyes. By trying to look with loving critical eyes at the image of myself I was responding to Jack as supervisor of my research seeking to extend me as student and I was responding within an inclusional collaborative relationship to a colleague with superior knowledge offering the lead in my~our enquiry.

I find looking at myself on video an uncomfortable experience and yet I am doing it because I want to understand better what I am doing and to improve my educational influence in my workplace. This time I engaged with 'gentle eyes' rather than the critical ones I usually use when looking at myself. I have seen others, particularly women, squirm with embarrassment at seeing their own image so I think you as reader will appreciate that the public sharing of this video reflects a trust in the productive potential of opening that space between us through these images.

After a lively interchange I eventually conceded, all be it grudgingly (I am still not fond of

my own image) , that Jack might be right and there was evidence I was demonstrating some of the qualities I value in other educators such as love, humour, pleasure, the genuine feeling of valuing the other and interest in them. To be able to make this judgement I realise the trust I have developed not only in Jack as supervisor and colleague but also in myself and that something productive can be created within myself and between us through our work as i~we.

I have chosen this clip because I focus on an issue that concerns me deeply. The issue is one of standards and judgements and my strong feeling that the government policies on the forms of accountability we are under pressure to use in local authorities are omitting some vital qualities of inclusionality and education. These qualities are not omitted from the lives of the educators I am working with. It is not common practice to specifically seek evidence of those qualities being lived and it is often difficult to persuade educators to share themselves through images although they will readily agree that text alone does not convey them. My developing trust in Jack as collaborator and my willingness to listen to his intent, rather than to my anxiety, lead me to ask him to video the session; I wanted to see if this could help me improve my practice with my living values as standards of judgement.

I have seen these qualities expressed by educators as they work to influence their own learning and the learning of others, be they children or adults but there is little communicable evidence. You can see these qualities expressed by Jack with South African educators talking about Ubuntu (see <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jwubuntucd.mov> .) He, creates a space for enquiry between self and another where each tries to listen to, and enquire of the other and self with humour and pleasure and to create something new, not only between 'us', but also each within 'self'. I think I can see myself express some of those qualities and by offering you the video clip I am inviting you to judge for yourself. (Jack and I share our understanding of our value of inclusionality and standard of enquiry learning)

I know that in the video, unusually for me, I can be seen making the longest contribution I have made in these conversations. As I watch the video I am listening intently to myself at Jack's insistence with 'gentle ears'. Listening requires both a skill and intention to hear and respond to what is seen, heard and felt of the response to what I am trying to develop and communicate. It also requires an intention to understand, and creatively connect with, what the other person is bringing and creating. It requires modification of the communication to engage, acknowledge and build on the response of the other and maintain engagement in the enquiry. Communication requires a skill and intention to convey meanings and understandings behind and beyond the words through a genuine interest and pleasure in the other and a belief that the venture is a worthwhile activity where something new can be created. In the video-clip I am focusing on the importance of qualities of an inclusional human existence that are at present omitted from the government 'targets' and the standards used in the workplace to judge our 'effectiveness'.

In producing this account and making it available to you it is inviting a response from you

that I think could help to create new living standards of judgement in education that more closely connect with the values, skills and understandings of inclusionality that we wish to see expressed more fully in the world.

In my inclusional relationships I think that I communicate an interest in the other from the genuine feeling of valuing the other. In the image below I recognize myself seeking to engage with another. I am seeking to connect my understandings with theirs with an invitation to enquire and in the expectation that something worthwhile will be produced.

As you view the video-clip do you recognize, as I do, that I am expressing my pleasure of being in a collaborative, creative, educational conversation with others? I believe that to connect with another person in such a way brings with it a feeling of pleasure that overrides and can support me to attend to rather than give in to temporary unpleasant feelings of embarrassment, fear, or anxiety which interrupts learning.

Do you recognize my expressions of humour. I believe that these often accompany moments when there is a connection between people who have shared values and understandings; who share that moment of realisation of that connection or the recognition that something new and of value has been created between them or within one of them in terms of learning and/or knowledge creation.

The emergence of this paper is, I think, evidence of the influence I have had not only in my own learning but also in Jack's. What has been produced is beyond what either of us intended at the outset and through it i~we have expressed the qualities of humanity which we are seeking to bring into the world and evidence in a manner that communicates within our workplaces.

**Jack's reflections on the co-creation of the living standards of judgement of equality of power relations, a loving passion for education in learning and knowledge-creation, enquiry-learning, life-affirming energy and receptively responsive systemic influence in the education of social formations**

*How do I (Jack Whitehead) respond receptively to Marie Huxtable's enquiry, 'How do I improve my practice as a senior educational psychologist working in B&NES while researching my practice for a research degree?'*

I am contextualizing my response in a tension between the equality of power in inclusional relationships and the unequal power relations between supervisor and supervised. The video-clip evokes in me the flow of pleasurable, life-affirming energy of feeling the flow of Marie's pleasure and her passion for the equal power relations of mutuality. I see the pleasure in Bataille's (1987, p. 11) terms as assenting to life up to the point of death and in Cho's (2005) terms of love in education, where the energy of loving relations is focused on knowledge-creation. Eleanor Lohr (2006) has expressed this well in her thesis on Love at Work (see <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/lohr.shtm> ) and Margaret Farren has shown her

own passion for education in forming a pedagogy of the unique from the web of betweenness in her doctorate (see <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren.shtml> ) .

So, in thinking about how I respond receptively to Marie's enquiry, I know that Marie is a unique human being with her own constellation of values, skills and understandings that constitute who she is, what she does and why she does it. In responding to her enquiries I am conscious of listening to her desire and commitment to mutuality, her passion for education and learning, her awareness of a tension between the standards being used to judge educational processes and outcomes in her workplace and the living standards she uses to judge the quality of educational processes and outcomes. I am also aware of her inclusional awareness and way of being in her valuing, connecting and enquiring with others.

The images of Marie in the video-clip are taken in the flow of Marie's expression of concern about the present standards being used to assess outcomes and her desire to articulate the living standards she uses to evaluate quality in education. I can feel Marie's focused will in articulating something about the standards she believes are of value in improving education. As I watch the video-clip I can feel Marie tentatively seeking a response from others to see if she has been understood. I can feel the spontaneity of the pleasure and laughter that carries for me Marie's life-affirming energy, passion for life and love for education and the delight she can experience and express in being with others.

Hence in my reflections with the video-clip and with Marie's reflections I believe that I am communicating the meanings of my embodied values of responding to the other with a flow of life-affirming energy that communicates in a way that the other recognizes themselves as assenting to life up to the point of death. I am thinking of values as expressions of energy that form the living boundaries connecting me with others. With Marie I am valuing her search for appropriate ways of representing her living standards in a way that is evidence-based and can communicate with others. I am valuing both the process of enquiry learning and the substantive content focused on living standards of educational judgment. In thinking about my ability to distinguish the educational influences of the expression and recognition of our embodied values in our learning I focus on a shift in my understanding of relationships and a change in Marie's willingness to engage in a self-study of her own learning that she will make public through her writings.

Marie has influenced my awareness of the importance of acknowledging the importance of inclusionality within equal power relations. She has also heightened my awareness of the need to resist relating to her within a supervisor~supervised relationship that involves unequal power relations. I believe that I have influenced Marie, through being receptively responsive to her interests, concerns, values, skills and understandings to improve the quality of her self-study into her educational influence through becoming more self-aware of how she is perceived by others in enhancing their learning. (Marie points to the video and her reflections as evidence of my influence in her learning) Marie is influencing my understandings of a way of being that is receptively responsive in flows of systemic influence.

The living standard of judgment of being receptively responsive in flows of systemic influence in the education of social formations is relatable to Marshall's (2004) idea of living systemic thinking which includes gaining feedback from others. Using Rayner's idea of receptive responsiveness, our co-created standard of judgment includes the responses to the feedback of others in enhancing the flow of systemic influence. What I am learning in researching with Marie is how to represent a receptively responsive flow of systemic influence in the education of social formations, as a living standard of judgment.

### **Shared Concerns**

We are fascinated by the possibility that some of the values, skills and understandings we are now sharing are helpful to others in creating their own forms of life in their workplaces and other social contexts. This fascination is connected with our desire to influence the education of social formations as well as self and other individuals. The power of a collective response in educating social formations often has greater influence than the actions of an individual. Hence we are interested in enhancing the flow of values that carry hope for the future of humanity with collective actions that serve this purpose. To this end we are researching together to see if we can contribute to a transformation in the standards of judgment that are used to legitimate what counts as educational knowledge.

It is our belief that the living standards of judgment, such as equality of power-relations, life-affirming energy, enquiry learning and love, that have already been legitimated in the living educational theories flowing through web-space, are making a contribution to this transformation. Our attention is now re-focusing on spreading the influence of this recognition and legitimation in local, regional, national and global social formations. Hence the embodied values we have referred to in this paper are increasingly being expressed as sociocultural relations, flowing through web-space from <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/living.shtml> that can influence the learning of social formations with living theories and standards of judgement.

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