

**How do I come to a better understanding of my proclaimed and embodied co-operative values and their influence of the learning of others, through the creation of this assignment? (Maureen B. October 2012)**

Values are the ideals that give significance to our lives, that are reflected through the priorities that we choose, and that we act on consistently and repeatedly. (Hall, 1994, p 4)

As I continue to strive to be an effective, authentic educator I am intrigued to better understand how my embodied and proclaimed values are evident in my practice as a facilitator and educator, how they manifest themselves and if and how they influence the learning and practice of others.

I decided that the challenge of writing this assignment would afford me the opportunity and provide the motivation to undertake that investigation and in so doing enable me to communicate and make public my understandings and meanings in relation to the question.

In my methodological choice, I have been influenced by McNiff's and Whitehead's (2011) ideas on action research and in particular, living theory methodology, in which questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' can be explored through action reflection cycles and I have approached this enquiry through that method. In writing the assignment, I assumed the questions integral to the action reflection cycle would provide a framing for the narrative and explanation and this was my starting point.

A living theory perspective is additionally based on the premise that it is through an individuals lived experience that they can research their influence. This is both self-validated as well as socially validated by a research group. This emphasises the need for a strong research community that can be used to validate the finding of the work. This fits my preferred learning style well as it relies on a community of peers to help me modify and shape my thinking, which as I will explain later placed me in the frame of mind to complete this assignment.

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I proclaim to live my life through the embodied values I hold that I describe as co-operative values. I have a strong commitment to co-operative ways of working and co-operative learning. In both my professional and personal life I am involved with facilitating and enabling co-operative groups in educational and community settings. Through this account I aim to come to a better understanding of my proclaimed co-operative values and provide educational explanations of how they influence me as an educator and in the learning of others. I will do this by focusing on the writing of this account and the process of guest editing a special edition of the UK Journal of Co-operative Studies (2011) and the setting up of a 'co-operative community of practice' to create the publication.

In an attempt to identify my embodied values, I think of what is important to me in my life. I have found the co-operative values defined by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA)

(1995) signify what matters to me and provide a useful language to explore my motives and actions and scaffold my reflections. They are comprised of a suite of six organisational values (self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity) and four ethical values (honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others). They provide a framework for self-reflection and form the benchmarks against which I judge myself and my practice.

Schwarz states that values:

...guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. People decide what is good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth doing or avoiding, based on possible consequences for their cherished values (2006, p 4).

He also proposes that values serve as standards or criteria (ibid.).

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I am constantly drawn to working with others as a preferred way of operating. As I seek to further understand my deeper motivations towards the co-operative approach and way of being, I recognise the need to understand my role and presence as the 'I' within the collective 'we' within a co-operative group and I will examine this through the process of working closely with two assistant editors in the production of the journal.

As I look for answers to the question I pose, I intend to develop my own understanding and improve my day to day effectiveness as an educator. I will enlarge the personal lens through which I view my practice and consider it from the perspectives of others. I will reflect on what co-operation looks in a 'co-operative community of practice' as set up to create the journal, with its internal relationships and inherent tensions and rewards.

From a co-operative viewpoint, learning is not a selfish and solitary pursuit. It is important for me that others with an interest can access and engage with my findings and in so doing, may advance their own learning and practice. Producing this narrative is not only a tool for self-reflection but enables my account to be shared. 'One of the distinguishing characteristics of action research is that the researcher must make public the story of their research in a way that is open to others to evaluate its validity' (EJOLTS 2012).

Moreover, by capturing the outcomes in writing, I am able to support the mission of the American Educational Research Association (2012) which is:

to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good.

and the purposes of the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2010) which is:

to encourage the pursuit of educational research and its application for both the improvement of educational practice and for the public benefit.

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I have the conviction that I will be able to improve my practice with a better understanding of how my embodied values affect my relationships with learners and how they affect their learning. I am not often engaged in conscious thought about the way my values frame my way of acting and being. It is only when I find myself reacting emotionally to situations and behaviour I find discordant, that I become aware of some deeper psyche.

Schwartz (2006) proposes that:

the impact of values in everyday decisions is rarely conscious. Values enter awareness when the actions or judgments one is considering have conflicting implications for different values one cherishes.

In pursuing this enquiry I found the need to understand more about the nature of values if I was to understand their influences on me and those of others. The Common Cause Report (2010) describes 'intrinsic values'. These are associated with concern about bigger-than-self problems, and with corresponding behaviours to help address these problems which include the values placed on a sense of community, affiliation to friends and family, and self-development. I would categorise all of the co-operative values I describe, as intrinsic values.

I also find the work of Schwarz (op.cit.) helpful in clarifying my understanding of values. He suggests the values theory defines ten broad values according to the motivation that underlies each of them. I have resonance with two of these and that capture the co-operative values I purport namely self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

'1 Benevolence. The defining goal is preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact. Benevolence values derive from the basic requirement for smooth group functioning and from the organismic need for affiliation. They promote co-operative and supportive social relations, emphasize voluntary concern for others' welfare and provide an internalised motivational base for such behaviour. Words associated with benevolence values are: helpful, honest, forgiving, responsible, loyal, true friendship, mature love, sense of belonging, meaning in life, a spiritual life.

2 Universalism. The defining goal is understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. Universalism values derive from survival needs of individuals and groups. But people do not recognize these needs until they encounter others beyond the extended primary group and until they become aware of the scarcity of natural resources. People may then realize that failure to accept others who are different and treat them justly will lead to life-threatening strife. They may also realize that failure to protect the natural environment will lead to the destruction of the resources on which life depends. Universalism combines two subtypes of concern—for the welfare of those in the larger society and world and for nature (broadminded, social justice, equality, world at peace, world of beauty, unity with nature, wisdom, protecting the environment)[inner harmony, a spiritual life]'

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The focus of my enquiry is the creation of an academic journal. It involved collaboration with two colleagues who assumed roles as assistant editors, brought together on this project by our shared desire to bring more legitimacy and exposure to the wealth of known practice in the field of co-operation in education. This was not a task that we would receive any financial reward for and we took it on in the knowledge that it would require many hours of concerted effort and hard work. I had felt frustrated for many years that co-operative learning as pedagogy was not receiving the recognition and adoption in the UK it deserved. We were creating an opportunity to change that.

I knew both colleagues well, although we had not worked on a project of this kind before. With their different skills and personalities, I knew they would stimulate and challenge my thinking and improve my enjoyment of the task. I consider them both to have a deep understanding of co-operative process and hold similar values to my own. It is this shared core that I believe enabled us to steer a straight course through the two year period from envisioning the possibilities to the realisation of the journal.

My account from this point on talks of 'we'. I have difficulty in removing myself from the shared experience and writing this account from the solitary 'I', although I held ultimate responsibility as editor. For the purposes the assignment I started by attempting to reflect the story of the creation of the journal to myself alone and failed. This does not surprise me but reinforced the understanding of my embedded view of shared experience and deep commitment to the 'other' which became a recurring theme throughout the enquiry and this writing.

I am inspired by the consideration of the 'I' and the 'We' in the writings of Huxtable and Whitehead (2012) who explain:

We use 'i~we' to emphasise a relationship in which the 'I' is not violated by the imposition of an inappropriate 'We'.

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.

The above explanation for me suggests the enhanced potential of something greater than the sum of the parts when two or more people work together. This is in accord with my own beliefs and perhaps explains why I unconsciously always seek to identify 'another' to work with. Indeed as the enquiry progressed my understanding of 'we' evolved from being static to dynamic.

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In planning the way forward, two challenging tasks ran concurrently. Firstly, 'What does co-operation look like in the creation of a journal?' Secondly, 'Who would be the players and be

part of the diverse group of academics and educationalists we would bring together to scope and realise the possibilities’.

Creating an academic journal in this way – indeed being involved in editing a journal - was something none of us had experience of and we realised probably no one else we were recruiting would have encountered. Through discussion and negotiation, the structure and processes to engage the community of practice through the production of the journal slowly emerged through many shared conversations over several months.

Appendix 1 is an extract from a planning document shortly into the planning process which describes the structure and process applied to the first part of the journal creation. I show it to illustrate the inclusive environment we were hoping to create.

There were desired cultural principles we wished to establish through sharing the vision, some which I will discuss later. These included a sense of belonging and mutual trust, openness and honesty and solidarity and a mutual caring for each other along the journey.

I have still on file, many hundreds of emails generated throughout the period of the journal production. See Appendix 2 as an example of an email to participants on 14 April 2011, which I consider illustrates my embodied expression of co-operation in my desire to create an inclusive community where people felt they belonged.

As I would mainly have only electronic contact with participants via email, I realised that I needed to model the values underpinning our actions through into the written communication. I took much trouble over the language and construction of these. Additionally, the high number of emails in itself is another illustration of my commitment to the co-operative process.

The other crucial element was to recruit the contributors. Some were known to us but others were found through contacting published authors and following up leads, who we felt had something to say. The task then was clear – to help the authors come to a common understanding and meaning of co-operative enquiry in the way that upheld co-operative values and enable them to develop their writing within a co-operative context, which we knew was highly unusual for an academic journal. Some we realised would need to let go of their more individual preferred way of working for the benefit of the project. It has been my observation that some academics engaged in research on co-operative aspects do not themselves exhibit co-operative behaviour. It was important to the success of our desired co-operative method of production, that we explored these issues early in the process with potential authors to explain our meaning of co-operative enquiry and gain their commitment.

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Other challenges were known at the outset, some emerged through the process. We intended to be non-judgmental or hierarchical and give a voice to as broad a range of contributors as there were stories to tell. We knew that there would be variations in experience, perceived relevance, perceived status, writing style and cultural references and

we had to plan to mediate these. There were also political considerations to take into account to ensure some of the key organisations had a voice and to dampen disparaging viewpoints.

My experience has shown that for any successful co-operative group, there has to be a sense of trust. The success of the community of practice would rely on this. We knew that we had to create space for the authors and ourselves to get to know one another and build relationships.

Perlman (1979, p.2) argues that what we call relationship is 'a catalyst, an enabling dynamism in the support, nurture, and freeing of people's energies and motivations toward solving problems and using help'.

We programmed two days throughout the process to bring all contributors together, one at the outset, the other three quarters of the way through. It was important to us, that these events modelled a co-operative experience where co-operative values could be expressed in action and the desired trusting relationships developed. One of the assistant editors already has excellent co-operative facilitation skills and we decided to utilise the additional skills of further colleagues who in my experience are great energisers. The first event revealed how unconnected approaches were between the participants and a greater dissonance between them emerged than anticipated. One notable difference and division was between those with a background and understanding of the co-operative movement, who would be familiar with a values driven approach, and those without.

Conforming with the usual format of the journal with a set format of peer reviewed lengthy articles and shorter 'think pieces' was a test to our resolve. Our needs for this special edition were different. The standing editorial board required the journal to uphold its status in academic publication rankings while we needed to give a voice to a breadth of practitioners. Driven by the strong commitment to our co-operative inclusive approach and a testimony to our resolve, after careful and lengthy negotiation the editorial board allowed us to double the size of the journal and to include as much additional material as we wished. This was a relief as it meant all contributors could be accommodated.

We were keen to nurture a sense of belonging and commitment to the task and participants with each other. It was our intention that through working together in a creative, generative and emergent way, authors would develop ideas, critique each other's work, provide mutual support, learn from each other and ultimately shape the Journal and its contents. It was intended that working in this way would cause all involved to think and reflect more deeply on theory and practice, strategy and themselves.

As previously mentioned, the co-operative community of practice was conceived to comprise the main contributors, both as a whole group as well as in thematic groups. Other more individual ways of working were not considered, as not reflecting closely enough the values we were attempting to nurture. Twenty seven potential contributors had been identified and a means to connect them and keep them connected presented a challenge. We were clear that the end product should read as a coherent publication telling a diverse story rather than a compilation of many accounts. It was important to have mechanisms in place whereby energy

could be created and contributors could bounce off each other's work. Technology could provide part of the solution; we hoped that the smaller themed groups would make the rest possible. So together as small and larger groups, we continued our relationships through the development and writing process through the use of a virtual learning environment, by telephone or using Skype and where feasible, face-to-face. People wrote and submitted their 'work in progress', and received feedback comments from their peers on both writing style and content, in a role that we defined as 'critical friends'. The work was then edited and shared again until completed. The process allowed authors to moderate their accounts based on what others were saying and negotiate with each other respective angles to focus on. The thematic groups enabled sharing in a more focussed way.

Perlman (ibid.) is guided by two propositions. One is that:

'The emotional bond that unifies two (or more) people around some shared concern is charged with enabling, facilitative powers'.

Engagement was closer and most connected with those contributors we had met and who had met others. We discovered that where thematic groups met several times over the writing period, the feedback supported this concept and less experienced authors made good progress.

Those who had not attended the workshop events were in my opinion, at a disadvantage. They were the ones in the main who did not engage with the VLE and needed to be chased after deadlines. They generally needed encouragement and reassurance more than others. The difference seemed that of participation, not belonging. The influence of our embodied values on their participation and learning through the process was less evident.

There were wide variations in people's writing experiences and abilities from extensively published academics to those who had never written before. One of the greatest dilemmas was working with highly experienced practitioners who had valuable stories to tell but whose writing was not at a standard for publication in an academic journal. Contrary, we had another contributor presenting the outcomes of several years of quantitative research in a written style that was inappropriate for the journal we were attempting to create. Excluding an author's account for either of these reasons was not an option and there was tension between being true to the co-operative learning process and assisting in an inevitable levelling process. Our solution was to work on this as a team with first and second readers and the contributor working together to give maximum support to the author. It is an example of where there was inevitable compromise with some writing being accepted as complete when more work could have enhanced it. The ultimate decision I had as editor was when to accept the work as 'good enough' or ask for further revisions and I was sensitive to do this without demotivating the author. Realising the many hours that had been invested in some of the writing, I found myself with a dilemma, wanting the best but being true to the co-operative process. I found this conflict presented an anxiety that on reflection I can now attribute to the living contradiction I was feeling.

Authors who had a hard journey in almost all cases found it ultimately vitalising as they could see the progress and improvement they had made. The co-operative approach was time consuming but in keeping true to its principles, it meant that some authors whose work would most likely have been turned down by other publications were able to enjoy the success of being published in this journal.

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At the point of writing this account, I found it very difficult to make a start almost to the extent of not bothering. I live a busy life, often with multiple projects in flow and know how to juggle to fit things in. Why was I unable to prioritise time to undertake this enquiry? I realised there were conflicting tensions at play that at first I could not explain. The analysis of my situation provided some interesting insights that I will explain.

### **Methodological Approach**

To keep my focus, my initial desire for the enquiry was to adopt a systematic approach in a tight analytical frame. I had chosen to work with 8 key questions in an action reflection cycle, a component of a living theory approach. I began by unpicking the story of the journal creation to identify practice that evidenced the 10 ICA co-operative values that I claim shape my practice. I then set about finding references from other authors whose writing supported the case I was making, which led to many hours of reading. I found I was struggling to motivate myself with this task. It seemed almost mechanical. Additionally, trying to differentiate and give individual significance in my practice to the 10 ICA values was limiting me. I was starting to appreciate that the values *collectively* carry my embodied expression of meaning and distinguishing qualities about who I am as in live co-operative values. Attempting to systematically place emphasis on the individual values separately as explanatory principles for my learning and influence was feeling perfunctory.

I was spending a long time looking for something that somehow didn't fit not only what I was trying to do but what was emerging from my reflection. I then pondered - does it need to? This was a critical moment in my deeper understanding of action research through the creation of a living theory. I realised that I needn't be constrained and could move to different forms of analysis that allowed me more freedom to explore my learning and the knowledge I was creating as an active learner. I could construct research methods that were meaningful to me. Once the block was removed, I was flowing. It is clear to me now however that working through the process as a transition gave me a better understanding of myself as an active learner.

I am led by Dadds and Hart (2001, p 169).who said:

'No methodology is, or should be, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods or techniques.'

I now have a better understanding of how the idea of a living theory methodology includes the unique contribution of an individual's *methodological inventiveness* (as Dadds and Hart call



it), in the creation of the theory, rather than to some overarching external principles to which each individual's methodology has to conform.

### **My expression of co-operativeness**

Having been part of the evening sessions with Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable at Bath University for two and a half years, I have built a strong sense of loyalty to them and the group. I have felt a sense of growth through attending the discussion groups and benefited from the freely shared time, insights, experiences and wisdom. Others in the group have been challenged to write also however they have shared their work in progress with the group over several months. The group has provided the validation required in a living theory approach. For me, writing the assignment was an offering back to those that have helped me – a subconscious sense of solidarity and mutuality and a completion of the process of investment in each other.

Contrary to this feeling of commitment, I was coming to realise that my need to work in the presence of others was playing a large part in my inability to begin the enquiry. I find little reward in solitary activity. It was when a colleague also writing an assignment, offered to spend a day working alongside me, that I felt pressed to make a start. As it transpired, we made an arrangement instead to keep in regular contact through the day by email, Skype or phone. This was enough. I didn't need her sitting with me as her virtual presence and feeling she was 'close' was sufficient to keep me on course for what was a productive twelve hours. With help, I had manoeuvred myself into a space that could deal with my conflicting sense of not having time but needing to do it for others.

In reflecting back to my role as guest editor of the journal and the community of practice, there are two perspectives I can now appreciate. The first is how easily I found myself entering the daunting task, as I had two colleagues to share it with. I did not suffer the same reticence as writing this account. Secondly, I realise that I played a similar role to my 'virtually present' colleague within the community of practice which probably contributed to a number of authors completing their contributions. I made myself available almost at the expense of my own well-being over 8-10 weeks of the intense writing period, working late into the night to respond to draft papers, hold extended evening and weekend Skype meetings, and generally keep everyone rolling along through encouraging emails. The fact that 27 contributors submitted and had their work published has to be a testimony to the process. I have learned through this enquiry that the virtual presence of another is effective as part of the co-operative working frame and for me can be as effective as their actual presence.

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I am aware that no matter how well I tell my story, my embodied expression of meaning cannot be constrained by text alone because the expression of energy in the meanings of my values cannot be communicated using only words on pages of text. I have sourced photo and video-data by way of a visual narrative to help me publicly communicate my meanings. Indeed in the recent call for papers (autumn 2012) of a special edition of special issue TATE

(Teaching and Teacher Education), will explore scholarly work beyond written texts and the valid use of other presentation media.

Huxtable (2009) explains a process using multi-media narrative, where she tries to clarify the meanings of her educational values which worked as a powerful illustration for me. She invites the reader to view the clip provided and by running the cursor back and forward share with her a sense of the flow of what she calls 'a respectful connectedness' between those in the scenes. She then asks the reader to re-read her observations, engaging with the still image and text and then with the video and the text. Finally she invites the reader as they are engaged in the tasks to consider whether the educational qualities which she was researching, are communicated more fully as the reader engages interactively with the multimedia narrative rather than the traditional text alone. She considers that she is able to communicate more of the relationally dynamic qualities of her educational research through this activity, than would otherwise have been possible.

I ask you to do the same with the following three clips, as I aim to show what others tell me is my defining ontological quality; a sense of loving energy, which is invitational to the other and reveals the sense of co-operative at the heart of 'who I am'.



1 Talking to a group of colleagues  
[http://youtu.be/OPkG46W\\_Z8M](http://youtu.be/OPkG46W_Z8M)



2 Talking to a video production manager about our needs from a video he was producing on our behalf  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qXVMZlcO5w>  
View from 1 15 2 16



3 In conversation with Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KM\\_QLrSKo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KM_QLrSKo)

View from 6.31-70.4

## Conclusion

Have I come to a better understanding of my proclaimed and embodied co-operative values and their influence of the learning of others, through the creation of this assignment?

It is in writing this account and through unpicking the creation of the journal, that I have discovered things about the research process and myself which has helped me understand more about my own learning and my influence on other learners. I can now more easily account for aspects of the educational influence in my own learning and through being an active learner I can see how to engage in knowledge creation rather than knowledge acquisition. I now understand how to more effectively set up a co-operative community of practice and indeed will be doing again, as the greatest validation of the co-operative process and my management and influence on it, is an invitation to guest edit another special issue of the Journal for Co-operative Studies in 2013.

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## Appendix 1

What	Who responsible	Timeframe
Four writing teams established through self-selection against themes 'Chair' identified for each theme to guide and motivate Protocols and purposes established by teams Each team to determine best ways to work	Maureen/Richard./Alan	End March 2011
On-line way of sharing writing determined by writing teams for both within team and whole group (CLADA VLA/Googledocs/others?)	Maureen/Alan	End March 2011
All participants meet at seminar (Birmingham) to share progress to date, build sense of community, review each other's writings etc.	Maureen/Alan/Richard to organise	27 June
Writing and peer review process - on-going		July/Aug
Meeting at SCS conference Cardiff to review progress	Maureen/Richard./Alan a.n.other theme leader	2-4 Sept

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## Appendix 2

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I have included details of all of the aspects of the journal, so that you can see the whole picture and have an insight into the 32 people or so, that will be part of our co-operative community of practice. I am very excited by the opportunity the project brings to us. It will serve as a point of reference for us for networking for debates on co-operation and education. Through the journal readership, it will be a platform to enable our ideas and understandings to be taken forward by the diverse group of advocates, researchers and practitioners working in the field.

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Once we have identified our collective suggestions, I hope that without too much adjustment, we will be able to agree who does what.

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I ask for your patience and tolerance as we work through the process – it is a different approach to constructing a journal and there is an element of learning as we go along!

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