

# **How do we recognise, express, represent and develop talents in the production of gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education?**

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## ***Abstract***

Government Policy has focused on the identification of defined groups of pupils as gifted and talented, comprised of some 10% of each school. The results of researching an alternative, inclusive and inclusional approach to gifts and talents in education (Hymer, 2007; Hymer, Whitehead & Huxtable, 2009) offer the opportunities for all pupils to be recognised as developing talents in the production of gifts.

The theories of Sen (1999) and Yunis Mohammad (2007) provide understandings of the background socio-cultural influences in the recognition, expression, representation and development of talents in the production of gifts for the educational knowledgebase of education. The background for the research includes dialogues in 2008 issues of Research Intelligence on an epistemological transformation in educational knowledge from practitioner-researchers.

The foci of this collaborative enquiry are the recognition, expression, representation and development of meanings of talents as living standards of judgment in claims to educational knowledge.

## ***Introduction***

Our living theory methodology (Whitehead, 2008) draws insights from methods used in phenomenological, ethnographic, case study, grounded theory and narrative approaches to educational research (Cresswell, 2007). It includes the use of a multi-media, narrative method for explicating the meanings of explanatory principles of educational influences in learning. Rigor is enhanced using the methods advocated by Winter (1989) and social validity is enhanced using the method advocated by Habermas (1976, 2002).

The paper draws on:

- Hymer's (2007) generative-transformational framework for gift creation.
- Rayner's (2005) idea of inclusionality.
- Biesta's (2006) ideas on moving beyond a language of learning into a language of education through the exercise of educational responsibility.
- Whitehead's (2008) living theory and living theory methodology.
- Sen's (1999) economic theory of human capability.
- Yunis Mohammad's (2007) idea of social business.

Our language and understandings of inclusive and inclusional gifted and talented education has emerged and evolved through our separate and collaborative practice and research, and working with and being influenced by: children and young people; leaders in the field of gifted and talented education such as Barry Hymer (Hymer, 2007) and Belle Wallace (2008); local, national and international educators.

To be clear, we 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)

We agree with Sen's distinctions between an economic theory of human capital and an economic theory of human capability. We use this distinction to emphasise the importance of an individual's ontological values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence. These values are not subsumed within our understandings of human capital. Similarly we are both in a position to identify with Yunis Mohammad's (2007) idea of social business where an individual's economic security is such that they can offer the products of their labour freely, as gifts, to others.

We start by illustrating from our different perspectives, constraints and opportunities, how and why we have evolved this collaborative enquiry. We will then use a multi-media, narrative method to explicate our recognition, expression, representation and development of meanings of talents as living standards of judgment as claims to educational knowledge.

### ***Context of this collaborative enquiry***

Jack is researching his influence, both locally and globally in a systemic epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. His vocation has been to enable educators to recognise, express, represent and develop their talents as educators in the creation, offering and accepting of their educational gifts to their students and to offer their embodied knowledge as 'doctor' and 'master' educators as gifts in the form of contributions to the educational knowledge-base of education

Marie is researching her systemic responsibility to organize both an inclusive and inclusional programme of extending educational opportunities for children and young people and a leadership programme for educators on Gifts and Talents in Education.

Our practice is expressed in, and influenced by, a complex ecology (Lee & Rochon, 2009) of dynamically inter-related intra and inter personal and socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts. Our local setting is in Bath and North East Somerset.

Marie had been evolving, developing and coordinating the APEX (ALL are Able Pupils Extending Opportunities) project inclusively in the local authority as a senior educational psychologist for a number of years when she was introduced to Jack at a NCSL meeting. Subsequently Marie asked Jack to extend the palette of support for development APEX offered by re-establishing and tutoring a Masters programme for local educators in 2005. She saw this as an opportunity for educators to experience learning through researching their practice to create and offer educational knowledge. Jack had worked for years to bring the embodied, legitimated knowledge of master and doctor educators into the academy as valued and valuable contributions to the educational knowledge base of education. He still sees this as a way of enhancing professionalism in education.

Since then the national gifted and talented education strategy has been launched and the national move for teaching to become a Masters profession has gathered pace. Gifts and talents had to become part of Marie's working vocabulary and she had to extend APEX to support schools and educators to creatively develop their educational responses to the national expectations in a manner consistent with their educational values. This presented considerable tensions as the values expressed in this, and other national strategies are inconsistent, implicit theories are incoherent and some practices contradictory. However, she was persuaded, by Jack and some Headteachers, that the national strategy might also present considerable opportunities.

The Masters programme, collaborative creative enquiries and webspaces that Jack and Marie collaborate to provide contributes to the educational relationships, spaces and opportunities APEX offers to support educators and learners developing talents for gift creation and teachers leading the development of inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision. A Gifts, Talents and Education unit has been added to the Masters programme Jack tutors. The accredited accounts of the educators are contributing to a web-based resource available to educators and policy makers wanting to develop inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision locally, nationally and internationally.

### ***Recognising, expressing, representing and developing talents of educators***

'Talent' like 'gift' is not a neutral word. To say someone has developed a talent implies that the skills, attributes, understandings, abilities, aptitudes... are socially valued. Similarly 'gifts' implies that also something valuable offered freely without expectation of reciprocation. Somewhere along the line a jump is made between recognizing these as social constructs to defining qualities of a person; 'that person has a talent' transmutes to 'that person is talented'. We have evolved our understandings of talents and gifts as social constructs and in so doing like Hymer (2007) who draws on Matthews and Dweck, we move from mystery to mastery, from an entity to incremental theory of intelligence and from a fixed mindset to one of growth. This enables us to explore and improve educational relationships, space and opportunities that support the recognition of talents that are employed in the creation, offering and accepting valued and valuable gifts, their development and enhancement.

‘Talent’ is misguidedly equated with an ability that is acquired and expressed at a high level of proficiency without effort. There have been a number of studies of high profile achievers that show that their proficiency has taken in the order of 10,000 hours of cognitively engaged practice. There is little understood about why an individual devotes so much time and effort to develop a particular talent. Even more intriguing, is why they often don’t recognize themselves, that they have worked so hard to develop and enhance particular talents, or why they don’t recognize or appreciate the level of proficiency that they have reached.

We have worked for years with educators who have developed their talents to create, and offer educational gifts to children, young people, colleagues and their school and organisation yet who do not understand their practice. By encouraging and supporting educators to research their talents for creating, and offering educational gifts we are helping them to understand more fully the what, how and why of their practice to improve it. By creating accounts that are made public and communicate to others, beyond their face-to-face meetings they contribute to their own learning, that of others (of all ages), and social formations.



The living theory approach using action research is a similar enquiry process to TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) developed by Belle Wallace (Wallace and Adams, 1993; Wallace, 2008). TASC is familiar to many educators and learners, of all ages, in schools nationally and internationally. It is familiar to schools locally having been introduced by APEX over many years.

Focussing on the ‘lets tell someone’ and ‘what have I learned’ stages on the TASC wheel enables participants to offer their learning as gifts to enhance the learning

of others and their own.

The importance of communicating to others is often recognized as an expression of the educational responsibility of professional educators to contribute to the learning of others. However, it is not so often acknowledged that in the process of articulating clearly to and with others descriptions and explanations (our living educational theories) of our practice we come to understand more fully our own practice and the knowledge we are creating, and how we are, and might further, improve. Put at its simplest: The best way to learn is to teach! ‘Teach’ here is understood as a process of inviting the other into an educational dialogue not imposing ‘content’ to be reproduced.

In our understanding of what is ‘educational’ we draw on Biesta’s (2006) insight that whilst we have a well developed language of learning we need to develop a language of education. We agree with Biesta that *‘we come into the world as unique individuals through the ways in which we respond responsibly to what and who is other’*. (p. ix).

As we make public our knowledge we invite others to help us validate our accounts by using Habermas' (1976, pp. 1-2) four criteria of social validity. We also strengthen the rigour of our accounts using Winters' (1989) six principles. In the process of validating and making our accounts more rigorous others also help us to recognize and value talents we are often unaware that we have developed or enhanced. By gaining a fuller appreciation of talents we have enhanced as well as those we want to develop we are able to make better use of ourselves as a resource for creating, offering and accepting educational gifts.

The final point we would like to make here is to explicitly acknowledge that in communicating to and with others we can come to a better understanding not only of our practice but of ourselves: our ontological and societal values that give meaning and purpose to our lives, our passions, interests, talents we are enhancing and those we want to develop, the terrain that we wish to continue in or move into where we feel an evolving sense of satisfaction and productivity in the contributions we make to our own learning and lives, that of others and the social formations in which we live and work.

We would like now to illustrate how we are supporting educators to recognise, express, represent and develop their educational talents in the production of gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education by making reference to the work of three educators from very diverse settings. Claire Formby and Sally Cartwright are members of the Masters group tutored by Jack and supported by Marie at the University of Bath, which we have referred to, Chris Jones is a member of the Improving Practice Conversation Café that meets weekly at the local authority offices and comprises employees of the local authority and related services. Chris brought her Masters work that she was engaged with at Bath Spa University to the meetings.

- Claire Formby works with children in Key Stage 1. Her second accredited Educational Enquiry for her Masters, 'How Do I Sustain A Loving, Receptively Responsive Educational Relationship With My Pupils Which Will Motivate Them In Their Learning And Encourage Me In My Teaching?' can be accessed from <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/formbyEE300907.htm>
- Sally Cartwright works with young people in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. Her accredited account for the Masters Gifts, Talents and Education unit, 'How Can I Enable The Gifts And Talents Of My Students To Be In The Driving Seat Of Their Learning?' and can be accessed from <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/scgandtnov08.htm>
- Chris Jones who as senior inclusion officer works with educators and schools. Her dissertation successfully submitted as part of her Masters at Bath Spa University, 'How Do I Improve My Practice As An Inclusion Officer Working In A Children's Service', can be accessed from <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/cjmaok/cjma.htm>

The claims to knowledge that we are seeking to illustrate and validate are that:

*By encouraging and supporting educators to research their talents for creating, and offering educational gifts we are helping them to understand more fully the what, how and why of their practice to improve it. By creating accounts that are made public and communicate to others, beyond their face-to-face meetings they contribute to their own learning, that of others (of all ages), and social formations.*

We think that there is sufficient evidence in the accounts, provided by the researchers themselves, which explicitly shows that we have helped them to understand more fully, the what, how and why of their practice to improve it and that their accounts show that they have contributed to their own learning.

What we think we need to pay some attention to is what counts as evidence that their accounts have contributed to the learning of others and to the learning of social formations?

Consider the evidence that Sally's accounts have contributed to the learning of others. Sally accounts show how individual students, working in a research community, have explored questions that they formulated themselves for their extended projects at AS level and gained their accreditation. The first group of students presented their accounts of their projects and their ways of working to the second group of students who have acknowledge their influence in their own studies. The first and second groups of students have presented their accounts to a Headteacher's conference and strategy meeting for 14-19 provision in the local authority and are making their presentations public through YouTube. We believe that the development of the ways of working in the research community for extended projects will be acknowledged in the accounts emerging from these contexts.

In relation to evidence of contributions to the learning of social formations we believe that the legitimization of Chris Jones' dissertation at Bath Spa University is evidence of the academic acceptability of relationally dynamic standards of judgment that have emerged from the ontological values in an individual's living educational theory. The academic legitimacy of such standards of judgment, in our view, distinguishes Jones' educational influence in the learning of a social formation.

However there is little of Marie's narrative that explains how and why she has wanted to enquire with Jack into, 'How do we recognise, express, represent and develop talents in the production of gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education?'. Hence the first part of the presentation is Marie's narrative. Jack will then answer the above question from his perspective of the 'we' and then we will both present our co-created answer. We believe that in this process we will each recognise the boundaries of the integrity of the other whilst being open to the generative possibilities of collaborative enquiry.

### ***Marie's story***

First presented with the national gifted and talented strategy I felt the imposition of the traditional approaches in the field where many practices sit very uneasily with values of inclusion. Dweck (2006) offers insights through her work on self-theory; I am smart (entity theory or fixed mindset) or I learn to be smarter (incremental theory

or growth mindset). White (2006) offers yet another in showing how the theory of intelligence expressed in a lot of the practice offered in the strategy has roots going back to Galton and notions fueled by a Victorian era with values of an empire and a class based society.

However, I have wanted to use the terms talent and gift more as I have refined meanings, through practice, that are inclusive and recognised the possibilities this offers for transformational educational practice. In doing this I have opened a space to develop values based practice and provision through creatively engaging with the strategies material emanating from the DCSF. Since the strategy was introduced the DfES (Department for Education and Skills) has become the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) with 'education' replaced by organizing and confining institutions (schools), categories of persons (children) and a category of social organization (families).

The words, gifts and talents, communicate something of value and values and the recognition and appreciation of the unique qualities of each person and their contribution within community. By using these values laden words and expressing an expectation that they will be responded to as a priority by schools and teachers as they work on: 'narrowing gaps'; inclusion; personalization of learning; wellbeing; learning-beyond-school and raising standards, the DCSF is offering those concerned with education, the possibility of legitimately focusing on improving inclusive educational theory, practice and provision. However, it takes courage, resilience and creativity for an educator to engage with what this, and other strategies, offer from a centering in their own values and researching, to improve their embodied knowledge, theory and practice. Many prefer the apparently safer road of simple compliance and replicating traditional forms of practice, despite the inner turmoil this often creates and the eventual professional challenge they lay themselves open to.

### *Jack's story*

Marie introduced me to an inclusional language of gifts and talents in 2006. I liked the idea that everyone has talents that can be developed through educational processes through which something of value to the producer can be offered as a gift (something freely offered) to others.

The 'we' I have in mind in the question are practitioner-researchers I have supervised for their doctorates. They have all shown their originality of mind and critical judgment in their theses and offered these as gifts that can flow freely through the internet for use by others.

The particular talents I have in mind are the production of doctoral theses that each contains an original contribution to knowledge with a standard of judgment that is relationally dynamic and distinguished by energy flowing values. I see these contributions, to what I call living standards of judgment for educational knowledge, emerging from the developing talents of the researcher and offered as gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education.

I want to draw your attention to the recognition, expression and representation of

such living standards of judgment in three of the most recently legitimated living theory doctoral theses.

*'I generate a living theory which offers 'spiritual resilience gained through connection with a loving dynamic energy' as an original standard of judgment.'* (Walton, 2008)

*'This loving way of being emerges as the energy that drives me to transform the social formation of the school to work alongside student researchers in an intergenerational and sustainable way.'* (Riding, K. 2008)

*'This thesis explores how I was able to create the shared living educational space necessary to enable teacher-research to occur and flourish.'* (Riding, S. 2008)

I am taking the expression of a loving dynamic energy, a loving way of being and the creation of a shared living educational space to be educational talents. The evidence that these have been recognized, expressed and represented is in the fact that the theses containing the above claims have been legitimated in the Academy. This isn't to say that such judgments are beyond question. It is to say that the claims to knowledge involving the recognition, expression and representation of these talents, are now in publically accessible theses for your critical scrutiny and creative discernment. They are flowing freely through the web as gifts for the educational knowledge-base.

Huxtable (2009) in a multi-media contribution to an Open Dialogue in Research Intelligence on an epistemological transformation in educational knowledge has explained how I use video-data to explore possibilities for sharing a recognition of the expression of energy flowing values, as talents, in different representations of educational practice and knowledge.

Here is one illustration from the educational practice of Moira Laidlaw whilst on VSO at what is now Ningxia Teachers University in China.

I took the video clip at the end of a lesson. I had turned the camera off thinking that the lesson was over as some 80 students began to leave the room. Seeing Moira walk to the door I turned the camera on again and gathered the following video-data:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno>

In this visual narrative of my actions in the here and now I am now using this data in the evidence-base of my claim that Moira is expressing a loving dynamic energy in

her educational relationships with her students, I move the cursor backwards and forward as I watch Moira's expressions with her students. I pause when I am feeling an 'empathetic resonance' with the expression of her loving dynamic energy. I have checked my interpretation of this flow of energy with Moira and we share the recognition and understanding that she is expressing this energy. From this agreement we both feel confident that we can use this data in a visual representation of the explanatory principle of 'loving dynamic energy'. We can both use this valid explanatory principle in explanations of her educational influence with her students and also in her own learning.

Having presented our individual stories we shall now turn to our collaborative enquiry into the question 'How do we recognise, express, represent and develop talents in the production of gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education?'

Using the approach described by Huxtable (2009) we will focus on the recognition, expression and representation of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility (Huxtable, 2008) as new relationally dynamic standards of judgment for educational knowledge. These relationally dynamic standards are constituted by energy flowing values that distinguish practices and learning as educational.

### ***Continuing conversations in the creation of this paper***

#### **Marie to Jack – 'Thinking about what you have written'**

*"You know what you have written here very much shows what you always do given half a chance. You focus on what is important to those you have been working with to make the knowledge they have created as values led educators and practitioners public. You help them develop their talents for researching themselves and their world to create and offer as gifts their knowledge of how they live a life that they judge as loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile. It doesn't matter the platform you always do it often placing yourself in their shadow. Jane Spiro's story says it very well. You only appear when it serves to support your others to move themselves forward.*

*Interesting reflecting on it. Educational responsibility? You have developed the talents of Fellow Traveler (Spiro, 2008) so well you are not even seen as invisible as you hide behind the list of doctorates or the ideas of others you are promoting. I have seen you move alongside, lead, step aside or even offer to be stepped on if you see it as serving your ultimate purpose of bringing the other into their own presence and that of others.*

*You are most particular about who you will do this for. They show particular qualities foremost of which is a desire to contribute to a loving world. Loving recognition? A recent quote goes something along the lines of - treat a person as they are and that is how they will always be, treat with them as the person they want to be and they will grow.' That is what I think you see – the person that they want to be. I think you offer people an amazing gift - a loving recognition of themselves as the person they want to be and how to bring themselves into their own presence – if they choose. Sometimes – or is that often – you see what the person themselves doesn't see*

*within them and you will hang on, for years if needs be, till they see what you see and give their values expression in practice. That is the second quality I think that you have developed your ability to spot – a determination to travel. Again Jane put it well in her story.*

*Respectful connectedness? My 'O' level English teacher told me that Macbeth was a tragedy because Macbeth had the potential for good, which he destroyed. You appear to have developed talents of self-protection so you withstand the occasional tragedy of people with so much to offer shooting themselves in the foot and trying to spread the damage around. You are respectful of your own boundary, which makes it safe for those you have an educational relationship with. You are also respectful of their boundary – more so than they are at times.*

*OK – that's as far as I have got. I can show you even in the short amount of writing you have done here the evidence to support the claims I have made. You are so consistent I can point to practically anything you have produced which will offer evidence of just the same: the talents you continue to enhance of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility to create and offer as educational gifts for the other to use, if they choose, to research to create and offer knowledge of themselves and the world as their life enhancing gifts to themselves and others.*

*Now – whether any of this eventually goes into the readerly text I don't know. I am just giving myself the permission to ramble and amble and share with you the thoughts you have a provoked without any thought of destination for the moment.”*

### **Jack's response**

*“OK Marie – I like what you have written above because it resonates closely with what I see myself doing and how and why I do it. In relation to our question, **How do we recognise, express, represent and develop talents in the production of gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education?** I will focus initially on 'recognising, expressing, representing and developing talents' before considering the 'production of gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education.'*

*Keith Kinsella, a doctoral researcher I supervise first used the term 'presencing development opportunities' to describe what he does as an educator. This resonated with my own understanding of one of my own responses. In my language I see myself as 'presencing development possibilities' with my students.*

*I think that you are right I do focus on what is important to those I have been working with to make the knowledge they embody values led educators and practitioners public. I work at helping them to develop their talents for researching themselves and their world to create and offer as gifts their knowledge of how they live a life that they judge as loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile. In doing this I have been influenced by Erich Fromm's (1960, p.18) point that there is no purpose to life other than that we give to our lives through our loving relationships and productive work. In presencing development possibilities I think that I am guided by my responses to what I see in the other as their love for what they are doing and their sense of living a*

*productive life. I also like Cho's (2005) insight that love in educational relationships can be expressed as knowledge-creation. In living a loving and productive life I focus on knowledge-creation of self and the world for myself and with those whose educational enquiries I supervise.*

*In looking at the words I use above I know that I am writing what I mean. I also know that the words are limited in the meanings that they can carry. For example, I took this video-clip of Moira Laidlaw at the end of a lesson at Guyuan Teachers College in China when some 80 of her students were streaming past her.*



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno>

*As I move the cursor backwards and forwards there are expressions between Moira and her students that resonate with me in my recognition of the expression of a life-affirming and loving energy I have checked my interpretation with Moira and we agreed that we both recognise the expression of a life-affirming and loving energy. Moira has also affirmed that she experienced a similar quality of life-affirming and loving energy in our educational relationship as I supervised her doctoral research programme.*

*What I have learnt how to do with the use of digital technology is to represent the meanings of such flows of energy with values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which I live and work. You have explained the process I use very clearly in the June 2009 issue of Research Intelligence (Huxtable, 2009). In presencing developmental possibilities to those whose research programmes I supervise I encourage them to express their own originality in their representations of their unique constellations of energy-flowing values in their explanatory principles of their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of others. In this way I believe that I am drawing attention to and helping them to become of their talents in expressing and developing values and knowledge that carry hope for the future of humanity and their own.*

*I also agree with you about my expression of values of respectful connectedness and educational responsibility. I like very much the way you see me as appearing to have developed talents of self-protection so that I withstand the occasional tragedy of people with so much to offer shooting themselves in the foot and trying to spread the damage around. I do believe that I am respectful of my own boundaries, which makes it safe for those that I have an educational relationship with. I am also aware of a desire to be respectful of their boundary – perhaps, as you say, more so than they are at times. I remember my Father being most concerned that he had helped me to develop boundaries that would be strong enough to withstand bullying. I think he did this in a way that enabled me to respect my own boundaries whilst being open to the possibilities for learning that life itself permitted. I think you might appreciate the*

*meanings of such energy-flowing and values-laden boundaries through my expression of a passion for academic freedom and academic responsibility in a context where I experienced their negation. I expression this energy and values in the following video-clip of a reenactment of a meeting with a Senate Committee on a Matter of Academic Freedom that was established to enquire into whether my academic freedom had been breached.*

*In the video-clip below I re-enact the moment when I start to leave a meeting with the committee that has produced a draft report on a Matter of Academic Freedom for Senate. The conclusion of the committee is that my academic freedom has not been breached. I agree with this conclusion, but as I leave I feel a humiliating lack of recognition of the pressure to which I've been subjected to in the University. As I get to the door I feel a flow of energy with the feeling that I do not accept the conclusion because of this lack of recognition. The video-clip communicates a flow of energy values and understanding. I am not privy to the discussion that following. The report to Senate acknowledged that the reason that my academic freedom had not been breached was because of my persistence in the face of pressure and that a less determined individual might well have been discouraged and hence constrained.*



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBTLfyjkFh0>

*I am including this visual narrative to counter any impression that the expressions of knowledge-creation, loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility have been expressed without a struggle. They have not. I think it is important in the sharing of the explanations of the educational influences in our own lives that we acknowledge such pressures and place them within their historical and sociocultural contexts.*

*I am unsure whether, as a reader, you share my sense of being privileged when an individual shares a story that reveals the ontological values that give meaning and purpose to their lives and expresses some of the theoretical insights that they use in making sense of what they are doing and why they are doing it. These stories often contain 'narrative wreckage' in the sense of painful experiences that the individual has transcended in understanding and expressing what matters in their life. For example, Eden Charles (2007) explains how an individual can move beyond decolonization through what he understands as societal reidentification and guiltless recognition. In developing his explanation Charles integrates insights from several social theories of colonization and experiences in Sierra Leone in the immediate aftermath of the civil that heighten his understanding of values that carry hope for the future of humanity. In 'presencing development possibilities', for Eden during my supervision, I focused on the significance of his meanings of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition in a way that resonated with his own meanings and sense of their centrality for his thesis. All of the living theory researchers whose theses can be*

accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living.shtml> have offered their narratives as gifts for others and for the knowledge-base of education.

*On my initial teacher education programme at Newcastle University in 1966-7 I produced my first study of education on 'The way to professionalism in education?'. My passion for education has been sustained and expressed in this presentation. I hope that I can continue to support the generation of living theories and their contributions as gifts to individuals and collaborative communities of practice and knowledge-creation in the service of education."*

### **Marie's response**

*"I am thinking that I am beginning to understand a little more about talents – I think your story of arriving at the university with a desire to bring the embodied knowledge of educators into the academy but had no talent to do so until you had worked hard to recognize, express and develop them. The extent of the talent you have developed for supporting and enabling educators to offer their educational gifts of their embodied knowledge in the form of their living educational theory is evidenced not only by the living theory accounts legitimated by the Academy as worthy of the award of doctorates and Masters. It is also evidenced by the unsolicited responses of your students where they offer you insights about your talents as supervisor from their perspective.*

*I don't want to go down the route of whether you had an innate 'potential' but I do want to pursue why you chose to devote time and effort to recognize, express and develop these talents and continue, despite the efforts of others to derail you. I think your focused energy has been maintained over time because of your commitment to enhancing the educational knowledge base of education with the embodied knowledge of educators. It is understanding better the dynamic inter-relationship between talents, gifts and the expression of ontological values that I think we might contribute to improving educational practice and theory. Feldman wrote:*

*My purpose in the discussion of fulfilment of potential is to highlight the need for differentiation and expansion in conceptions of giftedness and talent and their development. The relationship between these purposes and the more general issues about how a person should live his or her life and toward what ends are beyond the scope of the present discussion, although I have touched on them elsewhere (e.g., Feldman, with Goldstein, 1986/1991); Feldman, 1993a, 1993b, 1994b). (p.27)*

*I don't agree with him that progress can be made if we try to divorce development of talent for creating, offering and accepting gifts from how a person lives a life that is loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile. I think he contradicts himself later when he writes:*

*Although it is not the only goal possible for the field, understanding the development of greater and greater mastery in valued domains is a reasonable place to start as a goal for gifted education. To be sure, there have been concerns that the field has gone too far in the direction of performance,*

*achievement, products, and outcomes to the detriment of quality of experience, satisfaction with one's efforts whether or not they aim to master anything, and satisfaction with the simple joy of being gifted (see, e.g., Morelock, 1996); Piechowski, 1997; Roeper, 1990; Tolan, 1994).*

*Without denigrating these very real concerns, it is the premise of this discussion that the most promising route to satisfaction and joy in experience is through productive, sustained, effective efforts toward deep mastery of a domain that has value, both to the individual and to those who share the environment with that individual. This is not to say that mastery of a valued domain is the only route to happiness and fulfilment, and in this respect the critics of mastery or achievement have a point. But it is hard to imagine how the expression of one's potential in a deeply satisfying way would not involve doing so through one or more cherished domains.*

*There should always be a place for the individual, however gifted and in whatever ways, to be free of the need to prove the reality of his or her giftedness by performing at levels deemed to be remarkable, and the community should be careful in imposing achievement and mastery standards where they are inappropriate. It is nonetheless true that for most people in most communities, satisfaction and fulfilment of potential will involve finding something to do well and striving to do it better (Feldman, 1976; with Goldsmith, 1986/1991)'. (p.29)*

*I have all sorts of things going through my head and I don't know what order to put them. Let me just talk to you and then see if we might unpick something of use. Reading the chapter by Feldman is useful because it contains so many irreconcilable notions which riddle education. How do you know a person is gifted if there is no proof in the reality of performance? It is only through devoting a huge amount of time of cognitively engaged time to improving that there is evidence of talent:*

*The emerging picture from such studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert – in anything," writes the neurologist Daniel Levitin. "In study after study, of composers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players, master criminals, and what have you, the number comes up again and again. Of course, this doesn't address why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others do. But no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. (Gladwell, 2008, Outliers, New York: Little, Brown & Co. pp.40-41)*

*What motivates someone to struggle for that amount of time to researching to improve what he or she is doing I think varies. Fame and fortune seems to be the limits of the imagination of politicians and the result is a lot of people who flog themselves, and others, to death, perfecting talents that bring them and others no pleasure and ontological satisfaction. How many people greet retirement as a time they can do what they really want to do. What a waste of a life. I think education for children and young people should enable them to come to know themselves so they can determine*

*how they might live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life while earning a living. John White talks about the aims of education in much the same way.*

*As people find their vocation they learn what talents they need to develop and recognize those they have developed but not realized. I think that is what living educational theory contributes; creating knowledge of self, of the world and of self in the world.*

*I think it might be helpful if we clarified what we mean by educational gifts and gifts for the educational knowledge-base of education.”*

### ***In conclusion...***

The foci of this collaborative enquiry has been the recognition, expression, representation and development of meanings of talents as living standards of judgment in claims to educational knowledge.

The focus on living standards of judgment is particularly significant for understandings of the nature of educational knowledge. We believe that we have shown some of the meanings of the expression and evolution of energy-flowing and values-laden talents that can be used to distinguish educational knowledge. We have also shown where further evidence can be accessed for you to evaluate the validity of the claims we are making.

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