

# **THE GROWTH OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

## **Creating Our Own Educational Theories**

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In this major new book Jack Whitehead argues that all citizens who are concerned with the future of our planet and humanity should produce a story for themselves and others to account for their contribution to the creation of a more peaceful, just and productive world. He is particularly concerned to address teachers and all those who have an influence on forming the lives of our present and future citizens. He shows how each one of us can create our own descriptions and explanations for our own educational development as we answer questions of the kind, 'How do I live my values more fully in my practice?'. He argues that such explanations are forming a new, living educational theory which has profound implications for the future of humanity. Moving from the particular study of his own educational development as an academic in a University, he shows how an individual can learn what it means to support the values of freedom, truth, beauty, goodness, integrity, justice and democracy, having first experienced their negation in the workplace.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I love John Raven's acknowledgement in work undertaken for the Scottish Council for Research in Education in 1977:

*I myself believe that it would be in the interest of society to record the names of those who have done most to obstruct this work, but I am advised that to do so would not only be socially unacceptable but actually illegal.*

To all my family, friends, colleagues and students I am sure that you know what has gone into the production of this text and the warmth of my feelings for the part you have played in it. Without the political integrity, commitment and understanding of Geoff Whitty, Michael Young, David Hamilton and John Griffiths the work would not have been possible. Without the intellectual abilities, energy and communication skills of Pam Lomax and Jean McNiff the work would not have been published. Without the care of my colleagues Moira Laidlaw, David McConnell, Mary Tasker and Cyril Selmes I doubt if I would have survived some of the pressures directed against me. To all my students and friends who contributed their work to Parts Three and Four you give me hope for the future and pleasure in the present. Thankyou.

Professors Austwick, Dowdeswell, Thompson, Taylor, Cotgrove, West, Nisbet and Wrigley have also undoubtedly influenced my educational development in ways that perhaps they did not intend. Their activities and judgements within the power relations of the University have stimulated my creativity, some pain and much laughter. I feel sure that you will not forget their names.

## INTRODUCTION

I hope that you finish this book with a commitment not only to study your own educational development in the workplace but also with a commitment to act politically to enhance the professionalism of teachers.

Whilst other cultures have shown great wisdom in elevating teachers to positions of high social standing I don't want to restrict my audience to teachers. Yet I want to give them a privileged position in society because of their potential influence in forming the lives of the next generation. I also want to show that I value industry, commerce, science and technology because they contribute to our material wealth. However I want you to understand that I have seen what the uncontrolled search for profit can do to support corruption and to act against justice and freedom. Hence I want to suggest that education in industry and commerce can contribute to the creation and sustaining of a sense of integrity, business ethics and social justice within the society as a whole.

I also value public service and administration. I intend to show how educational action research within government can help to protect the public good by ensuring that local democracy acts as a buffer against its domination by the private market. Unfortunately the power of present legislation may be pushing the destruction of local democracy and public service too quickly to resist.

I am a 48 year old academic working as a Lecturer in Education in the University of Bath in the South West of England. As a student of education at the University of Newcastle in 1967 I was influenced by the work of the philosopher Richard Peters on ethics and education and by the humanistic psychology of Erich Fromm on the marketing personality. Both warned of the dangers of permitting market forces to penetrate and dominate education. They advocated action to protect democratic procedures in creating a just and free society. Peters emphasised the importance of other values such as rationality, consideration of interests, respect for persons and worth while activities. He also believed in the value of educational theory for the professional development of teachers and saw education as being related to the creation of a good social order. Fromm examined what happened to individuals when their personalities were formed under the dominant influence of the private market. He believed in resisting this dominance through developing a productive rather than a marketing personality. I recall the emancipatory influence of the introduction to his *Fear of Freedom* where I identified with his point that if a person can face the truth without panic they will realise that there is no purpose to life other than that which we create for ourselves through our own loving relationships and productive work.

I can now reflect on twenty six years professional experience of education and offer you my story as evidence of a productive life in education. The first six years were spent teaching in comprehensive schools. The other twenty have been spent researching and teaching at the University of Bath. The last fourteen years have been under Conservative Governments. Their legislation has been directed at

enabling the private market to penetrate all aspects of social policy. Their re-election in April 1993 has ensured that this process will continue. This book is based on the view that the implementation of such policies must be resisted for the good of education and society. This book places education at the centre of the public good and educational theorising in the workplace at the centre of improving the quality of life in our society.

For this to be achieved I am suggesting that a new form of workplace based, educational knowledge is required. A form of knowledge which is being created by people like ourselves in our personal educational theories as we describe and explain our own educational development in explorations of questions of the kind, 'how do I live my values more fully in my practice?'. In other words my intention is to convince you that your educational theorising about your own learning at work offers a hope for the future in creating a good and productive society.

At the centre of my analysis is the importance of productive work in paid employment. With many millions of workers in Europe and the rest of the World unemployed I do want to stress the importance of paid labour in creating a good and productive society. For example in three counties around Bath, Avon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, thousands of workers face unemployment as cuts are made in the public services. I identify with the pain that this will bring. I still recall the searing experience of receiving a letter some seventeen years ago terminating my own employment at the University and the strenuous collective efforts by others which went into sustaining my employment. The vital importance of such sustained collective action in sustaining the rights of employees is a lesson I would like to share with you in the story of my educational development. I imagine that we share a need for productive employment and the sense of well-being which often accompanies secure employment.

In your work do you find yourself asking questions of the kind, '*How do I improve what I'm doing?*' and valuing the opportunity to act in ways which you believe will improve its quality and efficiency. In other words I think you want your own originality and contribution to be valued by those you work with. I think you will be interested in my responses to having my originality and contribution denied and the efforts to have them acknowledged.

I am convinced that you will recognise your use of a common-sense yet disciplined form of action and reflection cycle as you resolve practical problems and attempt to improve the quality of your work. I think you will have expressed a concern that something needs improving when some of your values are not being lived as fully as you wish. You will have imagined ways forward, devised an action plan and acted. You will have evaluated the outcomes of your actions in terms of their quality and effectiveness. If you do not recognise this action reflection cycle in your professional life then a fundamental assumption of my work is destroyed. I submit my account and convictions to you for validation or rejection through your experience.

I also think you will have experienced working in a hierarchical organisation where another individual has used the power of a superior position rather than a rational argument to overcome the rationality of your own or a colleague's views. I doubt however if your organisation has instructed you that under no circumstances could you question the judgements of a person in authority. It may surprise you to learn that even within a University where you might expect academic freedom to be exercised without constraint, there are examples of pressure being exerted which could constrain an academic from expressing ideas freely. If we do not fight to protect our freedom to express our ideas within our workplaces do we not risk being dominated by authoritarian personalities? I hope you find the story of my educational development, in which I continue to insist on my right to question those in authority where there is evidence of bias, prejudice or inadequate assessment, an example of what might be achieved with persistence.

I imagine that you have been anxious at times that you might receive critical appraisals from someone in authority in your organisation. I feel sure that you would want such appraisals in all cases to be justly made. Whilst you might have made some errors at work which could lead to disciplinary action I imagine that it is more likely that you know someone else who has been disciplined. In these cases you might have felt that the action against a colleague was justified because of the error. In other cases you might have seen that unjust claims were made which were nevertheless supported in the disciplinary procedures of your organisation. In such cases the judgements are dominated by the truth of power rather than the power of truth. In the story of my educational development in the workplace I will explain how I have responded to the disciplinary power of my employers and supported the power of truth rather than the truth of power, by ensuring that information on the case is placed in a forum which is publicly committed to the values of integrity, truth and justice.

Because I want you to value the professional development of teachers I will locate some of my analysis in classrooms. This is because of teachers' significance in carrying values, understanding, knowledge and skills to the next generation. I am also interested in persuading you to support the power of truth in the particular regimes of truth which structure our political, industrial and commercial life.

The way in which politicians use power to sustain their ideas and view of the truth influences the social structure within which we all work. Such structures can support honesty and integrity as well as their opposites. For example, Robert Maxwell was permitted to flourish in the market place and to steal over £ 440 million from pension funds. I have a particular interest in this case because the late Lord Kearton, whilst Chancellor of the University of Bath was most influential in re-establishing Maxwell in the market place, in spite of the most damning criticisms by Government Agencies. I imagine that, like me, you are outraged by Maxwell's corruption and want to ensure that it is not repeated by others. However, what do you do when you believe that the public has a right to know but are subjected to political and economic pressure not to publicise your findings? I will give examples which show how individuals have

attempted to retain a sense of their own integrity whilst being subjected to such pressures.

By focussing on the above experiences in the story of my educational development I intend to reveal the fundamental values which I have embodied in the workplace. I then want to show you the case-study evidence of how teachers are living these values in their educative relationships with their pupils and students. In this way I want to convince you of the vital importance for our social order of enhancing the professionalism of teachers. What I have in mind is providing support for their continued professional development as they produce accounts of how they are answering questions of the kind, 'How do I live my values more fully with my pupils?', in the context of the values of dialogue and social justice supported by Mowenna Griffiths (1993), Chris Day (1993) Caroline Gipps (1993) & Gaby Weiner (1989)

When I first use the words epistemology and methodology with teachers and students they are often greeted with amused indifference. You may not use such terms in your professional conversations. However, I will be sharing my understanding of the importance of testing the validity of one's claim to know one's own educational development. This I associate with epistemology. I will also be sharing my understanding of the appropriate ways of answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'. This I associate with methodology.

Finally I want to go further than convincing you that the life of an educational researcher can be personally fulfilling, that it can have value for other professionals, that it can help to improve the quality of learning, that it can be entertaining and that it can contribute to improvements in the quality of life in our communities and society. I want to show you the growth of a new form of educational knowledge. This new form of knowledge includes a living 'I together with the more traditional conceptual frameworks which usually constitute a form of knowledge. In the new form of educational knowledge individuals speak in my own voices in explanations for their own educational development. When I include my educative relationships with my students in the story of my development I try to hold on to a commitment not to violate their freedom and autonomy as they speak for themselves in their accounts of their own educational development.

I have learnt from others the importance of developing a rapport with one's audience. I have often told the story of the first paper I presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference in 1977. It was on the question, 'How do I improve this process of education here?', and attracted an audience of one. I talked at my audience for fifteen minutes, without any attempt to discover who had shown sufficient interest in attending my presentation. After fifteen minutes my listener suggested that I could perhaps develop my sense of audience and Lawrence Stenhouse introduced himself! Since then I have shown some care at the beginning of lectures and papers to spend a little time trying to form a relationship with my audience. I have found this essential in encouraging conversations and correspondence in a shared sense of educational enquiry. In the next section I do hope that you feel addressed directly.