Improving practice as a head-teacher through living theory research and communicating meanings of embodied values

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Abstract

As a Head-teacher of a state funded English primary school I have a duty to implement government policy, and a personal and professional commitment to providing children with the best possible educational experience. There are times I, like many other educators nationally and internationally, experience tensions between these two drivers when my values are contradicted. This paper offers my living-theory (Whitehead, 1989), a description and values-based explanation of how I am working to resolve these contradictions and the educational influence I am having in my own learning, the learning of staff and children, and the learning of my school.

Keywords: Living-theory; values; professional development; learning; educational.

Introduction

I am Head-teacher of St Aldhelm's Church Primary School, a forward thinking school in an English village, set in a large rural county. I am working with staff, governors and community to develop an open mind to explore and challenge the perceptions of education, ensuring the very best opportunities for our children. There are times when, like many other educators, nationally and internationally, I experience tensions between my responsibility as an educator to meet the educational needs of my pupils and when my values as an educator are contradicted in the demand to meet government targets. This concern is being expressed by many, as can be seen in the open letter (Academics, 2014) by world-known academics to the Director of the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) about the damage to education of such tests. This paper offers a living-theory (Whitehead, 1989), a description and values-based explanation, of a head-teacher's practice as she works, through her Masters programme, to resolve these contradictions and have an educational influence in her own learning, the learning of pupils and staff, and the ethos of her school.

The style of the paper is intended to give teachers, and others concerned with improving teaching and teacher education, an insight into the thought processes and performance of an educator and the social policies that are part of the complex ecology (Lee & Rochon, 2009) of her research. I therefore adopt a personal voice from this point and address you directly rather than using the voice of a passive, uninvolved spectator, a style more commonly found in academic journals.

I want you to be able to appreciate my Living Theory[1] research as an educational, multidimensional, relationally dynamic process, engaged in by a head-teacher as part of her daily practice, cognisant of Medawar's (1969) point: "…scientific 'papers' in the form in which they are communicated to learned journals are notorious for misrepresenting the processes of thought that led to whatever discoveries they describe" (p. 8).

Only so much can be shared through two-dimensional paper. I agree with Eisner (1993) that other forms of representation are needed to communicate educational research. As Lather states, "The text is resituated as a representation of its 'failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach…" (Lather, 1994, as cited in Donmoyer, 1996, p. 21). The form of communicating also influences the nature of what is revealed through the research. Living Theory research is concerned with energy-flowing values in explanations of educational influences in learning (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2009). To communicate and research my energy-flowing values I have developed my own way of expressing myself in text as well as multimedia narrative.

Collingwood wrote:

I began by observing that you cannot find out what a man [*sic*] means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, … In order to find out his meaning you must also know what

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[1]   I follow Huxtable (2012, p.36) in this paper and use Living Theory (with upper case) to distinguish the form of research from my individual living-educational-theory (with lower case), that is my explanation of educational influence in my learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations (Whitehead, 1989)

the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer. (Collingwood, 1991, p. 31)

Quinn also talks of the need to decentre:

Decentring is a vital idea. It is the achievement whereby I learn what it is that you need to hear or experience in order to share what is in my mind, whether it be a question, an idea or a supportive anecdote. (Quinn, 1997, p. 86).

Therefore, I begin this paper by briefly providing a context. I introduce myself, my question and describe the professional terrain of my praxis, before outlining the research methodology that is the vehicle of my journey. I then draw on my Master's dissertation (Mounter, 2012) to illustrate my research journey as my CPD (continual professional development). The research that is at the heart of this narrative of 'Improving practice as a head-teacher' also serves as a concrete example of Living Theory research in action. I conclude the paper by reflecting on the knowledge I have created and its potential significance for other educators.

Contexts

At the time of writing I am Head-teacher of St Aldhelm's Church Primary School, a school for 4–11 year old children in an English village, set in a large rural county. More details of the school can be found on the website http://www.staldhelms.co.uk.

The job description of a head-teacher is changing, as the educational environment around is in flux. The speed of change is accelerating, the changes rocking the foundations of educational understanding, developed over centuries. As an educator, I am poised with a feeling of perpetual wariness and excitement for the future.

I focus on subject skills, knowledge and learning skills, preparing children for a world I can only begin to imagine, as technology races ahead faster than our imagination. I can tempt with fascination and challenge; probe and support the children to experience themselves as knowledge creators, risk all, try again and still keep coming back when stuck. I can teach them to be curious about the unknown, question the known and find new ways to research their learning, and to learn what it is for them to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others (Huxtable, 2012). Like Reiss and White (2013, p. 1) I believe that the task of education is to equip each learner:

1.   to lead a life that is personally flourishing and;
2.   to help others to do so too.

I can help them to find their own passions, to share with others, link across time and space, share, focus on skills, values, attitudes that prepare them for the unknown. For that sense of comfort within themselves, they must develop as a reflective learner, one holding their own 'space' within, nurturing connectiveness and loving recognition, confident and competent to develop, make and work with their own and other people's tentative offerings. I want the children at St. Aldhelm's to be keen to be researchers and challenge traditional perceptions of thinking and learning; as the legend above the Dollis Hill (London, UK) Post Office Research Station, 1910-1983, proclaims, "Research is the door to tomorrow". The form of research I want

my pupils to learn is, however, not just that by which they can create and offer valued and valuable knowledge of the world, but also that by which they can create knowledge of themselves and knowledge of themselves in and of the world (Huxtable, 2012).

Technology is being used to support and extend the learning of children and adults as a tool. As the biro replaced the quill, the typewriter the pen, the computer the typewriter, now video and stills cameras are used for gathering visual data, blogs link learners, iPads are used to surf, apps support skills, and interactive whiteboards are used to make learning public, and all are used to enhance the learning of self. Without this learning, I believe we cannot grow and we fear a future of uncertainty, unequipped to raise our self-esteem for ourselves, or to meet the challenges of tomorrow positively. These innovations change the style of learning, but the curriculum appears bound by the values and culture of a bygone age, which are far from the democratic principles to which modern Britain aspires (White, 2006).

Many government initiatives come into school and often feel to be another hoop we have to jump through. These hoops gives a temporary focus, before the next new 'changing' initiative comes through. Many of these initiatives, or 'lunch boxes' (as we call them, designed to be ready to serve out) feel to be 'bolt-ons', which head-teachers are expected to focus on in order to be seen to 'tick the box', and for their school to be described by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), as a 'good' or 'outstanding' school. This is an issue not just in the UK. For instance Pip Bruce Ferguson when reviewing this paper wrote:

> There are quite a few syntheses with what happens in New Zealand here. Schools I've done research in have described 'the 40-gallon tin' into which the Ministry of Ed dumps projects, which change regularly – the schools have to 'fish' in the tin to get the latest one and stay up with the play or they lose funding. But the funding for a specific initiative ends in a finite period of time, after which the schools are expected to continue it unaided… (P. Bruce Ferguson, personal communication, May 11, 2014)

As professional educators we want more. This is the reason why I continue to research my practice as a head-teacher by creating and offering my living-theory accounts[2]. My research questions are concerned with my desire to recognise each voice and opinion, understand and respond to the needs of the community that St. Aldhelm's sits in, whilst still improving the expression in practice of the ethos and values that underpin the foundation of the school, and contribute to the evolution of education for a democratic, loving society.

I work with staff, governors and pupils to develop an open mind to explore and challenge the perceptions of education, whilst ensuring the very best educational opportunities for all learners. I recognise I am not the only influential narrator. The children and adults in my school all have learning stories to tell. I recognise that as my learning story is influenced and shaped by others, so mine shapes theirs. Viewed as a whole they may enhance perspective and understanding of each one of us. Together these stories form pieces of a puzzle that I weave and merge to make my school a cohesive and unique educational learning community.

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[2]   Living-theory is used as the short term meaning living-educational-theory as it is in the literature.

Research methodology and methods

What attracts me to use a Living Theory[3] research methodology is that it is:

… a form of knowledge-creating self-study research of practice to improve practice, where the researcher:

- accepts responsibility for their practice

- researches their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations, to improve it

- recognises that their educational influence comes from the expression of their embodied knowledge and values

- identifies where and how they are a living contradiction, and/or living a contradiction in terms of their life-affirming and life-enhancing values, to improve their practice

- studies their self, not an egotistical, self-serving self, or 'i', but a loving 'i', intending to enhance their contribution to making this a better world to be

- clarifies and evolves their embodied knowledge and values. values are understood to be those energy-flowing values that are life-affirming and life-enhancing and give meaning and purpose to life the researcher's life and work

- evaluates and offers a theory to account for their practice with their values as living standards of judgement and explanatory principles

- draws on the knowledge created and offered by others, for instance in the various disciplines or other fields of enquiry, to enhance their research-practice

- creates and offers reasoned and reasonable accounts as valid educational explanations of educational influence in learning

- offers multimedia narratives to communicate the relationally-dynamic nature of energy-flowing values. (Huxtable, 2012, p. 77–78)

Living Theory research has at its heart a concern to practice ethically by making explicit the usually implicit embodied values of the practitioner-researcher, identifying contradictions in practice and developing ways to improve. As I work in the UK my research conforms to particular ethical principles, such as those set out in the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011), the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2010) and Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009) and the Health Professions Council Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HPC, 2007). The core of ethical guidelines from BERA, BPS and HPC is that all practice and research should reflect a concern for the well-being and well-becoming, of all those we work with. Making visual data public is discussed with parents and children and their informed permission sought for its use.

Living Educational Theory research has its origins with Whitehead when he recognised a fundamental error in the disciplines approach to educational theory as a schoolteacher

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[3] Living Theory research is used as the shortened term meaning Living Educational Theory as it is in the literature

working on his Masters degree, and his approach was subsequently developed during his vocational career as academic, educational researcher and educational theorist (Whitehead, 1976, 1989, 1993, 2012, 2014).

Since its inception, Living Theory research has grown and evolved through the living-theories of practitioner-researchers gifted on the web. Many are freely available at http://www.actionresearch.net and through other international platforms such as conferences, journals and doctoral and masters research legitimated by universities around the world.

Living Theory research has most often been situated with action research but is also at home with other values-based self-study orientated methodologies, such as ethnography (Cresswell, 2007) and narrative enquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Living Theory researchers draw on various quantitative and qualitative research methods as their enquiry necessitates. In my research I use methods that can be recognised within action reflection cycles, narrative enquiry and ethnography. I use various tools such as journals, sketchbooks, mindmaps, photographs and video to both capture data and communicate the life-enhancing values-based, multidimensional, relationally dynamic nature of educational relationships that are at the heart of what constitutes education as educational (Mounter, 2012; Huxtable, 2012).

Biesta (2006) points out we have a well-developed language of learning but an undeveloped language of education. When I talk of 'education' I mean something more than schooling; I regard the word 'teacher' as signifying more than an orchestrator of knowledge transmission and acquisition. I am using 'education', like Huxtable (2012), to indicate a creative, life-long process by which a person learns to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others; a life that expresses their best intent informed by their life-affirming and life-enhancing values. I want intrinsic values (Crompton, 2010) to run through every aspect of the educational experience of school. I recognise, as Ginott (1972) did when he wrote:

> I have come to the frightening conclusion: I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, a child humanised or dehumanised. (p. 15–16)

It is the embodied expression of values that has the greatest educational influence on those around us. This quotation, variously attributed, but often to Maya Angelou, puts it well, "… people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I see the challenge to me to walk my own talk, embedded in this quote also attributed to her: "I do not trust people who don't love themselves and yet tell me, 'I love you'." (http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3503.Maya_Angelou) As a consequence, I engage in self-study and research my practice to improve it, employing a Living Educational Theory research methodology.

In the process of researching their practice to improve it and create their living-theory, a practitioner-researcher comes to know more of themselves, the person they are and want

to be making a contribution to a world worth living in. The 'i' which is studied, is not an egotistical 'I' but rather an embodied, ontological, relational 'i' (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006) which expresses the values that form a person's explanatory principles and living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996) of their educational influence in learning (Whitehead, 1989). The concern of a Living Theory researcher is not simply to enhance their educational influence in their own personal and professional learning: it is also to enhance their educational influence in the learning of others and in social formations.

One of the social formations I live and work in is that of educational professionals. One way of expressing my responsibility to contribute to the learning of the international community is to make public, in journals, how, as an educational professional, I hold myself accountable for living my educational values as fully as possible, by offering accounts of my living-theories for validation. I recognise that each practitioner-researcher is a unique individual whose praxis is situated within his or her own complex ecology (Lee and Rochon, 2009).

An essential aspect of Living Theory research is the creation of accounts that are valid and rigorous. I use four questions derived from Habermas' (1976, pp. 2–3) four criteria of social validity on comprehensibility, rightness, truthfulness and authenticity. I ask:

i)   Do other people comprehend my living-theory account?
ii)   How can I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the claims I make?
iii) How could I deepen and extend my awareness and understanding of the relational influences of the contexts I work in and people I work with have on my practice and writings?
iv)   How can I show I am truly committed, over time and interactions, to living as fully as I can the values I claim to hold?

In the next section I move from Living Theory research as an academic abstraction to my lived experience creating my living-theory, as transformational and generative professional development as I worked on my Masters dissertation. By necessity of space and purpose my story is radically edited here, but I have left in some of what might be considered repetition. This repetition is intended to enable me to communicate in my authentic voice, as I create meaning, as I research my living experience as a head-teacher working to improve the educational quality of my school. I also want to enable the reader to revisit some of what has been previously touched on to help them in the process of creating new meanings, and to be more aware of learning as a multidimensional and relationally dynamic and co-creative process.

My research journey as my CPD: Living Theory research in action

The pressure on schools, and ultimately the head-teacher, is to provide pupils with 'education' within the narrowest view; to produce SAT (Standardized Assessment Tests) results that meet targets set by government agencies. This pressure comes from league tables, OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education), County, my School Improvement Partner and governors. This feels a heavy burden.

I want to swim against the current I feel sucking me under. I waver under the pressure for results and the acceptability these bring, whilst at the same time resisting pressures to run a school that goes against everything I hold true and believe in. I have struggled to reach this point in my life, to understand my living values and myself and give as full an expression as I can of my educational values through my professional practice. I feel I will betray the head-teacher I am and strive to be, if I don't at least try to be true to my aspirations.

I have struggled over five years to complete a Masters degree, while being a teacher and head-teacher. My journey is clear through the essays I have written and which have been accredited as part of the Masters programme (Mounter, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b) and working towards my dissertation (Mounter, 2012). The more I journeyed and found a place within myself of values creation, the more I struggled with the traditional form of scientific research based in the social sciences, championed by authors such as Cohen and Manion (1995). I can see a traditional form of research would be useful if I were comparing two forms of assessment, or focusing on a specific closed question. However, for my research to improve my educational practice and to enable me to recognise that I am an inextricable part of the research, this form is not suitable.

A form of scholarly research I have found I can embrace is that of Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead, 1989, 2012). In creating and offering my account of my living-theory, my values are clarified as they emerge in the process of researching my practice to improve it and serve as the explanatory principles and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) of my educational influence in my learning, the learning of others and of social formations.

As an *educational* researcher I am focused on improving my practice as an expression of my values through living experiences, reflection, questioning, linking to research, further reflection, understandings, in almost a spiral action. I represented this process in my Masters dissertation (Mounter, 2012, p. 125–126.) – see Figure 1 and Figure 2.

These 2-dimensional drawings represent[4]:

...an Action Research cycle, linking time as the fourth dimension and space as the fifth variable…

Within the heart of this image, holding the energy as a creative force is the 'space'. The centre and the energy of the Action Narrative Research, within us, generated through our journey as a reflective Active Researcher. Here we consciously flow our energy and focus between segments, often more than one at a time, using Reflective Creativity to pull the threads together, to explore, revisit understandings, make links, question and re-organise, before we can transform that energy into Reflective Wisdom. Reflective Creativity enables the formulation of clarity of our Living Values, whilst the Reflective Wisdom forms the basis of our Living Theories. (Mounter, 2012, p. 110)

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[4]   I use Garamond font throughout this paper to enable the reader to more easily see where I am quoting directly from my dissertation (Mounter, 2012).
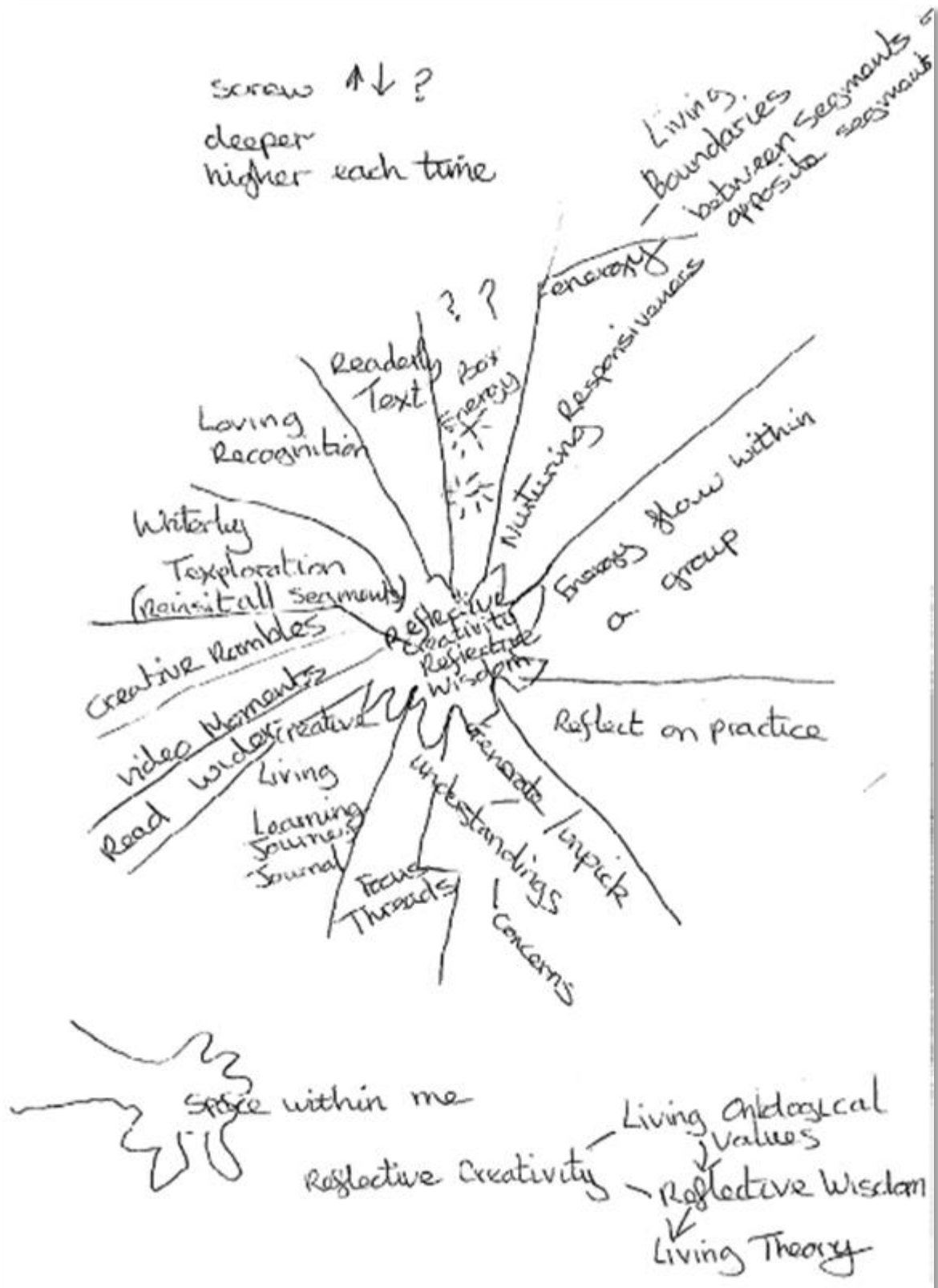
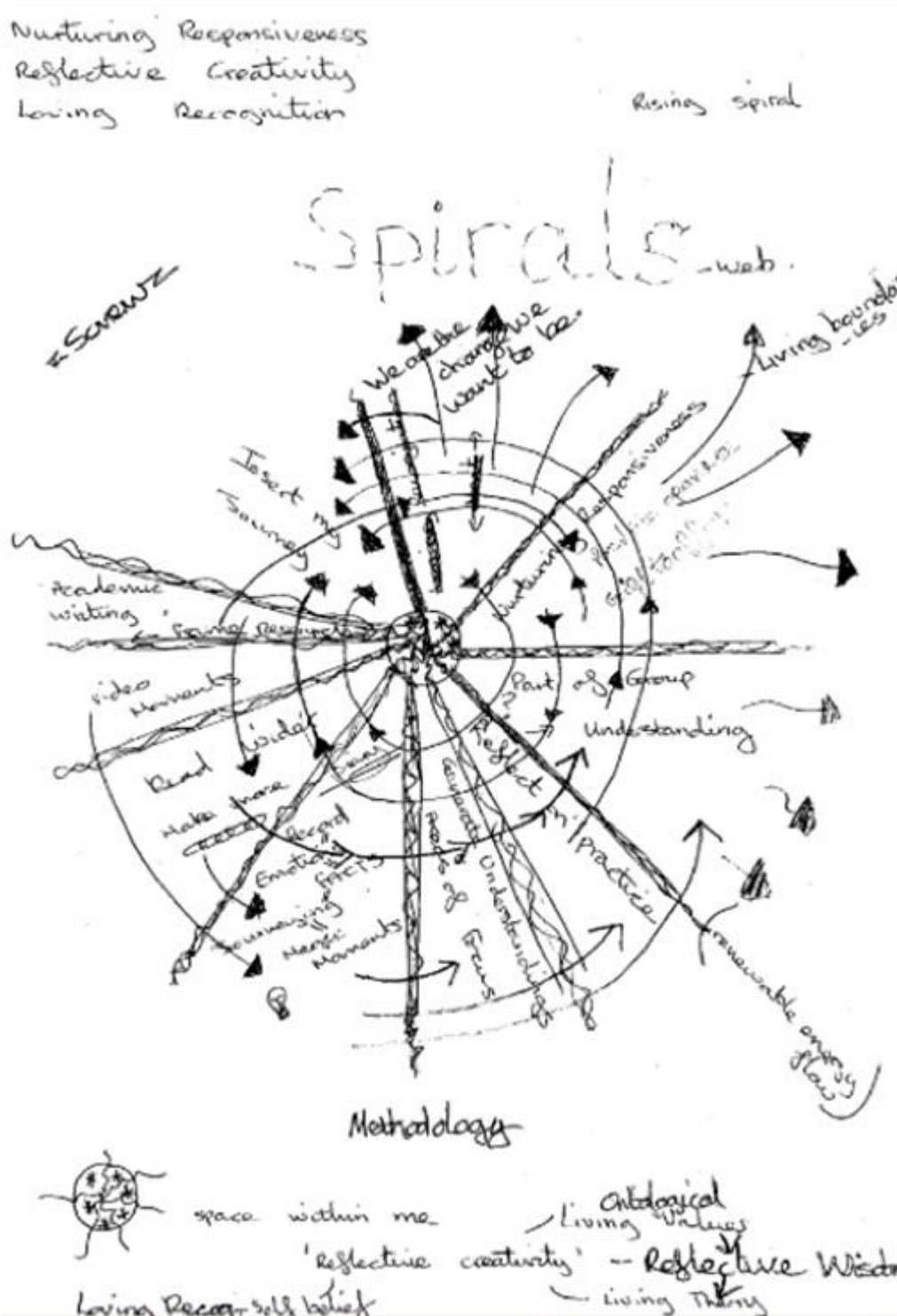**Figure 1.** Journal image 1 – my research process.

Figure 2.   Journal image 2 – my research process.

Whitehead (2012) brings into relief the importance of recognising and working to resolve contradictions to values experienced in practice. Through my Masters studies, I worked to resolve the contradiction to my values I experienced from government policy and the academics who expected my writing to conform to the traditional rubrics, while

maintaining my commitment to work within these constraints, to live to the fullest my ontological living values of 'Nurturing Responsiveness', 'Reflective Wisdom' and 'Co-creation of Knowledge'. You can get a sense of my learning journey from where I wrote:

> To a certain point it feels like the assignment I am struggling to write, pushing against the criteria I feel which constrains my thoughts, as I struggle to hold my head above the flow of conformity that threatens us.
>
> Similarly in school I have to play the game to a certain point, to gain the freedom to explore, to create and to inspire. One I believe will lift the other. One which will raise results but will engender children with the self belief and creative minds to forge the future they dream of.
>
> The logical step was for us to focus on the quality of teaching and standards in Maths and English. Until we can jump through the narrowing hoops we are given, nothing else matters. I read this, which I should believe and a part of my heart dies, whilst, if I am honest, the other part of me feared the risk, we took.
>
> My whole world feels as if it surrounds and is inside learning in its many forms. My life is a school, the pleasure, energy and life affirming values generated from being immersed and connected to the future, every day. For they are my dream of peace, eradication of world hunger, the next breakthrough in medicine, the creation of a true artist or the love of understanding, one for another; something this journey has made me so aware of.
>
> The more I journey as a Living Theory Action Researcher the more understandings I gain about the research process, about myself as a Teacher Researcher, and now as a Headteacher Researcher, but also as a learner. The cyclical process as an Action Researcher draws you to reflect on the learning and experiences past, and applying those to the future. For me this process has included essays as well as keeping a reflective diary, sometimes within a note book, others on line. But for a child action researcher, this would need to be carefully framed as a mesh, to support but not hold or confine. (Mounter, 2012, p. 52)

I recognised that my pedagogy had to be congruent with my educational philosophy and values as I wrote:

> Memories, experiences, connections are all pulled together through the Living Theory Action Research CPD process; through this essay I am demonstrating my own learning through the initiatives and changes introduced into my school. I also show how they alter the child's experiences and move towards an experience of learning, as a researcher of hands-on, experiential learning. This encourages the children to explore the world through the eyes of Living Theory Action Research and understand themselves as a learner. Being able to track their growth as a learner and store experiences as memories is key.
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> In my previous work I explored how children could record their development as a learner throughout their time at school. This led to the development of the Rainbow of Skills (Mounter, 2008a). This comprises of the seven colours of the rainbow, which represent a learning skill. This is further broken down within each colour. This provides children with statements about the learning skill they can focus on and record when they are using it, by using photographs and comments written on sticky notes. These are then stuck into the Rainbow of Skills as a dated record of how they grow as a learner.
>
> Through my research it soon became obvious that how we are as a person impacts on the learner we are/become and how we connect with the world around us. From here, 'Spirals' was developed as a joint project between Marie Huxtable and myself. It is divided into three sections, the first being all about myself as a person. Prompts help you to understand yourself by drawing, recording and remembering things that are important to you. The second section, the Rainbow of Skills, allows you to record your developing learning skills. The third section is called MeSearch. This is for the learner to apply the Living-Theory TASC (Huxtable, 2012) research process to their own

life. Where they can reflect on the learner they are, as well as the person on a deeper level, pulling threads and reflections together, developing creative wisdom within, stored to reflect upon at any point in time.' (Mounter, 2012, pp. 52–53)

This is what these stored reflections look like in practice (italic script indicates notes from my diary or journal):

Today in school I was chatting to a young boy, aged 9 (Child T) while he was working; he really made me smile when he told me that beyond the universe are squiggly things, zig zags that control things and make everything work. He talked of a control panel working the Earth. All the time he frowned, struggling to find the words to express the clear picture I could sense he could see in his thoughts. His body language and tone of voice portrayed reflective interest and concentration, a desire to connect with another person and explain his thoughts.' [note in my diary] It was his sense of joy and pleasure sharing his ideas, connecting to another, that made me make a note of this in my diary. He understood something, which has taken me so long!

The same day while outside at playtime, I watched the children running and playing, enjoying themselves. Afterwards the children talked of their friends and games and their eyes lit up with excitement and energy, the world holding its own sense of magic and discovery for them, an energy endlessly feeding them, as they reflected. These are just moments, odd glimpses into the energy and thinking of the children. But they are important, they, I believe hold the key, the energy I have been searching for.

How can I transfer that energy, in its raw form, that sense of passion and inquisitiveness, to an environment built to constrain?' (Journal note).

Desks, neat spaces, sit together, timetables, no choice or blue sky. Windows often high, or told not to look out, just listen and focus. But cannot my dream inspire the mind, bringing that surge of energy that is often so elusive to us teachers in our pupils. My mind rambles, but I feel as though we are forcing conformity, of history and tradition and a sense of replication. Is this tradition, the future or just safety within the 'box'? *How can I create that sense of space, freedom, exploration, hands on, mucky, intrigue in my school?' (Journal Note)*

It is sometimes easier to pose questions and to keep on journeying, than to stop, reflect and link to find answers. It is that sense of curiosity I seek, that burns, and even though you know you mustn't, you just have to.

"I didn't know learning wasn't boring?" (Child B [said which I noted in my diary])

The contradiction in this statement fascinates me. The pleasure comes from knowing I have engaged this child in a way that he hadn't expected or experienced before. But it makes my heart sink at the same time, as this child was in Year 5 and so switched off by the system and schooling he has received that hasn't engaged him. I want to make a difference.' (Mounter, 2012, p.55)

I was asked a while ago, how I would summarise my journey. What was the most important thing I had learned? How to answer such a question without long explanations and heartfelt contemplation? I have thought about this question a lot: as a thorn, it has stuck in the back of my mind, niggling the 'space' within. Through working on my dissertation I came to the conclusion:

I want to hold learners confidently in a place of uncertainty.

This may sound an odd answer but I feel strongly that all learners should be confident action researchers, developing their own learning theories and forms of research, starting whilst young at school. If you can work confidently in a place of uncertainty you have self confidence. You have the joy of the unknown and knowledge creation, forging your own path. (Mounter, 2012, p. 56)

In creating my dissertation, I tried to do what I try to encourage others to do, and kept notes and reflections made within the moment, recorded as files on my computer, sometimes as questions, as narratives, as a poem or just notes and images. I created my own research method, which combines the first, second, fifth and seventh segments of the TASC Wheel (Wallace & Adams, 1993, Wallace *et al.,* 2004, Figure 3), with the steps within Living Theory Action Research (Whitehead, 1993).

Figure 3.   TASC (Wallace *et al.* 2004).

I will describe my research process as shown in Figure 4, repeated below to make it more convenient to refer to.

I begin at '12 o'clock', with '? ?' to point to an openness to possibilities and an awareness of self. The + and – signs indicate the flow of energy to and from the researcher holding the space.

I move clockwise to the 'Nurturing Responsiveness' segment, where there is an awareness of living-boundaries and openness to explore (Huxtable, 2012). I am also positively aware of the needs of others and self, forming the bond between the two and a nurturing relationship of Reflective Creativity, which prods thoughts and questions to develop thinking and trust. This is the area of self-exploration through the connections made with others, the forming of Reflective Creativity and development to Reflective Wisdom. This merging of like minds and opposing minds creates an energy of its own that feeds, refuels and snag the conscious thought within the 'energy flow within a group' segment. It provides refuelling stops within a pressured, constrained world of limits, opportunities to develop creative thoughts, to share and challenge perceptions and creates within oneself an eagerness to explore and reflect on one's practice and values.

The boundaries between these segments are living energy, transformational with belief, fluid to the thought and a spiral in perspective, but whether raising or lowering is another question.
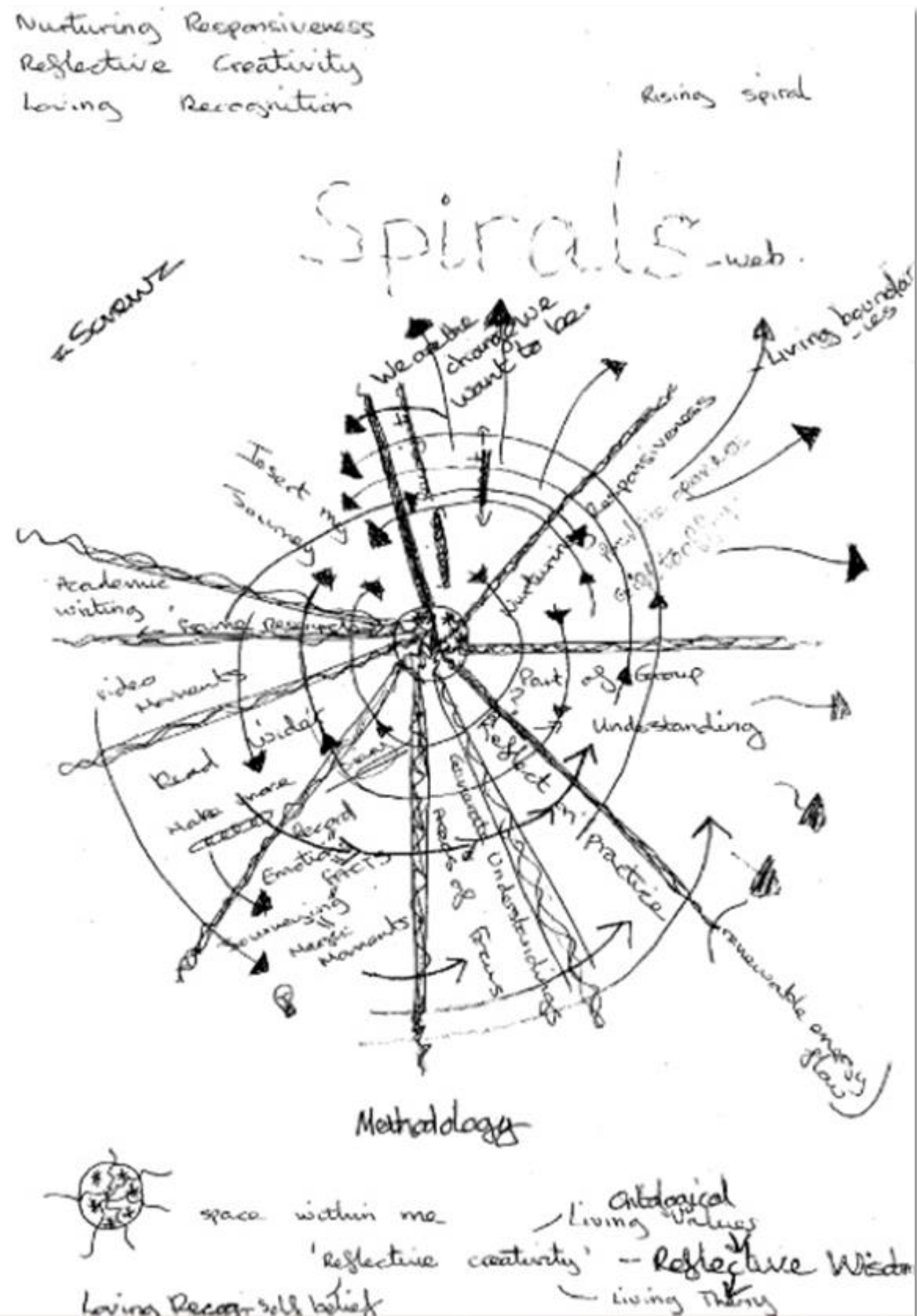
Figure 4.   Journal Image - My research process

The 'reflection on practice' flows on to 'generates/unpicks' questions, creating 'understandings' and 'concerns', which resolve into 'focus threads' to explore. This is the point at which I flow into my 'living diary' and begin to record my journey as a learner and 'read wider'. This record-making can be in many formats that inspire, provoke, and remind me of other learning and knowledge: for me this is often a poetic narrative. I have also kept video clips, notes, images, work by staff and children, mind maps and so on. I find myself drawn into these special moments on my journey and enjoy the play of words and images on paper. I can return to it; revisit the moment by immersing myself in the recording.

I have included 'read wider' here, to remind me that I am making sense of my own developing thoughts by exploring the work of others and critically engaging with them.

The next segments, 'video moments' and 'creative rambles' is where I think I begin to see the use of video clips about my own practice as useful evidence and reflective tools, beginning to link critical analysis in my reading and reflective creativity formulating narrative data as evidence. This for me is the point of pleasure when I begin in the next segment to pull the strands of my 'reflective creativity' together in the form of a 'writerly texploration'. I have named this segment 'writerly texploration' as it is the place I form and metamorphose the energy from meandering between, within, across from and next to each segment into my understandings.

Huxtable (2012) explores the concept of 'loving recognition' as an understanding of self, recognising talents, skills, strengths and developing of self-belief which I believe comes within the next segment. This point leads to linking with the seventh segment on the TASC Wheel, transforming the Writerly Text into a Readerly Text. This is when the formality of the action reflection cycle becomes important. It is at this point that it is necessary to engage with the criteria for examination and the steps within the Living Theory Action Research cycle. This process helps to focus the researcher by writing for an audience to identify the clear threads of the journey, the key points to convey and the presentation format best suited to communicate the message. This form of presentation may be a style well understood within the Academy or a new form to communicate a living-theory created through the journey of the researcher/writer.

The 'spiral- screw' energy of the research flows freely in a three-dimensional world, and through the fourth dimension of time as the researcher is held within the moment, but is also able to reflect and revisit the moment with the beauty of perspective hindsight and thought. The fifth dimension is of place, our place in the world, in our own understandings, in the political and social time of our age.

As I engaged repeatedly in this process through my Masters work I became clearer that 'loving recognition' and 'nurturing responsiveness' were intrinsic values that are at the heart of my practice and form my explanatory principles and standards of judgment. The practical influence of this stance can be seen in what I have done over the four years as I have focused on 'active learning' with our school community. This list gives an indication of some of the activity and thinking that gives the meaning of 'active learning' in St Aldhelm's and the basis for developing 'active researching' which includes: 'Creative Curriculum'; 'Research'; 'lock-down events'; TASC; 'Active Learning'; 'Fab Friday'; 'M.A.D. (Make A Difference) Club'; 'Learning Logs' – photographs, labels, skills, attitudes, self belief; Web sites. Figure 5 gives some indication of the diverse activities that are involved.
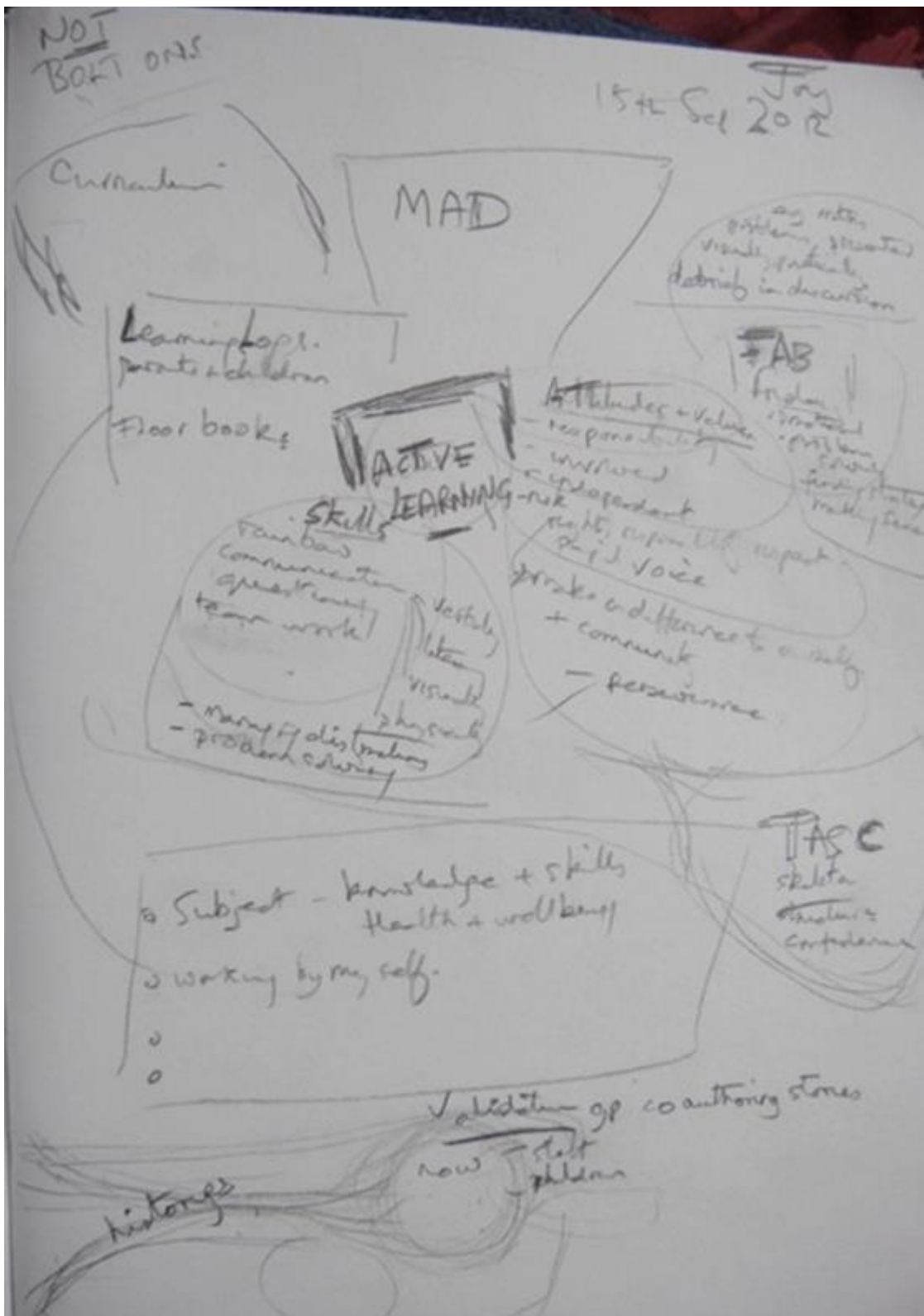
Figure 5.   Developing active learning adding to my complex ecology

By presenting this diagrammatic representation, I want to indicate that the complexity of the educational ecology within which my pupils learn cannot be fully communicated by simple text and bullet points within a school development plan. The activities and thinking hinted at by the sketch (Figure 5) have not been introduced and developed in a neat, linear sequence in series or in parallel, neither have they occurred in a haphazard manner. Rather, there has been an organic, multidimensional and relationally dynamic process at work, with periods of systematic action, a process Huxtable (2012) has referred to as "Living-Theory TASC". I have kept a consistent focus on developing opportunities that enhance the educational experience of school by each learner. The values that form my explanatory principles and living standards of judgment of my practice as head-teacher leading these developments, are a 'loving recognition' and 'nurturing responsiveness', and it is those that I communicate here with extracts from my dissertation, image and video:

> I am drawn to the work of Huxtable (2012) exploring Loving Recognition through her thesis. Finding a positive recognition between two people, enabling other connections to develop and learning to take place. Perhaps the recognition of a positive, open person? Someone who sees the positive in another individual, one who is able to listen, respond in a positive way and engage with others. Loving Recognition - dropping of barriers.

> In a learning environment where the traditional label of teacher and pupil still reverberates, I want more. I have struggled with labelling or naming the space I feel we create and can hold within us. A space of creative energy, connections and developing of our thinking, deep learning and knowledge creation.

> The relationship needed to create this space, to feel it, to be able to hold and carry it, is special, something you can't see, but feel inside. The tentative connectors we offer to another can be responded to in so many ways. Ways that close the offer down, some that make us feel inadequate, a space we withdraw ourselves into. Even those that make us want to protect our thoughts, which we keep and therefore don't offer, or a connection that enables us to open up and flourish.

> As a teacher and a human being I offer my beliefs in my values, which I try to hold and live fully, even when restrictions around me feel as though they are grinding my beliefs away. The connectors I offer are always positively given, with the belief that the person I am engaging with feels the same, however many experiences may make us believe otherwise. We have to positively offer and expect to receive likewise; otherwise our offer becomes tainted with nervousness and disbelief. This I often find is easier with children, who are so open and willing to engage, not worn with a nervous or edgy shell. This energy I offer as a connector is given with the hope that we will feel a connection that will tentatively open the creative space and hold it as a workable energy between us. As the teacher I work with children mostly, but want them to be able to feel the space for themselves. To know themselves in a positive way and hold the space as a creative energy, both within and as a shooting connector, enabling them to connect positively with others. To store, create, mould, discard, connect and deepen their understanding and self esteem in themselves and their connections with the world around them. This is more than recognising a like minded soul, but the gentle, guiding of how the space can feel the prompt of a reflective question encouraging introspection and the absolute conviction that we all have gifts to offer others. Gifts that will deepen our understanding of ourselves, our knowledge base and skill base, as well as giving us the opportunities to knowledge create. For me, this feels more like the job description I should have:

>> In some ways it is not personal, there is no recognition of the individual uniqueness of the other, it is an expression of a human desire to make contact, to reach out and touch and be touched by, emotionally, physically, intellectually... the other as a fellow human being. In that I see a respectful connectedness, which requires a mutual trust that boundaries and spaces will not be violated. (Huxtable, 2012, p. 11)

Practice to Theory - Loving Recognition or Nurturing Responsiveness? Or Both?

This is an educational theory that I offer for discussion and examination by the Academy. *'Nurturing Responsiveness'* describes the delicate role I hold, the balance between demonstrating and modelling skills to creating opportunities for self discovery. A definition of nurturing is: ... *to encourage somebody to grow, to develop, to thrive and be successful foster, tender care, protection to a young child, to keep a feeling in the mind for a long time, allowing it to grow or deepen.* (Encarta Dictionary, 2011, English.UK)

The combination of Nurturing Responsiveness in a setting of Loving Recognition is the key. Nurturing can only be done to its optimum if you know the child you are working with well, trust and a bond develops, the time invested to know their idiosyncrasies is well spent and deepens the Nurturing Responsiveness. Responsiveness is also as important as the Nurturing element. A definition is: *Showing positive response: reacting quickly, strongly or favourably to something.* (Encarta, 2011, English. UK)

If as a teacher I feel empathy towards the children I am working with, I know them well, so that I can support them as necessary, I can encourage creative thinking, mulling of thoughts and discussion. I must also be receptive to not only pick up on the subtle signals given, to support gently as required, to prod with a question or extend thinking, but to receive the gifts they are offering. In this environment of 'Loving Recognition' (Huxtable, 2012) and 'Nurturing Responsiveness', connections are made, trust is shared and the 'space' can be developed and held. Over time this 'space' can be found within, a space for self – growth of thought, knowledge, skills and self- belief.

Connecting to someone we don't know, as an adult, is a little more uncertain. I offer connectedness through Loving Recognition and Nurturing Responsiveness. This is the flow of change I apply to a situation that I am becoming familiar with, I live it, without the confidence of previous connections. Nurturing responses, I flow and change, adapt to the return signals I 'feel', generating more depth to the connection and the element of possibilities.

For the child, as they journey through our education system, they will experience many types of learning. Some value driven by the teachers they interact with, some defined by tests or systems from national directives, sometimes influenced by the ethos of the establishment they move from and to. But whatever the system or ethos the child encounters, if they have experienced Nurturing Responsiveness over a period of time and know themselves well as a learner, they can, I believe, hold the space and skills they have developed within themselves and use, for the lack of a better description, the elements of the establishment and system they find themselves in, that will continue to help them to grow. Even if that means for a time, they have to work within a system that doesn't feel true to them. They can fight the sense of loss of control, hold the space and feel for like minded souls. The inner reflection from this space can be both nurturing and confining if care isn't taken.' (Mounter, 2012, pp. 77–82)

Revisiting my dissertation in the process of creating this paper I can now see that this last paragraph expresses something of the complexity of 'nurturing responsiveness' in a context of 'loving recognition' and how an educator can, unintentionally, create a space wherein a loving intention can be felt at the same time as a colonisation. For instance, a framework offered to enable a learner, adult or child, to have the confidence to embark on an enquiry, can become a crutch that undermines the confidence of the learner to step beyond what is known to create new knowledge. It is a delicate balance to provide a safety-net that is adequate but is barely perceived, one that encourages and ensures a first step, but doesn't suggest or hinder, one that encourages the learner to feel the wind and fly.

I have worked extensively with Huxtable and she clarified her values, including 'loving recognition', 'respectful connectedness' and 'educational responsibility' in her thesis (Huxtable, 2012). She draws on my work and images in a way that resonates with me, and the meanings I give to my values of loving recognition and nurturing responsiveness. In this extract

from her thesis she recognises, values and works with knowledge I have created, and offered to enhance and communicate meanings of her embodied values and extend the educational influence of both of our gifts:

> This photograph (Figure 6), which is part of the collage, also has a personal connection. It was taken by Joy Mounter who I have had the delight of working with for many years. She had digital cameras available in her classroom and had one to hand at the moment when one of her pupils had understood something he had worked hard at, and another child recognised this and expressed their pleasure in the moment. Joy brought the photograph to share at the Masters group and subsequently included it in her Masters account in which she wrote:

Figure 6.   The moment when two children spontaneously shared their joy of learning and success at solving a problem with each other.

> This picture for me holds so much emotion and joy. It describes the journey to emotional learning and celebration in my classroom. The moment when two children spontaneously shared their joy of learning and success at solving a problem with each other. For me this is the assignment, 'the whole world in a grain of sand', a single moment. Learning independently, "We did it!" Child Q. ... (Mounter, 2006a)

I wrote (Huxtable, 2008b) what I felt communicated through this photograph:

> In this photograph, taken by Joy Mounter in her class, the boy has just learnt something he has been struggling with. The moment is shared and appreciated by the girl who expresses her delight with a hug. In this moment I see the pleasure of loving recognition and respectful connectedness between the children, the children and Joy. I also see this between these two children and Joy as part of the educational community she has created in the classroom. It is not just the physical boundaries that are relaxed but the emotional ones and I can feel the space charged with the emotional energy of pleasure given expression. Joy does not intrude but is included with the history of her relationship with the children. The boy in the background, smiling at the two, is also not intruding into the

space created between the children in the fore-ground but is included in the wider space, with space and boundaries neither fixed or discrete. This moment is evidence of the quality of an inclusional gifted and talented educational space that Joy has created, and is, as she put it herself, 'the whole world in a grain of sand'. (Mounter, 2006a)

There is so much expressed in this photograph. The context is formal, yet the pleasure and moment is personal. How did Joy bring that about? Without the photograph I do not think the meaning of the energy would communicate, and the humanness of the educational space and relationships that Joy had created, the recognition of the children of each other, and the delight they share in what one child has struggled with and the gift of understanding that he has created, valued and offered himself. Each is offering a loving recognition of them self and the other and there is a respectful connectedness in the expression of an educational responsibility. The intra- and inter-personal living-boundaries may be tested but not violated. (Huxtable, 2012, p.91–92)

Figure 7.   Video co-creating learning theory (start 12 seconds in)

What cannot be communicated adequately in text or two-dimensional images is the energy-flowing nature of the values inherent in understanding of loving recognition and nurturing responsiveness. I believe this video clip (Figure 7) I included in my Masters unit, (Mounter, 2007b) which can be accessed at http://youtu.be/hH2-5xexbAQ, adds to what I have expressed through text and image so far as to the meanings I am giving to loving recognition and nurturing responsiveness.

The clip, which is 10:36 long, is the second of a series of three taken on a Friday afternoon when I was working as a teacher and deputy-head, before I joined St Aldhelm's. The children are explaining their learning theory.

If you move the cursor back and forth, using a technique that Whitehead developed and described by Huxtable (2009), to find a point of empathetic resonance, such as the one at

5:16, I believe you can begin to appreciate better the embodied expression of loving recognition and nurturing responsiveness.

Through these extracts of my Masters work, I am aware of weaving insights I developed through the many stories that form multidimensional relationally dynamic pieces of my journey as head-teacher to improve the educational experience of the pupils of St Aldhelm's. My knowledge generation takes place through the reflections from within the lived moment of my research and the step-back reflections with the hindsight of further experiences. These reflections all tie together, as my experiences change practice, beliefs and my ontological living values. I have deliberately added 'living' here, as this process and narrative method reflects my life experiences through my 'story' as a researcher and continues to ripple through my life beyond the period of reflective research. I believe we live as one human being, interacting and learning from, and contributing to, the world and connections we make. My reflections, told at times formally through a narrative method, are at times transitional places of experience, at others as quiet reflections of thought. Both have the quiet impact on the person I am, on the way I interact with the world around me, on my values, which I live in my daily life, and form the heart of who I am and how I am perceived.

My approach to developing my school as a place of educational excellence has not been conventional or low risk, as one OFSTED inspector commented. My CPD through a Masters programme has also not been conventional. However, both have been an expression of my personal and professional responsibility to continuing my educational journey and to providing children with the best possible educational experience within the constraints of my duty as a head-teacher of a state school. Evidence of the educational influence I have had in the learning of the social formations within which I live and work is pointed at when I wrote in my dissertation:

> As a school we have struggled to move from satisfactory (OFSTED view) to a school making our own decisions and following our own path successfully. I wanted all of our hard work recognised. I wanted other schools to know of our successes and not just our struggles.
>
> In November [2011] I was delighted to be asked to present a workshop to Somerset's Deputy Headteacher's Conference. The workshop was to cover how we teach a creative curriculum at our school. This request came on the back of our last OFSTED report in April 2011, when we achieved 'good' overall with 6 areas, including our curriculum, as 'outstanding'. I was pleased to be asked, to promote the work we are doing at school. The workshop went well and I have been asked by other schools to send details of the Curriculum Map and Learning Logs that we use. I shared my belief in the Living Theory Action Research process as being the skeleton around which everything else hangs. The way in which I have engaged with myself as a researcher, and my school. (Mounter, 2012, pp. 105–106)

Discussion

I have presented my story as reflections of my journey, summarised for an audience. It is also the journey of the staff, children, parents and governors of St. Aldhelm's and those who are part of a wider research community of which we are all members. Narrative prose, explanations, discussions, photographs and video provide an emerging picture. One alone provides a layer of understanding but, drawn together, they show research emerging as a connection to the experience, one that resonates or challenges us from within.

The epistemological significance of this multi-media narrative is focused on the clarification and communication of the meanings of embodied values such as loving recognition and nurturing responsiveness as explanatory principles of educational influence in learning of self, other and social formations, in teaching and teacher education. The use of digital technology enables a process of empathetic resonance to be used to clarify and communicate the meanings of embodied expressions of values as explanatory principles. These embodied meanings cannot be carried by words alone. The meanings require both the embodied expressions, shown in the visual data, and the values-laden language of education to communicate clearly. This is why this publishing in journals such as EJOLTs is so significant in emphasising that multi-media narratives can communicate different meanings of educational influence, than can be communicated through words alone.

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