

Concluding comments and How can we enhance the flow of values that carry hope for the future of humanity? Part 2.



This conclusion continues the edited transcript of the conclusion to the conference presented by Jack Whitehead, and attempts to identify some essential aspects for consideration in developing creativity across science, art, dyslexia, education.

One theme is that of subjectivity/objectivity, the need for the inclusion of the person in academia and the questioning of the exclusion of the “I” in so-called objective academic research.

Jack Whitehead described how in America they found the kind of question with an “I” in the content was very difficult to acknowledge that it was or could ever be an academic enquiry, Jack described how his own practice in living educational theory gives him the feeling that “what I’m

trying to do in relation to my own self studies in practice relate across art, science, dyslexia and education". Jack explained in "How can I help you?" the 'I' is central even though the 'you' is crucial to the enquiry. Jack referred to Alan Rayner's (4) work in seeking "pleasurable engagement with living space" and invited the audience to share for a few moments what had been of value to them in the conference. Jack then stopped a hubbub of discussion with the words, "I have a feeling you could continue all afternoon." He acknowledged having the sense of being invited in to do something and the tension he experiences when breaking in to genuine dialogue between others for a purpose. He described the educational value of sharing what has been of value in the conference with others. "I just want to get a sense of how we can move from that quality where you are engaged with another person saying what really does matter to you, what is important into the group as a whole. That process of inclusion is really important in terms of talking about what this conference has been about and how to take it forward. If you are feeling slightly critical, you may have more the feeling that this is a flash of inspiration that like a flare can only blossom once and not come up again. I am not convinced, yet."

This process of inclusion requires safe space, a landscape free from ownership, neutral and accepting. The flares could, as in the oil fields, have gone underground – to pop up elsewhere. They could be easily extinguished, or the flame could burn in perpetuity as in the Olympic model.

Another common theme across the disciplines is that of sustainability. Whether the process and the time needed to make connections, form links and understand and respect different ways of working can be secured in an academia which is becoming increasingly product driven. You, the reader will realise that it is now six years on from the proceedings of this conference, and that it took place before the so-called 9/11 events. Was this event a brief flare? At times it has felt that it might have been. Many times I have thought that the ensuing global events tended to wipe out the value of all we had achieved in pulling Cascade together. As Jack said, the essential life affirming energy that we had experienced at Cascade needs to be celebrated collaboratively, but in the face of all we have seen during the ensuing years it has sometimes seemed like an impossible task.

Nevertheless not only have many of the participants of the conference formed networks, and stayed in touch with the other and developed new work, the call for more information about the proceedings continues slowly to grow. As Professor Gosling describes, we need dyslexic people, his own work with non exploding mine fields may prove to be one of the most life enhancing defence developments of the 21st century.

A theme that was repeatedly referred to is exclusion, the pain and the nature of exclusion. This centers on the lack of understanding and the resulting derogatory reaction from those who Will Gosling refers to as modal thinkers, "I could see it in their eyes". There is also something around language and the subtlety of the issues presented which makes them uncomfortable, sometimes non-verbal and therefore easier for non dyslexic people to ignore or avoid. This is common with other diversity issues. Ketaki Kushari Dyson spoke about this sense of exclusion and pain the performers of 'Night's Sunlight', a play whose content is intrinsic to widening participation debates, had experienced. Ketaki movingly expressed the difficulties and frustrations this

presented. Jack responded that initially he had expected that Mo's introductory comparison of 'Night's Sunlight' with Ibsen was likely to be hyperbole, however he and Alan Rayner felt it was one of the most powerful dramatic experiences they had ever experienced, "It was profoundly moving – a sense of affirmation that really did connect with the audience – values that were so powerful and relate undoubtedly with creativity and the values of the conference". Margarida Dolan added that the play ends with the woman saying she still has something to say, and in the context of creativity this is profoundly moving, "We still have something to say".

Alan McLean said he gained a sense of empowerment, had enjoyed talking to other dyslexics and that he would actually promote dyslexia more as an issue within disability culture. Ann Brigden celebrated people doing things that can be affirmed by others, paintings produced by scientists and academics, who may have put themselves out on a limb by being courageous enough to be open about their own dyslexia, made her feel that the academic ivory tower was actually beginning to shake. She said, "too often we feel we are a minority within a somewhat suffocating culture in education. Imagination, embracing creativity, play and playing with ideas are part of the learning process." This element of celebration and joy was important to identify as a different quality which comes from the uncertain interdisciplinary process.

Will Gosling movingly expressed his concerns that while the conference and he himself had indulged in what he termed "dyslexia triumphalism", which needed to be done, he reminded us of Diane Little's description of the characteristics of dyslexia are both "the man rattling his tin cup across the bars of cell and the man going to receive his Nobel Prize". Will remained worried about the dyslexia who "is not very gifted, who cannot rise above the circumstances of the society and education in which he finds himself" and said that this person "had been haunting him throughout the conference."

Jane Graves believes that everybody has talent. She reminded us that we are in a hierarchical system which continues historically to be about exclusion and failure. "Criminals are hugely creative, but not in ways that we can appreciate very much. It is difficult for us to try and change a system imposed on us which is not really sympathetic to the idea of being an inclusive culture".

Jack concluded that in living educational theory everybody will need to address the power relations associated with legitimizing embodied knowledge and to explain what they are learning as they seek to live their values more fully in their practice (5). He pointed out that this sense of the political is so important in terms of enhancing the flow of values that carry hope for the future of humanity. Referring to Basil Bernstein's last book (6) where he talks about the trick of the mythology that is played out on us. "The trick is trying to believe you are creating within schools something that is quite separate from power and control, and not part of the control mechanisms of a wider society. We need to see the connections. What Will is saying about the knowledge and the way we need to transform it is part of the process. Each living educational thesis has had to address issues of power and control and not allow it to be distorted by the academy".

These power relations are very evident across the disciplines, with science appearing at first to hold sway over art and education. It becomes clear working with scientists that the best science is not

the linear objective rationale we have been led to believe. Therefore there is another power base within education and teaching and learning that needs to be challenged. One common theme is the fear – for artists approaching science, for scientists approaching art, for dyslexic people approaching an education system that denies and derides their way of working, and for those in education faced with the need for change.

It becomes clearer that the dialogue that interdisciplinary and diverse work engages us in can be uncomfortable yet touches on some essential elements for human survival. We have much we can learn from this, and there is some urgency in the need for these issues to be addressed within academia. To conclude I repeat Jack's words, "It seems to me if we're going to have some influence in the world we've got to learn how to celebrate that life affirming energy collaboratively" and express the hope that this collection goes some way to achieving this aim.

References

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After word

As an artist who is dyslexic I have personally encountered the change in acceptance, a tangible growth in the understanding of the subject. The many contributors and participants at the cascade conference have undertaken much of the research in the field of dyslexia over many years. This work has played a great part in being responsible for the sea change in attitudes and the massive growth in awareness of the issues both in education and our culture.

I would like to thank all of the delegates at this conference on a personal level. It is due to your work and commitment to the field of dyslexia that the school experiences that I encountered due to my dyslexia will hopefully not be repeated for my children and many, many others. I personally now have a greater understanding of my own thinking and doing processes and am able to reflect on my own practice in a much more informed way. Thank you to all of you.

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