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**Towards a living theory of caring pedagogy:  
interrogating my practice to nurture a critical,  
emancipatory and just community of enquiry.**

by  
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**For the award of PhD from the University of Limerick**

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***To Note: The video clips are not viewable in this web version of the thesis. A disk containing a digital copy of the thesis and the video clips is included with the hard copy of the thesis and is available from the library of the University of Limerick, Ireland.***

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## ABSTRACT

In this narrative of my self-study action research into my practice I describe and explain my living theory of caring pedagogical practice as I claim to know my own educational development (Whitehead 1989a) in relation to teaching children to realise their capacity to think critically, within a context of a new scholarship of educational practice (Boyer 1990). I claim that as I researched dialogical pedagogies that would support my aims of encouraging children to be critical thinkers, I also reconceptualised my own identity as a critical thinker and began to challenge dominant orthodoxies that have traditionally determined who is seen as a knower in a primary classroom and who is seen as an educational researcher.

I articulate how my ontological values of care, freedom and justice in relation to others were transformed through their emergence into the living standards of judgment by which I evaluated the educational influence in learning of my developing dialogical practice.

I claim that I have generated a personal living educational theory about teaching children to be critical thinkers that is grounded in the idea of 'being' rather than 'having' (Fromm 1979), and this stands as my original contribution to knowledge in my field. I explain how I experienced a dissonance between my values and my practice that led me to critique dominant didactic norms as located in an abstract concept of a generalised 'Other', whereas my dialogical practice was located in the idea of relationships with real, concrete others (Benhabib 1987). I explain the significance of my research, grounded in my multimedia evidence base, for my own educational development, for my institution, and for the wider educational research community, as I clarify the developmental processes of my capacity to theorise my practice.

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