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# How do we improve our contribution to the professional development of educational practitioners by enacting a self-study methodology?

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In this chapter we explain our educational influence as we research our question, ‘How do we improve our contribution to the professional development of educational practitioners by enacting a self-study methodology?’ as Living Theory researchers. We:

- demonstrate the contribution Living Theory researchers make to the evolution of educational knowledge, as called for by Snow (2001) and Schön (1995);
- provide evidence of our developing understanding and practice of our own professional development;
- show and explain how we improve our contribution to the professional development of professional educational-practitioners.

Our ontological values of loving recognition, respectful connection, educational responsibility, creativity and academic freedom, and social values of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society comprise our explanatory principles and standards of judgement. Crompton (2010) describes such values as, “intrinsic, or self-transcendent” and are, “... concerned with bigger-than-self problems and with corresponding behaviours to help address these problems” (p.10).

The practice that is the focus of this chapter is our joint tutoring of a University of Bath (UK) Masters programme between 2008-2012. Participants included professional educational-practitioners working in various fields, including teachers and head-teachers in schools.

## Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework is provided by Living Theory research (Whitehead, 1989, 2008). Living Theory researchers create and contribute valid accounts of their living-educational-theories to the evolution of an educational knowledge-base. A living-educational-theory is the values-based

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explanation an individual gives of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they live and work in (Whitehead, 1989, 2008). We draw on ideas of Living Theory praxis, living-boundaries, Living Theory TASC (Huxtable, 2012).

Praxis can be used to communicate a notion of theory and practice held together and formed by a moral imperative. We use ‘Living Theory praxis’ to point clearly to a ‘moral imperative’ that is generated by the intention of the practitioner/s to research their practice to live their life-affirming and life-enhancing values as fully as possible and to contribute to the flourishing of humanity. Living Theory praxis highlights the fundamental importance of educators creating, “values-based explanations of their educational influences in learning” (Whitehead, 1989), as they research to develop praxis within living-boundaries. A living-boundary is a co-creative space within which energy-flowing values can be clarified and communicated. Living Theory TASC is a relationally dynamic and multidimensional approach to research and developing praxis, which integrates Living Theory research (Whitehead, 1989) with Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) (Wallace and Adams, 1993). The TASC enquiry process is illustrated in Figure1.

Clarifying our meanings of ‘we’.

Most of the academic texts we have read take the use of ‘we’ as unproblematic. When we use ‘we’, we are pointing to a relationship where each individual’s presence and contribution is acknowledged as distinct but not discrete. Our use of ‘we’ includes respect and valuing of the unique contribution each individual can make to the flourishing of humanity, together with an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian relationship of being and working together. We represent this by i~we~i to communicate the expressions of meaning of the African notion of Ubuntu translated as, ‘I am because we are’, with the additional recognition of ‘we are because I am’. Lower case, ‘i’ and ‘we’, are used to indicate the egalitarian nature of the relationship, where neither the individual nor collective is subordinate or dominant and ~ represents living-boundaries.

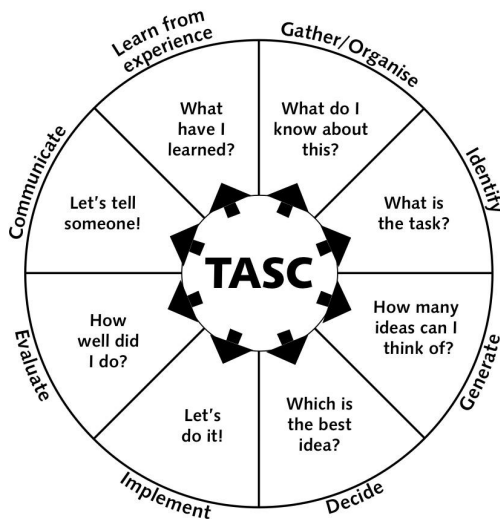


Figure 1. TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) Wallace and Adams, (1993)

Like Biesta (2006, p.54) we recognise that, "... coming into presence is not something that one can do by oneself", so it is important that we, as professional educational-practitioners, acknowledge and research our own educational influences in the learning of students we support, and their influence in our learning. Our educational pedagogy develops as described by writers such as Maturana and Bunnell (e.g. 1999) and Freire (e.g. 1972). Such an educational pedagogy is evidenced in the work of Sally Cartwright, one of our Masters students posthumously awarded the Diploma in Education by the University of Bath in 2015, we show in the section below.

We like the central idea of Biesta (2006): 'One of the central ideas of the book is 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) However, we believe that we differ from Biesta in that we work with a clear understanding of responsibility *towards* the other but *not for* the other. We respect people as responsible for their own learning and lives and see us each existing within mutually influencing relationships. In these relationships we use ~ to represent living-boundaries (Huxtable, 2012) between often bounded 'worlds' such as those of educator and learner, and the Academy and school. A living-boundary is a trustworthy, inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian, space within which knowledge can be created, co-created and offered with the hope of contributing to and benefitting from: our own learning; the learning of others and; a developing educational knowledge-base.

When we talk about our contribution we are talking about 'we' (Jack and Marie). However, there is a complexity to this because 'we' do not sit in isolation. So while we do not presume to speak on behalf of others we realise our 'we' includes those we work with, such as our students. Including our students in our 'we' expands as we recognise our students are in relationship with their pupils who are therefore part of our multidimensional relationally dynamic practice and learning. This highlights our understandings of the complex ecology of our relationships that includes the extra and inter-personal relationships and influences our intra-personal worlds. We explain our educational influences through the lens of these relational understandings.

In supporting educational-researchers developing their Living Theory research we seek to enable them not only to gain more skills in the sense of being 'craftworker,' or 'executive technician' (RI, Winch, 2013, p.13) but also to develop as professional educational-practitioners. What 'educational' means to us is working with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity to enable other persons and people to realise their best intent and lead a life that is personally flourishing and help others to do so too (Reiss and White 2013).

### **Explaining improvements in our contribution to the professional development of educational practitioners.**

We (Marie and Jack) explain our contribution in terms of our ontological values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness, educational responsibility, creativity and academic freedom, and social values of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society.

At the centre of our claim to be improving our contribution is a process of data analysis that uses empathetic resonance (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2015; Huxtable, 2009) to clarify the meanings of our energy-flowing life-affirming values. Print alone being too limited in what can be represented this process, using digital visual data, will be shown in the presentation. Here we point to an example. Sally Cartwright was concerned not only with helping her students achieve grades and develop skills but with developing an educational process that was humanising and social, as illustrated by the title of one of her units, "How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their own learning?" Evidence of her educational influence in the learning and lives of her students can be heard in the videos that are included in the notes you can access from <http://www.actionresearch.net>.

Research involves systematic enquiries made public. We claim to have improved our self-study methodology in deepening and extending the public communications of the teacher-researcher accounts in the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) and in the journal, Gifted Education International (2016).

Our self-study methodology addresses a concern with validity and rigour through the submission of explanations of educational influence in a validation group of between 3-8 peers who respond to questions, derived from those of Habermas (1976), that include the following:

- How do I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- How do I strengthen the evidence that is used to justify the claims that I make?
- How do I deepen and extend my sociohistorical and sociocultural awareness of their influences in my practice and understandings?
- How do I enhance the authenticity of my explanation by showing that I am living my values as fully as I can?

To enhance rigour in the self-study methodology we advocate the use of Winter's (1979) six principles of dialectical and reflexive critique, of risk, of multiple resource, plural structure and theory practice transformation.

### Justifying four claims to knowledge

*i) As we research our praxis to improve it, we show the emergence and influence of Living Theory research as a self-study methodology in the process of enacting it.*

There is an organic, dynamic relationship between conceptualising Living Theory research and the unique, living processes through which we, as individual researchers create and make public our living-theories. Our conceptualisation of Living Theory research has enabled researchers to locate their research within a field or paradigm. Evidence for this is forty living-theory doctorates accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>.

There is a concern that 'conceptualising' Living Theory research may mask or distort understanding that the creation and sharing of an individual's living-theory involves a unique process. We do not intend to imply there is 'the' process which is somehow greater than the unique living process of each person's living-theory. For instance, in answering our question 'How do we improve our contribution to the professional development of educational practitioners by enacting a self-study methodology?' we have been enacting our self-study methodology, which is recognisable as a Living Theory methodology. Evidence for this claim is in our own living-theory doctorates Whitehead, 1999; Huxtable, 2012 included in the public archive with other living-theory doctorates.

Bognar and Kovko (2008) show the influence of Living Theory research in their multimedia account of their self-studies as teacher-educator and educator in Croatia. It has also been shown in the educational journeys of young people participating in the BRLSI (Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute) Research project when they are empowered to recognise, value and work to enhance their own knowledge creating abilities and those of others. The young people and doctoral students explicitly talk about the difference they experience when encouraged to recognise and engage in creating, rather than simply acquiring knowledge. Their presentations can be accessed from <http://www.brslsiyouthgallery.org/brlsi-researchers/brlsi-researchers-2014-2015-report/>.

*ii) We have influenced the generation of the professional knowledge-base of educational practitioners who have enacted their own self-study methodologies in contributing to the professional knowledge-base of education.*

Our main forum for drawing attention to evidence that supports this claim is the website at <http://www.actionresearch.net>. In the presentation we will show how members of self-study masters and doctoral groups we support explain the enactment of their own self-study methodologies in improving practice and contributing to educational knowledge. The presentation of the website will include access to the freely available Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) with evidence on the enactment of self-study methodologies in professional learning from the editorial board of EJOLTS, the community space of EJOLTS, the post-doctoral living-theory research group and the living-theory research support group.

Drawing attention to the professional knowledge-base can be seen in and between the two issues

of (GEI) we edited. These include contributions from teacher-researchers we tutored on the Gifted and Talented Education module we devised and had accepted by the University of Bath:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei/geicontents1212.pdf>

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/geicontents2016.pdf>

These contributions show how practitioners have enacted their own self-study methodologies in contributing to the professional knowledgebase of education.

*iii) We have provided evidence to show how others have contributed to the knowledge-base of education with the inclusion of knowledge that we generated as we enacted our self-study methodology and contributed to the evolution of Living Theory research as a social movement.*

The evidence from others can also be accessed from the living-theory section of <http://www.actionresearch.net>. The explanations of educational influences in learning and lives, cross boundaries of professional field and country, is demonstrated by, for example, Pound (2003) Health Visiting in England; Timm (2012) Biochemistry in South Africa; Spiro (2008) Higher Education in UK; Tattersall (2011) Community Activity in Australia; Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi (2016) Teacher Education in Pakistan. The educational influence of Whitehead's ideas in creating an educational epistemology can be seen in the successfully completed doctoral theses, some of which can be accessed at <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>. Each living-theory thesis has been judged by examiners as making an original contribution to educational knowledge with unique values-based explanatory principles and living standards of judgement that have emerged through the methodology of the researcher in the process of enacting it.

*iv) We have enhancing our contribution to Living Theory research as a social movement*

Our claim to be improving this contribution is focused on:

1. The successful negotiation of a curriculum for a gifts and talents unit on the Master's programme at the University of Bath and the successful completion of this unit by self-study teacher-researchers made public at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>.
2. Enhancing the educational practitioner's contribution to an educational knowledge-base.

## Findings

Living Theory research, a self-study methodology, offers a credible academic and scholarly form of research that enables researchers to generate and contribute new educational knowledge through researching their own practice, wherever it is located. Living Theory researchers provide well reasoned explanations, drawing on, and creatively and critically engaging with, the theories of others and provide evidence of their educational influence in social, cultural, professional and personal learning.

Individual researchers' living-theory methodologies and their living-theories have been shown to integrate insights from theories of social, historical and cultural influences. These methodologies and theories are contributing to the creation of a future that enhances the flow of values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity rather than replicating the past, in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing and live my values as fully as possible?' A public archive can be accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net> and <http://ejolts.net>.

The self-studies have also integrated understandings of Living Theory research as a social movement that is enhancing the contributions of educational practitioners to the flourishing of humanity. The evidence that supports this claim can be found in the living-posters presented at the, 'Action Research Network of the Americas Conference in Toronto, Canada, 2015' and, 'The Action Learning Action Research Conference in Pretoria, South Africa, 2015' at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage061115.pdf>



## Discussion

The discussion focuses on how, in enacting a self-study methodology, professional educational-practitioners may enhance their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they live and work in and fulfil their professional responsibility to contribute to the development of an educational knowledge-base.

Each 'world' has its distinct complex ecology (Lee and Rochon, 2009), language, constraints, challenges, expectations, ways of behaving, contexts and constellation of values and beliefs. The nuance in meanings and effect of language used within a 'world' can have repercussions both within and beyond a 'world', which are not always obvious, as is the case within the world of academia. For instance, there is a distinction between education researcher and educational researchers. Our stipulative distinction is that education researchers ground their contributions to knowledge within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation within the disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. Educational researchers ground their contributions to educational knowledge in valid explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence their practice and understandings. These explanations are situated in the complex ecology within which the study is conducted. In addition, educational researchers research into intra, inter and extra -personal expressions of values, which are also part of the complex ecology of their educational practice.

The language, methodologies, conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the disciplines of education dominate what is accepted as valuable and valued knowledge by the Academy. This can be seen in Whitty's (2005) emphasis on education research and Levine's (2015) request to editors of AERA publications that they make reference to 'education' research rather than 'educational' research. As a consequence, self-study educational practitioner researchers can find it difficult to get their educational knowledge and educational theories, with their living logics, units of appraisal and living standards of judgement (Whitehead, 1989, 2008, 2010, 2014) recognised and accepted as contributions to the evolution of an educational knowledge-base (Whitehead, 2016).

Biesta (2006), points to the need for developing an educational language that enables us to move beyond a language of learning into a language of education through the exercise of educational responsibility. Lakoff (2004) shows how influential the use of language is and the need to use language that evokes the deep frames of intrinsic values described by Crompton (2010). The new language for communicating educational knowledge needs to go beyond the limitations of the medium of printed-text. Examples of the evolution of such a language, for the new scholarship, as called for by Schön (1995), can be seen in the multimedia accounts, which meet the rigorous demands of academic journals, and in the masters and doctorates accredited by universities internationally.

We are not saying that the ideas of education researchers are of little value or damaging to educational research. On the contrary, we stress the importance of critically and creatively engaging with a wide range of literature and integrating insights from education research into educational research. The concern arises when education researchers control what counts as educational research by imposing the language, conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of education researchers as if these constitute educational research. This imposition is serving to reduce the academic value of educational knowledge. It is also undermining the confidence of practitioner-researchers, many of who do not see themselves as academics, in their recognition of themselves as knowledge-creators.

In enacting a Living Theory methodology, practitioner-researchers have to recognise, value, and creatively and critically engage with their own embodied knowledge to improve their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations. The influence of teachers enacting a Living Theory research methodology can be seen in accounts of teacher-researchers awarded masters and doctorates, such as those that can be accessed from <http://actionresearch.net>.

In our recent research we have shifted our emphasis from supporting the academic legitimisation of the embodied knowledge of professional educators, to exploring the generative and transformational possibilities of enacting Living Theory research as a social movement. For

example, we have extended our pioneering work on innovative research methods (Huxtable, 2009) with living-posters and multi-screen SKYPES (Huxtable & Whitehead 2015).

## Conclusions

In answering our question, ‘How do we improve our contribution to the professional development of educational practitioners by enacting a self-study methodology?’ we have contributed to the development of an educational knowledge-base as called for by Snow (2001) and Schön (1995). We have given an explanation of the transformational and generative possibilities and educational influence that Living Theory research offers to individuals and collectives, which is to be found in what distinguishes Living Theory research.

We have shown how:

- Living Theory researchers contribute to the evolution of educational knowledge, which includes, but is not restricted to, the knowledge created by teachers in school, college or universities.
- We have enhanced our understanding and practice of our own professional development as educational practitioners, through generating understandings of Living Theory research in enacting our self-study methodologies with our embodied living values.
- We have improved our contribution to the professional development of educational practitioners by supporting their knowledge-creation in the generation of their own living-educational-theories in enquiries of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’

Finally we have explained why it is important to point to and resist the limiting influence of education researchers on the academic credibility and influence of educational knowledge being generated by professional educational researchers in enacting their self-study methodologies in Living Theory research as a social movement.

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