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## **How am I contributing to Living Educational Theory Research as an epistemology for practice with values of human flourishing.**

A contribution to the Symposium on 'Generating an epistemology for educational research from the responsibility of educators and educational researchers to research their own professional development.', presented to the 2024 Conference of the British Educational Research association 8-12 September 2024.

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**DRAFT 21 August 2024**

### **Abstract**

This paper makes an original contribution to knowledge in making explicit the units of appraisal, standards of judgement and living logics of the explanations for educational influences in learning of professional practitioners, who are realising their responsibilities as global citizens. It offers an academic justification for professional practitioners, exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I generate valid contributions to the growth of a global academic, intellectual and scholarly knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity?'; addresses differences in cultural values and influences around the world (Brown, 2021). These differences are acknowledged and integrated within original contributions to educational knowledge. These are exemplified by Living Educational Theory Research accounts, which have been academically legitimated by universities throughout the world; offers an original vision of professionalism that is values-led, through adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing and continual professional development. The purpose served by the original contribution to knowledge is focused on living a worthwhile and productive life. In my case my purpose is to contribute to enhancing educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing. I want to know that I am making this contribution. Hence my focus on the validity of my claims to know.

### **Introduction**

This educational research programme began in 1967 in the first science lesson I taught at Langdon Park School in London's Tower Hamlet, when I asked myself, 'How do I improve my educational influences in my pupils' learning?'. I shall explain below the significance of including 'I' as a living contradiction in an epistemology of educational knowledge. The dominant view of educational theory at the time was known as the disciplines approach. In this approach educational theory was believed to be constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. My professional learning between 1967-72 included two years part-time study for the Academic Diploma at the London Institute of Education. With this award in 1970 I was committed to the disciplines approach to educational theory. As my research into my educational influence as a professional educator continued, on the MA programme in the

psychology of education, in 1971 I began to question the validity of this approach as it omitted my explanations for my educational influences in my own professional learning and in the learning of my pupils. In this questioning I was assisted by video recordings of my classroom practice that revealed my existence as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989) in holding together my commitment to certain values whilst at the same time negating these in my practice. My questioning led to my rejection of the disciplines approach to educational theory and a change in my vocation. This moved from a focus on my enhancing my educational influences in the learnings of my pupils, to contributing to a valid form of educational theory that could explain an individual's educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of pupils/students. This later extended with a focus on the generation and testing of valid, evidence-based and values-laden explanations of educational influences in the learning of social formations within which my practice was located as I developed a better understanding of the ways in which sociohistorical and sociocultural influences have consequences for my educational practices and understandings. This extension is included in my present research question, 'How am I contributing to Living Educational Theory Research as an epistemology for practice with values of human flourishing?'. To distinguish this approach from the Disciplines approach to Educational Theory I have called it Living Educational Theory Research.

### **Units of Appraisal.**

The importance of a unit of appraisal in testing the validity of a knowledge-claim is that it establishes a clear focus on what is being tested for validity. In my first degree, a joint honours degree in Chemistry and Physics, the unit of appraisal was an individual hypothesis or theory. In the empirical sciences a theory was understood as being a set of determinate relationships between a set of variables in terms of which a fairly extensive set of empirically verifiable regularities could be explained. I don't want to underestimate the mental turmoil involved in moving away from this unit of appraisal in a positivist epistemology. In this move I was helped by Michael Polanyi's ideas in *Personal Knowledge* (1958) where he explained that his purpose was to strip away the crippling mutilations of centuries of objectivist thought as an individual made a decision to understand the world from their point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgement, responsibly, with universal intent.

Rather than the unit of appraisal being an individual hypothesis or theory, the unit of appraisal, in a Living Educational Theory Research approach to creating educational knowledge, is an individual's explanation for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located, with values of human flourishing. For researchers, like myself, who underwent an early training in scientific method and knowledge with the explicit assumption that the researcher's 'I' must be removed from contributions to knowledge on grounds of subjective bias, the shift to including 'I' as a living contradiction in contributions to educational knowledge can take time and effort to overcome what Polanyi called the 'crippling mutilations' of objectivist thought.

Once this unit of appraisal is accepted questions still remain about the validity of such claims to educational knowledge and the nature of the standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of the claims.

### **Standards of judgment.**

Whilst studying for the Academic Diploma at the London Institute between 1968-1970, the philosophy of education course included lectures by Richard Peters and follow up tutorials that engaged with his text, chapter by chapter from *Ethics and Education* (Peters, 1966). I continue to be convinced by the arguments that education is a values-laden practical activity. Peters used a Kantian form of transcendental deduction to justify his claim that values of freedom, equality, respect for persons, consideration of interests, worthwhile activities and the procedural principles of democracy were implied by the rationality of a person seriously asking themselves questions of the kind, 'What ought I to do?'

There are different forms of logic that define different rationalities and I agree with Marcuse that logic is the mode of thought appropriate for comprehending the real as rational. (Marcuse, 1964, p. 105). The 'living logic' of Living Educational Theory research will be considered in the next section.

Meanings of values can differ in different cultures and forms of rationality. In Living Educational Theory Research the meanings of values are expressed and clarified in the course of their emergence in practice, (Feyerabend, 1975):

We must expect, for example, that the idea of liberty could be made clear only by means of the very same actions, which were supposed to create liberty. Creation of a thing, and creation plus fully understanding of a correct idea of the thing, are very often parts of one and the same indivisible process and cannot be separated without bringing the process to a stop. The process itself is not guided by a well-defined programme and cannot be guided by such a programme, for it contains the conditions for the realization of all possible programmes. It is guided rather by a vague urge, by a 'passion' (Kierkegaard). The passion gives rise to specific behaviour which in turn creates the circumstances of the ideas necessary for analyzing and explaining the process, for making it 'rational'. (p.17)

I am making a distinction between lexical definitions and ostensive expressions of meaning. In a lexical definition, words are defined in terms of other words. In ostensive expressions of meaning, the meanings are expressed and clarified in the course of their emergence in practice. In expressing, clarifying and communicated embodied meanings of values I am claiming that each individual embodies a unique constellation of values that they use as explanatory principles in explaining their educational influences in learning. Hence, in Living Educational Theory Research the researcher must express, clarifying and communicate the meanings of the embodied values they use as explanatory principles in explanations of their educational influences in learning. I know that this raises difficulties for researchers who believe that it is

possible to produce a lexical definition of the meanings of the values that distinguish a practice as educational. I am drawn to Tannen's response to those who believe in this possibility. Tannen focuses on a paper called "A Conceptual Investigation of Love":

Having defined the field of investigation, we can now sketch the concepts analytically presupposed in our use of 'love'. An idea of these concepts can be gained by sketching a sequence of relations, the members of which we take as relevant in deciding whether or not some relationship between persons A and B is one of love. These are not relevant in the sense of being evidence for some further relation 'love' but as being, in part at least, the material of which love consists. The sequence would include at least the following:

- i) A knows B (or at least knows something of B)
- ii) A cares (is concerned) about B  
A likes B
- iii) A respects B  
A is attracted to B  
A feels affection for B
- iv) A is committed to B  
A wishes to see B's welfare promoted.

The connection between these relations which we will call 'love-comprising relations' or 'LCRs' is not, except for 'knowing about' and possibly 'Feels affection for' as tight as strict entailment. (Newton-Smith, W. pp 118-119,1973)

Tannen (1980, p. 459) asks 'How has such comically solemn ineptitude become possible?'

I know that many researchers may not be able to express themselves poetically, in a way that communicates their meanings of their values. These values can include love for which there are many different meanings. For example, John Donne communicates his meaning of erotic love in his poem 'The Extasie':

Whence, like a pillow on a bed,  
A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest  
The violets reclining head,  
Sat we two, one anothers best.  
Our hands were firmly cimented  
With a fast balme, which thence did spring,  
Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred  
Our eyes, upon one double string;  
So to'entergraft our hands, as yet  
With all the meanes to make us one,

And pictures in our eyes to get  
Was all our propagation.  
As 'twixt two equall Armies, Fate  
Suspende uncertaine victorie,  
Our soules, (which to advance their state,  
Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her, and mee.  
And whil'st our soules negotiate there,  
Wee like sepulchrall statues lay;  
All day, the same our postures were,  
And wee said nothing, all the day.  
If any, so by love refin'd,  
That he soules language understood,  
And by good love were growen all minde,  
Within convenient distance stood,  
He (though he know not which soul spake,  
Because both meant, both spake the same)  
Might thence a new concoction take, and  
depart farre purer than he came. (Donne, 1950, pp. 55-56)

Because I cannot express the meanings of my values in a poetic language that might enable me to better communicate meanings of the expression of embodied values, I needed to develop the following approach using empathetic resonance with digital visual data of educational practices (Whitehead, 2010).

I first encountered the idea of empathetic resonance in the writings of Sardello (2008). For Sardello, empathetic resonance, is the resonance of the individual soul coming into resonance with the Soul of the World (p. 13). Sardellos' meaning carries a religious meaning. I am using empathetic resonance from my humanistic perspective to communicate a feeling of the immediate presence of the other in expressing the living values that the other experiences as giving meaning and purpose to their life. Here is an example of the use of empathetic resonance with digital visual data to clarify and communicate the values-flowing energy of a passion for compassion and unconditional love (Naidoo, 2005). In her doctoral enquiry, Naidoo communicates her meaning of a passion for compassion with Marion and Charlie, a wife and husband, where the husband Charlie was caring for Marion as she lived with dementia.

This is how Marian sets the scene in her doctoral thesis for the second of two video-clips:

Shortly after meeting Charlie and Marion we were given the opportunity to make a documentary about dementia for a medical series. The Director asked if any of the patients and/or carers would like to make a contribution to the film. I asked Charlie and Marion if they would like to be involved and they agreed to help us. I felt it was very important for the filmmakers to meet them both before the filming in order to develop a relationship with them and to put them at their ease. Charlie and Marion handled the whole event with confidence and dignity. The account of their lives together and their

love for each other was very moving. The director asked them at one point how they like to spend their day. Charlie replied that they just enjoy each other's company and sometimes they just sit together on the sofa, quietly, and hold each other's hand. As he spoke he was holding his wife's hand, and although she now finds language very difficult, with her other hand she gently touched his face. As we packed up all the filming equipment the director, who was still very moved by the interview said to me, *"Today I experienced real unconditional love for the first time and that image of Charlie and Marion will stay with me for ever."*



Marian goes on to write:

You can share some of Charlie and Marion's experience of living with and caring for someone with dementia in DVD chapter 2, ***"Breaking down the walls of silence."*** I have included the first clip of Charlie and Marion in their home in conversation with me. In this first clip I have tried to show the life affirming energy of this couple who engaged in a warm loving and trusting relationship with me as they talked about living with dementia. I have included the second clip of Charlie reading from a letter he had prepared for me because he wanted to make sure he was able to communicate his feelings clearly. As I was filming and listening to Charlie I was becoming anxious about Marion who seemed to be drifting away and becoming excluded from what was happening. There follows which is for me a very beautiful and significant moment where Marion, who is now unable to use very much language found another way to communicate. In this moment she catches my eye and gestures behind Charlie's back in a very comical way that she thinks he is being big headed. I have included this clip because I believe it shows that I am being inclusional and responsive in my engagement with Marion and Charlie. I also believe it shows how the relationship I had developed with them both was one of mutual trust and respect. (see Naidoo, 2005) pages 188-190

Here is the second clip Marian describes above.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxJluUVE0qA>

The clip is 1:03 seconds and the moments described by Marian can be seen clearly at 54 seconds in this image:



Naidoo's thesis brings an energy-flowing value of a passion for compassion into the Academy as a living standard of judgment. As I watch the 1:03 video-clip above and read Naidoo's words I am aware that both are necessary, in the visual narrative, to evoke my empathetic resonance with a passion for compassion. In making such claims about the validity of expressions of the meanings of values using empathetic resonance with digital visual data I draw on Dadds' (2008) understandings of empathetic validity. Dadds sees this validity as the potential of practitioner research, in its processes and outcomes, to transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other, such that greater empathy and regard are created. Dadds distinguishes between internal and external empathetic validity. Dadds sees internal empathetic validity in terms of that which changes the practitioner researcher and research beneficiaries. She sees external empathetic validity as that which influences audiences with whom the practitioner research is shared. (Dadds, 2008, p. 279).

My next example of the use of empathetic resonance with digital visual data is focused on my eulogy at the ceremony for the posthumous award of Diploma in Education to Sally Cartwright on the 14th April 2015 at the University of Bath.

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/sallycartwrightmastereducatorjw140415.pdf>

I had worked with Sally for many years and tutored her practitioner-researcher on a masters programme (Cartwright, 2008). In 2010 I wrote to Sally to test the validity of my claims about her values:

I've said many times Sally that you express a quality of receptive and responsive engagement with others that communicates a love for what you do, a love of humanity and a valuing of the other. I've said that you express this quality through an awareness of space and boundaries in the places I see you working and living. I think these 11



seconds show you expressing this quality. Can you see what you feel/think as you watch it:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra5RAgfiNXk>

I have previously published the details of the use of empathetic resonance with digital visual data (Whitehead, 2010). At the heart of this method is running a cursor backwards and forwards along digital visual data to find the strongest expression of an embodied value in the educational practice. Bringing empathetic resonance with digital visual data into claims and contributions to educational knowledge is influenced by the rationality of Living Educational Theory Research which in term is defined by the living-logics of explanations of educational influences in learning. I shall now focus on my meaning of living-logics.

### **living-logics**

The importance of logic in Living Educational Theory Research is that it defines its rationality. The history of logic includes a 2,400 year old argument about the logic that defines rationality between classical and dialectical logicians.

In his work 'On Interpretation' Aristotle states the law of contradiction as two mutually exclusive statements cannot both be true simultaneously. In 'Phaedrus' Plato makes the point, through 'Socrates' that we have two ways of coming to know. We hold things together under a general principle and we can break things down into their separate components. 'Socrates' says that whoever can hold both the one and the many together he calls dialecticians. Aristotelean rationality rules out the possibility of two mutually exclusive statements as being true simultaneously. Platonic rationality includes the apparently contradictory statement that something can be both the one and the many at the same time.

The arguments, about the logic of rationality, continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the works of Popper (1963) , Marcuse (1964) and Ilykenkov (1977).

In answering his question, 'What is Dialectic?', Popper (1963) rejects dialectical claims to knowledge as, '*without the slightest foundation. Indeed, they are based on nothing better than a loose and woolly way of speaking*' (p. 316).

Popper demonstrates, using two laws of inference, that if a theory contains a contradiction, then it entails everything, and therefore, indeed, nothing. He says that a theory which adds to every information which it asserts also the negation of this information can give us no information at all. *A Theory which involves a contradiction is therefore entirely useless as a theory* (p. 317).

In his embrace of dialectical logic Marcuse claims that:

In the classical logic, the judgement which constituted the original core of dialectical thought was formalized in the propositional form, 'S is p.' But this form conceals rather than reveals the basic dialectical proposition, which states the negative character of the empirical reality. (Marcuse, 1964, p. 111).

In his analysis of dialectical logic Ilyenkov asks the questions:

Contradiction as the concrete unity of mutually exclusive opposites is the real nucleus of dialectics, its central category. On that score there cannot be two views among Marxists; but no small difficulty immediately arises as soon as matters touch on 'subjective dialectics', on dialectics as the logic of thinking. If any object is a living contradiction, what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it? Can and should an objective contradiction find reflection in thought? And if so, in what form? (p. 313)

In clarifying and communicating the meaning of living-logic as the rationality of Living Educational Theory Research, I want to focus on Ilyenkov's question, 'If any object is a living contradiction, what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it?' It was this question from Ilyenkov and a 'living contradiction' that influenced me to call my educational research approach, Living Educational Theory Research to distinguish it from the Disciplines approach to Educational Theory.

Ilyenkov's question includes reference to a living contradiction, thought and statement. The classical logic of the rationality of statements excludes contradiction from correct thought (Popper, 1965). How then can living contradictions be expressed in a relationship between thought and statement? When Ilyenkov was writing 'Dialectical Logic' he did not have the benefits of digital visual data to study, or represent, living contradictions in practice. Since the Inspectorate in Barking asked me to explore the educational potential of video-recordings in my work as a head of a school science department, I have been aware of the importance of visual data from one's own educational practice for experiencing, clarifying and communicating the epistemological significance of existing as a living contradiction in inquiries of the kind, 'How do I enhance the educational influences of my professional practice?' In the above section on

standards of judgment I provided examples of how a living-logic can define the rationality of explanations of educational influences in learning that include the meanings of embodied values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning and as standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of such knowledge-claims.

## **Significance**

The significance of the Symposium on 'Generating an epistemology for educational research from the responsibility of educators and educational researchers to research their own professional development.', is focused on the rationalities of the explanations of educational influences in learning from practitioner-researchers who have accepted an educational responsibility for researching their own professional learning and development and educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of others. The significance of the implications of asking, researching and answering the question, 'How am I contributing to Living Educational Theory Research as an epistemology for practice with values of human flourishing?' (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2024) has focused on the logic of the rationality of Living Educational Theory Research, with its units of appraisal, standards of judgment and living-logics of its epistemology.

The significance is related to the purpose that the paper serves. This includes enhancing the possibilities of professional practitioners realising their responsibility as educators and educational researchers. These include researching their own professional development and contributing to the growth of the global educational knowledge base, generated in the process, for the benefit of all.

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