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## **A Living Logic For Educational Research**

Jack Whitehead, University of Cumbria.



A 41:31 minute video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4xIg3E5Vt0>

A presentation at the 2013 Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, University of Sussex 3-5 September 2013

### **Notes to support the presentation**

#### **Abstract**

For over 2,500 years there have been disputes between adherents to formal and dialectical logics about the nature of rationality. The nature of the disputes, as illustrated by Popper (1963, p. 313) and Marcuse (1964, p. 111) often focused on the problem of contradiction, where dialecticians insisted that contradiction formed the nucleus of correct thought and formal logicians followed Aristotle in claiming that theories that contained contradictions were entirely useless as theories.

A living logic is presented, from successfully completed doctoral, educational research programmes, with a relationally dynamic form of rationality that includes 'T' as a living contradiction with dialectical logic and draws insights from propositional theories that are structured with formal logic.

#### **Introduction**

In presenting this paper at BERA 2013 on a living logic for educational research, to a session of the Special Interest Group of the Philosophy of Education, my interest in your responses goes back to my learning on the Academic Diploma course in the Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education of the University of London between 1968-70.

This course was explicitly committed to the disciplines approach to educational theory in which the theory was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology

and history of education. I accepted this view of educational theory, passed the course and moved on to a masters degree in the psychology of education. This was completed in 1972 at the time I worked full time as a Head of a Science Department in a London Comprehensive School with a sense of vocation that focused on helping adolescents to develop their scientific understanding. This sense of vocation was reflected in my masters dissertation on 'A preliminary investigation of the process through which adolescents acquire scientific understanding' (Whitehead, 1972).

During the 1971-72 academic year a feeling grew that the disciplines approach to educational theory was mistaken. This feeling was based in my experience of trying to explain my educational influences in my pupils learning using the disciplines of education. I discovered that no discipline of education either individually or in any combination could produce a valid explanation for my educational influence in my own learning, or in the learning of my pupils. This feeling, that the dominant view of educational theory supported by Philosophers of Education at the countries most influential Institute of Education was mistaken, moved my sense of vocation in education to change and to seek a university post that might enable be to contribute to the creation of a valid form of educational theory. I was fortunate to be appointed as a Lecturer in Education at the University of Bath in 1973 where I could focus on making this contribution between 1973 to the end of my tenured contract in 2009 and to finishing my doctoral supervisions as a visiting research fellow in 2012.

In 1983 Paul Hirst provided me with a clear understanding of the following mistake in the disciplines approach to educational theory when he wrote that much understanding of educational theory will be developed:

"... in the context of immediate practical experience and will be co-terminous with everyday understanding. In particular, many of its operational principles, both explicit and implicit, will be of their nature generalisations from practical experience and have as their justification the results of individual activities and practices.

In many characterisations of educational theory, my own included, principles justified in this way have until recently been regarded as at best pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more fundamental, theoretical justification. That now seems to me to be a mistake. Rationally defensible practical principles, I suggest, must of their nature stand up to such practical tests and without that are necessarily inadequate."  
(Hirst, 1983, p. 18)

Part of my desire to contribute to a valid form of educational theory contained the intuitive recognition of the mistake of replacing the practical principles used by practitioners to explain their educational influence, by principles with 'more theoretical' justification.

In offering a living logic for educational research that respects such practical principles, as these are clarified in the course of their emergence in practice, I am making the following distinction between education research and educational research.

I take education research to be research conducted within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of forms and fields of education knowledge such the philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, economic, theology, politics, economics, administration, policy and leadership of education. I take educational research to be research that produces valid explanations for the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which the individuals, live, work and research. In making this distinction I disagree with Whitty's point in his 2005 Presidential Address to BERA that 'educational research' is the narrower field of work specifically geared to improvement of policy and practice:

One way of handling the distinction might be to use the terms 'education research' and 'educational research' more carefully. In this paper, I have so far used the broad term education research to characterise the whole field, but it may be that within that field we should reserve the term educational research for work that is consciously geared towards improving policy and practice..... One problem with this distinction between 'education research' as the broad term and 'educational research' as the narrower field of work specifically geared to the improvement of policy and practice is that it would mean that BERA, as the British Educational Research Association would have to change its name or be seen as only involved with the latter. So trying to make the distinction clearer would also involve BERA in a re-branding exercise which may not necessarily be the best way of spending our time and resources. But it is at least worth considering.  
(Whitty, 2005, p. 172-173)

I shall focus below on educational researchers as **knowledge-creators** in their theory creation and testing.

What follows, with its focus on a living logic for educational researchers, is a summary of my educational research programme from 1970-2013 as I continue to seek to make a contribution to valid forms of educational theory. The clarification and communication of this living logic rests on the growth of my educational knowledge in the enquiry, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' This growth is focused on the explanations I have produced in my research programme for my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which I live, work and research. My living logic has emerged from transformations in these explanations.

The transformations in logic described below, include the transformation from the use of propositional logic, to structure the explanations in my masters dissertation on a preliminary investigation of the growth of scientific understanding in adolescents, (Whitehead, 1972) to the dialectical logic that structured my doctoral thesis 'How do I improve my practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry' (Whitehead 1999), to the living logic that structures my explanations of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which I live, work and research (Whitehead, 2008).

During the course of my research programme I coined the terms a 'living educational theory' as an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which the individual lives, works and researchers. The idea of a 'living' educational theory emerged as a response to Ilyenkov's (1977, p.313) question in his text on Dialectical Logic, 'If an object exists as a living contradiction what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it?' One of the problems faced by dialecticians such as Ilyenkov was that they were constrained by limitations in print-based texts to write about dialectics using a medium most suited for propositional communications that abided by the Law of Contradictions. Until the use of multi-media digital technology for communicating embodied expressions of meaning, dialecticians, using the print-based texts of international journals were constrained to communicating within the propositional logic that denied their rationality with their acceptance of contradiction as the nucleus of dialectics.

Multi-media accounts, especially those including digitalized visual data as evidence in explanations of educational influence play an important role below in clarifying the nature of a living logic for educational research from explanations of educational influence. In 1972 the Inspectorate in Barking provided me with the video camera and asked me to explore its educational potential in the Science Department at Erkenwald Comprehensive School. I turned the camera on myself and was most embarrassed in experiencing myself as a living contradiction as I saw what I was doing in a classroom. I believed that I had established enquiry learning with my pupils in the sense that I was eliciting questions from my pupils and responding to them. The video showed that I was actually giving the pupils the questions rather than helping them to form their own. This experience highlighted for me the value of visual data on my own practice in checking the validity of my beliefs about what I was doing. The inclusion of 'I' as a living contradiction in my enquiry, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' marked a transformation in my epistemology from that of a positivist scientist into the dialectical epistemology of my doctoral thesis.

The transformation of my logics continued into the living logic of my living theory methodology (Whitehead 2008) again with the help of visual data. At the heart of this living logic is a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries (Rayner 2005). Here is a 19 second, speeded up video of a workshop I am leading at the Guildhall in Bath that helped me to appreciate the importance of seeing myself with the help of such visual data in the relational dynamic of space and boundaries that my binocular vision cannot 'see directly'.



19seconds [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH6DiBaZm\\_Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH6DiBaZm_Y)

This visual data extends my binocular perception with a view of myself in multiple dynamic relations in space. My explanations of my educational influences in my own learning and in the learning of others, as well as the social formations in which I live, work and research, have been transformed through including such visual data as evidence in showing and explaining educational responses to experiencing myself as a ‘living contradiction’ that exists and responds within the relationally dynamic influences of the sociohistorical and sociocultural contexts in which I live, work and research.

I first outlined the transformation in my logics from propositional to dialectical to a living logic in the 2008 multi-media account of *Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories*. (Whitehead, 2008). My understanding of my living logic evolved from my educational enquiry, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ into my explanation of my educational influences in learning and then into an understanding of the logic of the explanation. In my understanding of logic I continue to use Marcuse’s (1964, p. 105) idea that logic is the mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational.

The approach outlined below is focused on a living theory methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge from questions of the kind ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ It also includes a new epistemology for educational knowledge. The new epistemology rests on a living logic of educational enquiry and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) that include flows of life affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of humanity. The presentation emphasizes the importance of the uniqueness of each individual’s living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) in improving practice and generating knowledge. It emphasizes the importance of individual creativity in contributing to improving practice and knowledge from within historical and cultural opportunities and constraints in the social contexts of the individual’s life and work. The web-based version of this presentation demonstrates the importance of local, national and international communicative collaborations for improving practice and generating knowledge in the context of globalizing communications. Through

its multi-media representations of educational relationships and explanations of educational influence in learning it seeks to communicate new living standards of judgment. These standards are relationally-dynamic and grounded in both improving practice and generating knowledge. They express the life-affirming energy of individuals, cultures and the cosmos, with values and understandings that it is claimed carry hope for the future of humanity. (Whitehead, 2008, p. 103)

Here is a video clip I include in the 2008 account in an explanation of my educational influence in the learning of social formation as I engage with institutional power relations. The explanation includes energy-flowing values as explanatory principles and in living standards of judgment.

In 1990, based on this judgment about my activities and writings, as evidence of a prima facie breach of my academic freedom, Senate established a working party on a matter of academic freedom. They reported in 1991: ‘The working party did not find that... his academic freedom had actually been breached. This was however, because of Mr. Whitehead's persistence in the face of pressure; a less determined individual might well have been discouraged and therefore constrained.’



Video 4. [Responding to matters of power and academic freedom](#) (Whitehead, 2006b)

Here is my re-enactment of a meeting with the working party where I had been invited to respond to a draft report in which the conclusion was that my academic freedom had not been breached; a conclusion I agreed with. What I did not agree with was that there was no recognition of the pressure to which I had been subjected to while sustaining my academic freedom. In the clip I think you may feel a disturbing shock in the recognition of the power of my anger in the expression of energy and my passion for academic freedom and academic responsibility. Following my meeting with the working party the report that went to Senate acknowledged that the reason my academic freedom had not been breached was because of my persistence in the face of pressure. This phrase, ‘persistence in the face of pressure’ is a phrase I continue to use

in comprehending my meaning of Walton's standard of judgment of spiritual resilience gained through connection with a loving dynamic energy (Walton, 2008).

I have included this video-clip on the grounds of authenticity. To understand the educational significance of the video of my keynote of March 2008, in my explanations of educational influence, requires an understanding of the significance of the rechanneling of the energy in the anger in the above video. I expressed this rechanneling in the keynote. This rechanneling was related to a persistence in the face of pressure. This persistence was possible through remaining open to the flows of loving dynamic energy in the passion for improving practice and contributing to educational knowledge. (Whitehead, 2008, p.117-118)

In this presentation my intention is to clarify and communicate my meanings of a living logic for educational research in the course of its emergence in my practice as an educational researcher in the knowledge-creating enquiry, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' The meanings are expressed both ostensively and lexically in the process of the evolution and growth of my educational knowledge in my educational research programme between 1970-2013. The growth of my educational knowledge includes the integration of ostensive expressions of meanings that are clarified through the experience of empathetic resonance with digitalised visual data, within a living logic.

One method I use, to enhance the validity of my explanations of educational influence in learning, is derived from Habermas' (1976, pp 2-3) ideas about communication and the evolution of society:

The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression (*verständlich*) so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true (*wahr*) proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully (*wahrhaftig*) so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right (*richtig*) so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified." (Habermas, 1976, pp. 2-3)

I have formed four questions that I ask a validation group to respond to, including any others that they wish to respond to:

How could I enhance the comprehensibility of my explanation?

How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the assertions I make?

How could I deepen and extend my understanding of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences on my writings and my practice?



How could I enhance my authenticity in the sense of showing over time and interaction that I am truly committed to living as fully as I can the values that I claim to use to give meaning and purpose to my life of enquiry?

A characteristic of the growth of my educational knowledge in the continuing extension of deepening of my cognitive range and concerns with propositional theories. This now includes the integration of the following insights from Biesta (2006), Derrida (1995, 1997) and Deleuze (2001).

My cognitive range now includes Biesta's idea on moving from a language of learning to a language of education with a responsibility of the educator lying not only in the cultivation of "worldly spaces" in which the encounter with otherness and difference is a real possibility, but that it extends to asking "difficult questions": questions that summon us to respond responsively and responsibly to otherness and difference in our own, unique ways." (p. ix) . I use Biesta's distinction between learning as acquisition and learning as responding and agree that learning as responding is educationally the more significant as I believe that education is not only about the transmission of knowledge, skills and values but *'is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their "coming into the world" as unique, singular beings.* (p. 27).'

My cognitive range and concern is extending as I engage with Derrida's understandings of democracy, responsibility and the 'Gift of Death'.

My commitment and understanding of democracy has rested in Dewey's work on Democracy and Education and the use of democracy as a procedural principle by Richard Peters (1966) in his Ethics and Education. Derrida challenges this idea by asking whether it is possible to keep the old name 'democracy' where is no longer a matter of founding, but to open out to the future, or rather, to the 'come' of a certain democracy:

For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept. (Derrida, 1997, p. 306)

Derrida also asks, On what condition is responsibility possible? He answers that it is on the condition that the Good no longer be a transcendental objective, a relation between objective things, but the relation to the other, a response to the other; an experience of personal goodness and a movement of intention. I find that this resonates with my movement of an intention that carries hope for the future of humanity. I accept Derrida's point that responsibility demands irreplaceable singularity and that it is only the apprehension of death that can give this irreplaceability:

What gives me my singularity, namely, death and finitude, is what makes me unequal to the infinite goodness of the gift that is also the first appeal to responsibility. Guilt is inherent in responsibility because responsibility is

always unequal to itself: one is never responsible enough. One is never responsible enough because one is finite but also because responsibility requires two contradictory movements. It requires one to respond as oneself and as irreplaceable singularity, to answer for what one does, says, gives; but it also requires that, being good and through goodness, one forget or efface the origin of what one gives. (1995, p. 51).

My cognitive range and concern is also extending as I engage with Deleuze's (2001) understandings of 'defying judgment', 'immanence' and 'difference'.

In recognising my commitment to bring new living standards of judgment into the Academy for legitimating contributions to educational I am challenged by Deleuze's criticism of philosophical judgment where he claims that philosophy degenerated as it developed through history, that it turned against itself and has been taken in by its own mask:

Instead of linking an active life and an affirmative thinking, thought gives itself the task of judging life, opposing to it supposedly higher values, measuring it against these values, restricting and condemning it...Philosophy becomes nothing more than taking the census of all the reasons man gives himself to obey... All that remains then is an illusion of critique and a phantom of creation. For nothing is more opposed to the creator than the carrier. To create is to lighten, to unburden life, to invent new possibilities of life. The creator is legislator – dancer." (pp 68-69)

In Deleuze's philosophy, Life does not function as a transcendent principle of judgment but as an immanent process of production or creation. Judgment operates with pre-existing criteria that can never apprehend the creation of the new, and what is of value can only come into existence by "defying judgment." (Smith, 1998, p. liii)

I believe that my explanations of educational influence with their living logic retain an openness to the possibilities that life permits. Deleuze's point about defying judgment reminds me to be aware of the dangers of deluding myself and that I am killing off creativity by judging life in an illusion of critique and in the imposition of inappropriate standards of judgment. Hence my inclusion of 'living standards of judgment' that are clarified and communicated in the course of their emergence in practice rather than being pre-existing criteria that are imposed in making a judgment.

I am also challenged by Deleuze's notion of immanence. The immanent event is actualized in a state of things and of the lived that make it happen. I relate such a process of actualisation to the creation of a living educational theory that explains a present practice in terms of an evaluation of the past together with an intention to create something in the future which does not yet exist. It is the living that can make it happen. Because of the inclusion of my own irreplaceable singularity, my 'I' within my living-educational-theory I am still working to understand the significance for my research of Deleuze's idea of 'a plane of immanence':

The plan of immanence is itself actualized in an object and a subject to which it attributes itself. But however inseparable an object and a subject may be from their actualization, the plane of immanence is itself virtual, so long as the

events that populate it are virtualities. Events or singularities give to the plane all their virtuality, just as the plane of immanence gives virtual events their fully reality. The event considered as non-actualized (indefinite) is lacking in nothing. It suffices to put it in relation to its concomitants: a transcendental field, a plane of immanence, a life, singularities. (2001, p. 31)

As I continue to engage with developing a better understanding of the relationships between 'I' and 'We' and use the term i~we to represent a dynamic relationship between 'I' and 'We', I am exploring Rajchman's (2000) point in 'The Deleuze Connection' where he focuses on what is capable of bringing us together without abolishing what makes us singular:

Multiplicity is not diversity, and making it requires another conception of Life – it is rather as if, under the “second nature” of our persons and identities, there lay a prior potential Life capable of bringing us together without abolishing what makes us singular. (Rajchman, 2000, p. 82)

In focusing on the nature of a dynamic of i~we relations which includes a pooling of energy within which we retain our unique and irreplaceable singularity I am engaging with Deleuze's idea of Difference:

Opening is an essential feature of univocity. The nomadic distributions or crowned anarchies in the univocal stand opposed to the sedentary distributions of analogy. Only there does the cry resound: 'Everything is equal!' and 'Everything returns!'. However, this 'Everything is equal' and this 'Everything returns' can be said only at the point at which the extremity of difference is reached. A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multitude, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings: on condition that each being, each drop and each voice has reached the state of excess – in other words, the difference which displaces and disguises them and, in turning upon its mobile cusp, causes them to return. (1994, p.304)

## Conclusion

A living logic for educational research has emerged from the enquiry, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' It has emerged in the logic that characterises the explanations, or living theories, produced by practitioner researchers as they explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, work and research. The explanations include insights from both propositional and dialectical theories of education and constitute the growth of an individual's educational knowledge. The living logic includes both living contradictions and a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries. The meanings of the living logic for educational research required both ostensive expressions of meaning communicated through digital visual data and lexical definitions of meaning. The living logic remains in a direct relationship with the practical, values laden enquiries, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and the explanations of educational influence in learning that are produced in such enquiries. The living logic distinguishes a form of rationality that can integrate insights from propositional and dialectical theories

without denying the rationality of these logics. A living logic for educational research, with its requirement of visual data for the communication of meanings of the expression of embodied values as explanatory principles has implications for extending the present solely text-based publications of BERA, into multi-media, on-line Journals.

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