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Enhancing Professionalism in Education Through Inquiry Learning: a Living Theory Research Approach.

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Abstract

Here we present a rationale for enhancing professionalism through Living Theory research drawing on the accounts of practicing teachers to provide examples of evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning. This rationale has emerged in the course of researching and answering questions of the kind ‘How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?’ and generating living-educational-theories (Whitehead, 1989) as valid explanations of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of others with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. We show how teachers are able to realize in practice two responsibilities they have as professional educational practitioners. The first is to continually inquire into their practice to understand, explain and improve it. The second is to create and make public valid accounts of their educational influences in learning as contributions to the development of an educational knowledge-base.

Key words

Professionalism, teacher inquiry, Living Theory research, inquiry-learning.

Introduction

This chapter is based on a critical analysis of the nature of educational inquiry, its role in the generation of educational theory and its contribution to enhancing professionalism in education, locally, nationally and internationally. It includes an analysis of Masters and Doctoral accounts produced by teachers inquiring into their professional practice to improve it. These inquiries are shown to make original contributions to educational knowledge, as teachers, using a Living Theory research approach, develop their professional educational practice through inquiry learning, by asking, researching and answering questions of the form ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ Living Theory researchers integrate

insights from the most advanced social theories of the day in the generation of their living-educational-theories.

We begin with discussing teachers as professional educators asking and researching questions concerning their practice. Our thinking owes much to the ideas of Peters (1966), Gadamer (1975) and Collingwood (1939). Peters and his colleague, Hirst, focused their professional development programmes with teachers on promoting the 'disciplines approach' to educational theory. In the 'disciplines approach', the philosophy, sociology, history and psychology of education constitute educational theory. Teachers were expected to take these education theories created by education researchers and apply them in their practice.

Whitehead started his career teaching science in an inner city comprehensive school and continued to study in the evening. A team of philosophers of education, including Peters, tutored The Academic Diploma course (1968-70). At the end of the course Whitehead accepted the disciplines approach and went on to study for his Masters in the psychology of education (1970-72) during which he recognised a limitation in the disciplines approach. The limitation Whitehead recognised was that the disciplines approach could not produce a valid explanation for his educational influences in his own learning or in his pupils' learning. He also recognised the mistake in the disciplines approach, later explicated by Hirst (1983, p.18):

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.

Whitehead (2016a) now sees this kind of intentional replacement as a form of 'epistemicide' (de Sousa Santos, 2014). Whitehead went on to distinguish between education and educational research. Education research is focused on developing conceptual frameworks and methods of validation within the disciplines of education, and theory generation is in the form of abstract, conceptual, generalisations. Educational research is focused on making public valid knowledge generated by educational practitioners inquiring into their practice to explain and improve their educational influences in learning, and theory generation is in the form of the valid values-based explanations of the educational practitioner for their educational influences in learning, which are relatable rather than generalisable. In education research researchers attempt to generate explanations for the educational influences of individuals 'derived' from the abstract conceptual frameworks of the disciplines of education. In educational

research the explanations for educational influences in learning (living-theories) are generated by individuals researching their educational practice, in the course of which they engage critically and creatively with theories and knowledge in other fields and disciplines.

As a result of recognising the mistake of trying to apply the 'disciplines approach' to educational research Whitehead began on his journey that lead to the creation of a Living Theory research approach for developing educational knowledge and theory. In Living Theory research, teachers, and other professional educational practitioners, recognize and inquire critically and creatively into their embodied knowledge, in order to improve their practice and contribute to the development of a professional educational knowledge base. What distinguishes living-theories (Whitehead, 1989) are the embodied ontological and relational values of the researcher that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity and give their lives and work meaning and purpose. The meanings of an educational practitioner's values are clarified as they emerge in the course of their Living Theory research and form their explanatory principles and standards of judgment. The phrase 'flourishing of humanity' is used to communicate at least two meanings; the flourishing of 'humanity' as a species and of the flourishing of each person's humanity as well as that of communities.

We wish to emphasise that in the generation of a living-educational-theory educational researchers use insights developed through critical and creative engagement with theories from the disciplines of education. However, we are claiming that no theory from the disciplines, either individually or collectively can produce a valid explanation of an individual's educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding.

We are also claiming that each Living Theory researcher generates their own living-theory methodology in the course of generating their living-theory. Later in the chapter we show how a researcher's living-theory methodology can be distinguished from other methodologies, such as Case Study, Action Research, Autoethnography, Narrative Research, Grounded Theory and Phenomenology whilst drawing insights from them, (see: Whitehead, 2016b and Huxtable, 2016, for further details).

As the chapter progresses we detail the place of inquiry learning and Living Theory research within teacher education and development, beginning with a 'Schools Council' funded project on inquiry learning in 1976. This project marked Whitehead's learning from teachers on their use of action-reflection cycles in improving inquiry learning. We provide a critical analysis of this and other Living Theory research conducted by teachers to show the contribution of their inquiries to the professional learning of teachers in the context of political,

socio-economic and cultural national changes in contributing to the growth of educational knowledge in the educational knowledge-base.

An analysis of empirical evidence of a Living Theory research approach, to the professional development of teachers, reveals an educational epistemology for educational inquiry based on explanatory principles that include values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. The explanatory principles are those of a 'substantive theory' (Punch & Oanacea, 2014) in that they explain the educational influences of an individual in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings.

We conclude this chapter by showing how teachers engaging in Living Theory research and progressing through Masters and Doctoral inquiries are able to realize in practice two responsibilities they have as *professional* educational practitioners.

Teachers as professional educational practitioners

'Teacher' and 'professional educational practitioner' are often taken to be synonymous but this is not necessarily the case. This can be seen in Winch's (2013) paper where he answers his question, *What Kind of Occupation is Teaching?* He distinguishes between teacher as craftworker, executive technician and professional, but makes no reference to teachers' roles and responsibilities to realize the educational purpose of education or the form or value of their contribution to the evolution of an educational knowledge base. Winch's writing, like so much of researchers in education, loses touch with what education is about. Ginott (1972) graphically illustrates the importance of teachers keeping focussed on the core meaning of education as they also seek to be effective instructors:

Dear Teachers:

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness. Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, or educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human. (p. 137)

In addition education is concerned with learning to recognise and value self and others and their contributions to the flourishing of humanity. Fukuyama says it eloquently:

Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame and pride, are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process. (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xvii)

Educational practice is a values-based activity. These are values Crompton (2010) refers to as intrinsic and are those that include, “the value placed on a sense of community, affiliation to friends and family, and self-development.” (p.9). That is what makes Living Theory research particularly appropriate for educational practitioners. In the course of their research the Living Theory researcher clarifies the values that give their life and work meaning and purpose and which form their explanatory principles and standards of judgment. These standards are ‘living’ (Laidlaw, 1996) as the researcher’s values are ‘living’ that is ‘evolving’ as the researcher inquires into their practice to understand, explain and improve it.

Trying to develop practice that expresses our own values-based standards while, at the same time, meeting other externally imposed standards, may at times create tension for the educational practitioner. A Living Theory researcher, rather than ignoring or waiting for ‘better times’, will focus on how they may work to resolve such tensions while living their embodied values as fully as they can.

There are different ways to understand the teacher as a professional educational practitioner in education. One responsibility of a professional educational practitioner is to continually inquire into their practice to learn how improve it. Another of their responsibilities is to contribute to, and draw on, an educational knowledge-base and other related knowledge-bases, such as those of the disciplines of education. An example is offered by Huxtable’s doctoral thesis (Huxtable, 2012) in which, amongst other things, she draws on, and hopes to contribute to, the evolution of psychological theories of ‘gifted and talented education’, while contributing to the evolution of Living Theory research as an educational knowledge-base and social movement. We think that it is worth emphasising our distinction between the education knowledge-base that is constituted by the theories of the disciplines of education and the educational knowledge-base that is constituted by living-educational theories. Living Theory researchers engage critically and creatively with the theories in the education knowledge-base created using a ‘disciplines approach’ to draw insights from

these theories to enrich and challenge their thinking and practice and enhance the rigour and validity of the educational knowledge they create in the form of accounts of their living-theories.

The examples below illustrate how a teacher can realise their responsibility to enhance their professionalism in education by adopting a Living Theory research approach.

Inquiry learning

We believe that at the heart of inquiry learning is the art of questioning and imaginative, generative dialogues. Whilst our understanding of inquiry learning is not restricted to scientific inquiry we agree with Medawar, a Nobel Prize winner, when he writes:

The purpose of scientific enquiry is not to compile an inventory of factual information, nor to build up a totalitarian world picture of natural Laws in which every event that is not compulsory is forbidden. We should think of it rather as a logically articulated structure of justifiable beliefs about nature. It begins as a story about a Possible World – a story which we invent and criticize and modify as we go along, so that it ends by being, as nearly as we can make it, a story about real life. (Medawar, 1969, p. 59)

Collingwood reinforced our focus on the question, ‘How do I improve my practice?’:

Whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, depends on what question it was meant to answer; and anyone who wishes to know whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, must first find out what question it was meant to answer (Collingwood, 1991, p. 39)

Gadamer expresses the quality of conversation we aspire to:

To conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes. Hence it necessarily has the structure of question and answer. The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us. ... To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other’s opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning. For we have seen that to question means to lay open, to place in the open. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 367)

We include these insights in our meaning of inquiry learning and Living Theory research in the sense that we see such a theory as ‘a story which we invent and criticize and modify as we go along, so that it ends by being, as nearly as we can make it, a story about real life’ (ibid). We are careful to be as precise as we can as to the question(s) our inquiries are intended to answer, such as ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’, ‘How do I explain my educational influences in learning?’ and that emerge through our research. We also recognise the importance of making explicit the living logics (Whitehead, 2013) in explanations that are grounded in the dialogues and dialectics of question and answer.

A Living Theory research approach to enhancing professionalism

There are many different forms of practitioner-research, each distinguished by the nature of the practice the person wants to enquire into and the questions they want to ask. Living Theory research is a form of educational practitioner-research to answer questions of the form, ‘How do I improve what I am doing and live my values as fully as I can?’ Researchers’ practice is commonly, but not limited to, that concerned with generating knowledge of a field or discipline. ‘Educational’ practice is concerned with learning and with living human qualities and values, such as love, that contribute to the flourishing of humanity.

We have found that the meanings communicated through printed text are too limited to communicate the meanings of the energy-flowing, and relationally dynamic (Whitehead, 2013, p.1) ontological values that can be clarified in the course of their embodied expressions in educational practice. This recognition led to the development of a method of empathetic resonance (Huxtable, 2013), using visual data of practice to communicate their meanings. Such visual data has been included as evidence in multimedia narratives such as those of Jones (2009) and Mounter (2008b) in their Masters dissertations and Huxtable (2012) in her doctoral thesis.

Living Theory research is also a form of self-study in that the ‘I’ of the researcher is at the heart of an enquiry, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ Whilst each living-theory is a self-study, not all self-studies are living-theories. This is because a researcher can engage in a self-study, as demonstrated by the work of Tidwell, Heston & Fitzgerald, (2008), without producing a validated explanation of their educational influences in learning. The self in Living Theory research is not considered to be an isolated, self-serving one but rather one that is both an expression of their unique individuality and their relational self in the Ubuntu sense (as described by Charles, 2007) of ‘i am because we are’

together with 'we are because i am' and together this can be represented by $i \sim we \sim i$ (Huxtable, 2016).

Implicit in the question, 'How do I improve my practice?' is the assumption that you know what your practice is. A Living Theory researcher continually questions such an assumption to better understand what they are doing and reveal unintended, often unnoticed, consequences. Whitehead (1989) learned that what you think you are doing and what you are actually doing is not necessarily the same thing when teaching. In 1970, when teaching science, Whitehead was given a video camera by the Inspectorate to explore its potential for improving science education. He turned it on himself and found that while he thought he had inquiry learning going in the classroom he was unwittingly giving his pupils the questions. His imagination immediately started to create ways in which he could realize his value of inquiry learning more fully and the video-data showed that he was doing this.

A second point concerning self-study is the explicit acknowledgement that a person's presence always has an influence and it beholds an educational practitioner to learn more what that is and how to enhance the educational influence they want to have. If you doubt that a person's presence (and that is not always in the form of a physical presence) has an influence, think about a person you know who brings sunshine or storm clouds with them when they enter or leave a room or organisation; a person who seems to do little or nothing yet has a recognisable influence, for better or worse. Educational practitioners are seeking to improve what they are doing within a social context that is subject to networks of sociohistorical and sociocultural influences. Education is a complex business that involves many, forever evolving, relationships. Hence, Living Theory researchers need make clear the relationships and sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts that influence their lives and practice and the generation of their explanations of their educational influence in their own learning as well as the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they are part of. The need to collect data by educational researchers, which helps them see and communicate the meanings of their educational influences, which are multidimensional and relationally dynamic, has led us to the developing use of video and digital technology (Huxtable, 2012).

While Living Theory researchers locate their research with reference to the growing body of educational research literature, they also draw on such literature, together with that of other fields and disciplines in developing their praxis. A Living Theory researcher's account can be recognised as a contribution to educational knowledge as it will include:

- a validated, values-based explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations

(such explanations draw insights from the most advanced social theories of the day).

- a communication of their embodied, life-affirming and life-enhancing values that form their explanatory principles and standards of judgment of educational practice. These values are clarified as they emerge in the course of the research.
- an analysis, interrogation and critique by the researcher of their embodied educational practice that they are giving meaning to as they live it, to reveal how and where they can improve. It includes revealing where they experience themselves as a living contradiction and where they experience their values contradicted, and how they seek to resolve the tensions created.
- evidence to support their claims to know their educational practice and be improving it.
- an explanation to show how insights drawn from sociohistorical and sociocultural theories have influenced the educational practitioner-researcher's practice and understanding.

Enhancing Professionalism with Inquiry Learning in Teacher Education.

In 1975 the Schools Council began to fund local curriculum development projects as they questioned the efficacy of national projects in helping to improve practice within schools. One of the first grants was given to the inquiry learning project, *Improving Learning with 11-14 year olds in Mixed Ability Groups* (Whitehead, 1976a & b). Two evaluation reports were produced. We believe that there is a lesson from these two reports that continues to be relevant to teachers and teacher educators today.

In his first evaluation report of March 1976, Whitehead explained the teachers' educational influences in terms of existing models of innovation, change in the teaching learning process, and evaluation. The responses of academic colleagues in the School of Education showed that they comprehended the analysis and thought it appropriate. However, the responses of the six teachers in the project showed that whilst they comprehended the models used to explain what they had been doing, they "could not see themselves in it".

When Whitehead heard this criticism he could see that it was justified. He had eliminated the teachers' knowledge in explaining what they had been doing by applying existing models and theories from the academic literature. He had done to the explanations of the teachers what he had done to his explanations of his own educational practices, under the influence of the philosophers of education in 1968-70, when he replaced his practical principles by principles from the disciplines of education (Hirst 1983, p. 18).

Whitehead went back to the data, as requested by the teachers, and with their help constructed a second evaluation report (Whitehead, 1976b). In his analysis of the data Whitehead was shown by the teachers that they used action-reflection cycles in improving inquiry learning with their students. These cycles involved sharing concerns where the teacher felt they were not living their values as fully as possible; imagining ways of improving practice and choosing an action plan to act on; acting and gathering data to make a judgement on the effectiveness of the actions; evaluating the effectiveness of the actions in realising the values; modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluations; and sharing an explanation of educational influences in learning. The form of this report uses these cycles whilst the content, includes visual representations to help to communicate meanings. The teachers all agreed that this report now offered a valid explanation of their practice and learning. These two reports are available from the web:

1st from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmaemarch1976all.pdf>;

2nd from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ilmagall.pdf>.

We know academics feel under pressure to replace the practical principles used by practitioners, to explain what they are doing with principles from the disciplines of education and educational studies, for many reasons. One reason in England comes from the Research Excellence Framework. Through this framework, English universities receive financial rewards, largely for contributions to traditional forms of theory (although there is now a growing recognition of impact on practice), research and the knowledge that is valued. We all live and work within political, socioeconomic, sociohistorical and sociocultural contexts, which influence what we think and do. It is important to recognise these influences and draw insights from these theories about these contexts in the course of Living Theory research as well as drawing on the knowledge generated using the disciplines approach in education.

Enhancing professionalism: Contributing to an educational epistemology

Our understanding of an epistemology as a theory of knowledge is focused on the unit of appraisal, the standards of judgment and logic of a claim to knowledge. The epistemology of living-educational-theories has the following unit, standards and logic.

The unit of appraisal is what is being judged. In Living Theory research the unit is the individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding.

The standards of judgment are living (Laidlaw, 1996) in the sense they can evolve, and are the standards that are used to evaluate the validity of the claim to knowledge. Such claims in Living Theory research are the explanations of educational influence. The explanatory principles are focused on the ontological and relational values used by the individual to give meaning and purpose to their life. They include insights from existing theories that the individual uses to make sense of their experience and learning. The meanings of these values are clarified and communicated in the course of their emergence in practice. This is done with processes of empathetic resonance and validity used with digital visual data from practice, as illustrated by Huxtable (2009).

The logic of a living-educational-theory follows Marcuse's (1964, p.104) notion of logic as the mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational. The logic of Living Theory research is a living logic (Whitehead, 2013) that is appropriate for explaining an individual's educational influences.

We now want to show you how teachers have enhanced professionalism in education through inquiring into their practice to improve it employing a Living Theory research approach and bringing their knowledge into the Academy, the world of the academics.

Enhancing professionalism through Masters' programmes.

The first example we want to draw your attention to is Sally Cartwright's accredited Masters modules (see below). These were created as Sally researched with secondary school students. The second is that of Joy Mounter's Masters (see below), created as Joy worked with primary school pupils.

Sally Cartwright was posthumously awarded her Diploma of Education by the University of Bath. You can access the 8:20 minute video of Jack's eulogy at the award ceremony from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yvg_9_S4boM. This recognises Sally as a Master Educator because she continually researched her practice to improve it and to contribute to the professional knowledge-base of education.

Sally was concerned not only with helping her students achieve grades and develop skills but with an educational process that was humanising and social. Sally helped her students to value themselves and others for who they are, to enjoy and respond to their intellectual curiosity, their emotional and personal journey as well as their intellectual one. Evidence to support this claim can be seen in video of her students presenting to a group of strategy managers, which you can access starting with <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMpaltNH7kg> (Huxtable, 2009).

In the time we knew her, Sally helped us recognise and appreciate how an educator might both respond to the demands of the establishment, both school and the university, and stay true to the values that are at the heart of education - that is to enable her students to grow as educated, and not simply well trained, people. Because she was both generous and professional she researched her practice and offered the knowledge she created as a gift that continues to be influential. For instance, she offered her assignments for open access on the web (<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>) and her writings are in two issues of an international journal, Gifted Education International (GEI) (Cartwright, 2008c, 2016).

- In a Living Theory approach to enhancing professionalism in education through inquiry learning we stress the importance of presenting sufficient evidence to justify any claims being made. Sally provided this evidence:
- In the learning and lives of her students. This can be heard in the videos that are included in the notes you can access from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/sallycartwrightmastereducatorjw140415.pdf>
- In the learning of others. This can be found in Gifted Education International (Cartwright, 2016) and in her students' Extended Projects (Cartwright, 2008b)
- In the learning of the social formations. This can be seen in the legitimisation of her educational knowledge by the academy and in the dedication to Sally of the June 2015 issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (see: <http://ejolts.net/node/245>).

Forming a good quality question that includes the 'I' of the inquirer and is focused on improving professional practice is important. Here are the questions and critical reflection from Sally's Master's assignment that show her meeting these criteria for good quality questions.

1. How can I help my students understand and develop the skills of independent learning? (Cartwright, 2008a)
2. How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their own learning? (Cartwright, 2008b)
3. How can leadership qualities improve my practice as a teacher? (Cartwright, 2009)
4. How can I research my own practice? (Cartwright, 2010a)
5. A critical reflection on my learning and its integration into my professional practice. (Cartwright, 2010b)

In writings 5 above Sally demonstrates how Living Theory research enabled her to recognise and live more fully her values and to make a valuable contribution of

the knowledge, she created through her Masters research, to both the academic world and the world of professional practice.

Sally's strength as an educator and as a contributor to the knowledge-base of education, through her educational research, was in her capacity to clarify, share, deepen, extend and transform the educational knowledge she expressed in her educational relationships with her students.

We had the privilege of videoing many of Sally's classes with Year 11, Extended Project Students, which she analysed in her Masters programme. You can access video at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/sallycartwrightmastereducatorjw140415.pdf> of Sally talking about her values and addressing her students, parents and colleagues following presentations at the University of Bath by her Extended Project Students, as well as all of Sally's writings for her Masters units.

Joy Mounter is another teacher who enhanced professionalism in education through inquiry learning in the course of her Masters as a Living Theory researcher, by inquiring into her practice, to learn how to improve it, as well as contributing to, and drawing on, an educational knowledge base. Joy's contribution is in the form of her Masters, can be accessed from <http://actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>. This is also evidence of her practice as that of a Master Educator (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016).

In Joy's successful doctoral proposal of June 2015, *How can I contribute to the creation and enhancement of the educational influences of a community of learners, supporting each other and their own development?* Joy Mounter recognises herself as a Master Educator:

As part of the expression and development of my professional responsibility as an educator I research my own professional learning as I ask, research and answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' I recognise myself as a Master Educator through the successful completion of my MA in Education with the following enquiries and dissertation:

How can I live my personal theory of education in the classroom to promote self reflection as a learner? First Educational Enquiry Unit, 2006.

Language of learning to the language of educational responsibility. Second Educational Enquiry Unit, 2006.

If I want the children in my class to extend their thinking and develop their own values and learning theories, how can I show the development of their learning? How do I research this in my classroom? Research Methods Unit, 2007.

How can I work within the government's perspective of 'gifted and talented' but still remain true to my own living values? Gifted and Talented Unit, 2008.

Can children carry out action research about learning, creating their own learning theory? Understanding Learning and Learners Unit, 2008.

How can I enhance the educational influence of my pupils in their own learning, that of other pupils, myself and the school? Third Educational Enquiry, 2008.

As A Headteacher Researcher How Can I Demonstrate The Impact And Self-Understandings Drawn From Living Theory Action Research, As A Form Of Continual Professional Development In Education? MA Dissertation, 2012.

Access Joy's writings, *Can Children Carry Out Action Research About Learning, Creating Their Own Learning Theory?*

at: <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounterull.pdf>

They show her 6-year-old pupils not only using the action research cycle of 'Thinking Actively in a Social Context' (TASC) but also offering critical and creative evaluations on how the TASC model of inquiry (Wallace & Adams, 1993) is too limited to describe their learning because it is two-dimensional. They explain on video how the model should be three dimensional and dynamic to describe their learning. Joy's writings show how she researched collaboratively with the 6-year-olds to answer her question.

You can see the children critiquing it in the videos Joy has in the appendix to her Master's unit, *Understanding Learning and Learners assignment, Can children carry out action research about learning, creating their own learning theory?*

You can access the clip: 'What use is the TASC Wheel?'

at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH2-5xexbAQ>

and you can access the clips:

'What do you think of the TASC Wheel?' at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti4syOrlDdY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSqg1phEEaM>

We hope that you will see the children and Joy engaging in inquiry learning collaboratively in an i~we~i relationship. Joy and the three children each have a unique contribution to make to the development of their learning in the respectful, trustworthy creative space between them. Each values their own contribution and that of each other, not just the words they use but the embodied, tacit knowledge they bring into the space and work with co-creatively. They each take from what is created to inform their future learning.



Figure 1. TASC wheel (Wallace, Maker, Cave, & Chandler, 2004)

The children later told Belle Wallace (who originated TASC, shown in Figure 1) that TASC does not communicate the multidimensional, interrelated flow that is the actuality of their learning. The children built a model (Figure 2) to communicate such a flow of energy. They used colour to show the flow, and represented the learning and knowledge created, erupting up through the centre, the heart of the enterprise, as a shower of sparks on what is in the present and future.



Figure 2. Joy Mounter's pupils' model of their learning (Mounter, 2007)

A synthesis of Living Theory (Whitehead, 1989) and TASC (Wallace & Adams, 1993) creates Living Theory TASC (Huxtable, 2012). This represents one approach to Living Theory research. It shows Living Theory research constitutes far more than just systematic enquiry, as is implied by representations of the research process as linear, spiral or circle. There is also an organic phase when the researcher may, at various times, or at the same time, be gathering and organising what is known in the field, implementing a plan of action, or clarifying their concerns. There is a multidimensional and dynamic relationship within phases and between phases. Qualitative and quantitative methods may be used, and theories and insights, derived from knowledge developed by academics and practitioners in various fields and disciplines, may be drawn on. What is used and drawn on is influenced by whether it helps the researcher to understand and improve their practice and create a valid account of their living-theory.

Living Theory research

Living Theory research incorporates 'writerly' and 'readerly' processes of creating a valid living-theory account. (The researcher clarifies their understandings for themselves in the 'writerly' phase and creates an account that communicates to others through the 'readerly' phase). Having completed and tested the validity of their account, asking questions derived from Habermas (1976, pp. 2-3): does it communicate; is there sufficient evidence to support the claims made; is there

sufficient detail for the context of the research to be understood; and is there sufficient evidence to support the researcher's claim the values clarified in the course of the research are those that give the researcher's work and life meaning and purpose and form the researcher's explanatory principles and standards of judgment.

We want to stress the relational-dynamic and multidimensional inter- and intra- connections between the organic and systematic phases and the researcher having the confidence to recognise, value and work with their own creativity as they evolve their research methodology using their methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001):

Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. (p. 166)

There is no simple, formulaic way of engaging in Living Theory research. Researching educational practice does not stand apart from the creation of knowledge of the world. The researcher integrates their research to create knowledge of the world with their research to create knowledge of themselves and themselves in and of the world. In the process they learn what it might be for them to live a satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others. The researcher also explicitly recognises the collaborative nature of knowledge creation in living-boundaries between themselves and others as communicated by i~we~i .

Navigating obstacles and where to now?

In offering a Living Theory approach for enhancing professionalism in education through inquiry learning we are aware of obstacles. While some obstacles require a long term, strategic and collective effort to deal with, others can, and have been, navigated by individual professional educational practitioners with determination and creativity.

We have made elsewhere the case for enhancing professionalism in education through the accreditation of the knowledge of Master and Doctor Educators (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016). However universities and professional bodies in the UK have yet to form a partnership for recognising and legitimating the public expressions of the evolving embodied knowledges and praxis of professional educational practitioners as Master and Doctor educators. The procedures for overcoming this obstacle are simple. All that is needed for a university and a professional body to agree to recognise Master and Doctor educators in accrediting the knowledge generated through inquiry learning of their living-educational-theories. In the meantime determined and creative professional

educational practitioners are using degrees already available to have their living-theories recognised at Masters and Doctoral degree level, as can be seen by some made public on <http://actionresearch.net>.

Another obstacle to recognising the academic legitimacy of an educational epistemology can be understood in terms of 'Epistemicide' (de Sousa Santos, 2014). This refers to the "killing off of knowledges" that do not conform to the dominant epistemology of the Western Academy. The epistemological transformation that is required to give academic legitimacy to the embodied knowledges of professional educational practitioners in different universities has already begun (<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>). This offers an exciting opportunity for individual teachers willing to make public accounts of their living-theories to make a significant contribution to the global growth and spread of the influence of an epistemology comprising the knowledge of professional educational practitioners. The internet makes this opportunity accessible to increasing numbers, including those who are in the early stages of developing their educational practice as well as those who are developing as doctor educator as can be seen by visiting the evolving homepage of the living-posters of educational practitioners, <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage061115.pdf>.

Living Theory research stresses the importance of recognising the creativity of each practitioner-researcher in generating their own living-theory methodology as they produce their living-theory. 'Training' programmes in research methods and methodologies tend to 'transmit' existing knowledge in the Academy, rather than facilitate the emergence of the individual's living-theory methodology. In supervising Living Theory research we emphasise the importance of engaging reflexively with traditional research evidence and theory in gaining academic legitimacy for the expression of the embodied knowledges of practitioners.

Engaging in any research requires access to resources. Some have a financial cost, such as access to many journals and academic libraries, tutoring, supervision and legitimisation of masters and doctoral programmes of continuing professional development. However many learning resources are freely available on the internet, as is support through web-based research groups. As the cost of technology and connection falls this offers opportunities for individuals to contribute to, as well as benefit from, the growth of knowledge in a living global i~we~i relationship.

There are many other obstacles to teachers enhancing their professionalism in education but universities, academics, governments or access to resources does not create the major obstacle. People create the main obstacle from their fears and lack of confidence in themselves as knowledge-creators, which also means they have the power to deal with it. Frankl so beautifully expressed a resolution, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is

our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” We would add that in sharing the knowledge we create we contribute to the flourishing of humanity, of which we are part.

Through this chapter we have sought to communicate:

- An understanding about the roles and responsibilities of a teacher in education as a professional educational practitioner.
- The meaning and contribution of ‘inquiry learning’ in the context of enhancing professionalism of educational practitioners.
- Understanding and practice of a ‘Living Theory research approach’.
- Living Theory research as a form of practice for teachers in education as professional educational practitioners who want to realise their educational roles and responsibilities in all they do.
- Making a contribution to the educational knowledge-base through making public an individual’s living-educational theory and living-theory methodology.

We hope we have stimulated your imagination and inspired you to want to experience yourself, the pleasures and challenges of employing a Living Theory research approach to enhancing your professionalism in education. By creating and making public your accounts of your living-theory you will be enhancing not only your own practice you will also be contributing to the evolution of an educational knowledge-base through which humanity can flourish.

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