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# Generating living-educational-theories from changing practices for changing times: Past, present and future possibilities of self-study research

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## Context of the study

The study is positioned in terms of research into the self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) carried out since the founding of S-STEP in 1993. The changing practices are focused on enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in the changing contexts in which the enquiries are located.

The main theoretical assumption is that self-study researchers can contribute to the creation of a new educational humanism (Hamilton & Zufiaurre 2014) through the generation of their own unique living-educational-theories (also known as living-theories). Not all self-studies produce living-theories, as a self-study researcher can focus on an extensive range of issues related to self. However, all living-theories are self-studies in that a researcher's living-theories are the values-based, validated explanations they give for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which their practice is located (Whitehead, 1989). These explanations include the researcher's communication of their life-affirming and life-enhancing ontological values (the values that give their lives meaning and purpose) that are clarified and evolve as they emerge through their research.

We are claiming that these values distinguish a post-Enlightenment, humanist social agenda that rejects stereotypes of normality (and abnormality) and struggles to replace them with normative ideas about the inclusion of difference (Hamilton & Zufiaurre, 2014, p. 150). We are making the assumption that values such as those expressed by Nelson Mandela which include freedom, justice and democracy in his Ubuntu (Whitehead, 2011) way of being, are ones that can be included within the new educational humanism.

The theoretical framework includes the following distinction between education and educational researchers.

Education researchers contribute to education knowledge within the forms and fields of knowledge of the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, politics, theology, leadership and administration of education.

Educational researchers contribute to educational knowledge through theories such as their living-educational-theories generated as life-enhancing, values-based explanations of educational influence. Living-educational-theories of present learning include evaluations of past learning and an intention to improve practice in the future in ways that are not yet realized in practice. Improvement in practice is understood as practice that contributes to a world in which humanity can flourish and is expressed in the values-based living standards of judgment of the living-theorist. In making this distinction we are claiming, in our theoretical framework, that S-STEP researchers can contribute to the new educational humanism (Hamilton & Zufiaurre, 2014, p. 150). They can make this contribution, as shown below, by making public their living-educational-theories in which they are holding themselves accountable for living their values that carry hope for the future of humanity, as fully as possible.

## Research literature connection

The research literature from S-STEP researchers, drawn on in this study, includes the authors' self-studies for their doctoral and post-doctoral inquiries (Huxtable 2012, 2013; Whitehead 1999, 2008, 2009, 2013). It includes Whitehead's (1995) response to the contents of the

1995 issue of the *Teacher Education Quarterly* on Living Educational Theory in Self-Study Research, to emphasise the importance of S-STEP researchers explaining their educational influences not only in their own learning but in the learning of others, especially their students' learning.

The connection with the papers in *Research Methods for the Self-study of Practice* (Tidwell, et. al. 2009) and the S-STEP research of the authors can be understood in relation to a limitation in printed text-based forms of communication of energy-flowing explanatory principles. This limitation is serious because the expression of energy is needed for any action to take place and this recognition is necessary in any valid explanation of that action. We agree with Vasilyuk (1991) that relationships between energy and values are only weakly understood. We have shown, using a process of 'empathetic resonance', how the limitations of print-based communications, when compared to the embodied expressions of meaning communicated through video-data, can be transcended in visual narratives that communicate the meanings of the expressions of energy-flowing values and their influences in the learning of others (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006 a&b).

The connection between the contributors to the *S-STEP Journal on the Study of Teacher Education* (STE) and the living-educational-theories of S-STEP researchers can perhaps best be understood by comparing the communications in the printed text-based journal STE and those in the multimedia *Educational Journal of Educational Theories* (EJOLTS), especially the December 2013 issue at <http://ejolts.net/current>, in which Griffin (2013) and Campbell (2013) communicate their meanings of being 'loved into learning' within their self-study, multimedia narrative. We are claiming that the meanings of an energy-flowing, relational value of being 'loved into learning' requires the ostensive expression of embodied meanings using visual data together with the language in printed text to enhance the validity of the communication. In pointing to this limitation in print-based communications we are not denying the importance and significance of these communications. We owe much of our own learning, especially in relation to theories of education, to these communications. All we are doing is to focus attention on how visual narratives might better communicate the meanings of embodied expressions of energy-flowing ontological values in explanations of educational influence.

The connection with some 36 doctoral theses from S-STEP researchers who have made original contributions to educational knowledge can be understood in terms of a 'pooling of energy' (Hutchison, 2013) that can contribute to the generation of a new educational humanism. We have placed our living-educational-theories (Whitehead, 1989, 2013; Huxtable, 2012) within the dynamic flow of this pooling of energy by making them freely available on websites such as <http://www.actionresearch.net>. The generation of an educational humanism that has global significance will require many more contributions.

The contents of the multimedia EJOLTS (2008-2014) and the contents of the September 2013 issue of *Gifted Education International* (GEI, 2013) serve to emphasise both the significance of ideas that can be communicated through the printed text of GEI and some of the limitations. We are thinking of limitations in printed-texts, in communicating the meanings of embodied expressions of energy-flowing ontological values, that are transcended in the multimedia narratives of EJOLTS that communicate meanings of the energy-flowing living standards of judgment and explanatory principles of the S-STEP researchers.

The connection with the writings of Donna and Jerry Allender (1991;

2008; 2014) are focused on their understandings of the possibility of humanistic research:

The broadest insights came out of a higher regard for the wisdom of practice over attention to integrated theoretical knowledge. For the most part, there were no general conditions that could be used to organize and summarize the usefulness of specific imagery techniques. The concept of a living educational theory that Jack Whitehead (1993) later proposed as a strategy for integrating personal knowledge for teachers fits the data better. The concept is enlarged by the notion that this personal knowledge is not the product of thinking that is isolated from the work of others but rather the result of intensive collaborative conversations. Interpersonal connections place the personal theory in a kind of knowledge in communication. (2014, p. 123)

## Contexts of the study

The contexts are those of professional practice in which S-STEP researchers are asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in their masters, doctoral and post-doctoral research programmes. We work with a broad understanding of educational practitioner that includes those working in primary, secondary and higher education, as well as other contexts such as health and industry. We include as educational practitioners those who not only work with teachers and students. For example educational practitioners also work with parents, carers (care givers) and community members. The educational practitioners we work with are situated world-wide.

## Aim

### Problems

The problems are focused on our purpose below. The problems are focused on making explicit the living-logic (Whitehead, 2013b) and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) that distinguish the rationality of living-theories. They are focused on the nature of the relational epistemology (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 7).

In 1990 Boyer advocated a new approach to scholarship. In 1995 Schön developed Boyer's ideas and advocated that researchers develop a new epistemology from Action Research for the new scholarship of teaching. We claim to be contributing to this new epistemology by showing that while Living Theory arose from Action Research it is not just a form of Action Research. Living Theory researchers also use other methods such as narrative enquiry, autoethnographical research and self-study, in creating their living-theories.

The problem is focused on the nature of the living-logics (Whitehead, 2013b) and the living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) that can be used to evaluate the validity of the explanations in living-theories as contributions to educational knowledge. The logics and standards are not only living, they are relationally dynamic and continuously evolving in the network of relationships that influence the practices and understandings of the self-study researchers. At the same time the practices and understandings of the self-study researchers influence the network of relationships that are contributing to a new educational humanism.

### Purpose

The purpose is to make explicit the standards of judgment and a living-logic to distinguish the rationality and original contributions to educational knowledge of the living-theories of self-study researchers in contributing to the generation of a new educational humanism.

### Questions

We use 'i~we' (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006) in the questions below to emphasise the relational dynamic and mutual influences between the egalitarian individual and collective and point to a creative, democratic space (a living-boundary) between them.

The main self-study questions are:

- How do i~we produce valid explanations of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which i~we live?
- What are the nature of the standards of judgment and logics that distinguishes the rationality of these explanations in contributing to the generation of a new educational humanism?

The use of 'I' in questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' could give the mistaken impression that 'I' exists as a completely autonomous agent, free to do what he or she wishes independently of sociohistorical and sociocultural influences. One influence of the sociohistorical and sociocultural conditions can be seen in the differences between pressures to conform to academic communications in solely printed texts and the communications that are possible in multimedia narratives. We have explored these differences in a solely printed text the organisers of a World Conference on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management insisted should be used in our presentation (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006a) and the multimedia account we produced to show our audience the differences between a solely printed text communication and a multimedia narrative (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006b). We also use 'I' in the non-egotistical sense used by Buber (1947) when he stresses the humility of the educator (p. 122) and the non-egotistical use of 'I' in 'I-You' relationships (Buber, 1970, p. 117).

In answering the question, *What are the nature of the standards of judgment and logics that distinguishes the rationality of these explanations in contributing to the generation of a new educational humanism?* we bear in mind Laidlaw's (1996) insight that the standards of judgment are themselves living. If our standards are to be educational they must include the recognition of an extension in cognitive range and concern in the learning within the enquires, 'How do I improve my practice?'; 'How do i~we improve our practice?.'

We owe the most recent extensions in our cognitive range and concern to Forester's (2012) idea of 'living legacies', to Delong's (2013) understanding of 'a culture of inquiry' to ideas of 'cultural empathy' (Potts, Coombs and Whitehead, 2013) and 'living global citizenship' (Coombs, Potts and Whitehead, 2014) and to Hamilton's and Zufiaurre's (2014) notion of creating a new educational humanism':

I would deny the very essence of 'living legacies' if I did not acknowledge those whose preceding work nourished the field in which it is seeded. They are legion; all part of the chain of 'flourishing humanity' that connects the loving, hope-filled values, aspirations and struggles across many disciplines and practices. (Forester, 2012)

## Methods

### Participants

The participants are self-study researchers who have offered their accredited explanations of educational influences in learning for masters and doctorate degrees as gifts that are available through the internet to other researchers.

### Data sources

The data sources include the masters and doctoral degrees of self-study researchers available from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>  
and  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>

Data includes the September 2013 issue of Gifted Education International

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

and the December 2013 issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories:

<http://ejolts.net/current>

### Data analysis

The analysis of the data is focused on the living-educational-theories of the self-study researchers. The analysis is focused on explicating the unit of appraisal, the living standards of judgment and the living-logics (Whitehead, 2013b) that distinguish the rationalities of the explanations. The living standards of judgment include the researcher's ontological, energy-flowing values that carry hope for the future of humanity and distinguish contributions to the creation of an educational humanism.

The unit of appraisal 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 in which the practice is located.

The analysis of the digital visual data, to clarify and communicate

the meaning of the embodied expressions of the energy-flowing values that form the explanatory principles of the self-study researcher, uses a method of empathetic resonance (Huxtable, 2009). Empathetic resonance presents digitalized visual data from the educational practice of the self-study researcher, in an explanation of educational influence that is grounded in the expression of energy-flowing, life-enhancing, ontological values. These are the values that the researcher uses to give meaning and purpose to their educational practices. The cursor is moved backwards and forwards around the point of the video-clip at which the researcher feels the greatest resonance with an ontological value that they are seeking to live as fully as possible. The researcher uses the value-words that help them to communicate their meanings of the embodied expression of the energy-flowing, relational value. The method of empathetic resonance stresses the importance of a relationship between the embodied expression of meaning and the meanings in the words we use. The method of empathetic resonance requires both the digitalized visual data and the meanings in the value-words we use (Whitehead & Huxtable 2006b).

The data analysis includes an evaluation of the individual's influence in enhancing the flow of values that carry hope for the future of humanity. We are assuming that each individual, has a unique constellation of these values in the generation of their living-educational-theory. So, each individual can generate their own unique, evidence-based contribution to the creation of an educational humanism (Whitehead, 1999 & 2013; Huxtable, 2012, 2013) using strategies and techniques that attend to issues of trustworthiness.

The issues of trustworthiness are focused on the validity of the explanations and the rigor of research procedures. We use Popper's (1975) insight about strengthening the objectivity of accounts through intersubjective criticism:

...for inter-subjective testing is merely a very important aspect of the more general idea of inter-subjective criticism, or in other words, of the idea of mutual rational control by critical discussion. (p. 44)

Validity of explanations is strengthened during the self-study research using four questions derived from Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity related to comprehensibility, evidence, sociohistorical and sociocultural influences and the authenticity of the accounts over time and interaction.

1. How could we enhance the comprehensibility of our explanations of educational influence?
2. How could we strengthen the evidence we use to justify the assertions we make?
3. How could we deepen and extend our sociohistorical and sociocultural awareness of their influence on our practice and writings?
4. How could we enhance the authenticity of our explanations in the sense of showing that we are truly committed over time and interactions to living as fully as we can the values we claim to hold?

Rigor is strengthened through the use of Winter's (1989) six principles of dialectical and reflexive critique, plural structure, risk, multiple resource and theory practice transformation.

## Outcomes

### Findings

The analysis of the data, including multimedia narratives of explanations of educational influence, reveals the living standards of judgment and the living-logic that can be used to distinguish the rationality of the explanations that constitute living-educational-theories. This living-logic is distinguished from the propositional and dialectical logics that distinguish the explanations in print-based academic journals (Whitehead & Rayner, 2006).

### Discussion

We have considered both the opportunities offered by insights from propositional and dialectical theories for extending the cognitive range and concerns of living-theorists, and the constraining influences of the logics of these theories in omitting energy-flowing values as explanatory principles of educational influence.

The opportunities offered by multimedia journals for extending the forms of representation (Eisner, 1993, 1997) used by self-study

researchers, for explaining their educational influences in learning, can transcend limitations in printed-text only communications of the embodied expressions of meanings of energy-flowing values. The December 2013 issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories contains multimedia narratives that include values such as 'being loved into learning' that we have claimed can contribute to the creation of a new educational humanism.

## Conclusions

Contributions to the generation of a new educational humanism can be made through the creation and sharing of living-educational theories. These theories are constituted by the values-based explanations that individuals produce to 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, and contribute to a world in which humanity can flourish.

The academic legitimacy of such living-educational-theories has been demonstrated through their acceptance as doctoral theses in different Universities within different countries.

These theories are being generated in changing practices over time, in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

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