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# S-STEP Chapter

## Chapter 4. Self-Study in Elementary and Secondary Teaching: A Living Theory Approach

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### Abstract

In this chapter we present examples of Living Theory research, a form of Self-Study, which show teachers, teacher educators and administrators researching to improve their teaching and the educational experience of students and contributing the knowledge they create in the process to a professional educational knowledge base. We clarify the relationship between education and educational research and show how Living Theory is distinguished within other forms of Self-Study research. Consideration is given to the opportunities and challenges of promoting this approach, and other forms of Self-Study research, as ways to improve practice in schools. We show the development of ideas since Whitehead's contribution 14 years ago, in 2004, to the first International Handbook of Self Study on, 'What counts as evidence in self-studies of teacher education practices?'. Our emphasis in this chapter is on practising educators, their professional development and gaining academic recognition for the embodied knowledges of master and doctor educators.

**Keywords Self-Study; Living Theory; Teacher Education; Educational Influence.**

### Introduction

Self-Study research – why bother? The theories of psychologists, sociologists and others concerned with education can be useful for teachers to draw on when they try to improve their practice. However, how these theories are expressed in practice can be very different, as Ginott (1972) eloquently points to when he wrote:

I have come to the frightening conclusion: I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or

humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, a child humanised or dehumanised. (p. 15 and 16)

As the decisive element in the classroom we believe it is a professional responsibility of teachers to engage in a form of Self-Study research to ensure they are creating an energizing, life-affirming educational climate where learning and learners can thrive rather than simply survive. The purpose of Self-Study research is not to pump up the ego of a self-serving self but to research the self that is trying to contribute to the knowledge-base of teaching and learning.

Why **Living Theory** research? We believe that what distinguishes a teacher as a professional educator is that they continuously research their practice to improve their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of their students and contribute to the evolution of an educational knowledge base. We believe teachers can do this by researching their practice, integrating insights drawn from critically and creatively engaging with the knowledge of others, and holding themselves accountable by contributing the **validated knowledge** they generate to the growth of an educational knowledge base. We recognize that there are a variety of ways in which teachers can study themselves and their practices. In Narrative Inquiry, for example, researchers use narrative to help them create meaning in what they are doing; in Auto-ethnography, researchers focus on the implications of cultural influences in their practice and understandings.

Researchers can also focus on Action Research which can include different schools of thought such as a Critical Theory school of Action Research. This gives priority to understanding the political, economic and cultural influences in their Self-Study researchers practice and understandings. Living Theory researchers include insights from these different approaches to improve what they are doing. What particularly distinguishes Living Theory research from other forms of Self-Study is the generation of an evidence-based explanation of educational influence in learning. The explanations include the clarification of their ontological and relational life-enhancing values. These are the values that give meaning and purpose to their lives and form their explanatory principles of their educational influences in learning and the standards by which they hold themselves accountable as professional educators.

## ***Relationship of authors***

We have researched for many years, both individually and collaboratively, in the UK (United Kingdom), Canada and other settings, as students and supervisors engaged in masters, doctoral, post-masters and post-doctoral inquiries. Here we focus on our Self-Study research made public in international conferences, such as that reported in the Conference Proceedings of the S-STEP Conferences (Castle, 1-11), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and international journals, such as the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* (EJOLTs). We are particularly concerned to share the growth of our educational knowledge since the publication of the first *International Handbook*. (Loughran et al, 2004)

## ***Central points that will be covered***

The Self-Study research we introduce in this chapter is focused on two distinct but related concepts of 'practice': the first is improving **educational influences in learning** in elementary and secondary schools; the second is contributing to the professional knowledge base of education. Our contributions are made through the **academic legitimation** and

validation in the Academy of the embodied knowledge of others and ourselves as educators and through making public our research in conference presentations and journal publications; for example, the masters degrees of Griffin (2011) and Mounter (2012, 2006) that focus on improving and explaining their practices in primary schools. Campbell's (2011) masters degree is focused on her teaching in a secondary school.

In her doctoral research program, Mounter is exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering her question, 'How can I (do I) contribute to the creation and enhancement of the educational influences of a **community of learners**, supporting each other and their own development? In her doctoral inquiry Campbell includes 'being loved into learning' as an original explanatory principle and living standard of judgment in her contribution to knowledge. Delong's and Whitehead's post-doctoral inquiries include their research with Griffin and Campbell in the 2015 conference of the Action Research Network of the Americas in Toronto on, 'Improving Practice with Living Theory Research in Living-Cultures-Of-Inquiry' (Whitehead et al., 2015). Huxtable and Whitehead's post-doctoral Self-Study inquiries include their research into the creation of a professional of educators with the living-theories of master and doctor educators (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016).

The growth since 2004 in our educational knowledge, as Living Theory Self-Study researchers, has developed from an evolving understanding of self that is relational and dynamic and influenced by the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in our practices and understandings. Having gained academic accreditation in higher education for making public our embodied knowledges as teachers, teacher educators and professional educational practitioners, the growth in our educational knowledge is now focused on researching our contributions to the social movement of Self-Study researchers that is enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. This commitment to evolving understanding can be seen in the conclusion to the 2004 Handbook contribution:

I am hopeful that the next ten years will show an extension of the dialogic influence of s-step researchers in contributing to the future of humanity. I am hopeful that this contribution will continue to focus on improving the quality of each s-step researcher's influence on his or her own learning and on improving students' learning. Finally, I am hopeful, given the evidence of the last ten years, that the evidence will show that we have continued to improve our contributions to the education of social formations as we contribute to the growth of educational knowledge through our self-studies of our teacher-education practices and our practices as global citizens. (Whitehead, 2004, p. 902)

The evolving understandings also include our use of **digital visual data** and validation methods to clarify and communicate the meanings of the embodied expressions of our ontological and relational values that we use in our explanations of our educational influences as Self-Study researchers. Our research to improve, understand and explain practice has focused on **enhancing educational influences** in our own learning, in the learning of students, pupils and colleagues, and in the learning of the social formations that are the context of our practice and understanding. Whitehead (1989) coined the term **living-educational-theories** (sometimes expressed as living-theories) for such valid explanations of educational influence in learning.

### ***How the chapter is organized***

In this chapter, we have written as 'we' when we have common understandings about Self-Study. Individuals are recognized by name when they are speaking about their own Self-

Study and living-theory. It is important to us to keep the voice of each researcher clear and strong in the text you are reading. From now on in the text we refer to ourselves as Jack, Jackie, Marie, Liz, Cathy and Joy. This is consistent with our relationships. For others we keep to the usual academic tradition of using surnames. When referring to our academic publications we keep to the academic tradition.

The chapter is organized as follows:

- Living Theory research: Its nature and examples of how and why it ‘works’ for us including our data sources, means of analysis, and validation methods.
- Self-Study, Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) and Living Theory research
- The value, opportunities and challenges of Self-Study research in schools
- How we differentiate between education and educational research, why that is important and the role of academic literature in our theorizing and research.
- Our contributions to a professional knowledge base of teaching and learning and what we learned from the opportunities and challenges along the way.
- Our ways forward to contribute to a flourishing of humanity as global citizens.
- Concluding thoughts and next steps.

To begin, we clarify the nature of Living Theory research, the relationship to other forms of Self-Study research and the ways in which we have been engaged in the creation of our own living-educational-theories.

## **Living Theory research: Its nature and examples of how and why it ‘works’ for us**

In this part of the chapter, we clarify Living Theory research as a particular form of Self-Study that generates **living-educational-theories**. We relate Living Theory to other forms of Self-Study. We then illustrate the implications for teachers and other professional educational-practitioners from our Self-Study research.

### ***Nature of Living Theory***

The nature of our Living Theory research is that it is characterized by our inclusion of **‘I’ as a living contradiction** in inquiries of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ When we feel we are not living our values as fully as we desire in our practice we have frequently used action-reflection cycles to help us progress. We imagine ways forward and choose one on which to take action in an action plan. We act and gather data to enable us to make a judgment on the effectiveness of our actions in living our values as fully as possible. We evaluate the educational influences of our actions.

As educational researchers, we submit our explanations to public scrutiny in our classrooms with our students, in professional development sessions, at conference presentations and in our publications and in validation groups. In validation groups we ask participants to test the validity of our explanations and to help us to strengthen the comprehensibility, the evidence-base of our assertions, our sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings and our authenticity in living our values as fully as possible. We give more details later in the chapter.

Another of the distinguishing characteristics of our Living Theory research is that our explanations include the relational and ontological **humanitarian values** we use to give

meaning and purpose to our lives, as explanatory principles and living (Laidlaw, 1996) standards of judgment in our explanations. We have all experienced at times the limitations of printed-text communications to carry the meanings of our embodied expressions of our values. Hence, we have all used digital visual data, to clarify and communicate the meanings of our values in the course of their emergence in our inquiries into improving our practice.

In developing our explanations of educational influence, we are identifying our practices as those of **global citizens**. We are meaning this in the sense that we belong to and are contributing to a global community of Living Theory researchers. Some of these contributions can be seen in:

- i) The 2015 Town Hall Meeting of the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) Conference in Toronto (DeLong, 2015);
- ii) A workshop on Living Theories in the 2017 ARNA Conference Cartagena (Whitehead, 2017)
- iii) A keynote and workshop (DeLong, 2018) at the 2018 Action Learning Action Research Association Conference in Vermont, USA, with the theme of ‘The Action Learning Action Research Legacy for Transforming Social Change: Individuals, Professionals, and Communities’ Developments, Organizational Advancements, and Global Initiatives’ (Tetteh, 2017).

## **Data Sources**

The primary data sources are the **embodied knowledges** of practitioner-researchers and the related traditional theories of others. When a practitioner-researcher creates and shares a report of their educational learning, this report can then become data for the next explanation of their educational influences in on-going cycles of research. As Self-Study researchers seek to understand the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in their own learning, they can use data from the most advanced social theories of the day. The data gathered includes any data that might be useful in an inquiry of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ It can include traditional observation schedules and interviews, as well as, quantitative data, such as test scores. It can also include digital visual data and data from audio-tapes and transcripts of conversations, art works and performances in dance and music. In producing an evidence-based **validated explanation** of educational influence it is crucial to understand how the data can be analyzed and the explanations validated.

## **Means of Analysis**

Analysis of data is closely related to the purpose of a Self-Study inquiry. In this Self-Study research the purpose is focused on understanding, improving and explaining teacher educational practices. We believe that a central purpose of teacher-education is to enhance the educational influences of a teacher in their own and their pupils’ learning. Hence our focus is on explaining this influence. This involves the analysis of data in relation to the generation and testing of **explanations of educational influences** in learning. At the heart of our explanations of *educational* influence are the relational and ontological-embodied humanitarian values we use to give meaning and purpose to our lives as educators. The embodied expressions of the meanings of these values are clarified through our research and our analysis of visual data from our practice in which we clarify and communicate the meanings of our values in the course of their emergence in practice. We believe it worth emphasizing that you may need to engage with our analyses of our multi-media texts in order to comprehend our meanings. Mounter’s (2008a) analysis of her educational influences with

6-year-old pupils in, ‘Can children carry out action research about learning, creating their own learning theory?’ is a valuable source of this form of learning.

We want to be very clear about the significance of including **visual evidence** from the Self-Study researcher’s own practice in an explanation of educational influence. Living Educational Theory research has been extended considerably by developing methods for collecting and analyzing digital video data. These analyses include the clarification and communication of the meanings of the embodied expressions of ontological and relational values that individuals use to give meaning and purpose to their lives. The analyses include the use of multimedia formats to communicate the knowledge created. They are made public in journals published online that accept the inclusion of digital visual data, such as **Educational Journal of Living Theories** (EJOLTS, 2000-2018).

In our understandings of the sociology of absences (de Sousa Santos, 2014) we are seeing the logic and language used in Western Academic traditions, especially in printed-text based books and journals, as potentially limiting and distorting the valid representations of the practices and knowledges of the educational influences of Self-Study researchers. An example of multi-media analysis of data, in explanations of influence can be found in Campbell, Delong, Griffin and Whitehead’s (2013) ‘Introduction to living theory action research in a culture of inquiry transforms learning in elementary, high school and postgraduate settings’. Another example is in the account by Huxtable of her educational practice. It includes her concern with enhancing children’s and young persons’ abilities to learn to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others. In particular, we point to Huxtable’s (2012) analysis of her educational influences in her inquiry, ‘How do I Evolve Living-Educational-Theory Praxis in Living-boundaries?’

As Self-Study researchers, who are generating and sharing their living-educational-theories, we wish to avoid the criticisms that have often been made of Self-Study researchers: that the research lacks validity and rigour as it is merely subjective and anecdotal. We believe that we have avoided such criticism through the use of a rigorous process of validation.

## ***Validation methods***

At the heart of our validation methods is the recognition of Popper’s point that **objectivity** is grounded in **intersubjective criticism** and that we can enhance the validity of explanations through the mutual rational controls of critical discussion (Popper, 1975, p. 44). Therefore, we establish validation groups of between three to eight peers to help to test the validity of our claims to knowledge and to strengthen the validity of our explanations through the exercise of critical discussion. We ask the members of a validation group to include in their responses to the following four questions that have been influenced by Habermas’ (1976, pp. 2-3) ideas on communication and the future of society.

- 1) How could I enhance the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- 2) How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my assertions?
- 3) How could I deepen and extend my sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings of their influence in my practice and explanation?
- 4) How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing that I am living as fully as I can the relational and ontological values I claim to be using to give meaning and purpose to my life.

In the next section we make a distinction between Self-Study, S-STEP and Living Theory research. We go on to explain our choice of Living Theory and how a new teacher-researcher might engage in Self-Study.

## ***Self-Study, Self-Study of Teacher Education Practice and Living Theory research***

We make a clear distinction between Self-Study, Self-Study of Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP) and Living Theory research. Self-Study is a broad term that can include the study of self in a wide range of contexts that are not contained within the boundaries of education. All S-STEP research is by definition a Self-Study and is contained by the boundary of 'teacher education practice'. Living Theory research is a form of Self-Study. What distinguishes Living Theory research from other forms of Self-Study is the 'self' that is studied and the purpose. For example, self-studies can be carried out within many different perspectives, such as those of Adler, Freud and Jung. Some S-STEP researchers, in researching their educational practice do so through a Living Theory perspective, such as Farrell (2012). Not all Self-Study is contained by the boundary of an explanation of educational influences in one's own learning, the learning of others and the **learning of social formations**, as in Living Theory research.

We also draw a distinction between S-STEP research and Living Theory research. S-STEP was established in 1993 as a Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association by a group which included Whitehead. Since then there have been many publications to show the wide range of methods (Tidwell, Heston & Fitzgerald, 2008), used by S-STEP researchers. These include methods drawn from Narrative Inquiry, Phenomenology, Autoethnography, Grounded Theory, Case Study, Ethnography and Action Research. Living Theory researchers draw insights from these methods in the generation of their explanations of educational influence. For example, in their edited writings on academic **Autoethnography**, Pillay, Naicker and Pithouse-Morgan (2016) show how a group of academics explore their self-studies of cultural influences in their practice. This emphasis on cultural influences is important to Living Theory researchers as they include sociocultural and sociohistorical influences in their educational explanations. In Living Theory research, the primary concern about improving practice is the responsibility of each person for explaining their educational influences in learning. In her research on **Cosmopolitanism**, Keizer-Remmers (2017) demonstrates how the method of 'Social Photo Matrix' can be used with an Action Research process and other research methods to generate a multi-media living-theory account.

In an edited text on, 'Being Self-Study Researchers in a Digital World' (Garbett, & Ovens, 2017), the Self-Study researchers have produced a book that is mainly a printed text. It makes almost no use of digital technologies. However, Bullock et al. (2017) do point out that, 'The body is an important epistemology for teaching about teaching in any environment – new technologies offer new challenges for teacher education' (p.45). Digital visual data is used to show Self-Study researchers expressing, clarifying and communicating their energy-flowing, embodied values and understandings in educational relationships and has been used by Self-Study researchers who have made original contributions to educational knowledge that have been accredited within Universities for masters and doctoral degrees (Whitehead, 1996-2018).

Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2017) focused on the importance of digital technology to create accounts less dependent on text:

As we embraced becoming less text dependent, our meaning-making became more translucent. We distilled two research poems from 40 pages of emails and letters and used these poems to create a second, less text dependent, mood board representation to

‘see’ the ‘essence’ of our dialogic thoughts in space (see Fig 10.2). In our second mood board, we aimed for balance between visual images and typescript. (p.144)

The edited text to which they contribute, claims to be presenting research on the intersection of Self-Study research, digital technologies, and the development of future-oriented practices in teacher education. Our main problem with the book by Self-Study researchers, as both Self-Study and Living Theory researchers ourselves who use digital technologies in our own teaching and research, is that its communications are limited by the domination of printed text. With the increasing popularity of **e-media texts**, with live urls to multi-media data, it is possible to overcome this limitation. By referring to the multi-dimensionality of web-based materials, we hope to show how we are transcending such limitations although we recognize that we are working within the limitations in this printed text-based communication.

Another limitation of Self-Study, S-STEP and Living Theory research that has to be guarded against is the omission of any engagement with social and other theories, including those that are currently extending thinking and practice. We are thinking of ideas that raise the possibility that the logic and language used in this research are contributing to what de Sousa Santos (2014) has referred to as ‘**epistemicide**’ in terms of the elimination of ‘Epistemologies of the South’. We are extending this idea to the knowledge of practitioner-researchers. Our use of digital technologies, especially with digital visual data from our own educational practices in evidence-based explanations of our educational influences, has enabled our contributions to educational knowledge to move beyond the limitations of both printed-text and explanations that do not engage with such insights.

### ***Why, as individuals, we chose to engage in Living Theory research***

Why any educator engages in Living Theory Self-Study research, rather than another, is an existential as much as an intellectual decision so here we each try to share our individual responses rather than a collective one. We have all used **action-reflection cycles** at some point in our inquiries and continue to do so as we encounter concerns, imagine what to do, gather data, evaluate the influence of our practice and modify our concerns, ideas and actions in the light of our evaluations. However, the generation of our living-educational-theories as explanations of educational influence goes further than the use of the action-reflection cycles.

Jackie –

I chose Living Theory because it celebrates the embodied knowledge of teachers and challenges them to live their values more fully while working to improve their learning and teaching with their students. It thrives in and contributes to a living-culture-of-inquiry (DeLong, 2013). Values-based inquiry leads to values-based living, learning and teaching and as Bullough and Pinnegar (2004, p. 319) state "the consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of Self-Study research".

When I was ready to engage in doctoral research, I was unwilling to continue studying others’ work and prescriptions for learning and leading. I needed the research to help me do a better job as a superintendent and be a better person. I was introduced to Living Theory just when I needed a methodology that was meaningful in my life b.

Jack-

Living Theory research ‘works’ for me by enabling me to affirm my confidence that I am making a difference in enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry

hope for the flourishing of humanity. This contributes to my desire to live a loving and productive life. Working and researching cooperatively with others who are expressing such values and understandings helps to sustain and strengthen my activities in promoting the spread of Living Theory research as a social movement.

Marie –

During the last years of my career as an Educational Psychologist I became increasingly concerned that I could describe clearly what I was doing and how, but could not account for why, for instance, I would arrange for one speaker and not another to lead teachers' courses or why some theories attracted me and not others. I also knew that the criteria by which I was held to account, such as the grades children were given, were inappropriate at best and potentially damaging at worst but I had no way of judging whether my work was making an educational difference and I believed it was important that I did. Living Theory research enabled me to ask questions that were important to me as a professional educational-practitioner, create valid explanations for what I was doing and standards by which to judge my educational practice in the process of trying to improve it.

Living Theory research challenges me to recognize and hold myself to account to live the life-affirming and life-enhancing values that give my life and work purpose and meaning in ways that other forms of Self-Study, practitioner-research or social science research do not.

Liz-

I was introduced to Living Educational Theory while taking a methodology course for a Master's degree. During the course we were introduced to a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Initially, I was very interested in Autoethnography until I learned about Living Educational Theory. Each student was asked to select one methodology to explore in more detail and present his / her findings to the class. I chose Living Educational Theory and for the next three days immersed myself in the research. Today, seven years later, I can still feel the excitement and energy that I experienced while doing the research and presenting to my peers. I had been a practising teacher for over two decades and I was constantly reading, researching, attending workshops, and taking additional qualification courses all in an attempt to improve my practice for myself and the learners in my care; however, this was the first time I can say that I experienced educational freedom.

I felt that my experiences were valuable and as I learned to unveil embodied knowledge in a critical and creative way, I became more confident as a teacher and researcher. I discovered and explored my personal values and the explanatory principles that guide my practice and my life which enabled me to examine self through a new lens. The growth I experienced surpassed my expectations and continues to do so today. I became a better teacher, researcher, mother, friend, and human being as I discovered my authentic self and my interconnectedness with others and the world. No other "educational" experience has provided that kind of learning and personal growth for me and the learners in my care.

Cathy –

There are many directives, resources and requests coming to administrators and other educators from the Ministry, the school district, agencies, parents and the community

at large on a daily basis. In order to have a clear, cohesive, directed way forward I need to have a solid foundation for making decisions. Through Living Theory, I have developed not only an understanding of my values and beliefs, but also a comfort with being public in questioning and modifying my actions to be better, to align or realign myself with my values. I used to believe that I had to be perfect, or close to it, to be a leader. As a leader and imperfect, I felt I was an imposter.

Now I know, through my own research (Griffin, 2011), the power of being a leader who makes mistakes, learns and co-learns in public. I have seen and documented the effect authentic learning has on students and colleagues- it levels hierarchy, draws people in, brings down barriers and builds productive working relationships very quickly. I now trust in my ability to be myself and see where that takes me.

Joy –

Mooney (1957, p. 155) outlines research as a ‘personal venture, which, quite aside from its social benefits is worth doing for its direct contribution to one’s own self-realization.’ This idea of fulfilling my own personal and professional development as well as contributing socially is an important aspect of my ontological values and search for a research methodology. Lather’s (1986) research reflects ‘our beliefs about the world we live in, but also the world we want to live in, combining our understandings of the present from the past and influences to a better future’. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), identify three dimensions within a research paradigm which I agree are important; ontology, epistemology and methodology, describing the ontological and epistemological dimensions as the ‘world view’. Aligning this ‘worldview’ (ibid., 1999) with my epistemological understandings of knowledge democracy (de Sousa Santos, 2014) and methodological democracy, I find myself drawn to Lather’s (1986) belief that we can combine our current understandings, reflections of the past to strive for the future we believe in. This defines my needs within a research paradigm.

Frankl (1984) focuses my choice of methodology and desire to be a values-led practitioner in my search for meaning in my life and world-view. My exploration for a methodology that fulfils my need for a values-based, creative methodology enabling me as a practitioner to research my own role, values, influences and practice and thus to create my own educational theory, has led me to the Living (Educational) Theory research methodology (Whitehead, 1989). Frankl explores the professional ‘spark’, for me seen through my years of creating my own living-theory methodology in my efforts to influence my practice, but also others in my social formations, as I strive for Frankl’s description of ‘idealism’: “promote him to be what he can be”.

### ***How might a new teacher-researcher engage in Self-Study?***

New teacher-researchers may not be the same as pre-service or novice teachers. **New teacher-researchers** may have had many years of professional practice in which they have been reflecting on how to improve their practice. It is important that they come voluntarily and that no coercion is involved. With support and encouragement, they become teacher-researchers as they learn how to make public their embodied knowledges as educators as they inquire into improving their practice and become knowledge-creators. You can access the evidence and explanations of how new teacher-researchers have been supported in engaging in Self-Study in the 8 volumes of ***Passion in Professional Practice*** (Delong, et al., 2000-

2007). The teachers engaging in these self-studies came from different practitioner inquiry traditions, with a shared desire to help their students to improve their learning. Some focused on narrative inquiry, others on action research, while others stressed the priority to be given to sociocultural and sociohistorical influences in practice and understandings. What attracted the teachers to Living Theory research was the focus on clarifying and communicating the meanings of the embodied, ontological values that the teachers used to give meaning and purpose to their lives in education. They identified with a Living Theory approach as it included the use of these values as explanatory principles in their explanations of their educational influence in the learning of their students.

In the Grand Erie District School Board in Ontario, Canada, while Jackie was a Superintendent of Schools, educators, including teachers, administrators, consultants and educational assistants, researched and published their self-studies in 8 volumes of *Passion in Professional Practice*. She was fortunate in that she had the influence to share her vision of teachers as researchers of their own classrooms. Positional influence can be a two-edged sword in that teachers could stay away from this vision because it came from a power source but in this case, beginning with a group of 7 (five teachers and two school administrators), hundreds of teachers came voluntarily to research and share their knowledge in the 8 volumes and in workshops at conferences. They were each given 5 half-days of release time from teaching, small group sessions in the skills of research and support for writing their research, at first by Jackie, herself, and then many of them took up the leadership of the network. Of course, the teachers gave much more of their own time to conduct the research than the 5 half-days. The fact that Jackie was conducting her own study to improve her practice (Delong, 2002) at the same time helped to encourage teachers to try this new form of professional learning.

These insights gained by Jackie and the educators of the Grand Erie District School Board led into the developments of Self-Study in the **Bluewater Action Research Network** (BARN). Liz Campbell and Cathy Griffin, teachers in the board, created and led the network.

Liz –

In the Bluewater Action Research Network, the research completed during 2013-2017, ranges from reducing anxiety in Junior and Senior kindergarten classes to learning without grading in a high school art class. The practitioners included early childhood educators, educational assistants, classroom teachers from kindergarten to grade 12, lead teachers and administrators. This is easily the most rewarding work I have done outside of my classroom. Each year, I was more and more amazed and inspired by the desire and dedication of my colleagues to improve their practice which also helped me to improve my practice. In addition, all of the research is available to the public as participants shared and videotaped their results in a symposium each year. You can view the variety of questions and results and the feedback of BARN participants (Campbell, 2017).

For the past six years, I have used Living Theory research as the foundation of my teaching practice. In the process of writing the dissertation for a PhD in Educational Sustainability, I have kept extensive journals (including video footage) of my classroom experiences and the development of my living educational theory. I am at the beginning stages of data analysis and have already noticed some interesting patterns and themes.

In 2013, I wrote an *EJOLTs* (*Educational Journal of Living Theories*) article (Campbell, 2013) which explains how I introduced my students to Living Theory

research and recounts some of the classroom experiences I had to date. I have permission from students to share their work.

In the next section, we discuss the opportunities that we have experienced, as well as the challenges and obstacles to promoting Self-Study research in schools.

## **The value, opportunities and challenges of Self-Study research in schools**

### ***The value of teacher Self-Study in elementary and secondary schools***

First, we'd like to begin with some thoughts on the value of Self-Study in our schools. Its value ranges from improved teacher learning and instruction to improved student learning to students as **co-learners** and **co-researchers**.

Joy –

As a primary school practitioner-researcher in the south-west of England, I positively embraced Self-Study research in my classroom, as not only a personal form of Continual Professional Development (CPD), but also as a self-knowledge tool for the children in my class (7 and 8 years of age). Research-led professional practice within an educational setting provides collaborative support, a 'powerful and key factor in quality CPD identified by Cordingley et al. (2003). Leitch and Day (2000) and Burton and Bartlett (2005) identify the benefits of educational research as a form of CPD.

Self-Study research was a personal decision and not part of the settings' formal CPD plans, but my own explorations, as I sought to improve. As a shared research journey, the children and myself, asked 'How can we improve what we are doing?', 'How can I improve what I am doing?' and 'How can I improve what we are doing?' Although only a small project and not one the children would necessarily experience in other classes, the self-knowledge we all gained stayed with us beyond the class.

I have experienced how research conducted within a research community affords the practitioner the ability to maintain a passion for, and an up-to-date knowledge of, research-based practice, as well as linking to equally like-minded souls (Mounter, 2008a&b; 2012). By 'like-minded', I mean those who have a curiosity, a need to strive to be the best practitioner they can be through the process of CPD. Our profession is losing passionate practitioners: some will leave the profession altogether; some will continue, a husk of the potential they could have offered. Snow (2001, p. 9) wrote of the rich resource of excellent teachers and identified how their skills and knowledge were largely untapped. Reflected in the new recommendations for teacher CPD from the Department for Education in the UK, is highlighted an understanding that 'High-quality professional development requires workplaces to be steeped in rigorous scholarship' (DFE, 2016).

Jackie –

Having spent much of my teaching career involved directly in professional development activities, I knew first-hand that traditional models of transferring knowledge and best practice to classrooms had abysmal records of efficacy. When I

was introduced to Self-Study research using the Living Theory methodology, I came to see through my research to improve my own practice the potential to influence improvement in pedagogy and curriculum in classrooms. In addition, seeing the positive effect of teachers having control over what they saw as important areas of improvement for themselves combined to transform my own learning, leadership and view of professional learning.

Both these issues of improvement and control resonated with the educators with whom I worked. There was a risk in introducing this vision in a school system: once individuals had power over their own learning, had the data to support their knowing, spoke with their own voices, they could no longer be easily convinced that others knew more about teaching their students than they did, based on their self-studies. With their validated knowing, teacher-researchers began to see that academic research could inform their instructional practices when they could research the strategies in their own classrooms.

Liz -

As I was re-reading this article recently, two things became obvious to me: the first is that much of what I wrote and observed many years ago is still very true and relevant today which I believe speaks to the sustainability of Living Theory research and secondly, I realized how profoundly affected my students were by fear of judgement and how the use of video in the classroom and in their research helped them to unveil this knowledge and, in many cases, to overcome it. In addition, last year, one of the themes that emerged in the Bluewater Action Research Network was the rise of anxiety and depression in junior and senior kindergarten students (four and five-year olds). You can access these projects and the results at the url for Bluewater District School Board (2017). I firmly believe that allowing students to conduct their own research is a powerful strategy for addressing the mental, academic, spiritual, and emotional needs of all students. Using a living theory methodology enables students to identify their beliefs and values and formulate a worldview that is clear and concise and because it is their own unique theory, they are much more able and willing to live more fully according to their values and to be held accountable for their beliefs. This is an educational experience that can address, among many things, the concerns for the rising mental health issues that the children and youth of today are experiencing.

In the next section, we discuss the opportunities that have been available to us in supporting S-STEP research in our schools and school districts.

### ***The opportunities of promoting Self-Study in schools***

Our main reason for promoting Self-Study in schools is that it is focused on enhancing professionalism in education through improving practice and contributing to the professional knowledge base in education. We distinguish between non-accredited and accredited continuing professional development through Self-Study. Professional educators are continuously engaged in asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ The initial engagement with this question is motivated by a professional concern to improve practice and can lead to non-accredited explanations of influence such as those included in the 8 volumes of *Passion in Professional Practice* (DeLong et al., 2001-2007). We believe that enhancing professionalism in education will require the accreditation of the embodied knowledges of educators and that the enhancement could

depend on the recognition of educators as master and doctor educators (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016).

In the years 2011-2018, Canadian colleagues have had access to funding to support practitioner-research in schools. That is not to say that it has been easily accessible, in sufficiently large amounts or without strings attached. Prior to that it was a matter of incorporating it into system initiatives as Jackie was able to do because of her access to budgets in the Grand Erie District - for 3 years she even had a budget line called 'classroom research', but then it was eradicated.

Cathy –

Given funding to release teachers for specific professional development (e.g. math), I look for ways to encourage research in self-identified directions while facilitating change in the areas identified by board and school priorities. I try to find connections between mandated activities or funding opportunities and the raw worries and hopes of educators wanting the best for their students. We are fortunate in Ontario to have many self-directed research project grants funded by the Ministry of Education and the teaching unions.

From the opportunities, we move to the challenges.

### ***The challenges of promoting Self-Study in schools***

While our experiences of promoting Self-Study in our settings have commonalities, there are some differences.

Liz, Cathy and Joy talk about the challenge of providing leadership for Self-Study researchers,

Liz -

My experience of promoting Self-Study research within our local Board of Education and in my classroom in rural Ontario has been extremely challenging at times, so much so that I have come to understand why some people may feel intimidated and/or overwhelmed with the process. However, the rewards outweigh the challenges a thousand-fold. The challenges are as unique as the individuals and their local contexts and experiences and this is one of the universal challenges of Self-Study: there is no single formula, recipe, or procedure. However, this is also a key factor in the significance and effectiveness of Self-Study research. The inherent nature of Self-Study recognizes and values the unique individual and as such creates a space and place for the unveiling and articulating of embodied knowledge that can transform the practitioner. The ripple effect of this transformation is infinite.

Cathy –

As a new administrator, it is taking time for me to get comfortable in my role and to feel confident in leading by making my own Self-Study public. In leading professional development within my school, it is challenging to make the time, amidst many other demands and requirements, to create a safe space for staff to voice the concerns they have about their own practice, to talk about their values and passions. As we stressed above we are fortunate in Ontario to have many self-directed research project grants funded by the Ministry of Education and the teaching unions.

It is a challenge to encourage and support staff to apply for grants that are available to educators to do Self-Study when educators are already very busy or have not had experience in leading their own professional development. Above all, it is difficult sticking to a vision of Self-Study when the cultural norm is to look to an outside source for the problem that needs to be fixed. I have to work hard to maintain my inner and outer dialogue as, “What is the nature of my influence as I strive to improve my practice?” instead of, “I will teach them a, b, and c and that will fix the problem.”

Joy –

I am exploring further the challenges related to the testing of students at system-wide levels as I prepare my transfer paper from masters to doctoral studies. For instance, I see in our setting what Connolly and James (1998) describe as professional development and school improvement closely-linked to numerically target-driven outcomes which held staff to account. In a world of challenge and league tables, Clayton et al. (2017) describe how this can narrow the focus of CPD to measurable outcomes and then the fear is that CPD is led by the focus of the government, rather than practitioner professional development.

We believe that the challenges for Self-Study inquiry of any form is dependent on the person as much, if not more, than the context within which they are working. The opportunity and challenge for the researcher in making their inquiry public, however, may be influenced by a context in which it may be wise and to do so could damage health and job security. For all of us, there have been situations where it has been imprudent to publicly criticize our superiors and organizations. However, Boland says that he has been careful about criticizing the colonizing ways of his organization but now is finding the courage to do it:

I notice that parrhesia (truth telling) is becoming increasingly important to me (or perhaps just more practised). I have become increasingly bold when giving my opinion in areas where I think I have something to say. As an academic, reading Foucault on the topic has released hesitations I might have had and encouraged me to speak out in fora in which I would formerly have remained quiet. (Boland, 2017, p. 70-71)

Jackie –

The way in which we teach Self-Study is also a challenge. To get teachers started in Self-Study, I ask them to write stories about what matters to them. Within those stories are the values and passions that inform their lives and teaching. The purpose is to get them to see their embodied knowledge and the knowledge of their colleagues. I deliberately steer them away from texts and ‘authorities’ to get them to write and speak with their own voices. Only after I see their growing confidence in their ways of knowing, in conducting their own research do I introduce them to the words of others such as research in the disciplines. With this confidence and control over their own learning comes an independence of thought that challenges authorities around them, such as school leaders and university research ethics boards (Suderman-Gladwell, 2001).

There is also the challenge of moving them from their stories which are descriptions of their passions and teaching challenges, to explanations of their learning in their investigations and how they can support their claims to know that they have improved.

Their voices are most important but they need the voices of others - students, colleagues, the literature - to validate their claims.

One of the greatest challenges to promoting S-STEP research in schools is the one examined by Whitehead in *Teacher Education Quarterly* (1995) on Self-Study and Living Educational Theory. As part of his contribution to this issue, Jack analyzed the other contributions to this issue and pointed out the lack of **evidence on the educational influences** of the S-STEP researchers in the learning of students. This evidential base in explanations of educational influence continue to need strengthening in order to convince policy makers and other funders to provide the resources to develop an Self-Study approach to continuing professional development in teacher education. It is important to us to continue to ask ourselves and others, ‘What evidence is there that I have influenced the learning of students in my classroom?’

In answering such questions, it is important to engage in longitudinal studies in order to demonstrate educational influences in learning over time. The development of teachers’ visions from preservice into their first years teaching: A longitudinal study, has been analyzed by Parsons, et al. (2017):

Contemplating and articulating one's vision is a reflective process that guides teachers' instruction and professional development. However, little research has explored how teachers develop their visions from preservice preparation to their first years’ teaching. The current study describes the visions of nine teachers over the course of seven years. The researchers describe teachers' visions, how the teachers enacted their visions, affordances to enacting their visions, obstacles teachers faced to enacting their visions, and how teachers' negotiated obstacles to enact their visions. Findings demonstrate the stability and influence of teachers' visions and the multitude of factors that impact teachers' daily decisions. (p.12)

Like Parsons et al., we believe that **longitudinal self-studies** of teachers and teacher educators, with many years of reflective practice, can offer important additions to the professional knowledge base of education. We also believe that as well as focusing on visions, it is important to generate evidence-based explanations of educational influences in the learning of pupils/students. We have explained how such evidenced-based explanations can enhance professionalism in education through the academic recognition and legitimation of the embodied knowledge of Self-Study master and doctor educators. We are suggesting that present self-studies by teachers and teacher educators could be strengthened by focusing attention on evidence-based explanations of the educational influences of Self-Study researchers in the learning of their students.

In the next section, we discuss the differentiation between education research and *educational* research.

## **How we differentiate between education and educational research**

It is important for teachers working in education settings to understand what distinguishes educational practice, theory and knowledge, from practice, theory and knowledge in education. Teachers have many roles and responsibilities. One is that of instructor tasked with efficiently enabling pupils and students to acquire the skills and

knowledge that comprise the given curriculum prescribed by their organization, community or society. Effectiveness of their practice is frequently judged in terms of students' test/exam scores. Other data is also often collected to evaluate the quality of teachers' practice; for instance, student (or parent) satisfaction questionnaires. This positions the student as a client or consumer with associated expectations of what constitutes teachers' practice. Numbers of admissions to high prestige establishments or professions have been applied to define teacher effectiveness.

These different demands made of teachers can make it difficult for them to keep a focus on realizing their educational responsibilities towards their pupils and students. Unless teachers are clear about what constitutes educational practice, theory and knowledge it is easy for them to lose sight of what they might do as professional educators to improve what they are doing and contribute to the evolution of a knowledge base for the benefit of all.

Maturana, a Chilean biologist and philosopher, gives an insight into a pupil/student's perspective in his poem, 'A Student's Prayer' (1994, p.61).

Don't impose on me what you know,  
I want to explore the unknown  
And be the source of my own discoveries.  
Let the known be my liberation, not my slavery.  
The world of your truth can be my limitation;  
Your wisdom my negation.  
Don't instruct me; let's walk together.  
Let my riches begin where yours ends.  
Show me so that I can stand  
On your shoulders.  
Reveal yourself so that I can be  
Something different.  
You believe that every human being  
Can love and create.  
I understand, then, your fear  
When I ask you to live according to your wisdom.  
You will not know who I am  
By listening to yourself.  
Don't instruct me; let me be.  
Your failure is that I be identical to you.

In 1983, Hirst, one of the main proponents of the **disciplines approach to educational theory**, in which this theory was constituted by the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education, acknowledged the following mistake in his claim 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 characterizations 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)

So, we are seeing education research as being defined by the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the disciplines of education and educational research as being distinguished by the values- laden explanations that practitioner researchers produce for their educational influences.

Pring (2000) says that he sees educational practice as concerned with values:

‘... what makes this *educational* practice is the set of values which it embodies – the intrinsic worth of the activities themselves, the personal qualities which are enhanced, the appropriate way of proceeding (given the values that one has and given the nature of the activity).

... The *practice* of teaching embodies certain values – the importance of that which is to be learnt, the respect of the learner (how he or she thinks), the respect for evidence and the acknowledgement of contrary viewpoints.’ (p.135)

However, Pring appears to be talking about educational practice denoted by values that are reified, impersonal and which do not communicate the personal and emotional commitment that is inherent in what is educational about education. He hints at this earlier in the same paper:

‘Central to educational research, therefore, is the attempt to make sense of the activities, policies and institutions which, through the organization of learning, help to transform the capacities of people to live a fuller and more distinctively human life. Such research needs to attend to what is distinctive of *being a person* – and of being one in a more developed sense. It needs to recognize that the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of *learning* those distinctively human capacities and understandings are by no means simple – they need to be analysed carefully. And *a fortiori* ‘teaching’, through which that learning is brought about, will reflect that complexity.’ (p.17)

While Pring understands the importance of research recognizing, ‘the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of *learning*’, he makes no reference to the ‘why’ of the person doing the learning. This might account for Pring’s reference to values giving no sense of the living reality of ‘being a person’ as a unique individual learning to live their own life as fully as possible, rather than an abstract ‘distinctively human life’.

### ***Practical distinctions between education and educational research***

The theories of psychologists, sociologists and others concerned with education can be useful for teachers to draw on when they try to improve their practice. However, how these theories are expressed in practice can be very different. In school-related terms, the pressure ‘to cover’ the curriculum with equal emphasis on learning all skills can be overwhelming for teachers and can be viewed as reason for knowing what is educational. Teachers understand in an academic sense that some learning is more important than others but get caught up in teaching more and faster in lieu of teaching responsively so that the students learn deeply. Prescriptions for covering the curriculum may lead them to following checklists without rational thought or deep thinking. Education research is very good at producing models with

prescriptions that ignore the dynamics of each classroom. Formulas and education theories can serve to undermine teachers' embodied knowledge and their confidence in it.

One of the vehicles for prescriptions is education texts (as opposed to educational texts) that direct teachers on how to teach. In the UK, the 'national strategies' (DFE, 2011), have been profligate with examples in the 'literacy strategy' of how teachers should 'deliver' the 'literacy hour'. Educational articles and books are those written by practitioners about their own practice not as a prescriptive 'how to' but as one means of teaching that another teacher might learn from, not replicate. Once on a path to study oneself and one's practice with the help of colleagues and students, ideas are integrated from both education and educational research.

Educational research positions students as individual researchers needing to start with the identification of their own set of values and beliefs before interacting with the values espoused in the curriculum, in society at large or by special interest groups.

Liz –

I am talking about the problems with the application of education, as opposed to educational research, to classrooms when I direct your attention to the homepage of the Ontario Ministry of Education's website (OME 2018), where you will see improvement in graduation rates highlighted and, celebrated, with a clear indication to continue this "success". While this may seem to be an admirable goal, I have personally experienced some of the negative effects of a mandated general goal that does not take into account the unique and individual needs of each student, school, and community and places additional pressure on educators to comply and conform for the sake of the general good.

The Ontario Ministry of Education claims to be "one of the best in the world" developing "graduates who are personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens" who are more likely to graduate and meet higher academic standards (p. 1). Again, a statement rife with values and beliefs that may not reflect the individual beliefs and values of the students the system is designed to serve. If the Ontario Ministry of Education, or any education system, truly wants to meet the needs of individual students and contribute to a positive change in education, that is, create more educational opportunities for students and educators, then they would be wise to do more to recognize, value and promote, the use of theories, methodologies and research that create genuine educational knowledge and learning.

Jackie –

In coming to understand the difference between **research in education** and **educational research**, the transformational experience for me was the realization that academic writing prescribing how I must teach and lead according to a checklist (that just needed to be followed in order for me to arrive at excellence in teaching and leadership) was theoretical and not practical. Once I was encouraged by Jack Whitehead to write my own story/narrative, uncovering my values and examining if those stories showed me living or denying those values, I started to see the values as screens for making values-based decisions about my way of teaching and leading. Improvement no longer came from an external image of how I should live but from an internal drive to be a better person, leader, teacher.

Reducing the **educational explanations** of practitioner-researchers to the explanations in theories from the disciplines of education is still widespread in many university programs on education. In giving priority to the living-theories of practitioners, Living Theory researchers are not rejecting or ignoring the knowledge created by sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, historians, management, administration and other forms of theory in education. What we are rejecting is the idea that the educational explanations of individual Self-Study researchers can be reduced to explanations derived from these theorists, taken individually or in any combination. In the generation of our own living-educational theories, we draw on insights from the work of Habermas' (1976) criteria of social validity, de Sousa Santos' (2014) idea of 'epistemicide', Lather's (Donmoyer, 1996, p. 21) notion of 'ironic validity' and Biesta's (2006, p. ix) notion of 'responsibility'.

In the following section, we share a few of our own self-studies as examples of how educators engaged in Living Theory research contribute to the knowledge base of teaching and learning and what we have learned from the opportunities, obstacles and challenges along the way.

## **Our contributions to an educational knowledge base of teaching and learning and what we learned**

We now identify a few examples of contributions to a knowledge base of teaching and learning, what specifically we believe that contribution to be and what we learned along the way.

Jack –

In 1976, I was a participant in a local curriculum development into improving scientific understanding with 11 to 14 year olds in mixed ability groups. I produced my first evaluation (Whitehead, 1976 a) and submitted it to the teachers with whom I was working and researching. The teachers explained that they could understand the academic models I used to explain their practice and influence but could not see themselves in the report. They asked me to go back to the original data I had gathered and redraft the report. Working with one of the teachers I transformed the report in a way that the teachers agreed was a valid explanation of what they had done (Whitehead, 1976b). I then saw that the report was in the form of action-reflection cycles. This was the first time I had explicated an action-reflection cycle in an explanation of educational influences in learning in inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and it marked a transformation in my approach to educational research.

Many of my contributions to the professional knowledge base of teaching and learning can be accessed in the masters' and doctoral writings on my website (Whitehead, 1996-2018).

My learning from the opportunities, obstacles and challenges along the way has focused on learning how to re-channel my emotions of anger and frustration when I experienced personal and institutional blockages. I learned to redirect these feelings into a flow of loving energy to do what I believed in, whilst looking for ways of maximizing the opportunities by going round the obstacles and transcending the challenges. (Whitehead, 1993)

Marie –

I am still trying to learn not to ‘fight against’ ideas and people but rather to find ways to work cooperatively to create and advance ideas, practices and praxis that contribute to the flourishing of humanity. If I can look on some ‘obstacles and challenges’ as expressions of other people’s concerns presented with what I experience as negating, rather than hope-filled energy, then sometimes if I can find a way of engaging in a productive dialogue with them rather than in dual monologues. I believe such dialogue holds the possibility of transforming the energy into a creative tension by which obstacles and challenges offer potential for productive engagement. Pound’s living-theory of alongsideness (Pound, 2003) is a way of being that I find inspirational.

Jackie –

Despite the fact that I have been conducting Living Theory research myself and encouraging and supporting others at the same time to create their own living-theories for over 20 years, I have evolved and am still evolving my own understandings. I have committed myself to working to ensure that the voices of the teachers are respected, legitimated and accredited. I exhort them to refuse to let anyone, supervisor, academic, anyone, however kind they may seem to be, speak for them, to take away their voice, to assume their knowledge. This passion that fueled my work came, I think, from experiencing first hand that access to the temple of all knowledge is through the gates at the university and that the practitioner’s knowledge is legitimated when university academics speak for them. I learned the importance of vulnerability, persistence and creative compliance as well as some skills for climbing over the walls. Much of this work can be found on mine and Jack’s websites.

Liz –

I have always maintained that one way to understand Living Educational Theory is to experience it for yourself. This is why I made a commitment, along with my colleague, Cathy Griffin, to share this knowledge and to support others who want to improve their practice. We applied for and received funding from the Ontario Ministry of Education Provincial Knowledge Exchange program for four consecutive years to facilitate a self-directed, Self-Study project using Living Educational Theory. We named our project BARN (Bluewater Action Research Network). Each year, we invited a few participants to co-facilitate with us so that we could support a large group of practitioners and to contribute to the sustainability of the program. Cathy Griffin has moved on to an administrative role and I retired from secondary school teaching; however, the program continues to flourish as others eagerly step into the role of facilitator.

We began each session setting out our intentions and then we would ask the participants for feedback at the end of the day and we would use this information to plan our next session. Our goal was to create a safe place for practitioners to examine their practice within a loving community of inquiry. This was based on the model we experienced while completing our master’s degree when Jackie DeLong was our instructor.

At the time of writing this chapter, I received a text message from Krystal Damm that BARN had received the funding they requested to run the network again in 2018. This is a clear indication of the recognition and value of Living Theory work in Ontario and

could be a useful resource for funding for other Ontario educators. You can access the 2016-17 projects at Teach Ontario (2018).

Cathy –

Writing about my contribution seems paradoxical to me when I feel the greatest result of my involvement in Living Theory Action Research has been change in my personal practice. However, because I have noted the key changes, studied their effect on students and colleagues, and intentionally shared what and why I do what I do in public forums including academic articles, I can describe these intensely personal revelations as both what I have learned and my contributions to the professional knowledge base. In describing my learning and contributions, I am validating the claims of the other authors in describing the nature of their influence on me.

**Vulnerability** is strength: Jackie placed herself in front of our entire Bluewater Masters cohort and asked us for constructive criticism of her practice. From that experience I learned that in placing herself and her students in that uncomfortable position she was breaking down the hierarchical walls that separated mentor/learner from student/learner and made it comfortable (or at least ‘uncomfortably comfortable’, as one of my colleagues says) for everyone to take part in a culture of inquiry (DeLong, 2013) as critical friends and equal learners. I, in turn contribute in my local contexts by making public my values and intentions and asking for feedback on my own practice. Practicing and honing this skill in our BARN group helped create the safe environment Liz talks about. I also encourage educators to ask for feedback from their students. I have contributed to the professional knowledge base by writing academic accounts of the effect this practice has had on students in the EJOLTs journal and in a blog, Mentoring Moments (Griffin, 2015-16).

It is difficult for educators to open themselves up to feedback without seeing first how much strength it can give them, how much confidence and certainty in direction. I facilitate the use of **student voice** as feedback to educators in my local context and then share this with a wider audience whenever I can (e.g. Ontario Teachers’ Federation Webinars). For example, I interviewed aged 12-14 English Language Learners (ELL) at our school which has a 40% ELL population and shared the video clips of these students explaining their values, concerns and barriers to learning.

Hearing student feedback on our practice not only influenced widespread change in teacher practice but it also prompted educators to elicit more feedback after making changes to their practice. I then got permission to share these student and teacher videos within our school board, at conferences and as part of an OTF webinar to encourage others to use student voice to inform educational practice. It is important to have access to strategies and resources that other teacher-researchers have researched and tested. It is equally important to have models of how to integrate these strategies into your practice, or to test your own strategies, through personal research. I want to give courage to others to carve their own path as a researcher rather than feel that academics who have published a book hold all the knowledge.

Learning is struggle and joy: I and every other teacher I have worked with struggle with translating best practice education research into our own educational practice. For example, in the Ontario curriculum there is an emphasis on student metacognition: identifying strengths and weaknesses, setting and monitoring goals. I struggled and

struggled with how to make this authentic and meaningful rather than being the one to impose goals based on what I believed to be true. The battle ended up with me teaching my students to do their own action research projects and write their own learning skills for their report cards (Campbell, 2013 and Mentoring Moments Griffin, 2015-16). Jack has influenced me to treat the niggling feeling, the living contradiction, as the next challenge, a joyous opportunity to investigate how or why I am not living according to my values. In anything I write or post, in each of my professional development contexts, I unveil my struggle and try to convey the joy of working the problem through to the end.

Joy –

‘...bringing more fully into the world the expression of a loving, **life-affirming energy**, of justice, of compassion, of freedom, of gift, of talent and of knowledge creation’ (Whitehead, 2007). This extract defines the values I hold as a person and as a practitioner, which I strive to hold and define through using a Living Theory methodology within my research, practice and professional voice.

This quote from an interview with Desmond Tutu (2013), strongly resonates with my value of ‘Nurturing Responsiveness’ (Mounter, 2012), reminding me of the sense of community and flourishing of humanity I feel is so important in Living Theory research: ‘I need you, in order for me to be me; I need you to be you to the fullest’.

It is vital to engender a research space of reflective pause and renewal, a form of CPD for a profession that all too frequently faces the past and not the future in a rush of changes. The requirement is to create a research community space for the melding of minds, a dynamic, safe, challenging and exhilarating space and one in which to meet and enable others to meet in the physical and the virtual worlds. It is a place where time and distance have no meaning and barriers and borders do not exist, just the flow on a worldwide platform of renewal and energy defined within a Living Theory values-based framework.

My greatest learning came from opening this shared space for learning between the pupils and myself. I shared the cooperative research space of myself and my pupils (aged 6, 7, 8 years of age) in a rural mixed-age class in the south-west of England as we explored as researchers our own learning and influences on others. As a professional, I offer my research as a gift, but the pupils asked me a profound question one day, which transformed my practice, my values and my role as a researcher: ‘Why is it only grown-ups that write about learning, when it is us that do the learning? Why haven’t they asked us?’ Child N (Mounter, 2008a) In our shared living-theory we offered an exploration of learning from two perspectives: the critical reflection and analysis of professional and pupil. The pupils critically engaged with learning theories, before constructing and offering their own.

On You Tube you can watch an extract of the children discussing the changes they felt should be made to a research model called TASC (Wallace, 2005) and how they had developed their ideas, even making a 3D model (Mounter, 2008b).

My **educational influences on learning** and my affirmation of **cooperative research** with my class is seen expressed in the educational relationship with my pupils, as I respond to their needs in relation to their learning. Our ‘gift’ is for each other, other learners and the educational profession is the QUIFF theory of learning constructed by

the pupils. The sharing of our voices and research strengthened our gift, offering us personal and collective growth and transformation enriching the **flourishing of humanity**.

In the next section, we share our efforts to contribute to a better world by acting as global citizens and contextualize the global significance of Self-Study.

## **Our ways forward to contribute to a flourishing of humanity as global citizens**

Living (Educational) Theory methodology (Whitehead, 2008) engenders a reflective understanding of self, others and the ability to be part of a continual flow of energy for change. Whitehead (2017, p. 391) states that this can add to the flourishing of humanity, a concept explored continually since Aristotle. Keyes (2002) defines flourish as, 'living within an optimal range of human functions, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth and resilience'. Since humans are complex beings, there is no one way or best way forward. However, we believe we can make better progress together if each person is open and generous enough to make their contributions accessible and respectfully appreciative of that of others. In the spirit of 'walking our own talk' we share a few examples of what we have done that we believe contributes to the flourishing of humanity which may transcend the potentially negating barriers of nationalism or ways of thinking and limitations of traditional social science research methodologies.

From a 'personal and practical' perspective arising from our Living Theory work, we refer you to our work at the '1st Global Assembly on Knowledge Democracy: toward an ecology of knowledges', that took place in Cartagena Colombia on the 16th June 2017. This included contributions from Self-Study researchers from India, South Africa, Europe (including Ireland and the UK) Bolivia, Canada, Japan and China and the keynote from de Sousa Santos.

In considering this global significance of Self-Study research, we are aware of the dangers of imposing a theory of knowledge that can serve the interests of what de Sousa Santos (2014) calls 'epistemicide'. By **epistemicide** he means the killing off of knowledges by the current hegemony of West/neo-liberalist knowledge systems. As practitioner-researchers who have been successful in gaining academic recognition for our masters and doctoral degrees, we have experienced first-hand the pressures of epistemicide. We are committed to deeply heterogeneous and emancipatory approaches to knowledge. Through Self-Study research we see ourselves contributing to the empowerment of diverse knowledge communities and knowledge systems critical to the long-term sustainment of people and the planet. In making this contribution we acknowledge the pressures to conform to the current hegemony of West / neo- liberalist knowledge systems.

We also refer you to the Town Hall meeting, convened by DeLong at the 2015 Action Research Network of the Americas Conference in Toronto. In this meeting we contributed to a global community of Living Theory Self-Study researchers with the help of multi-screen SKYPE contributions and 'living-posters' from many cultures and countries such as South Africa, Canada, India, the Republic of Ireland, Croatia and the UK (DeLong, 2015).

We now share some individual thoughts on our ways forward as **global citizens**.

Jack –

My way forward is focused on learning how to develop and extend my co-operative ways of working and researching in enhancing the global influence of Living Theory

research as a social movement. In particular, I am working and researching within organizations such as the Action Learning, Action Research Association, Action Research Network of the Americas, the Collaborative Action Research Network, The Bluewater Action Research Network, The Association for Teacher Education in Europe, the S-STEP group at AERA, as well as with Living Theory doctoral and post-doctoral researchers in the Educational Journal of Living Theory, to extend the influence of Living Theory research. This involves the clarification and communication of meanings of cosmopolitanism (Keizer-Remmers 2017) and global citizenship (Coombs, Potts & Whitehead, 2014). It also involves learning how to contribute as fully as I can to the spreading influence of the values and understandings of the international co-operative alliance (ICA 2018).

Jackie –

The way that I am taking forward and contributing to the **flourishing of humanity** is through the individuals and systems that I influence. It is in the capacities and accomplishments of the students, teachers and administrators who have asked and answered their own questions to improve themselves and their world that I see them contributing as global citizens.

If we focus on small incremental steps, through the teachers to the students, we build a future of values-based individuals that can be the change we wish to see (paraphrasing Gandhi). When I hear a teacher ask her students, ‘How can you help me to teach you better?’, that democratic living-culture-of-inquiry (DeLong, 2013) that can transform the nature of the educational experience is evident. With students as young as 6-7 years of age (Schlosser, T., 2011; Mounter, J. 2008), 9-10 years (Bognar & Zovko, 2008), 10-11 years (Griffin, 2011) or 16-17 years (Campbell, 2011) we see them articulating their values and taking responsibility for improving their own learning. In small ways, these efforts contribute to improve the world and are in themselves part of the Living Theory social movement. It is also an issue of becoming truly democratic as we see Cathy asking her students to help her become a better teacher and learner and sharing her knowledge globally in her EJOLTs article (Griffin, 2013).

I continue to be involved in publishing in books and journals such as the **Educational Journal of Living Theories** and presenting at conferences globally such as ALARA World Congress, 2018.

Liz –

One of the greatest challenges for classroom teachers is making time to understand and/or explain what they do, how they do it and most importantly, why they do it. We are so busy with the day to day demands that it is difficult to carve out time for reflection and collaboration. However, it has become readily apparent to me that the most valuable resource in education is the educator. When time and space is created for practitioners with a desire to improve what they are doing, as we did with BARN, the results are simply astounding. Practitioners gain insights about their values and become extremely aware of their influence on students, their colleagues, and their community in general. This heightened awareness influences their teaching which has a profound positive impact on student learning and improves interactions with colleagues and the school community.

Currently, I am in the process of writing the dissertation for my PhD which will include an account of my evolving living educational theory. My guiding question is, 'How has love influenced me as a teacher, researcher and learner?' Publicly sharing this account is one way I intend to contribute to the flourishing of humanity. After the completion of my PhD, I hope to be able to continue to support new and veteran educators through professional development opportunities and courses for credit in Bachelor of Education, Master's and PhD programs.

Cathy –

Yesterday I walked into the classroom of a teacher who is working with his colleagues and me to improve our teaching of algebra. I turned my camera on and started recording. A challenge was presented to the class and they got to work. I panned the room and captured all students getting to work, busily talking, making charts, looking at the board, thinking in silence. I followed the teacher around and captured some conversations with students. "This is what I'm thinking...", "You know I'm not going to give you the answer, but I'm wondering why you tested so many of the ordered pairs?" "I think next I need to..." "I know this is the answer because..." BZZZZ - I check my phone that just vibrated, "There is some cool patterning happening in my room if you want to visit."

When I arrived at the second classroom, the students were already into an individual consolidation activity but the teacher's eyes lit up when she saw me. She jumped right in, excited, "The lesson worked so well! I had to step out for a minute and when I came back in they were still all talking about the math! I just walked around and listened." I circulated the room and looked at what the students were writing. And **all** of them were writing about math- WOW! They understood what they had learned. The answers were diverse and individual.

I have this vision of a school in which these real examples are the norm. Each individual is flourishing - motivated, engaged, learning. The perceived and real pressures have dropped away and what is felt by all is excitement in challenges, the joy in the struggle that is learning. Each individual is on a learning journey and is able to talk to others about the mistakes they have made, their successes, their challenges and the action they are going to take next. My way forward to realizing this vision is to model my own learning, to ask for feedback on my efforts to improve from teachers and students and to facilitate opportunities for individuals to identify their own values and concerns and to engage in Living Theory research. If I can influence educators to take control of their own learning, they will in turn influence students take control of theirs.

Joy –

My living values have at the heart a belief in ontological, epistemological and methodological democracy. As an active Living Theory researcher, I make a living-commitment to a global methodological and knowledge egalitarianism and personal and collective growth and transformation, identified by Whitehead (2008) as 'the flourishing of humanity'. I am, as a way of being, 'Living Research', in my way of viewing and interpreting the world I interact with, adding to my Living-archive and thus my living-theory methodology. Living Theory research builds a community of knowledge creation and sharing by crossing all borders and recognizing each contribution to the educational knowledge base.

Marie -

My current way forward to contribute to a flourishing of humanity globally is by learning how to cooperate with people in other communities and cultures who share my desire to realize humanitarian values in practice through extending the global influence of Living Theory as a social movement. Those with whom I am learning to cooperate include Living Theory doctoral and postdoctoral researchers working in diverse fields and countries. By working with the Editorial Board and Development Team of the Educational Journal of Living Theories I hope to contribute to the development of a platform for making freely accessible public accounts of professional educational-practitioners, which meet high academic and scholarly standards, and contribute to improving educational practice, opportunities and provision globally.

In our work we have been developing possibilities, which connect Living Theory, Self-Study researchers and communities. For instance, we encourage teachers to create and share their 'living-poster': an attractive A4 poster including text and images which provides brief details of the Self-Study context, interests, values that motivate them and that give their life and work meaning and purpose. It includes research passions, details of any publications, the url to their website (if they have one), contact details and the url to a three-minute YouTube video of them introducing themselves and their work. If you would share your living-poster this would enable us to extend the influences of Living Theory research as a social movement by bringing your self-studies into different professional community spaces and to contribute to global connections. An example can be seen by visiting living posters (2017) on Whitehead's website (1996-2018). Another way is to make contributions to EJOLTs and other journals in order to build the capacity of researchers to use multimedia to express their energy-flowing values and create the critical mass of teacher-researchers that Snow (2001) called for at the 2001 AERA.

In our concluding thoughts, we share how Living Theory and other forms of Self-Study can inform and improve practice and next steps.

## **Closing Thoughts and Next Steps for Teachers**

Our main concern has been to provide the evidence that demonstrates how Living Theory/Self Study can help to improve your teaching and educational influences in your students' learning. Improving the educational experiences of students, while enhancing professionalism, includes a Self-Study researcher gathering data and analyzing the data in terms of the values that constitute an improvement in educational influence in students' learning. It also includes submitting an explanation of these educational influences to a validation group of peers who will help to strengthen the comprehensibility, evidence, sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings and authenticity of the explanation. Self-Study researchers can learn much from the opportunities and challenges, including understanding how to differentiate between education and educational research and the role of academic literature in Self-Study theorizing and research.

We have stressed the importance of establishing and sustaining networks of practitioner-researchers committed to contributing to the flourishing of humanity. It is essential for professional growth and our ability to live authentic and productive lives to work within a community of people who share similar values. We are encouraging you to make

connections with people who are passionate about learning, improving practice and generating educational knowledge. We believe that you will feel energized, especially during challenging and difficult times, by belonging to professional communities of Self-Study educators, like BARN. In acknowledging the important contribution that financial support and educational leadership can make in enabling you to research your own educational practices as continual professional development, we are encouraging you to seek out such financial support and leadership.

It is important to influence the nature of educational leadership. Sympathetic and committed supervisors and leaders of the research groups are most helpful in this process of generating living-educational-theories and gaining academic accreditation. In order to legitimize and respect the embodied knowledge of practitioners an influential leader, who has political understanding, who has access to resources and who has created his/her own living-theory, is most helpful. In addition to political knowledge, that person needs a full understanding of how systems work and can assist in moving Living Theory and other forms of Self-Study research forward. Influential leaders do effect change in power and knowledge-structures: they can do this by sharing their values and research, by modelling and sharing their vulnerability (DeLong, 2013, p. 26), by recognizing and supporting practitioners that share their values and by dedicating themselves to researching their practice.

Self-Study researchers need to develop an awareness of the issues of power and knowledge that affects students' learning and their own. These issues also influence Living Theory and its emergence as a **social movement** (Whitehead, 2016). Wherever we are able, we try to influence others to ask co-workers and students to self-evaluate and to ask for evaluations of their practice from their peers and students. Where shared power exists, there is no hierarchy, only **democracy** and shared learning. Self-Study researchers can learn so much from students because we can work and research cooperatively with them to help them to improve their practice and to generate their own living-theories. We need more teachers who ask students, 'Help me to teach you better'. It is in the students' stories of transcendence that we find the passion to continue to encourage and support teachers to share their embodied knowledge and create their own living-theories.

Suggested next steps for teachers are closely connected with **community-based research** as Self-Study researchers participate in contributing to a global social movement of Living Theory researchers. While Self-Study researchers continue to act and research locally in seeking to improve practice and generate and share educational knowledge, they need to contribute to a global social movement of Self-Study researchers who are generating and sharing their living-educational-theories. This research will involve the submission of proposals to educational conferences and journals that publish Self-Study research.

For the sake of our planet and humanity, we need more individuals who are self-assessing, who conduct Self-Study, S-STEP, and Living Theory research. We hope that strong teachers and leaders can transcend the pressures of a constant barrage of dictums from the powers in the school systems, departments of education and universities telling them how to teach and how to lead and that they will stay true to their values as explanatory standards of judgment. By continuing to strengthen our local professional communities of Self-Study researchers and making global connections through S-STEP and other conferences (DeLong 2018) it may be that we can stand together against **epistemicide** and draw strength to continue to improve students' learning and to challenge and confront wrong thinking.

We are hoping that you will contribute with us in sustaining a critical and creative engagement within a living-culture-of-inquiry that is focused on personal/professional improvement to contribute to a **global social movement** that is focused on the **flourishing of humanity**.

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