

# How Do I Influence The Generation Of Living Educational Theories For Personal And Social Accountability in Improving Practice?

Using A Living Theory Methodology In Improving Educational Practice

Jack Whitehead, Department of Education, University of Bath, Bath, UK.

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## ABSTRACT

The context of this self-study is my working life in Education between 1967-2008. Most of that life, between 1973-2008 has been lived in the Department of Education of the University of Bath where I am seeking to contribute to the Mission of the University in developing a distinct academic approach to the education of professional practitioners. The approach outlined below is focused on the generation of a living theory methodology in exploring the question, 'How Do I Influence The Generation Of Living Educational Theories For Personal And Social Accountability in Improving Practice?' It also includes a new epistemology for educational knowledge from creating living educational theories in enquiries of the kind, How do I improve what I am doing? The living theory research methodology used to address this question emerged during the course of my 40 year enquiry. It draws on multi-media explanations of educational influences in learning to communicate the meanings of the expression of embodied values and life-affirming energy in educational relationships. The chapter emphasizes the importance of the uniqueness of each individual's living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) and their methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2000) in asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

### **A) The context for the study**

The context for the study is relationally dynamic. What I mean by this is that it has been influenced by changes in the relationships between the economics, politics, ecology and sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts that have affected my work and the evolutionary transformations in my thinking as a school teacher between 1967-1973 and later in the University of Bath in the UK as a Lecturer in Education between 1973-2008 (Whitehead, 2008). Here is the story of the evolution of a living theory methodology. Each individual can create their own living theory which explains their educational influence. I am offering a living theory methodology that you might find useful in creating your own.

The beginnings of this major transformation of context occurred in 1971 in terms of my vocation in education. Between 1967, when I began teaching, and 1971, I felt my vocation in terms of enabling my pupils to develop their scientific understandings. My sense of professionalism was focused on my teaching. This began to change with my academic studies of educational theory between 1968-72 for my Academic Diploma in the Philosophy and Psychology of Education and for the Masters Degree in the psychology of education at the Institute of Education of the University of London.

In my special study on my initial teacher education programme, on 'A Way To

Professionalism In Education?' I had written about the importance of a professional knowledge-base for education. In my later studies of educational theory between 1968-72 I began to see that the dominant view of educational theory, known as the disciplines approach because it was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education, was mistaken. The mistake was in thinking that disciplines of education could explain educational influences in learning. The error wasn't grounded in mistakes in the disciplines of education. The mistake was in the disciplines approach to educational theory. It was in thinking that the disciplines of education, individually or in any combination, could explain an individual's educational influence. My recognition of this mistake in 1972 re-focused my vocation towards the creation and academic legitimation of valid forms of educational theory that could explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work. My move to the University of Bath in 1973 was motivated by this desire to contribute to the creation and legitimation of educational theory.

The explicit acknowledgement of the mistake was stated clearly in 1983 by Paul Hirst, one of the original proponents of the disciplines approach, when he said that much understanding of educational theory will be developed:

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

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

The scholarly context of the study, in 2008, continues to focus on the creation and legitimation of valid forms of educational theory that can explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work. This contemporary focus on the significance of epistemological transformations in what counts as educational knowledge can be seen in a recent contribution to *Research Intelligence* – a publication of the British Educational Research Association.

*In this brief paper, I want to note the changes that have occurred in how research is carried out, funded, presented and assessed in the time I have been a practitioner-researcher, and the attempts that I have observed to include more diverse perspectives and presentation styles in research. I want to suggest that these changes are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. (Ferguson, 2008, p.24)*

In acknowledging the influence of the economic context on the study I have held a tenured contract at the University with secure employment from 1973 to the end of the contract in 2009. I do not want to underestimate the importance of this economic

security in my capacity to keep open a creative space at the University of Bath to develop my research programme. Neither do I want to ignore the influence of individuals and institutional power relations of the political context that required some *'persistence in the face of pressure that could have discouraged and therefore constrained a less determined individual'*. These are the words used in a report to the University Senate in 1991 from a Working Party established to enquire into a Matter of Academic Freedom, related to my research (Whitehead, 1993). While the words are not my own, they resonate with my experience of working in the University and I believe them to be true. I shall return to this point in section d) when I look at the theoretical perspectives that have influenced my analysis of data.

The sociohistorical and sociocultural contexts of my workplace are western and mainly white. These are changing with multi-cultural and postcolonial influences beginning to question the power relations that sustain unjust privileges and the dominant logic and languages that sustain what counts as knowledge in the Western Academies. I have found the work of Edward Said (1993) most helpful in the evolution of my thinking to include these sociocultural understandings of the power relations that sustain colonial privilege. I have found the work of Eden Charles (2007) on Ubuntu, guiltless recognition and societal reidentification most helpful in understanding how to engage in transformatory educational practices. These practices move beyond the power relations that reproduce social formations and into transformational practices that are living the values of inclusionality. I am also grateful to Yaakub Murray (2008) who first introduced me to the idea of Ubuntu.

In my early work between 1967–73 I used a positivist and propositional view of knowledge from the influence of my first degree in physical science. During the middle period between 1977– 1999 I extended my epistemological understandings to include dialectics and since 2003 I have been exploring the implications of an epistemology of inclusionality which has much in common with African, Eastern and other indigenous ways of knowing (Ferguson 2008). This is not to imply a rejection of all my insights from propositional and dialectical theories. I continue to value insights from these theories as I deepen and extend my understandings of living educational theories and a living theory methodology with the evolution of the implications of asking, researching and answering 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

## **B) The research question(s) that emerged from the context**

The practical question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' emerged before my awareness of its significance as a research question. I asked the question in my first day as a science teacher in Langdon Park School, a London Comprehensive School in 1967. I felt a passion to help my students to improve their scientific understandings. In my first lessons I could see that my pupils were not comprehending much of what I was saying and doing. However, I did not feel my concern to be grounded in a 'deficit' model of myself. I felt a confidence that while what was going on was not as good as it could be, I would be able to contribute to improvements. My imagination worked to offer possibilities about improving what I was doing. I chose a possibility to act on, acted and evaluated the effectiveness of what I was doing in terms of my communications with my pupils. I know that the idea that individuals experience problems can be seen as working with a 'deficit' model. I think I would feel this myself if other people talked about me as having problems! Yet I have no problem in

acknowledging for myself that there always seems to be something to improve in my practice and in the way the world is organised. I think that this awareness of the importance of improving practices is grounded in a passion to see values of freedom, justice, compassion, respect for persons, love and democracy lived as fully as possible. I find much to celebrate in looking back and appreciating what has been accomplished while recognizing that there is still much to do.

I became aware of the significance of the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' as a research question in 1976 as I worked on a local curriculum development project with six teachers in different schools to improve learning for 11-14 year olds in mixed ability science groups. The 'how' in the question was a research question in the sense that it was a 'methods' question, 'How do I do it?' I produced an initial report on the project to explain our learning in terms of the most advanced theories of the day in relation to changes in teaching and learning style, and curriculum innovation and educational evaluation. It was accepted as a 'good' report by academic colleagues and rejected by the teachers I was working with. Their main reason for rejecting it was that 'we can't see ourselves in it'. Following the rejection I reconstructed the report from the original data I had collected with the teachers. I did this with the help of one of the teachers, Paul Hunt. The teachers accepted this second report as a valid account.

I could see that the second report had the action reflection form of expressing concerns when values were not being lived as fully as they could be, imagining ways forward, acting on a chosen way forward, evaluating the influence of the actions in terms of values and understandings, and modifying the concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluations. In the initial report I had used models from the most advanced theories of the day to explain what we were doing. In the reconstructed report I used the values and responses of the participants, including the pupils, to explain what we were doing as well as insights from the theories of the day.

As my research programme continued, my question, 'How do I improve my practice', began to focus on the methodological and epistemological issues of generating valid explanations of educational influences in learning. In 1985 I published my first explanation on how to generate the explanations I call 'living educational theories':

*"My purpose is to draw your attention to the development of a living form of educational theory. The theory is grounded in the lives of professional educators and their pupils and has the power to integrate within itself the traditional disciplines of education. Educational theory occupies an ambiguous position in the profession of education. Its importance is due to the fact that a profession supports its skills and techniques with a body of systematically produced theory. On the other hand, teachers tend to decry educational theory because of its lack of relationship to their practical skills and techniques.*

*My purpose in writing this chapter is to outline how I think a professionally credible educational theory could be generated and tested from a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in educational contexts in order to improve the rationality and justice of:*

*(a) their own educational practices,*

(b) their understanding of these practices,  
(c) the situations in which the practices are carried out.  
'It is most empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively, though it is often undertaken by individuals sometimes in co-operation with "outsiders" ' (Kemmis and Carr, 1983).

*I am assuming that a teacher action-researcher, who is interested in contributing to knowledge of the process of improving education within schools, will be faced by an academic community which will examine the legitimacy of the claim to knowledge. I am also assuming that a teacher-researcher is concerned to establish a direct relationship between the claim to know what he or she is doing and the pupils' educational development.*

*The educational analysis which follows is focused upon the nature of the validity of an individual action-researcher's claim to know his or her own educational development. The analysis outlines a form of educational theory which can be generated from professional practice and which can integrate the different contributions of the disciplines of education. Let me say at the beginning how I see the relationship between my own research and teacher action-research. In my work in a University I am paid to make scholarly and acknowledged contributions to knowledge of my subject, education. I characterize my attempts to make this contribution a form of academic action-research. In my investigation of my own claims to know my own educational development I have explored the nature of a form of educational theory which is directly related to educational practice. My particular concerns have focused upon the academic legitimacy of an individual's claim to know his or her own educational development. I think that my findings will be of use to those teacher-researchers who wish to justify their own claims to knowledge to the academic community."*

The research question(s) that emerged from the context of analyzing an individual's claim to know their educational development were: How can an individual's claim to know their educational development be strengthened in terms of its personal and social validity? What are the standards of judgment and the units of appraisal that can be used in evaluating the validity of such claims to educational knowledge? I outline the methodological implications of answering such questions in the next section and distinguish methodology from method.

The most influential paper I have written on living theory was published in 1989 on *Creating Living Educational Theories From Questions Of The Kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'* (Whitehead, 1989a) This coincided with the publication of my 1988 Presidential Address to the British Educational Research Association on Research Based Professionalism (Whitehead, 1989b). The significance of the Appendix to this address is that it shows my research supervisions in terms of masters degrees. The first living theory doctorates were those of Mary Gurney (1988) and Jean McNiff (1989).

Gurney, M. (1988) *An Action Enquiry Into Ways Of Developing And Improving Personal And Social Education*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath.

McNiff, J. (1989) *An Explanation For An Individual's Educational Development Through The Dialectic Of Action Research*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath.

These were followed by research degrees where the majority of the titles include 'I' or 'me':

Eames, K. (1995) *How do I, as a teacher and educational action-researcher, describe and explain the nature of my professional knowledge?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/kevin.shtml>

Evans, M. (1995) *An action research enquiry into reflection in action as part of my role as a deputy headteacher*. Ph.D. Thesis, Kingston University. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/moyra.shtml>, Jointly supervised with Pamela Lomax.

Laidlaw, M. (1996) *How can I create my own living educational theory as I offer you an account of my educational development?* Ph.D. thesis, University of Bath. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/moira2.shtml>

Holley, E. (1997) *How do I as a teacher-researcher contribute to the development of a living educational theory through an exploration of my values in my professional practice?* M.Phil., University of Bath. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/erica.shtml>

D'Arcy, P. (1998) *The Whole Story.....* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/pat.shtml>

Loftus, J. (1999) *An action enquiry into the marketing of an established first school in its transition to full primary status*. Ph.D. thesis, Kingston University. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/loftus.shtml> Jointly supervised with Pamela Lomax.

Whitehead, J. (1999) *How do I improve my practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry*. Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/jack.shtml>

Cunningham, B. (1999) *How do I come to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Retrieved 19 February 2004 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/ben.shtml>

By 1999 my question, 'How do I improve my practice?' was focusing on the use of narrative forms of representation and beginning to integrate visual data from video-clips of practice into explanations of educational influence. My questions about explanations of educational influence were also beginning to focus on bringing evidence of my educational influence from the accounts of my students of their learning in our educational relationships. This is perhaps best seen in the publications:

Whitehead, J. (1999) *Educative Relations in a New Era. Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, Vol. 7, No.1, pp. 73-90, 1999.

and in my doctorate:

Whitehead, J. (1999) *How do I improve my practice? Creating a New Discipline of Educational Enquiry*. PhD Thesis, University of Bath

The evolution of the meaning of my question, 'How do I improve my practice?' between 2000-2008 can be understood through sixteen of my successfully completed supervisions in which I worked to enable doctoral researchers to create and legitimate their living educational theories. The supervisions between 2000 and 2004 stressed the importance of including evidence to justify claims to know the influence of one's own practice in one's own learning and in the learning of others.

I think the educational influence of ideas from my research programme and my supervision can be seen in the inclusion of 'I' or 'my' in the titles. In answering my question, *How do I influence the generation of living educational theories for personal and social accountability in improving practice?*, I would say that my stress on the inclusion of 'I' or 'my' in the title of doctoral theses has served to highlight the uniqueness of each individual's living theory and their use and development of a living theory methodology. Each individual has researched their own processes and contexts for improving practice and evolved their stories with forms of personal and social accountability. They have also offered their stories freely, as gifts to others through their flow through web-space: Finnegan (2000), Austin (2001), Mead (2001), Boshier (2001), Delong (2002), Scholes-Rhodes (2002), Roberts (2003), Punia (2004).

In 2004 the University of Bath changed its regulations to permit the submission of e-media and my students were amongst the first to submit under this new regulation. From 2004 most of these included visual narratives with video-data of their practice.

In addition to the inclusion of visual narratives to communicate the meanings and influences of the expression of embodied values in explanations of educational influence, another evolution in the meaning of my question occurred as I understood Alan Rayner's (2004, 2005) idea of inclusionality. I am thinking here of inclusionality as a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as connective, reflective and co-creative. I brought this understanding of inclusionality explicitly into my question, 'How do I improve my practice?' and into the supervisions below while retaining an emphasis on the importance of including 'I' and/or 'my' as necessary to the research:

Hartog, M. (2004) *A Self Study Of A Higher Education Tutor: How Can I Improve My Practice?* Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/hartog.shtml>

Church, M. (2004) *Creating an uncompromised place to belong: Why do I find myself in networks?* Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/church.shtml>

Naidoo, M. (2005) *I am Because We Are. (My never-ending story) The emergence of a living theory of inclusional and responsive practice*. Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/naidoo.shtml>

Farren, M. (2005) *How can I create a pedagogy of the unique through a web of betweenness?* Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren.shtml>



Lohr, E. (2006) *Love at Work: What is my lived experience of love and how might I become an instrument of love's purpose?* Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/living.shtml>

Charles, E. (2007) *How Can I bring Ubuntu As A Living Standard Of Judgment Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition.* Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/edenphd.shtml>

Adler-Collins, J. (2007) *Developing an inclusional pedagogy of the unique: How do I clarify, live and explain my educational influences in my learning as I pedagogise my healing nurse curriculum in a Japanese University?* Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/jekan.shtml>

Spiro, J. (2008) *How I have arrived at a notion of knowledge transformation, through understanding the story of myself as creative writer, creative educator, creative manager, and educational researcher?* Ph.D. University of Bath. Retrieved 3 May 2008 from <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/janespirophd.shtml>

The researchers I work with in supervision have all acknowledged my influence over the course of a minimum of five years of sustained enquiry to their successful completion of their doctorates. One of the most delightful acknowledgements is at the end of Jane Spiro's thesis with a story about 'The Thought Doctor and The Fellow Traveller' (Spiro, 2008). I hope that you will read this as it reflects back to me the important principle in my methodology of recognizing the creativity and uniqueness of the other.

I too have acknowledged the educational influences of the students whose research programmes I have had the privilege and pleasure of supervising. For the award of a doctorate there must be evidence, recognized by the examiners, of originality. This can be expressed as originality of mind or an original contribution to knowledge. I have learnt something highly significant for the growth of my own educational knowledge from each doctoral researcher. For example, Moira Laidlaw (1996) pointed out the living nature of the value-laden standards of judgment I was clarifying through action reflection cycles. Up to this point I thought that I was clarifying the standards in the course of their emergence in practice and that the standards were then stable and fixed. I had not appreciated the significance of seeing them as living standards of judgment. Eleanor Lohr (2006) with her focus on 'Love at Work' moved my insights to highlight love as a living standard of judgment. In emphasizing the importance of 'loving what I am doing' in explaining my educational influences I have been helped by Cho's (2005) insights on the importance of expressing love in educational relationships for knowledge-creation. One of the greatest difficulties I encounter in my supervision is in bringing the recognition of others of their talents into their explanations of their educational influence. In my experience many individuals experience difficulty in publicly acknowledging their own talents. Yet, without such recognition it is difficult to produce a valid explanation of one's influence. Others can help in developing this public recognition. Moira Laidlaw has been most helpful in providing an understanding of the talents I express in my educational relationships in a narrative of celebration of my 40 years in education (Laidlaw 2008). Moira distinguishes my listening: enthusiasm; understanding of the student's insights and pushing them further; expression of responsibility as a form of



empowerment; timing; values and connectivity. I identify with the narrative form of Moira's account and recognize that I need to bring the talents she recognizes, as being expressed by me, into my own explanations of my influence.

The educational influences from my research supervisions is too long to acknowledge in detail here. Other publications acknowledge this influence (Whitehead 2005). I would however like to highlight some of the most recent influences. Eden Charles (2007) has helped to develop my understanding of Ubuntu as a living and relationally dynamic standard of judgment. Je Kan Adler-Collins (2008) has focused my attention on the creation of a safe learning space and Jane Spiro (2008) has helped to develop a focus on knowledge-transformation with an emphasis on creativity.

Working with the doctoral researchers at the end of their doctoral writings I take great care in making sure that the Abstracts of the theses really do say what the researcher feels is their original contribution to knowledge. We focus on the title to make sure that it reflects their primary concerns. I do hope that you will take some time to access these original contributions to knowledge and to appreciate the value of the analyses in explaining their influences. I also hope that you find the analyses of value in evolving your own.

Researching the implications of asking and answering the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' has involved the evolution of the following living theory methodology.

### **C. The evolution of the methodology over the course of the research**

A distinction can be made between the uniqueness of each individual's living theory and a living theory methodology that can be used to distinguish a theory as a living theory. It is sometimes useful for researchers to be able to identify paradigmatic ideas that can be used to identify the research as belonging to a particular community of enquiry. In using the idea of a living theory methodology I want to stress that this includes the unique contribution of an individual's methodological inventiveness in the creation of a living theory, rather than referring to some overarching set of principles to which each individual's methodology has to conform, in an impositional sense of the word. There are however distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology that include 'I' as a living contradiction, the use of action reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence.

Living theory methodology has evolved from my initial focus on an appropriate method for researching the implications of asking the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' The distinction I make between method and methodology is that I refer to a method as a single procedure used in the research such as an interview, or a questionnaire, the use of an action reflection cycle and the use of a validation group to strengthen the validity of an account. What I mean by a methodology refers to the theoretical analysis of the methods appropriate to my enquiry, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

Over the course of my working life in education I have evolved three different sets of principles for my theoretical analysis of the methods I use. These principles are grounded in the three different epistemologies below, propositional, dialectical and

inclusional and each carries their own ontological implications.

### **i) Using a propositional perspective in a living theory methodology**

From a propositional perspective, a living theory methodology can be understood as involving methodological inventiveness, action reflection cycles, narrative enquiry and personal and social validation:

#### **a) methodological inventiveness**

A living theory methodology is as unique as an individual's living theory. It emerges in the course of an enquiry of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' There is no predetermined way of answering this question, and the form that the enquiry takes is influenced by the individual's methodological inventiveness as Dadds and Hart have understood:

*" The importance of methodological inventiveness*

*Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. We had understood for many years that substantive choice was fundamental to the motivation and effectiveness of practitioner research (Dadds 1995); that what practitioners chose to research was important to their sense of engagement and purpose. But we had understood far less well that how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes." (Dadds & Hart, p. 166, 2001)*

*"If our aim is to create conditions that facilitate methodological inventiveness, we need to ensure as far as possible that our pedagogical approaches match the message that we seek to communicate. More important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage of practitioners – and those who support them – to create enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care. Practitioner research methodologies are with us to serve professional practices. So what genuinely matters are the purposes of practice which the research seeks to serve, and the integrity with which the practitioner researcher makes methodological choices about ways of achieving those purposes. No methodology is, or should be, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques..." (Dadds & Hart, p. 169, 2001)*

One of the methods often used in the development of a living theory methodology is that of action reflection cycles.

#### **b) action reflection cycles**

In my experience everyone who is exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering their question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' recognises that they engage in the following process with their own living 'I'.

I recognise that I am working to improve what I am doing because of the values I use to give meaning and purpose to my life. I think we may be similar in that when we believe that our values are not being lived as fully as they could be, we feel concerned and our imaginations begin to offer possibilities for improving practice. When the conditions permit, I chose one possibility to act on. I act and evaluate the effectiveness of my actions and understandings in relation to the values I use to judge improvements in my practice. If I am still not living my values as fully as I believe to be possible I modify my concerns, actions and evaluations. This systematic process has been recognised by all those I have worked with as something that they too have engaged with implicitly in the process of working to improve what they are doing (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005).

In my own research and my research supervision I stress the importance of producing validated explanations of educational influences in learning. The production of such explanations as contributions to knowledge seems to me to be a characteristic of research. I associate research with knowledge-creation. Methods of validation are important in research so that a publicly validated knowledge-base can be established. For me this involves both personal and social validation as two of the distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology.

### **c) personal validation**

I work with Michael Polanyi's (1958) decision that distinguishes personal knowledge. This is a decision to understand the world from my own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgment responsibly with universal intent. I know that the local identity of my 'I' is influenced by the non-local flows of space and energy through the cosmos. Yet I do work with a sense of responsibility for the educational influences I have in my own learning. I do recognise myself as a unique human being with this responsibility and I do exercise a sense of personal responsibility in validating for myself my claims for what I believe to be true. In doing this I take account of responses from a process of social validation.

### **d) social validation**

Since 1976 I have used a process of democratic evaluation, described by Macdonald (1976), together with the four criteria of social validity proposed by Habermas (1976a), to strengthen the personal and social validity of living theories. By this I mean that I submit my explanations of educational influence to a validation group of peers with a request that they help me to strengthen the comprehensibility, truthfulness, rightness and authenticity of the explanation. Within comprehensibility I include the logic of the explanation as a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational (Marcuse, 1964, p. 105). Within truthfulness I include the evidence for justifying the assertions I make in my claims to knowledge. Within rightness I include an awareness of the normative assumptions I am making in the values that inform my claims to knowledge. Within authenticity I include the evidence of interaction over time that I am truly committed to living the values I explicitly espouse.

A living theory methodology from a propositional perspective does not seem to be capable of clarifying the meanings of the embodied values that form the explanatory principles in my accounts from the grounds of my experience as existing as a living contradiction. For this I need a dialectical perspective.

## **ii) Using a dialectical perspective in a living theory methodology.**

A dialectical perspective holds contradiction to be the nucleus of dialectics. This resonates with the 'I' in my question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' as 'I' exist as a living contradiction in the question. By this I mean that I hold together values and their denial together in my practice. It is this experience of myself as a living contradiction that seems to spark my imagination into generating possibilities for improving practice and leads into the development of action reflection cycles. What these cycles enable me, and others to do, is to clarify the meanings of our embodied values as these emerge in practice. Following Feyerabend (1975) in his work 'Against Method' I agree that understanding freedom involves experiencing the meaning of freedom in the course of its emergence in practice. Hence my emphasis on understanding the meanings of values from their embodied expression in practice. For the sake of clarity I want to make a distinction between two different meanings of practice. From a cultural-historical perspective a practice can be seen as arising in response to general demands of societal need. A practice can be conceptualised as a historically developed and conditioned tradition of action for addressing societally-formed needs (Chaiklin, 2007). This is not how I am using the word 'practice'. I am using 'practice' to mean 'what I or others are doing' in asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

I think this distinction is important for researchers who want to avoid a gap between theorising about their practice and their conscious lived experience. Researchers who encounter the use of 'practice' from a sociocultural and activity theory perspective or a cultural-historical perspective might be wise to ask if there is a gap between this abstract conceptualisation of 'practice' and the conscious lived experience of the individuals who are theorising their own practice. I am thinking here of researchers who are concerned to research improvements in practice through exploring the implications of their practical question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

While a living theory methodology from a dialectical perspective can embrace contradictions and use action reflection cycles to clarify the meanings of values in the course of their emergence in practice, the nucleus of contradictions does not permit the expression of the life-affirming energy and values of inclusionality. These are not grounded in contradiction but experienced in affirmation. These affirmations of energy with values in a living theory methodology need an inclusional perspective to include them in explanations of educational influence.

## **iii) Using an inclusional perspective in a living theory methodology**

You can see me living this methodology from an inclusional perspective with life-affirming energy and values in the streaming video from the keynote presentation to the 2008 International Conference on Teacher Research at:



[mms://wms.bath.ac.uk/live/education/JackWhitehead\\_030408/jackkeynoteictr2803081arge.wmv](mms://wms.bath.ac.uk/live/education/JackWhitehead_030408/jackkeynoteictr2803081arge.wmv)

You can also access the notes I produced for the presentation at <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/aerict08/jwict08key.htm> and appreciate, through the video, the qualities of affirmation and inclusion I communicate in my presentation which are different to those in the multi-media notes I posted before the presentation. I am explaining how to combine voices in living educational theories that are freely given in teacher research. The point about a living theory methodology from an inclusional perspective is that it includes a relationally dynamic and receptive responsive to the flows of energy and values in the living space. I think that one of my original contributions to educational knowledge is my use of multi-media narratives to communicate the explanatory power of flows of life-affirming energy in explanations of educational influence. We cannot do anything without energy, yet representations of the energy are not emphasised in explanations of educational influences in learning. The video to my keynote shows me expressing the life-affirming energy that distinguishes my love for what I am doing in education. There are other values such as freedom, justice and compassion that flow with this energy and form explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence.

As I communicate with the audience I distinguish my way of being as a form of systemic presencing as I am seeking to be receptively responsive to those I am with. Being receptively responsive implies some form of improvisation in making a creative response to the perceived needs of the other. Keith Kinsella, a colleague from Exeter University introduced me to the idea of systemic presence and I use this in the idea of systemic presencing to describe a capability for expressing a relationally dynamic awareness of the interconnecting and branching networks of relationship in an educational space.

The flow of energy with values that I believe that I am expressing and communicating in this keynote can be distinguished by a loving flow of energy in that I am loving what I am doing.

Having distinguished the contributions that propositional, dialectical and inclusional perspectives can make to a living theory methodology, I do not want to lose sight of the importance of including analyses from a range of theoretical perspectives within the methodology.

#### **D) The analyses used to glean information from the research data**

The increasing desire of individuals to research their own practice in order to understand their influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of their organisation had led to increasing requests for help about appropriate methods and methodologies for exploring the implications of seriously asking, researching and answering question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' In addition to the interest in methods and methodology, individuals have expressed interest in the theoretical perspectives that can be used in the creation and evaluation of their living educational theories. As each individual's explanation of their educational influences in learning is unique this has implications for the analyses of the research data.

This need for a unique explanation of our educational influences means that traditional theories cannot by their nature produce valid explanations for this influence. In a traditional theory an explanation is produced as a set of propositional relationships. These relationships are abstract and general. One of the characteristics of a traditional theory is that it is a general theory from which an explanation can be derived that applies to a particular case. Living theories are different. They are the explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in learning. They are grounded in the relational dynamics of everyday life and explain the receptively responsive educational influences of individuals in their own lives. They are unique.

One of the reasons I became committed to supporting the development of living educational theories is that they offer individuals the opportunity to produce accounts of our influences in a way that focuses attention on the worthwhileness of our lives in terms of the values and understandings we use to give meaning to our existence. You will see that I focus attention on the idea of influence rather than causation. This is because of my fascination with our lives of intention. I see living educational theories being grounded in the conscious lived experience of individuals who are intentional and imaginative with creative capabilities. Because of these qualities I cannot say that I have educated anyone other than myself. This is fundamental to the analysis of research data. I can say that I have influenced the education of others. I do hope that this distinction is clear. Whatever I do in my educational relationships, including this writing, is mediated through a creative response of the other in making sense of what I do, in terms of their own learning. For me to understand my educational influence in the learning of the other I must see that what I have done has been mediated in the other's learning with values to which I subscribe. I cannot distinguish something as educational without approving it. For me education is a value-laden practical activity and I rule out some learning as non-educational. There is much learning of this non-



educational kind in the world today as individuals learn how to do harm to each other and not to work cooperatively in each other's interests. Hence my stress on educational influences in learning.

### i) **Influence**

My focus on influence has been strengthened with Said's point about the value of focusing on influence in the work of Valéry:

“As a poet indebted to and friendly with Mallarmé, Valéry was compelled to assess originality and derivation in a way that said something about a relationship between two poets that could not be reduced to a simple formula. As the actual circumstances were rich, so too had to be the attitude. Here is an example from the *Letter About Mallarmé*.

*No word comes easier or oftener to the critic's pen than the word influence, and no vaguer notion can be found among all the vague notions that compose the phantom armory of aesthetics. Yet there is nothing in the critical field that should be of greater philosophical interest or prove more rewarding to analysis than the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another.”* (Said, 1997, p.15)

In analysing data in terms of influence I do not go as far as the word-scepticism of Valéry (Hamberger, 1972). However I shall be suggesting that adequate representations of our expressions of our embodied values that give meaning and purpose to our lives must go beyond our use of propositional language, beyond a grounding in the living contradictions of dialectics and into an inclusional flow of life-affirming energy with values that includes Valéry's insight about the significance of influence:

“Outside his poetry Valéry, like Hofmannsthal, was a ‘word-sceptic’; and the ‘word-scepticism’ arose from the same awareness of the uniqueness of that which art seeks to express, and the inescapable commonness of words. ‘If words could express it,’ ‘Le Salitaire’ says about his own icy habitat,

*It wouldn't be much. Everything that can be said is nothing. You know what humans do with what can be expressed. All too well. They turn it into base currency, an instrument of imprecision, a lure, a trap for mastery and exploitation. Reality is absolutely incommunicable. It resembles nothing, signifies nothing; nothing can represent or explain it; it has neither duration nor place in any conceivable order or universe.....* (5)

Like Hofmannsthal and other post-Symbolists, Valéry turned to mixed media – the fusion of words with music, décor, gesture and dance in *Amphion* and *Semiramis*, of words with music only in the *Narcissus Cantata* – out of an aversion to the ‘base currency’ of words. These media did not describe or relate; they enacted: and Valéry's aversion expanded to the epic and descriptive modes: ‘What can be recounted cannot count for much!’ (6)” (Hamberger, 1972, p.69)

The second point about the analyses of data is that the analysis is offered within a form of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007). McNiff (2007) has shown how to do such an analysis in her writings on ‘My Story Is My Living Educational Theory’.

## ii) Narrative

The increasing use of narrative in educational research has enabled distinctions to be drawn that I find most helpful in the analysis of my research data. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) have offered the following distinction between analyses that privilege macrosocial conditions of life and those that privilege individual lived experience:

*“Although it may seem extremely abstract, understanding the ontological as opposed to epistemological starting point of Marxist-influenced social theory is necessary for understanding the style and content of this scholarship as well as its relationship with narrative inquiry. A mode of inquiry founded in epistemological commitments – such as positivism – takes accurate description of the world as its primary objective. Epistemic principles, in this case, determine the way the accuracy of research conclusions will be assessed. A mode of inquiry founded in ontological commitments – such as Marxism or critical theory – takes transformation of those ontological conditions as its primary objective. For the Marxist influenced scholar, research and analysis is an intervention that seeks to change the material conditions that underlie oppressive social conditions.*

*As remarked on earlier, narrative inquiry shares with Marxism an explicit grounding in ontological commitments as well as the goal of generating scholarship that transforms the ontological conditions of living. The difference between the two traditions of inquiry are located in the specifics of those commitments and their conceptions of intervention. Scholarship grounded in Marxism privileges the macrosocial material conditions of life as the primary influence on human life and thinking. The relational texture of everyday life, including the personal, religious, historical and cultural narratives that provide meaning to that life, are treated as derivative of the macrosocial conditions of life. Furthermore, these narratives are frequently considered obstacles to be overcome on the way to a more realistic understanding of the causes of human experience.*

*The narrative inquirer, by way of contrast, privileges individual lived experience as a source of insights useful not only to the person himself or herself but also to the wider field of social science scholarship generally. As described in the comparison to post-positivism, this approach to analyzing human experience is grounded in a pragmatic relational ontology. It takes the immediacy of lived experiences, specially its narrative qualities, as a fundamental reality to be examined and acted on. According to this view, all representations of experience – including representations of the macrosocial influences on that experience – ultimately arise from first-person lived experience and need to find their warrant in their influence on that experience.” (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, pp. 49-50)*

In my own analyses of research data (Whitehead, 2005) I have used a narrative form that integrates insights from the sociocultural and sociohistorical theories of the day. I see both as necessary to explaining my educational influences in learning and in the generation of living educational theories.

## iii) Other Theoretical Perspectives

Because of limitations of space I cannot present here the details of the wide range of analyses I use with my research data. I have done this elsewhere (Whitehead, 2004, 2005; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Each individual’s constellation of theoretical

perspectives that they draw on in generating their living educational theories, is unique. Mine includes insights from the life's work of Erich Fromm . I continue to value his insights into the differences between the marketing and productive personalities (1947), the fear of freedom (1942), the importance of the art of loving (1957), the revolution of hope (1956) and to have and to be (1976). From Foucault (1980) I learnt to see the intimate relationships between power and knowledge and to see the importance of the power relations and procedures for determining what counts as knowledge in a particular context. This resonated with Habermas' (1976b) understandings in *Legitimation Crisis* and continues to focus my practice on transforming the standards of judgment used in the Academy to legitimate what counts as educational knowledge. In looking at video data of educational relationships my analyses and recognition of flows of life-affirming energy with the value of the being of the other continue to be influenced by the ideas of Paul Tillich and Martin Buber. I am thinking particularly of Tillich's (1962, p. 168) idea of the state of being affirmed by the power of being itself and of Buber's poetic expression of the I-You relation in education in the special humility of the educator (Buber, 1947, p. 122).

As I analyse research data in terms of educational influences in learning I draw insights from Edward Said's (1993) work on culture and imperialism. I look for the evidence that shows an awareness of the dangers of imposing one's views on another. I look for the exercise of creativity that mediates between what the educator does and what the learner learns. From Bernstein's analyses I continue to draw on his insight into the dangers of creating a mythological discourse:

*"I would like to propose that the trick whereby the school disconnects the hierarchy of success internal to the school from social class hierarchies external to the school is by creating a mythological discourse and that this mythological discourse incorporates some of the political ideology and arrangement of the society.*

*First of all, it is clear that conflict, or potential conflict, between social groups may be reduced or contained by creating a discourse which emphasises what all groups share, their communality, their apparent interdependence.*

*By creating a fundamental identity, a discourse is created which generates what I shall call horizontal solidarities among their staff and students, irrespective of the political ideology and social arrangement of the society. The discourse which produces horizontal solidarities or attempts to produce such solidarities from this point of view I call a mythological discourse. This mythological discourse consists of two pairs of elements which, although having different functions, combine to reinforce each other. One pair celebrates and attempts to produce a united, integrated, apparently common national consciousness; the other pair work together to disconnect hierarchies within the school from a causal relation with social hierarchies outside the school." (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxiii)*

### **Concluding insights**

In answering the question, how do I influence the generation of living educational theories for personal and social accountability in improving practice, I have focused on explicating the living theory methodology that has emerged in my educational practices.

I am hopeful that you will find useful the ideas and representations of flows of life-affirming energy with values for your explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence. I am thinking here of explanations in which you account to yourself and others for the worthwhileness of the life you are living.

I am also hopeful that you will feel the importance and urgency of sharing your living educational theories with others so that we may be offered an opportunity to learn from the gift of your own living theory. In my experience, individuals like to understand the 'how' as well as the 'why' questions. Hence my emphasis on sharing each others' living theories so that we may learn useful insights from each other. I am thinking of insights on how we can research and answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in contributing to making the world a better place, to be. I am hoping that the exercise of my imagination in creating a living theory methodology is resonating with your own.

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