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The Catalytic Validity of the Living Educational Theories of Self-Study Researchers in Improving Practice and in Creating a New Epistemology of Educational Knowledge

Context of the Study

The intellectual context involves an inclusional response to the need for a new epistemology (Schon, 1995) for educational knowledge, with clearly communicable logics, units of appraisal and standards of judgment. This context includes the tension between propositional theorists who are dominant in the West, dialectical theorists who are dominant in Russia and inclusional theorists who are dominant in the East. The social context is the continuously transforming political, economic and cultural influences of globalization.

The self-study workplace contexts of the researchers include the generation of living educational theories. This includes an analysis of the catalytic validity of Whitehead's own living educational theory in his educational influences in the supervision of masters and doctoral educational research programmes and the emergence and legitimation of the living educational theories of others in the Academy, including the University of Bath. The context includes a self-study of Huxtable's living educational theory as she supports the generation of the living educational theories of both pupils and teachers, in relation to their creation of gifts and development of talents in schools in an English Local Authority embracing Hymer's (2007) notion of gift creation.

The policy context includes the UK government's policies on enhancing the educational experiences of pupils through responding to and developing their gifts and talents inclusively and inclusionally. It also includes the government's policies on standards for teacher education.

The technological context includes the use of multi-media digital technologies and the world wide web in enhancing the catalytic validity of living educational theories.

Aim

The main aim of the presentation is to evidence the claim that the catalytic validity of the living educational theories of self-study researchers is influencing improving practice and creating a new epistemology of educational knowledge.

The new epistemology will be distinguished in terms of its living logics and standards of judgement. The issue of validity will be focused on:

- i. Relationally dynamic and receptively responsive living logics and standards of judgment.
- ii. The claim that multi-media representations of educational relationships and explanations of educational influences in learning can communicate, better than text alone, the meanings of relationally dynamic and receptively responsive educational relationships in teacher education.
- iii. The catalytic validity of the ideas in the living theories of others in a range of professional and international contexts.

Methods and Methodology

The methods include self-study action research in generating living educational theories from enquiries of the kind, How do I improve what I am doing? They include narrative enquiry and validation groups to enhance both the rigour and validity of the living theories. The overarching methodology will be that of a Living Theory Methodology and we are placing this account within a context of Living Theory Methodology as educational, inclusional, self-study research.

We are making a distinction between *inclusive*, by which we mean to include all, and *inclusional*, following Rayner (2004), to describe a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as connective, reflective and co-creative. Inclusional theory and practice is inclusive but not all theories that underpin inclusive practice are inclusional. Alder-Collins (2007) describes an inclusional pedagogy as creating a space for informed listening, which acknowledges the differences of the other as a celebration of diversity and of the boundaries that are permeable and dynamic.

My space, as a space, needs to be both bounded and open, bounded in the sense that it can take on the charge/energy/association of being associated with study as opposed to being unbounded as in social activities, and open in the sense that students can develop a feeling of ownership and of belonging in the space. (Adler-Collins, 2007, p. 293)

Living Theory Methodology steps aside from the constraints of the social sciences, and the places between, which might be described as *interdisciplinary* as summarised by Sumner (2003) to provide a response to Medawar (1969).

The purpose of scientific enquiry is not to compile an inventory of factual information, nor to build up a totalitarian world picture of natural Laws in which every event that is not compulsory is forbidden. We should think of it rather as a logically articulated structure of justifiable beliefs about nature. It begins as a story about a Possible World – a story which we invent and criticise and modify

as we go along, so that it ends by being, as nearly as we can make it, a story about real life. (p. 59)

Mooney's (1957) reflections on the need for a methodology appropriate for educational research are still unanswered by what have become dominant forms of action research and self-study. "We want a way of holding assumptions about research which makes it possible to integrate the pursuit of science and research with the acceptance and fruitful development of one's self" (p. 166).

Whilst our living educational theories have benefited from the inclusion of insights from the most advanced social theories of the day, we believe that a living theory approach to educational enquiry includes an exploration of the influences of a life-affirming energy with values that are beyond conceptions of the *social*. Multimedia accounts of explanations of educational influence have already been published (Whitehead, 2007, 2008) to show the capacity of visual narratives to communicate the meanings of this energy in educational relationships.

By making public the embodied knowledge and theorised practice of educators, their living educational theory, Living Theory research programmes are contributing to the knowledge base of educational research (Ferguson, 2008). These living theories reflect education as a value-laden activity and refer to values as those qualities, which give meaning and purpose to our personal and professional lives. They demonstrate that in asking questions of the kind, How do I improve what I am doing? practitioners can create their own theory by embodying their educational values in their practice and by giving a valid explanation to account for their improving practice. Whitehead (1989, 1999) distinguishes between education research, which is constituted by disciplines such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education, and educational research which is informed by, and draws on, the disciplines but is constituted by education as a distinct discipline demanding its own forms of enquiry, epistemology and theories which arise from values which carry hope for the future of humanity.

Educational research requires a form of logic that can enable us to theorise our practice that is rational, communicable, relationally dynamic, and valid which provides a catalyst for change as Huxtable and Whitehead (2007) claim:

Our intention is to develop living approaches to evaluating our educational influences in learning which are dynamically interrelated with the standards by which we make those judgements and have the possibility of contributing to our educational endeavours. To do this we need to develop new forms of logics, research methodologies and evidence which keep connection with the values we are seeking to live.

For example, the majority of theory in the Western Academy uses a propositional logic with a 2,500 history going back to Aristotle, with the law of contradiction stating that two mutually exclusive opposite statements cannot be true simultaneously. Dialecticians however, hold that human beings hold living

contradictions together in their practice. For example, in questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' individuals can experience themselves as a living contradiction in recognising that they hold together certain values with their negation at the same time. Dialecticians and formal logicians tend to deny the rationality of the other's position. We believe a third logic, a living logic of inclusionality, can include insights from both propositional and dialectical theories without denying the rationality of either logic. We accept Marcuse's (1964, p. 105) idea of logic as a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational. (p. 10)

A living logic, while new to the Western Academy, is familiar to those coming from many Eastern traditions (Punia, 2004).

In creating a living theory account we are not just writing a history of what we have done; the phase in the research of creating a narrative which communicates is part of the research process,

...as we conduct our research and generate our own living educational theories. These theories are living in the sense that they are our theories of practice, generated from within our living practices, our present best thinking that incorporates yesterday into today, and which holds tomorrow already within itself. (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p.3)

In creating the accounts of our living theory we intend to have an educational influence in our own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. To do so we need to tell a good story well and communicate powerfully. A narrative told with an authentic voice speaks to self, a good story told well communicates with an educational intent to others, a good story told powerfully talks to power with the intent of influencing policy.

We recognise that our commitment to research how we are living our values as fully as we can through our practice includes the desire to produce something of value to others. To evidence the claim that the above ideas have contributed to improvements in practice and generated a new epistemology for educational knowledge, we will now focus on the catalytic validity of our accounts.

Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process re-orientes, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it, a process Freire terms conscientization. ...The argument for catalytic validity lies not only within recognition of the reality-altering impact of the research process, but also in the desire to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination through research participation. (Lather, 1991, p. 68)

The Catalytic Validity of the Research Programme: How Do I Improve What I Am Doing?

In the course of his 35 years, through his educational research programme into the nature of educational theory Whitehead has put forward the following original ideas.

- 1) Living educational theories are being constituted by the explanations given by individuals for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations.
- 2) Living educational theories are being constituted by individuals explaining their educational influences in enquiries of the kind, How do I improve what I am doing? in which *I* exists as a living contradiction in the sense of holding together a commitment to live certain values, together with the experience of their denial in practice.
- 3) In action reflection cycles, individuals express their concerns, imagine ways forward, act and gather data, evaluate actions and understandings and modify concerns, ideas and actions in the light of evaluations. In this process the values that the individuals use to give meaning and purpose to their lives (their ontological values) can be clarified and developed in the course of their emergence in practice and formed into living (epistemological) standards of judgement.
- 4) Multi-media narratives can assist in the communication of living theories from the perspective of inclusionality (Rayner, 2005), which includes a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as connective, reflective and co-creative.

The evidence of catalytic validity (on <http://www.actionresearch.net>) includes analyses of the living logics, units of appraisal and living standards of judgment that have legitimated a new epistemology for educational knowledge in the Academy. Whitehead's university has a mission to have a distinct academic approach to the education of professional practitioners. He argues that a living educational theory approach to professional practice and educational knowledge contributes to a distinct academic approach. The outcomes include doctorates with culturally diverse contexts, such as the work of Naidoo (2005) examining living theory of inclusional and responsive practice (found at <http://www.actionresearch.net/naidoo.shtml>), the work of Charles (2007) examining how Ubuntu can become part of the living standards in the Academy (found at <http://www.actionresearch.net/edenphd.shtml>), and the work of Adler-Collins (2007) examining inclusional pedagogy within a healing nurse curriculum in the context of a Japanese university (found at <http://www.actionresearch.net/jekan.shtml>).

While this text based copy of the Conference Proceedings cannot by its nature present the meanings in a visual narrative that includes video-data, there may come a time when the proceedings are web-based and contain the live URLs included above which can connect you directly to these doctoral research programmes.

The Catalytic Validity of the Research Programme: How Do I Enhance My Educational Leadership in Developing Gifted and Talented Educational Practice?

Huxtable leads in the development of a local authority's responses to the national gifted and talented education strategy. She holds to the belief that every one has talents they can develop and gifts they can create, value and offer and, as Shekerjian (1991) says, "Everyone has an aptitude for something. The trick is to recognise it, to honour it, to work with it." (p. 1)

For an aptitude to be of value time, effort and commitment are needed. In America, as in the UK, there is a notion of people who can be categorised as gifted and talented. In responding to English government policy on gifted and talented education, we share Hymer's (2007) view that at best gifts and talents describe what one can do, not what one is. White (2006) asserts intelligence, which is the foundation of the notion of gifted and talented children, has no rational base. The notion has its roots with Galton in 1865, as an expression of his values and beliefs coming from a puritan background and brought up in a world of empire, class, and acceptance of predetermined destiny. Freeman (2002) points out that the notion of gifted and talented is not a universal truth. "The major cultural dichotomy affecting educational provision for the gifted and talented is between the largely Eastern perception – 'all children have gifted potential' - and the largely Western one – 'only some children have gifted potential'" (p. 9).

While we do not believe it is possible to predict what contributions a person will make to the world, we do believe that they can be influenced for better or worse. In supporting teachers to develop inclusive and inclusional educational language, theory and practice through creating their own living theory accounts, we are seeking to improve the quality of the educational experience of children and young people. Teachers have worked with us through a master's programme, and some of their accredited accounts can be found at <http://www.actionresearch.net>.

Evidence for the catalytic validity of our ideas can be seen in the newly accredited MA Unit *Gifts and Talents in Education* at a UK University. We suggested to the Director of Studies for the Advanced Courses Programmes that an MA Unit, *Gifts, Talents and Education*, should be included in the curriculum of the Department of Education. He agreed, and we contributed to the content of the successful proposal with the emphasis on inclusional in the following content: *The value judgments implicit in different perspectives on the education of gifted and talented children particularly in relation to inclusional approaches to education.*

Prior to this addition to the MA curriculum and before registering for a research degree, Huxtable produced an educational enquiry, *How Can I Improve My Practice Through "Walking the Talk" and "Dealing with Doorsteps"?* in which she explains her understanding of the action research method of Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) developed by Wallace and Adams (1993) and relates this to her understandings of Living Theory. Ros Hurford, a local teacher in Bath, was also in the group and they

have continued to share ideas. Hurford acknowledges the influence of Huxtable's ideas in her educational enquiry, *How Does the Writing of a New Gifted and Talented Policy Enable Me to Reflect Upon and Evaluate My Personal Values about Gifts and Talents? In What Ways Am I Living My Values in This Area?* (Hurford, 2007)

To assist in enhancing the catalytic validity of ideas from her research programme Huxtable places the ideas on her website at <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/> The website includes analyses of the catalytic validity of her responses to UK government policy on gifted and talented education, as evidenced in the living theories of teacher-researchers who are working and researching with her to help their pupils express and develop their own gifts and talents in their living theories. It includes analyses of the catalytic validity of her responses to the approach to learning known as Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) (Wallace, Maker, Cave & Chandler, 2004), as evidenced in the living theories of the teacher-researchers she is supporting in local schools.

Concluding Comment

In concluding this presentation on our enquiry into the catalytic validity of the living educational theories of self-study researchers in improving practice and in creating a new epistemology of educational knowledge, we are more than curious about the influence of the ideas, or lack of influence, in your research programme. From experience we know that ideas can take some time to captivate the imagination of individuals and influence cultures of enquiry. If you feel that our ideas are mistaken or too limited it would be good to hear from you so that we could benefit from your insights and demonstrate the catalytic validity of your ideas. If you use our ideas in any way it would be good to share your writings as an affirmation of the value of our own.

Space does not permit the presentation of the further evidence of the catalytic validity of these ideas in international contexts. This can be accessed elsewhere on <http://www.actionresearch.net>.

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