Researching To Overcome Poverty With Action Research And Living Educational Theories

Jack Whitehead, University of Cumbria

A paper presented in the Symposium on Creating Educational Theories Which Engage With Issues of Poverty at the British Educational Research Association Conference, 3-5th September 2013 at the University of Sussex.

Abstract

A symposium at AERA 2012 on 'Action Research as the Core Of Educational Research' included the argument that the propositional and dialectical forms of educational knowledge generated by **education** researchers are not sufficient to serve the public benefit and hence overcome poverty, because these forms of knowing do not necessarily include the lived responsibility of the researcher to engage with improving practice (Whitehead, 2012). Hence the need to focus on the generation of living-educational-theories by **educational** researchers who necessarily engage with improving practice in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in contexts of poverty of academic publications.

The call for papers for AERA 2013 focused on the Theme, 'Education and Poverty: Theory, Research, Policy and Praxis.' (AERA 2012) The organisers explained that they conceived of poverty broadly in seeing that poverty exists not only through the lack of material goods but that an intellectual poverty can also pervade educational organizations and society. I agree that poverty interacts with education through local, national and international systems of financial markets and the global knowledge economy and are mindful of the need to make and research values-based responses to the de-moralisation and de-valuation (McTaggart, 1992) that often accompanies the sustained imposition of economic rationalist policies. I also agree that other poverties are at work in and around education. There are moral poverties and environments of artistic impoverishment that offer limited opportunities to develop creative talent and aesthetic appreciation. In this presentation I shall focus particularly on the potential of digitally-mediated communications to overcome a poverty in academic publications that omit visual representations of flows of life-affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of humanity.

Introduction

In researching to overcome poverty with action research and living educational theories I am focusing on a poverty in print-based academic texts in the omission of visual data that can communicate meanings of energy-flowing values that carry hope for the future of humanity. The omission is serious because of the significance of flows of energy in explanations of anything that we do. The omission of adequate representations of energy-flowing values in explanations of educational influence is serious because as a values-laden practical activity, education necessarily influences the expression of values.

I am making the assumption that one of the main purposes of educational researchers is to produce valid explanations for 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. I work with a distinction between education researchers and educational researchers. I see education researchers as making contributions to knowledge within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of forms and fields of education, such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, politics, theology, administration, leadership and management **of education**. I see educational researchers as making contributions to educational knowledge in valid explanations of educational influences in learning. In focusing on the importance of including energy-

flowing values in explanations of educational influence I am agreeing with Vasilyuk (1991) about the problematic nature and lack of clarity about links between energy and value:

> Conceptions involving energy are very current in psychology, but they have been very poorly worked out from the methodological standpoint. It is not clear to what extent these conceptions are merely models of our understanding and to what extent they can be given ontological status. Equally problematic are the conceptual links between energy and motivation, energy and meaning, energy and value, although it is obvious that in fact there are certain links: we know how 'energetically' a person can act when positively motivated, we know that the meaningfulness of a project lends additional strength to the people engaged in it, but we have very little idea of how to link up into one whole the physiological theory of activation, the psychology of motivation, and the ideas of energy which have been elaborated mainly in the field of physics. (pp. 63-64)

To show how the poverty in print-based academic texts can be overcome through digital, multi-media narratives that can explain educational influences in learning, I shall first focus on the communication of meanings of energy-flowing values with visual data, using processes of ostensive expressions of meaning, lexical definitions and empathetic resonance. I shall then draw your attention to academic texts that have been legitimated as doctoral theses and masters dissertation where such energy-flowing values have been legitimated as explanatory principles and living standards of judgment. I shall then engage with ideas from East Asian and other Epistemologies to explore their implications for overcoming the poverty in the print-based texts that are grounded in a Western Epistemology (see Whitehead, 2013 for a living logic for educational research).

The communication of meanings of energy-flowing values

There is a difference between clarifying and communicating lexical definitions of meaning and clarifying and communicating ostensive expressions of meaning using visual data. In lexical definitions words are defined in terms of others words. The concept of punishment for example can be defined lexically as the intentional infliction of pain by someone in authority on someone who has broken a rule. Ostensive expressions of meanings of energy-flowing values require a process of empathetic empathy with what is being express through the visual data. Here are three examples to demonstrate such ostensive expressions of meaning.

The first is from the ending of a class in China with Moira Laidlaw as some 80 students flow past her. As I move the cursor along the 1:03 minute clip I pause at a moment of resonance where I experience Moira expressing her life-affirming energy with a love for what she is doing in her relationships with her students. I have checked this expression of meaning with Moira and she too sees herself expressing this life-affirming energy with love.

1:03 minutes http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno

The second is from the International Conference of Teacher Research (ICTR) in Montreal in 1999, where Jacqueline Delong is expressing her life-affirming energy in the living boundaries of a culture of inquiry to support teacher-research. Jacqueline explains her educational influence in the learning of others through the energy-flowing value of a culture of inquiry (Delong, 2002).

3:11 minutes - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsECy86hzxA

Towards the end of this video-clip as Delong is describing the 'S.W.A.T.' team response to a request by a teacher for help in developing her action research, Delong expresses her life-affirming energy and the pleasure in loving what she does in education. It is such expressions of energy and value that characterize the explanatory principles in a living-theory approach to enhancing professionalism in education. (Delong & Whitehead, 2007, p. 1)

The third is from a keynote I gave to the International Conference of Teacher Research (ICTR) in New York in 2008 on *Combining Voices In Living-educational-theories That Are Freely Given In Teacher Research* (Whitehead, 2008). I am expressing a rechanneling of my energy-flowing values with anger to love. I shall pause the video of the keynote at the point of empathetic resonance where I am expressing this rechanneling from anger to love.

You can access the presentation at:

http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwictr08.pdf

together with the 1:01:15 hour video of the presentation in which I explicitly draw attention to the rechanneling of the anger into the love for what I am doing. The video can be accessed from:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4kL1Ek6dJk

The significance of such expressions of meaning of energy-flowing values is that they can be used as both explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence in learning and as living standards of judgment in evaluating the validity and legitimacy of contributions to educational knowledge. In gaining academic credibility for energy-flowing, living standards of judgment in the Academy, living-theory researchers are going beyond criticizing limitations in traditional, print-based texts, in the creation of a new epistemology.

Adler-Collins (2007) and Huxtable (2012) are two researchers whose doctorates have been legitimated as making original contributions to knowledge and whose theses are publicly available on the internet. Their titles include the questions they have answered and I have embolded the points where they focus on energy-flowing values and living standards of judgment. Adler-Collins brings an energy-flowing, living standard of inclusionality into the Academy as an original contribution to educational knowledge:

> **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?**

> **Abstract**

> The social context of this thesis is embedded in the processes and reflections experienced during the development, implementation and evaluation of a healing nurse curriculum, using action research enquiry on my teaching practice, in a Japanese rural university in the years 2003-2007. These processes include the evolution of my ontology and the creation of an inclusional pedagogy of the unique with transitional certainty as a living epistemological standard of judgment. **An energy-flowing, living standard of inclusionality** as a space creator for engaged listening and informed learning is offered as an original contribution to knowledge.

> Two major strands of enquiry are interwoven and inseparable in this thesis. The first is my life-long self study of my own learning and the values and practices that embrace all the different facets of my life,

including being a nurse, educator, and Buddhist priest. The second extends the first, putting them firmly in the context of a specific time frame, weaving a textual narrative that passes between the different aspects of my multiple selves, building a picture for my readers that is grounded in my actual praxis.

This narrative gives insights to the growth of my educational knowledge as I research the unique position I hold of being the only white, male nurse, foreign educator in a culture that is so completely different from that of my birth and early education. Finally, I use the analysis of the voices of my students' experience of my teaching and curriculum to mirror back to me my own values as they were seen through the eyes of others in their emergence in praxis. Such usage brought about fundamental ontological changes in me and my practices as a teacher.

Huxtable brings the meanings of her energy-flowing values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, and her social values of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society as explanatory principles and living standards of judgment into the Academic in her original contribution to educational knowledge:

How do I Evolve Living-Educational-Theory Praxis in Living-boundaries?

Abstract

My educational practice is concerned with enhancing children and young persons' abilities to learn to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life, for themselves and others. This thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge as a multimedia narrative. It communicates my ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, and social values of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society. I clarify meanings of my values, as they emerge within living-boundaries through the evolution of my living-theory praxis, to form explanatory principles and **living standards of judgment** in my claim to know my practice.

Working as a senior educational psychologist responsible for implementing policy on high ability learning, I experienced the following concerns: Practice, theory and research often appeared to lose connection with the purpose of education; Theory and practice appeared to be developed independently, and without explanation or evaluation related to values of education; Those involved with education appeared to be in discrete worlds, each vying to exert their hegemony over the totalising development of educational theory, practice and provision. Emerging from my research I offer four original ideas:

1) Living-Educational-Theory praxis, highlighting the fundamental importance of educators creating 'values-based explanation of their educational influences in learning' (Whitehead, 1989a), as they research to develop praxis within living-boundaries.
2) Living-boundaries as co-creative space within which **energy-flowing values** can be clarified and communicated.
3) Inclusive gifted and talented education developed from an educational perspective, which enables each learner to develop and offer talents, expertise and knowledge as life-affirming and life-enhancing gifts. The knowledge is that created of the world, of self, and self in and of the world.
4) Living-Theory TASC, a relationally-dynamic and multidimensional approach to research and developing praxis, which integrates Living-Theory (Whitehead, 1989a) with Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) (Wallace and Adams, 1993).

Huxtable, (2009) provides an illustration of how digital, visual data can used to communicate ostensive expressions of embodied meanings of values such as 'respectful connectedness' and 'loving recognition' in ways

5

that add meaning to those that can be communicated through lexical definitions alone:

> The video, for which ethical permissions were sought and given is on
> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ck_ECxcaEc
>
> I have watched this 6-minute video many times and each time there is something special about it, particularly in the relationship between Louise (teacher) and Louis (pupil in the foreground). If, using Jack Whitehead's technique (Whitehead, 2008b), you run the cursor back and forward you may share with me a sense of the flow of a respectful connectedness between them. Each is respectful of the emotional, physical and personal boundaries of each other and the other two children. There is sensitivity between adult and children not to impose but to offer and invite. The space between them changes in a flowing 'dance' as they move – *back* to invite, *in* to engage. Louise's loving recognition of Louis, appreciating and valuing his intense desire to share, to inform, to engage the group and particularly Louise, in creating an understanding. I see her loving recognition of Louis as she enables him to express his educational responsibility towards her in his desire to bring her to a point of understanding that satisfies her. In that, Louise is expressing her educational responsibility towards Louis.

Huxtable, (2013a) has also explored the implications of asking, researching and answering her question, 'How do I improve what I am doing with a living theory praxis in engaging with issues of poverty?', and the development of inclusive educational theory practice and provision from an educational perspective (Huxtable, 2013b)

Overcoming the poverty of Western Epistemologies with their print-based communications with ideas from East Asian Epistemologies.

Inoue (2012) has argued persuasively that East Asian Epistemologies have much to offer Western approaches to knowledge creation and validation. He introduces readers to *Ba, Kizuki, Omoi, Takumi, Kizunu* and *Chi*. With the increasing availability of digitalized visual data we can see ourselves in our practices with a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries. Data expressed in words alone, without the visual, finds it difficult if not impossible to represent flows of life-affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of humanity. The following contributions described by Inoue from East Asian Epistemologies could help to include space, energy and relational ways of being into our explanations of educational influence.

> *Ba* is a Japanese term often used in everyday communication referring to the communicate space for co-developing a new understanding. *Ba* is co-constructed by the participants in the communicate space with an understanding that it is for engaging in organic dialogues and co-constructing a new understanding (or kizuki) of the targeted issue with others. In Japanese contexts, practice improvement and collaborations are often done by assuming such opportunities as *ba* (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). (p. 92)
>
> *Kizuki* is a path to embrace mindfulness in our lives. In every moment of your life, you can find ample opportunities for developing new *kizuki*. This happens whether or not you belong to Japanese culture. If it happens, you come to see the world with a new perspective from your experiences and your personal theories are newly developed and improved. *Kizuki* brings a death to the old worldview, and generates a new perspective in your mind.
>
> The direct translation of *omoi* is thinking, but thinking itself does not capture the depth of this concept. *Omoi* is an integrate form of feeling, thinking, and passion developed by going through challenges and collective experiences that create jikkan or a gut feeling. *Omoi* defines who you are and what you are up to, and being in touch with your *omoi* helps you to be true to yourself. (20)

The direct translation of *takumi* is skill, but just like many Japanese terms that I introduce, the direct translation does not capture the depth of what this term implies for us.

We could say that educational practices require not only explicit technical skills to teach but also wisdom and insight on the students' development, on social dynamics and on capturing the right moments. These are not necessarily clearly describable in teachers' manuals or standards but are often shared by experienced educators in informal dialogues or in actual school situations. And one thing that is unique about educational practices is that this also applied to students' learning. As an educator your role involves not only developing your own *takumi* as an educator but also helping students develop academic knowledge and skills in the ways that lead them toward acquisitions of *takumi* in the subject area you are teaching. (57)

Kizuna means an enduring bond between people. *Kizuna* is created among people when they share the same experiences in the long run and go through important challenges in life together. It is more than just a friendship or an alliance between people. It is a stronger bond that often lasts one's lifetime and cannot be easily wiped away from one's memory. When *kizuna* is built with others, you open up yourself beyond a socially acceptable persona and expose your weakness, drawbacks, problems and dilemmas. Once *kizuna* is created, you have a strong sense that you really know the person and become firmly connected with that person (Nakayama, 1993).

Chi (or *qi*), is a word that refers to the energy that sustains your life or the life force that motivates you to act in the world. This concept is shared in many Asian cultures and has slightly different names such as *ki* (Japanese), *gi* (Korean) and *khi* (Vietnamese). *Chi* is believed (p. 135) to have originated in the nature world, and any living being contains some *chi* as it takes in foods, water, and air that exists in nature. *Chi* flows within our bodies and throughout the universe. We can stay physically and mentally healthy when our body has a good flow of chi connected to the world. Consequently, *chi* plays a central concept in the practices of Chinese medicine, acupuncture, martial arts, Feung Sui, and other traditional practices in East Asian cultures. In fact, the Japanese word for motivation is *yaru ki* for which the literal translation is *chi* for action (i.e., yaru means to act, and ki means *chi*). The assumed role of *chi* in motivation is built into the cultural epistemology in terms of its use in everyday communication.

The idea of Chi in particular as an energy that sustains life and motivates individuals to act in the world in consistent with the ostensive expressions of meaning of a life-affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of humanity. The ideas from the East Asian Epistemology outlined by Inoue stress the importance of the relational dynamics within which individuals live, work and research. I am suggesting, with evidence from the living theory doctorates available from http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml , that the use of multi-media narratives that include such video-clips as the three above, for communicating meanings of energy-flowing values, do much to overcome the present poverty in academic texts of educational research that are restricted to print-based communications.

References

AERA (2012) The Theme for AERA 2013. Retrieved 5 August 2013 from
http://www.aera.net/Portals/38/docs/Annual_Meeting/2013%20Annual%20Meeting/Conference%20Theme%20
2013.pdf

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. Thesis, University of Bath. Retrieved 5 August 2013 from
http://www.actionresearch.net/living/jekan.shtml

Adler-Collins, J. (2013) Engaging with emotional poverty across cultural boundaries and differences? Paper presented in the Symposium on Creating Educational Theories Which Engage With Issues of Poverty at the British Educational Research Association Conference, 3-5th September 2013 at the University of Sussex.

Huxtable, M. (2012) How do I Evolve Living-Educational-Theory Praxis in Living-boundaries? PhD Thesis University of Bath. Retrieved 5 August 2013 from http://www.actionresearch.net/living/mariehuxtable.shtml

Huxtable, M. (2009) How do we contribute to an educational knowledge base? A response to Whitehead and a challenge to BERJ. *Research Intelligence*, 107, 25-26. Retrieved 11 January 2008 from http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/huxtable/mh2009beraRI107.pdf

Huxtable, M. (2013a) How do I improve what I am doing with a living theory praxis in engaging with issues of poverty? Paper presented in the Symposium on Creating Educational Theories Which Engage With Issues of Poverty at the British Educational Research Association Conference, 3-5th September 2013 at the University of Sussex.

Huxtable, M. (2013b) Developing inclusive educational theory practice and provision from an educational perspective. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference, 3-5th September 2013 at the University of Sussex.

Inoue, N. (2012) Mirrors of the Mind: Introduction to Mindful Ways of Thinking Education. New York; Peter Lang.

Vasilyuk, F. (1991) The Psychology of Experiencing: the Resolution of Life's Critical Situations. Hemel Hempstead; Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Whitehead, J. (2012) To Know Is Not Enough. Or Is It? Paper presented on the 14th April at the 2012 AERA Conference in Vancouver in the Symposium, To Know Is Not Enough: Action Research As The Core of Educational Research.

Whitehead, J. (2013) A living logic for educational research. A paper presented to the 2013 Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, University of Sussex, 3-5 September.