

Improving Schools With Action and Living Theory Research

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The powerpoint slides for the keynote can be accessed at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwcyprus250415.pptx>

The 40 minute video of the keynote can be accessed at:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib2_tT_IRtY

Here is the paper prepared to support the powerpoint slides and the video of the presentation:

Abstract

This presentation focuses on Action and Living Theory Research approaches in improving schools. In a Living Theory approach each educator, whether teacher, head teacher, or administrator asks, researches and answers their question, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional context?' A Living Theory approach to enhancing professionalism involves the production and sharing of validated explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others (pupils and/or colleagues) and in the learning of social formations. These validated explanations are what I call living-educational-theories and they connect directly with enquiries into improving pupils' learning.

Many people find that they start with going through action-reflection cycles as Action Researchers and move to Living Theory research to answer the important questions that emerge for them as educators such as 'How can I explain my educational influences?' Action research involves the use of an action-reflection planner in which each individual shares their concerns and what they want to improve, with their colleagues. They share the values that are motivating them in what they are doing. They imagine possible improvements in what they are doing, choose one to act on and act on it. As they are acting they gather data to make a judgment on the effectiveness of their actions.

This presentation also includes access to the evidence and values-based explanations of educational influence from other educators around the world who are using this approach. These explanations include the creation of networks of support within and between schools and outside agencies that affect education.

The importance of digital communications and multi-media narratives in these networks will also be demonstrated with evidence from <http://www.actionresearch.net> and <http://ejolts.net>. The case will be made that educators in Cyprus, because of sociohistorical and sociocultural influences, are well placed to take a leadership position in creating a profession of Master Educators of Cyprus that involves sharing their explanations of educational influence as they enhance the flow of values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

Introduction

My thanks to the organisers of the conference for the opportunity to share ideas, here in the Republic of Cyprus on Improving Schools With Action and Living Theory Research. It is a pleasure to be here and to share ideas on the following issues:

- i) Your present context of continuing professional development.
- ii) Creating Master Educators of Cyprus using:
 - a) Action Research.
 - b) Living Theory research and living-theories.
- iii) Spreading the influence of Living Theory research with digital communications and multi-media narratives and evidence from <http://www.actionresearch.net> and <http://ejolts.net>.
- iv) Supporting the Creation of Master Educators of Cyprus with Living Theory Research and Action Research.

i) Your present context of continuing professional development

In all my keynotes in different countries I try to familiarize myself with research and policy related to teacher professional development. So, I studied Yiasemina Karagiorgi's and Loizos Symeou's research on *Teacher Professional Development in Focus: Reorganizing the Existing In-Service Training Scheme in Cyprus*. This research was carried out whilst they worked at the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute and the Cyprus College respectively, with data gathered in 2005.

Their study is an excellent piece of social science research, using a survey-orientated approach, with questionnaires distributed to a random stratified sample of pre-primary, primary, secondary and vocational schools. The questionnaire aimed at diagnosing teachers' in-service training needs in Cyprus

in order to address the potential development of in-service training in the particular educational system within the framework of lifelong professional development, and second to generate questions concerning the basic dimensions of in-service training provision in Cyprus and lay the foundations for in-depth study on the emerging issues (p.1).

Their paper discusses the emerging challenges for professional development in the Cyprus educational system in terms of teachers' needs (p.3) and their concluding remarks include the following focus on needs identification:

...diagnoses of training needs of both the teachers as well as the schools would ensure that professional development responds to teachers' and schools' needs and not to providers' interests. Therefore, needs-identification studies should be conducted on a systematic basis to bring clarity to the decisions about the expectations from particular in-service training initiatives and lead to the design of in-service training activities, adjusted to school and teacher realities. Such studies should probably not only adopt a survey oriented research approach -like this study- but should involve methods to enhance enrichment in terms of data interpretation. (p.17)

Whilst reading the study I was drawn to the statement:

In general, current in-service training provision in Cyprus is mainly informal, individual and voluntary and has not evolved into structured practices. (p.4)

At present I believe that you are in a period of educational reform with developments in teacher training involving a shift to school-based professional development with Head teachers increasingly involved in self-evaluation projects. However, I think that I am right in claiming that I am offering my suggestions, about the improving schools with action and living theory research and the value of living global citizenship, in your social context in which your embodied knowledge as Master and Doctor Educators is not recognized within the accrediting and regulatory bodies of Cyprus.

Whilst this is my first visit to Cyprus I presented ideas on *Action Research in Teacher Training and in the Living Theories of Professional Educator* to a conference organised by the Greek Centre for Educational Research at the University of Patras, on the 17 April 1999 (Whitehead, 1999). You can access this presentation at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwgreek1999.pdf>

In that presentation I explored the use of Action Research in both training and education within the context of the influence of Greek theories of knowledge. In particular I drew attention to the value of the Internet in communicating the value of action research in the creation and testing of the living-theories of professional educators. (p.1) Some 16 years after that presentation I return to

the evidence of the Internet in spreading the influence of the living-theories of Master and Doctor educators.

In this introduction I want to stress a point I made in Patras that emphasizes the importance of networks of support for professional development:

If you wish to work at the development of action research and living theory approaches to teacher education I would hold this point at the focus of what you do. It is vital, in my view, to find the appropriate balance between support for teacher- led initiatives and the development of appropriate system's support from central agencies in relation to improving standards through living educational theories. (p.11)

ii) Creating Master Educators of Cyprus with:

a) Action Research

Universities throughout the world are accrediting Masters and Doctoral Degrees in Education. I have two such degrees. My Masters Degree from the University of London and my Doctoral Degree from the University of Bath. As far as I am aware no University is accrediting the embodied knowledge of a Master or Doctor Educator in a Masters or Doctoral Degree. All that is needed to create a profession of Master and Doctor Educators of Cyprus is for a degree awarding body in Cyprus to recognize your embodied knowledge; the knowledge you express in your practice and that you can make public through your Living Theory research as that of a Master or Doctor Educator. You might begin by gaining accreditation for the degree of Master Educator for a master's curriculum that includes assessment for masters units and a dissertation. You can access freely such writings at

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

for curriculum units on: gifts and talents in education; Active Learning and Knowledge Creating Research; Educational Enquiries; Research Methods in Education; Methods of Educational Enquiry; Understanding Learning and Learners, together with master's dissertation.

For many years I worked with Jean McNiff on publications concerned with Action Research before moving on to focus on Living Theory research. You can access some of our ideas in:

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2011) All You Need to Know About Action Research. 2nd Edition. London; Sage.

Whitehead, J. & McNiff, J. (2006) Action Research Living Theory. London; Sage.

b) Living Theory research and living-theories

I am claiming that your embodied knowledge could, if made public and evolved,

with Living Theory research, create both a profession of Master and Doctor Educators in Cyprus and improve learning with pupils and students. To make your knowledge public, through Living Theory research, I believe that you will need to shift your present understandings of educational theory and add the following perception to your understanding of educational research and educational theory. From my experiences of presentations and conferences around the world I believe that it is likely that what counts as educational knowledge and theory in Cyprus is largely defined by University Academics. Many of these academics will have been schooled in a particular discipline and their reputations will have been built on their academic publications. These publications will be mainly structured through a Greek approach to logic and knowledge that owes much to Aristotle with his Law of Contradiction that does not permit two mutually exclusive statements to be true simultaneously.

I am asking you to reflect on your own daily experiences where I believe you will recognize that you exist as a living contradiction in the sense of holding certain values whilst at the same time negating them in practice. I first saw myself as a living contradiction in 1972 when viewing a videotape of classroom in which I believed that I had established enquiry learning in the sense of my pupils asking their own questions with me making a serious response to their questions. The video showed that I was, however subtly, giving my pupils the questions. This experience of existing as a living contradiction immediately stimulated my imagination to think of ways I could live my value of enquiry learning more fully. I choose one of these ways, acted, gathered data on my actions, evaluated my actions in relation to my values and understandings and modified my concerns, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations. I continue to use such action-reflection cycles in improving my practice.

I make a clear distinction between Living Theory research and a living-educational-theory. Living Theory research is paradigmatic in the sense of recognizing what counts as a living-educational-theory. It is important to understand that this recognition involves the original contribution, made by an individual's living-educational-theory, to educational knowledge. The conceptual frameworks of Living Theory research do not define these original contributions. They enable the recognition that the individual's living-theory is making an original contribution to Living Theory research and educational knowledge.

A living-educational-theory is the unique and original contribution to educational knowledge made by the individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which the practice is located.

Huxtable, (2013) has given a very clear account of this distinction.

You can access two issues of the journal *Gifted Education International* (2013 & 2016), where the above ideas have been developed in more detail with evidence from the writings of Master Educators.

Original papers on which the September 2013 issue of *Gifted Education*

International, dedicated to the memory of Sally Cartwright, is based, can be accessed below:

- i) Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable - Living educational theory research as transformational continuing professional development
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmhGEIarticle141012.pdf>
- ii) Amy Skuse - How have I developed my own personal views of gifts and talents in education and how does this influence what I do in the classroom?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/module/amyskusegandtined010110.pdf>
- iii) Vicky M Tucker - How my involvement with an inclusive, educational, gifted and talented programme has influenced my work with students who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/vickytuckerg&t.pdf>
- iv) Louise Cripps - How can I clarify my responsibility as a head teacher as I provide opportunities to enable all children in the school to create talents?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/crippslgandta0809.pdf>
- v) Sally Cartwright - How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their learning?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/scgandtnov08.pdf>
- vi) Joy Mounter - How can I work within the government's perspective of 'Gifted and Talented' but still remain true to my own living values?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/jmgt2008opt.pdf>
- vii) Ros Hurford - How does using philosophy and creative thinking enable me to recognise and develop inclusive gifts and talents in my pupils?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/roshurfordg&t.pdf>

Original papers on which the January 2016 Living Theory issue of Gifted Education International is based can be accessed below:

- i) Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable - Creating a Profession of Educators with the living-theories of Master and Doctor Educators.
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/JWMH151114.pdf>
- ii) Nina Clayton - How am I using my own understanding and development of gifts and talents to promote the learning of children?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/masters/ninaclaytongandt.pdf>
- iii) Kate Kemp - How have I come to recognise and develop my talents which are my gift to my colleagues and pupils?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/kkgtunit2008.pdf>
- iv) Joy Mounter - How do I recognise the move from the language of learning to the language of educational responsibility?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounteree207.pdf>
- v) Sally Cartwright - How do I research my own practice?
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/module/scrme010110opt.pdf>

Whilst the above contributions to Gifted Education International are focused on making public the embodied knowledge of Master and Doctor Educators in England, there are connections to be made between the Master and Doctor Educators in different countries and the unifying values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. I think that you will find these values in the work of the educator, Sally Cartwright. Sally died in 2013 from a double brain tumor, and the University of Bath recognized Sally's academic work at an award ceremony at the University of Bath on the 14th April 2015. I do hope that you will access Sally's writings and the 8-minute video from the award ceremony at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/sallycartwrightmastereducatorjw140415.pdf>

When I first raise the possibility with educators, that they already have the embodied knowledge of master and doctor educators and that Living Theory Research can help them to make this knowledge public and to deepen and extend it, I have been met with some skepticism, especially as I suggest that they could be accredited for their masters and doctoral degrees by exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering their questions 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I have found it easy to respond to this skepticism by giving access to the resources that show how other educators have received their masters and doctoral degrees from a range of different universities for such enquiries. These resources are at:

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

for the making public of the embodied knowledge of Master Educators and at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>

for the making public of the embodied knowledge of Doctor Educators.

It is difficult but not impossible for an individual, working as an independent and autonomous educator to achieve these outcomes. To be successful we often need spread the influences of Living Theory research and to create and sustain networks of support.

iii) Spreading the influence of Living Theory research with digital communications and multi-media narratives and evidence from

<http://www.actionresearch.net> and <http://ejolts.net> .

As I'm speaking to you today on the 25th April 2015 there is an inaugural meeting taking place of the **Network of Educational Action Researchers Ireland** (NEARI), with contributions from four doctor educators and help from Dr. Pip Bruce Ferguson of Dublin City University:

Mary Roche (2007) [Towards a living theory of caring pedagogy: interrogating my practice to nurture a critical, emancipatory and just](#)

community of enquiry. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Limerick.\n<http://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=46>

Bernie Sullivan (2006) A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realizing the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality (2006) PhD thesis University of Limerick.
<http://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=47>

Caitriona McDonagh (2007) My living theory of learning to teach for social justice: How do I enable primary school children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and myself as their teacher to realize our learning potentials? PhD thesis, University of Limerick.
<http://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=48>

Máirín Glenn (2006) Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice. PhD thesis, University of Limerick. <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=50>

You can access these theses and other dissertations and theses supervised by Prof. Jean McNiff from Jean's website. You can access this from the other websites of interest section of <http://www.actionresearch.net> .

You can also access living-theory doctorates from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> . I was privileged to supervise some 32 of these doctorates between 1996-2012 at the University of Bath, and to be continuing such supervisions at the University of Cumbria. You can also access the master's writings of Master Educators from:

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

Perhaps the most significant forum for spreading the influence of Living Theory research with digital communications and multi-media narratives is the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS), since its first issue in 2008. You can access freely all the back issues and contributions from <http://ejolts.net> .

Branko Bogнар, a founding member of EJOLTS and a leading influence in the use of the digital media for its publication, has recently published, with Pascale Mompoin-Gaillard, a book on *Creating an online community of action researchers* (Bognar & Mompoin-Gaillard, 2015). There is great significance in the publishers - the Council of Europe. Here is evidence of the spreading influence of ideas through online communities. As a member of the European Community it might be possible for educators in Cyprus to connect with the Council of Europe and to create mutually supportive relationships with other European Educators in creating a profession of Master and Doctor Educators in Cyprus.

iv) Supporting the creation of Master Educators of Cyprus with Living Theory Research and Action Research

In advocating a Living Theory research approach to improving schools, through creating a profession of Master Educators of Cyprus, I realize that it will take years of sustained commitment by yourselves and others to embody this approach within your culture. You may be able to shorten the time it can take to do this by learning from others who have made progress in developing this approach through creating and sustaining networks of support in the organisations that affect their educational practices. However, you must also be prepared to seeing initial successes fall back in a particular school, whilst recognizing that the influence of the ideas can be spreading in different schools, regions and countries.

For example, Kevin Eames, whilst Head of English at Wootton Bassett School in England, had a leadership influence in beginning and sustaining for several years a school-based group of teacher-researchers for improving pupils learning. Kevin had the full support of the head-teacher and I was supervising Kevin for his M.Phil. and then his doctoral degree into the professional development of teachers. In his 1995 doctoral thesis, Kevin writes about his action research approach to professional development and educational knowledge.

You can access Kevin's thesis at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/kevin.shtml>

and download his chapter on *Action Research as a Form of Professional Knowledge in a Whole-School Setting*, from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/KEVINPHD/kechap6.pdf>

Because Kevin's influence lessened in the School, with his two-year secondment to the local authority to work on assessment issues, the influence of the action research group in the school began to weaken. But, at the time when it was working well, Linda Grant a Canadian working with the Ontario College of Teachers visiting the school, liked what she saw with the action research approach to professional development and shared the ideas with colleagues in Ontario. Jacqueline Delong, a Superintendent of Schools in the Grand Erie District Board of Ontario, liked the ideas and registered for her doctorate at the University of Bath, with my supervision. Jacqueline completed was awarded her doctorate in 2002 for her living-theory on *How Can I Improve My Practice As A Superintendent Of Schools And Create My Own Living Educational Theory?*

You can access Jacqueline's doctoral thesis at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/delong.shtml>

I also hope that you will access Chapter Three of Jacqueline's thesis because of its focus on *Building A Culture Of Inquiry, Reflection And Scholarship*.

You can access Chapter three at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/jdphd/ch3.doc>

You can also access the evidence of Jacqueline's sustained support for a Living Theory approach to professional development in the December 2013 issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theory (EJOLTS) at:

<http://ejolts.net/node/209>

This issue includes contributions from Cathy Griffin, a primary school teacher and Liz Campbell, a secondary school teacher. The contributions focus on their living-theory master's dissertations, supervised by Jacqueline Delong.

A Living Theory research approach to improving schools, requires the sustained commitment of individual educators to explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' This requirement also needs to be supported by developing and sustaining networks of support outside schools.

Cathy Griffin and Liz Campbell have been successful in proposals for funding to support the Bluewater Action Research Network (BARN) in Ontario, Canada. Details of BARN will be presented at the Action Research Network of the America's conference in Toronto 8-9 May 2015. These proposals serve to emphasise the importance of the creative and commitment of individuals in engaging with funding bodies and with communicating in international forums of educational action researchers. These kinds of funding proposals may be necessary to support the creation and sustaining of local teacher-researcher networks:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/griffin/ospreyprop.doc>

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/griffin/barn1form.xls>

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/griffin/barn2form.xisx>

I hope that I have emphasized sufficiently the importance of a lifetime's commitment to the enhancement of professionalism in education.

During my lifetime's commitment to enhancing professionalism in education, I have benefitted from dramatic inventions in technology, especially the communicative power of the Internet and the use of digital video technology for the creation of multi-media narratives of educational influences in learning.

Interim Conclusion

I realize that the creation of a profession of Master Educators of Cyprus, will take years. Its possibility rests on something that I believe everyone here is committed to. That is to exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I also believe, that as educators, you are committed to living as fully as possible the

values you use to give meaning and purpose to your lives and that contribute to the flourishing of humanity. I urge you to build on these commitments in creating and sharing your explanations of your educational influences in your own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work. I also urge you to create a profession of Master Educators of Cyprus by gaining accreditation for your living-educational-theories and by campaigning for the spreading influence of Living Theory research in improving schools. On the 8th May 2015 the Action Research Network of the Americas Conference is in Toronto, with a Town Hall Meeting in which the 'virtual presences' of Living Theory Researchers can be accessed in the 'living posters' at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arna/ARNPosterhomepage230415.pdf>

I do hope that you will contribute your own 'living-posters' to this extending global network of practitioner-researchers who are supporting each other in enhancing the flow the values and understanding that can make the world a better place to be.

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