

'Living Theory research making a difference in communities and organisations: continuing conversations.'

A report on the 13th April 2019 gathering hosted by Rachael Burgess in Bath UK.

Jack Whitehead 13th May 2019

Context

This report is intended to act as an invitation for you to join or continue to participate in educational conversation by showing what occurred on the 13th April 2019. The gathering on 13th April was as an episode in a continuing educational conversation, which has extended over years.

Background

The gathering on 13th April 2019, hosted by Rachel Burgess in Bath UK, in preparation for the ARNA 2019 conference in Montreal, followed the first she hosted 4th February 2017, which was in preparation for the 1st Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy: towards an ecology of knowledges' in Cartagena. (Report available from

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwreportoncarnstudyday060216.pdf>.)

That in turn followed on from a 'Town Hall meeting' at the ARNA 2015 conference in Toronto organised by Jacqueline DeLong. At all three events there were participants physically in the room with others brought in through SKYPE.

Participants:

Six members of the Conversation Café and an interested colleague of Rachel's were physically present for the day.

Jack	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/jack020617.pdf
Rachel	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/rachael-burgess-poster-2019.pdf
Robyn	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/robyposters2.pdf
William	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/william020617.pdf
Sonia	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/soniaposter.pdf
Marie	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/marie020617.pdf

16 other Living Theory researchers from England, Mongolia, Canada, India, Italy, Albania, Venezuela, and Eire, and a group from NEARI joined through SKYPE for one or more sessions. (Unfortunately, IT let us down on one occasion and Sadruddin, Pakistan, was only able to be present through his poster)

Mega (Mongolia)	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/mega-poster.pdf
Undar (Mongolia)	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/munkh-undars-living-poster.pdf
Iris (Albania)	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/iris-aliaj.pdf
Joy (UK)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/joy020617.pdf
Giulia (Italy)	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/giuliaposter.pdf

Mairin (Eire)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/mairin250518.pdf
Mary (Eire)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/MaryR250518.pdf
Caitriona (Eire)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/caitriona250518.pdf
Mark (UK),	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/mark-living-poster.pdf
Sadrudin (Pakistan)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/gutoshi020617.pdf
Swaroop (India)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/swaroop250518.pdf
Moira (UK)	http://www.spanglefish.com/moiralaidlawshomepage/
Jackie (Canada) day	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/jackieposter.pdf
Judy (Canada)	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/judyposter.pdf
Liz (Canada)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/liz020617.pdf
Geitza (Venezuela)	http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aran/aranposters/GeitzaRebolledo0705.pdf
NEARI (Eire) 15.10	http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/aaposters130419/neari-poster-2019.pdf

What happened on the day

Rachel, who hosted the meeting in her house (Bath UK), set the scene for the day. We then each introduced ourselves, including those present through SKYPE, and gave very brief summaries of our research/enquiries using our living-poster (projected on another screen) as a focus.

Jack (who facilitated the day) summarised and led us into a conversation around the theme: *Living Theory research making a difference in communities and organisations: continuing conversations.*

New SKYPE participants were welcomed and introduced themselves with their living-posters projected onto another screen.

Jack introduced the Living Theory Wiki (access from http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main_Page), and lead us into conversations around extending our educational influence in communities and organisations.

Over lunch people in the room and through SKYPE continued to get to know one another.

After lunch new SKYPE participants were welcomed and introduced themselves and Jack encouraged participants to identify and explore issues of personal and collective responsibility, accountability and engaging with power and equality and inequality, in trying to enhance the educational influence we have with communities and organisations.

An hour later new SKYPE participants were welcomed and introduced themselves before Jack clarified the distinguishing relationships between practitioner-research methodologies, Living Theory research,

Action Research, Autoethnography and Narrative Enquiry and how insights could be drawn from these methodologies and other theories in contributing to our practical enquiries.

Then, a SKYPE connection was made to the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) meeting in Sligo, Ireland. The NEARI meeting followed a meeting of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) and attracted a number of doctoral researchers who introduced their research. Jack gave a brief outline to the NEARI group that related to the theme of the day: *Living Theory research making a difference in communities and organisations: continuing conversations*. When the NEARI group left Jack led us into a final conversation around 'creating futures' and brought the day to a conclusion.

Unedited recording of the gathering – unlisted on YouTube

Session 1 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LikCe4TDdAA>

Session 2 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZX4lwMVX6s>

Session 3 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgoz1MwFuro>

Session 4 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onx-sSEcjw>

Session 5 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zta4TammeU>

Reflections from some SKYPE participants

On 27 Apr 2019, at 21:20, Mark Potts <mapotts53@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Jack

I only joined the meeting for a short time but I felt the positive energy of the group whilst connected. I learned that living theory action research is thriving and continuing to inspire researchers internationally. There were contributions from participants from around the world. The comments and questions provided a sense of a community that is supportive and appreciative of each participant's work. Thank you for inviting me to participate.

Mark Potts

On 28 Apr 2019, at 19:36, Moira Laidlaw <moirafrog@gmail.com> wrote:

The 13th of April was a significant meeting for me. I was drawn to Action Research at Bath University first - back in the 80s - and then slowly and surely into Living Theory in the early nineties. I always felt instinctively that AR and LT were speaking to me directly, about things I cared about as an educator in secondary schools (teaching English, Drama and German as well as Psychology later on in the late nineties and early noughties), things like justice, fairness, creativity, love and community. LT in particular helped me clarify to myself and others in ways that helped me improve my practice and, I would claim, my own and my students' learning. I gained my Ph.D. in Living Theory in 1996. In 2001 I went to China as a volunteer with VSO in the bare northwest and spent six difficult and thrilling years at a university as an educational volunteer. It was a baptism of fire, but one I continue to learn from. In China I found communities wherever I went, tight-knit communities developed through hardship and mutual support, through familial love and a belief that tomorrow could be better than today, especially for the next generation. I learnt a lot about love and hope there as well.

I now work at the Open University as a distance learning tutor in several modules for their M.Sc. in development management and I now supervise a doctoral student - Arianna Briganti whom I tutored for her final Project module for the M.Sc.

13th April stands out for me. I joined the 13.00-14.00 session with several colleagues, some known, old friends and some I'd never met before from around the world on Skype and colleagues meeting in a house in Bath, and it was like coming home. Such was the care of the people organising it and running the session, it felt effortless and inclusive. I must admit, I'd forgotten quite what it felt like to

be bathed in this community so directly, as my contact with the 'Bath' group is often fragmented through geographical distance, a busy life and other focuses.

What did I learn from it? It's not easy to put into words. I suppose it's something to do with re-learning, coming home to where I belong I suppose, a sense that I am not alone in my struggles for clarification, for greater self-awareness, to make the most of the life I am lucky enough to have. It was a delight to hear about what colleagues and friends are doing, how they are making sense of their own lives as they seek to improve what they are doing. What we are doing. I found it all relatable in that Michael Bassey sense.

I know there have been discussions and meetings and papers in EJOLTS and elsewhere for years now, about how we can work towards an i~we~us (with variations – see Mounter 2019 at <http://www.spanglefish.com/allicanbe/index.asp?pageid=698540>) sense of community and in our writings and research. Although I can't really put it into words - yet - I felt something powerful happening on the 13th April. It was like waking up. For that hour and beyond I have felt more connected. It was one of the only times I have felt such a powerful sense of the i~we~us dynamic, which had always been a little theoretical before. It seemed full of vital life, serious, yet light-hearted, focused yet flexible. I felt in it something akin to what I'm struggling to create with my OU students, whom I only meet through Skype or email or online tutorials. One of the key learning for me has to focus on community, a sense of being comprised absolutely of individuals, who are going through their own unique processes of learning about the subject they've chosen. I recognise, however, that the focus for my work with the OU students is more about trying to create a sense of community of learners who can feel connected, yet with the absolute right to diverge where and when it is right for them.

13th April has honed my sense of working towards this aim, which is a living and developmental one. 13th April offered me a glimpse of something I value, something to be aspired towards but not merely ever something merely to try to replicate. Community needs to be through a working consensus of all parties and I felt a part of that on 13th April.

On 3 May 2019, at 01:20, Judy McBride <judy.judymcbride@gmail.com> wrote:

What I am offering as my reply is a *métissage* of various voices from the event that captured my imagination. I have incorporated voices and an image with great respect and care (note from Jack – permissions have been given).

I hope it is helpful,
Judy



Leaning Into Learning: A *métissage* of caring voices in continuing conversation

Judy's poetic responses to the following can be accessed from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arna/judy13april.pdf>

Continuing our educational conversations

We are proposing to:

- Share our reflections on what, if any, learning has occurred since the last gathering that can help us improve our future efforts.
- Continue to support one another by sharing what we are doing, our progress, and proposals of future activities
- Research into the educational influence of creating such events as this, promoting global conversations and critically and creatively engaging with the ideas of others.

Creating a future with educational conversations

In continuing and developing our educational conversations we keep in mind how Gadamer clarifies the art of conversation:

To conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes. Hence it necessarily has the structure of question and answer. The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us. ... To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning. For we have seen that to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all the possibilities fluid. A person skilled in the 'art' of questioning is a person who can prevent questions being suppressed by the dominant opinion. A person who possesses this art will himself search for everything in favour of an opinion. Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but in the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter). (Gadamer, 1975, p. 367)

In educational conversations we distinguish between learning and educational influences in learning. Educational influences in learning are distinguished by learning with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity as Living Theory researchers generate and share their explanation (their living-theory) of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings.

We hope this report supports Living Theory researchers in their endeavours to make a difference in communities and organisations in continuing local and global educational conversations as Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt puts it:

... Society needs to be renewed by making a shift from the negative energy of fear, competition, control and war to the positive energy of faith, love, hope and creativity. Clearly, we need to conceptualize and practice not just learning conferences but Loving Learning Conferences. (Zuber-Skerritt, 2017, p. 224).

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed.) (2017) *Conferences as Sites of Learning and Development: Using Participatory Action Learning and Action Research Approaches*. Abingdon; Routledge.

One thing we will be doing to contribute to creating futures through educational conversations is to bring attention to your work by showing the living-poster homepage at the forthcoming events where we have presentations accepts, such as in Montreal at the ARNA conference. If you would send us your reports of the educational conversations you are creating and your living-posters, including references and/or links to details of your work we will add them to the update of the living-posters homepage. It would help if you could send them by 25th May to marie_huxtable@yahoo.co.uk .

Questions, concerns or thoughts? Please don't hesitate to contact us at jack@actionresearch.net .