Sonia Hutchison PHD Proposal

- A working title of the topic area

How does my lived experience, from being 'a child in care' to being a leader of a carers' charity, sustain the hope that we can be the change we want to see in the world?

- General overview of area

My research will begin by looking at my lived experience of being a child of a mother with German/Polish descent who has schizophrenia and drug issues and a father from English/Scottish/black West African descent and had schizophrenia and drug and alcohol issues. After being in short-term care twice I was moved into long-term care at the age of three. Educational outcomes for children in care are expected to be low only 13.2% gain 5 GCSE's A-C compared with 57.9% of the general population http://ewww.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000930/sfr08-2010.pdf only 6% go to university compared to 38% of young people http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/datasets/a00196857/children-looked-after-by-las-in-england. These figures were lower when I was in care. Children born to two schizophrenic parents have 36.6% (Slater and Cowie, 1971) chance of developing schizophrenia.

There are many more negative statistical predictions for my life. This is a reason I am choosing not to use an empirical form of research as my experience has been that statistics do not encourage hope and have the danger of creating self-fulfilling prophecies (Merton, 1968) if these are the only stories that are told in research.

I have not fulfilled the prophecy of these statistics but instead have thrived to become a Chief Executive of a Carers' Charity and been recognised for a community achievement of the year award for my tireless work in the local community. I am motivated to be the change I want to see in the world (paraphrasing Gandhi, 1913) and to support others to do the same. I have been told that my story is inspiring and people are moved by what I have achieved despite my background.

My aim of my research is to inquire into my own story, not a smooth story of self but a story that carries the authenticity of narrative wreckage (Whitehead, 2008). Through this inquiry I am aiming to make an original contribution to knowledge that influences a wider audience of practitioners to hold the hope for the people they are seeking to serve. My thesis will be values based as my values of hope, love, justice and participation guide me personally and as a leader.

I will aim to evidence the relational dynamic with those I serve as staff, volunteers, trustees, beneficiaries and wider stakeholders. I will aim to research my wider influence on social formations within which I work by looking at what is said about me from third parties.

- Identification of the relevant literature

I am using a living theory (Whitehead, 1989) methodology in my research which makes the 'I' central to my research. I am not distinguishing between myself as a practitioner and my wider life, I believe like Sarason (1988) the two are impossible to distinguish between. Our values are living and can't be rarified. Living Theory methodology asks questions of the nature 'How can I improve what I am doing? The research starts with who I am and my story, I am keen that there is not a danger of a single story (Adichie, 2009) being told about children in care rather enabling my living theory to emerge in my life and my leadership. Using ethno-autobiographic (Kremer, 2003) method I will ground my research in my 'ethnic, cultural, historical, ecological, and gender background' pg9. The usual term is auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997), I choose to use Kremer's term which prioritises the issues of ethnicity as I want my story to influence social formations.

Auto-ethnography has been criticised for being self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999). To counter such criticisms I am clear that by understanding my story it will become clear where my values and hope that we can be the change we want to see in the world comes from. Without bringing my story to the research I would be revealing a fraction of the data and learning.

I will consider the literature on children in care (Leeson, 2007; Macleod, 2007; Munro, 2001). Going to University from Care (Jackson et al, 2005) is researching 129 children in care getting to university and makes good recommendations. As third person research I feel the story is being told for the care leavers, I am keen to tell my story myself in my research. I will use participatory research (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995) methods aiming to empower others involved in my research to tell their own story. I will research how I am influenced by my story and those of others to improve the organisation I am leading and the social formations I am influencing.

The academy does not always accept participatory research or first person research (Kuokkanen, 2004) as this type of knowledge is not seen as valid. In order to meet this criticism I will use Habermas (1976) criteria of validation through several validation groups trying to gain wide criticism of my thinking to ensure what I am saying is authentic, comprehensible, right and truthful. Validation groups will be used to strengthen the rigour (Melrose, 2001) of the research.

In my current position I am familiar with a wide range of literature about carers (Carers UK, 2004; 2007; 2011; 2013; Clarke and Riley, 2006; Clifford et al 2011) and young carers (Becker et al, 2000; 2004; 2008; Fives et al, 2013) Whilst I use these research papers as a resource for funding (see appendix 1) bids the third person nature of the research means I feel there is a gap between the researcher and the carers in the research. My original contribution to the carers' literature will be to research from the perspective of a carer for my mum with mental health issues and drug addiction, leading a carers' centre and encouraging the carers I support to tell their own stories to be included in the research as part of the participatory method.

Literature on carer participation (Roulstone et al, 2006) is often incorporated with service user participation as carers are usually included as 'service users and carers' (Levin, 2004) in the research. I would argue this does not take into account the differences in the lived experiences depending on whether you are a service user or

carer. I would argue the barriers to participation are different. I am influenced by Unicef's The Convention of the Rights of the Child and article 12 in particular was introduced to me as a child in care and affirmed the belief I held as a child that my views should be taken into consideration. The literature on participation is contradictory as those that are participating are described in the third person removing them from the researching process.

The literature on leadership is diverse (Bolden, 2003), I have engaged with literature on authentic leadership (Chan et. al, 2005; Avolio and Gardiner 2005; Gardiner, 2011; Walumbwa et al, 2008; Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005) as I feel it is important to be true to my values as a leader. However I feel the literature on authentic leadership lacks authenticity as it describes leaders' authenticity from a third person perspective lacking the authenticity of the voice of the leader researching their own leadership. In my research I am interested in how I am leading my own learning the learning of others and the learning of social formations which necessitates starting from the first person (Hutchison, 2011; Hutchison, 2012; Hutchison, 2013 and Walton et al, 2013).

- Key research questions

  1. How can I use my story to inspire myself and others to be the change we want to see in the world?
  2. How can I draw insights from participatory research to develop my living theory methodology?
  3. How can my research make an original contribution to knowledge that will be useful to other leaders; to people interested in developing participation models, and improving their ability to put the value of participation into practice; and to others supporting carers or being a carer, by being an inspirational role model, and providing them with a method of reflecting on and improving their practice.
  4. How can I, in collaboration with others, continue to improve my practice as I develop unique knowledge and understanding in being a leader in a carers' charity and fully live my values of participation?

- Methodology

I am planning to use living theory action research (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) as a methodology to develop unique knowledge and understanding in how being a leader in a carers' charity can fully live values of hope, love, justice and participation. Living theory methodology enables methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) meaning I will choose methods that fit with my values and enable my research to be values based. I will use ethno-autobiography (Kremer, 2003) as a method to tell my own story grounded in socio-cultural factors that have affected me and enable carers to tell their stories through the research. I will use multimodal methods (Crotty, 2012) including multimedia approaches (Whitehead and Huxtable, 2009) capturing the embodied expressions of the stories which hold evidence of the pooling of energy (Hutchison, 2011) within the values of the relational dynamics as they emerge in practice. I will use narrative methods including stories and reflections of those involved in the research (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991).

I will seek to use participatory research methods enabling me to live my values to empower people through participation to enable change to occur. Living theory is about improving practice, this involves constant learning and change. Reflection is important to improve my practice, however participation of those involved in the organisation enables my personal improvement of practice but moves it beyond continual professional development into research which changes the carers I support to improve their social context.

- Timescale/research planning

My thesis will focus around three view-points looking at 'I', 'we' and 'them' as I explore from 'child in care' to leader of a carers' charity:

As this is a living theory methodology the structure will emerge through the process of my research, however it will include:

- Introduction, identifying the purpose of my research and setting out the structure of my thesis.

- Methodology

- 'I' this section will be first person research exploring how I came to be where I am today, it will tell the story of my early life, how I came to work in my current role, the significance of values such as hope, love, justice and participation. The story will explain how I came to learn about living theory, how I realised that my values based practice is highly significant as a means for improving my practice and enabling me to live my values in practice. I will review and create multimodal data including pictures I've drawn, diaries, videos, photos, reports and funding bids.

- 'We' this section will be second person research, using a participatory method and empower others to tell their own story so I am not acting as the researcher who tells their story for them. I will use a multi modal approaches to make the research inclusive. I will explore with my co-researchers whether those I serve as a leader see me living my values in practice, if they see my leadership is influencing others to improve their practice and whether my leadership is seen as authentic.

- 'Them' this chapter will identify what I consider I am contributing of wider social value, what influence I am having on the wider world and will connect my research and findings with the literature on authentic leadership, carers, and participation.

- I will draw conclusions which highlight the overall significance of my research and the original contribution to knowledge it has made. I will look at the overview of why my approach to research is important in improving the areas of practice in my research. These include improving people's life

chances rather than reducing them (Goffman, 1963:15), leadership practice, supporting carers and their families.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Successful Funding Bids

2011 Lloyds TSB Foundation - £24,000 over 1 year Co-bid Writer
2012 Carers Service Tender – 2.1 million over 5 years Lead Bid Writer
2013 Young Carers Service - £212,000 over 4 years Co-bid Writer
2013 Big Lottery - £300,000 over 3 years Lead Bid Writer