

Proposal for a keynote symposium linked to the Practitioner-Researcher Special Interest Group for the 2010 BERA Annual Conference at Warwick University 1-4 September 2010.

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Explicating A New Epistemology For Educational Knowledge With Educational Responsibility (2)

Overview

Overall coherence is in the continuing explication of the relationally dynamic epistemology transformation of educational knowledge under discussion in Open Dialogue in six, 2008-9 issues of Research Intelligence. This epistemology is emerging from the self-studies of educators in schools and universities with pupils and students as they research questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' It is also emerging through their engagement with the most advanced social theories of the day. Within its living logic of natural inclusionality it integrates insights from both propositional and dialectical logics. Initial insights to distinguish the relationally dynamic epistemology were presented in a keynote symposium at BERA 09. The data-base for the explication of the new epistemology has extended in 2009-10 and now includes over 40 living theory doctorates.

Ontological coherence is provided through educational enquiries into improving practice and generating educational knowledge in which individuals account for their own lives and influence in terms of the values and understandings that give meaning and purpose to their lives (Walton 2008).

Epistemological coherence is provided by a living logic of natural inclusionality (Rayner 2009). The unit of appraisal is the individual's explanation of their educational influence in learning to improve practice and in contributing to educational knowledge. The meanings of living standards of judgment are clarified in the course of their emergence in doctoral and other research programmes. The clarification includes the use of principles of rigor and personal and social validity.

Methodological coherence is provided by narratives that integrate action reflection cycles in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' Video-data from educational relationships is used to ostensibly clarify and develop meanings of living standards of judgment. These standards include the value and energy of educational responsibility for distinguishing the research as educational.

Conceptual coherence is provided by a view of educational research that is distinguished by the expression of educational responsibility in educational relationships in educational space. In this view contributions from education researchers provide insights for the generation of educational theory.

Multi-media evidence from 2008-10 issues of the Educational Journal of Living Theories will demonstrate the international significance of living theory educational research upon practice, policy and theory in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, China, Japan, Canada, Croatia, India and South Africa.

Supporting Statement

In this symposium educational researchers are viewed as distinct from education researchers in seeking to contribute to forms of educational knowledge that can explain an individual's educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations.

It is always timely to present ideas to a community that claims to be contributing to the reconstruction of what counts as educational theory. The contributions to the symposium develop a relationally dynamic epistemology for educational knowledge. They set out procedures for systematizing and making public the knowledge-base of practitioners. They present evidence of their original contributions to educational knowledge. The presentations are also consistent with current ideas that show how multi-media narratives can communicate explanations of educational influence in learning in ways that connect the life-histories of individuals with the sociocultural influences in which we live and work.

To ensure the high quality of the research data, as well as the quality of the analyses, they are drawn from the research programmes of practitioner-researchers for a minimum of five years of enquiry in their completed research programmes. Each practitioner-researcher expresses educational responsibility in distinguishing his or her research as educational. As part of this educational responsibility they produce narratives to show how they account for living their ontological values as fully as they can. These values flow with a life-enhancing energy. These energy-flowing values form explanatory principles and living standards of judgment in evaluating the validity of the claims to educational knowledge.

Each contributor engages with their ontological values and the power relations of sociocultural pressures that influence both their practice and the academic legitimation of their educational knowledge. McNiff focuses on accountability in supporting practitioners' action research in higher education in analysing, 'New cultures of moral accountability through epistemological transformation'. She explores some of the conditions and potentials for social evolution through the legitimation of the knowledge generating capacities of all individuals. Walton draws on her post-doctoral exploration of a search for meaning in the creation of a Centre for the Child and Family with insights from the research of Ledwith's and Springett's (2009) transformatory model of participatory practice. Renowden focuses on researching accountability with professional identity in her enquiry, 'How do I understand and continue to develop an epistemology of loving accountability as I work as a lecturer in higher education?'

Practitioner researchers cannot do anything without expressing energy. An assumption that contributes to the coherence to the symposium is the belief that educational relationships involve the expression of a life-enhancing energy with values. Huxtable focuses on forms of representation and accountability that communicate the meanings of the complex ecologies of her practice. These include the living boundaries that are informed by energy-flowing ontological values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility (including the vital role of good humour).

From the ground of the expression of educational responsibility in educational relationships the contributors use relationally dynamic units of appraisal, living logics and standards of judgment in their claims to educational knowledge. Drawing insights from research into Ubuntu in South Africa, Whitehead deepens and extends the explication of these energy flowing and values-laden units, logics and standards in his analysis of educational theories and living theory methodologies that can be used in researching and explaining educational influences in learning.

Individual Contributions

New cultures of moral accountability through epistemological transformation

Jean McNiff, York St. John University, UK

Background to the research

This paper explains how and why I hold myself accountable for my practices as I seek to influence the development of new cultures that demonstrate the moral accountability of practitioners, with a special focus on higher education. The research has been conducted with practitioners over ten years as a series of action-reflection cycles, across a range of settings and geographical locations, and each demonstrates the transformation of my own learning. Currently the research is located within higher education settings in the UK, Ireland and South Africa, and appears to be contributing to the writing of new stories about the nature and purposes of higher education (Rowland 2006), as these are explicated through practice as the demonstration of moral accountability. The collected published accounts constitute a strong evidence base (e.g. McNiff and Collins 1994; McNiff et al 2000; McNiff and Whitehead 2006) for the legitimation of a new epistemology for educational knowledge with educational responsibility.

Focus of the enquiry

The project has been marked by a focus on reciprocal learning in the pursuit of epistemological justice for social legitimation, appreciating that social improvement happens only when each individual recognizes the other as of equal worth. Consequently dominant messages about the other have needed to be deconstructed, which has involved the interrogation of knowers' own normative knowledge and truths. Such practices, however, cannot happen within current epistemological regimes that allocate people to hierarchically constituted social ranks on the basis of skin colour, heritage, wealth and other manufactured categories of 'difference'. Yet these very epistemological practices are endemic within higher education, given the prioritizing of propositional forms of knowledge and the frequently non-legitimised status of personal and relational ways of knowing (Schön 1995). Given also that the work of higher education is to generate knowledge, it is therefore positioned as assuming leadership in debates about knowledge production.

This, then, was the research task: to influence the development of new personal and relational epistemologies within higher education, to legitimate the knowledge of all individuals, regardless of who they were or where they were located, including people in townships (McNiff 2010).

The commitments articulated above transformed into practical work with groups of practitioners in the UK, Ireland, South Africa, China, and elsewhere, sometimes in appalling conditions, all leading to the award of masters or doctoral degrees. Concurrently I have worked with academic practitioners, who have also received their higher degrees, sometimes as participants on the same programme. These stories have significance for how higher education, as a key legitimating body, should theorise its practices as manifestations of its espoused epistemologies.

Research methods

The individual and collective research methodologies used throughout took the form of generative

transformational action enquiries, grounded in a view of human practices as an infinite process of new beginnings (Said 1997). Also key was recognition of the ‘supercomplex’ (Barnett 2000) nature of research methodologies, as located within historical, cultural, political and epistemological frameworks. This recognition enabled all participants to appreciate how they could actively create individual and cultural stories with preferred endings of hopeful transformation.

These collective stories, communicated in oral, visual and written form, constitute my data and evidence base, to test the validity of research claims that others and I are contributing to the development of cultures of moral accountability through the transformation of our own epistemologies. The current focus of my enquiry is how and why these practices may be developed within higher education.

Theoretical frameworks

The validity of the ideas and practices is tested against those of philosophers such as Arendt (1958), who speaks of the inherent worth of all individuals; Said (1997) and Chomsky (1986), linking personal accountability with social sustainability; and Polanyi (1958), positioning personal knowledge as the basis of social action. Ideas about conceptualizations of the university are tested against those of theorists such as Rowland (2006), Cousins (2009) and Barnett (2000). Methodological rigour (Winter 1989) is demonstrated throughout all validated accounts, each of which also meets the communicative criteria articulated by Habermas (1987) and Lather (1994); and especially through the demonstration of values that emerge through practice as living criteria and standards of judgement (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Each text shows the transformation of its author’s history and culture as a new story of loving relation through shifting the epistemological centre (Ngugi 1993).

Contribution to knowledge

The key educational significance of the research lies in its capacity to show the realization of potentials when higher education practitioners engage in the interrogation and transformation of their own epistemologies, and theorise the practical outcomes of their commitments as new stories of hopeful futures.

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Developing a Centre for the Child and Family with a Transformative Model for Participatory Practice.

Joan Walton, Liverpool Hope University

Background to the Research

My lifelong enquiry began at the age of 18, when I became a residential ‘housemother’, and experienced the great suffering of children in my care who had been removed from their families of origin. Their often challenging behaviour expressed the hurt and damage they were experiencing, in ways which would in turn inflict hurt and damage on myself and others. I found myself continually asking what meaning and purpose there could be in a life where such suffering by young children was possible. I also was asking what knowledge I could acquire in order to help free these young children from such suffering.

Nearly 40 years later, having completed my PhD thesis which documents the story of that enquiry, I have become extremely knowledgeable; I have read many academic books, learned many theories, and become aware of numerous research studies which claim to add to the body of knowledge that should help such children. And yet my daughter also became a residential child care worker at a young age; and it was frightening how close her experience was to mine. Despite all the increase in knowledge, at a grass roots level, the suffering was as great as ever.

On a wider, more general level, in their 2007 report on childhood in rich countries, the UK came last out of 21 countries on an overall measure of wellbeing. A further piece of comparative research by the same authors on children’s well-being in the European Union shows that in a comparison of 25 European states, the UK ranks 21st, above only the Slovak Republic, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. It seems that in the world of academic research, we have a long way to go to discover how to create knowledge that will help us learn how to improve the wellbeing of children and young people.

Focus of the Enquiry

As a newly appointed lecturer at Liverpool Hope University, I have as part of my research enquiry established a Centre for the Child and Family, which seeks to build on a living theory approach to human existence, and which has as its focus the question:

“How do we integrate research and practice, across disciplines and between professions, to enable a demonstrable improvement in the wellbeing of children and young people?”

The development of the Centre for the Child and Family is a research project in its own right, seeking to integrate a participatory approach to knowledge creation that transforms our understanding of how to improve the wellbeing of children and young people, through exploring and evaluating a collaborative way of working across professions and disciplines. It aims to test out the hypothesis that the wellbeing of children can be continuously improved by pooling the energy, values and talents of the numerous professionals who are passionate about making a difference to the quality of children’s lives.

Having developed a living theory approach to action research within my own doctoral enquiry, I have become sure that the transformation in practice and knowledge that is required to find ways to help even the most distressed and vulnerable of young people, will only come through the transformation of individuals, as a consequence of them asking and answering questions of the kind ‘how do I improve my practice?’

Theoretical Frameworks

It is intended to use Ledwith and Springett's (2009) transformative model for participatory practice as the framework for planning and evaluating the work undertaken by the Centre. They identify what they perceive to be the key dimensions of transformative change - Local/Global, Collective/Self, Ontology/Epistemology, Action/Reflection, and Inner/Outer Consciousness. These dimensions are seen to be interconnected, with the energy for change being created by the dialectical relation between each component, and the system becoming out of balance if any one dimension is weak or missing.

It is intended to develop and evaluate the value of this model through creating a community of professionals committed to working individually and collaboratively to generate knowledge that will enable us to integrate research and practice, across disciplines and between professions, to enable a demonstrable improvement in the wellbeing of children and young people.

Research Methods

Action research "suggests an orientation to research that is aimed at improving participants' lives" (Reason and Bradbury 2008:xxi), and hence offers a methodology that allows the participatory principles of Ledwith and Springett's model to be developed in practice.

Reason and Bradbury are clear about the transformative possibilities of action research, and its commitment to integrating research and practice:

By bringing scholarship and praxis back together, thereby drawing on long cultural traditions, our immodest aim is to change the relationship between knowledge and practice, to provide a model of social science for the twenty-first century as the academy seeks additions and alternatives to its heretofore 'ivory tower' positivist model of science, research and practice (xxxiv) .

A living theory approach to action research (Whitehead, 1993; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), offers a means by which individuals become more critically conscious of their own interests and commitments to 'making a difference in the world'.

Evidence Base

The Centre is newly constituted, and hence has not got to the point where it can provide evidence that either supports or negates the hypothesis it is exploring. However, evidence will be generated through the narratives of those engaged in the research, as living theory provides a research methodology which not only enables practitioner-researchers to contribute to the process of 'transforming the world through transforming self' (Walton 2008), but in so doing it will provide explanations of their influences that demonstrate the value and validity of their learning.

Contribution to new educational knowledge

There are over 40 living theory doctorates that have contributed to the 'continuing explication of the relationally dynamic epistemology transformation of educational knowledge' as discussed in the 2008-9 issues of Research Intelligence. The Centre will explore ways in which individuals working on improving their own practice can begin to research with others to develop a community of 'living educational theorists' working collaboratively with a shared intent.

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How do I understand and continue to develop an epistemology of loving accountability as I work as a lecturer in higher education?

Jane Renowden, St Mary's University College, UK.

Background to the research

In this paper I continue to explore the potentials of my research as a senior lecturer in a higher education for the development of a new epistemology of educational knowledge with social responsibility. My professional learning journey, now at doctoral level, has been characterised by an increasingly strong link between a desire to demonstrate professional accountability and the creation of my professional identity as fulfilling my potentials for a dialogically-constituted practice that honours the other's capacity for original thinking and creative engagement. I theorise my practice as a form of public accountability through demonstrating the validity of my claims to be influencing my own and others' learning for good.

Focus of the enquiry

The focus of the enquiry is therefore my practice as I interrogate how I am holding myself and others to account for their practices in a loving yet rigorous way. It is exploring the tensions between different types of accountability. My understanding of 'the good' is that it resides in the living practices of people as they work collaboratively for social sustainability. Sustainability implies that a process contains its own capacity for infinitely renewable self-transformation. My practice therefore focuses on how I can support student teachers and myself as their supervisor to develop relational forms that encourage independent thinking through rational debate and stringent critique, within a caring dialogically-constituted context of critically reflective practice.

Research methods

I adopt a self-study action research approach to enquiring into my practice, as I encourage student teachers and myself to interrogate the normative epistemologies and cultural assumptions of our social contexts and our own thinking. This involves drawing on the work of critical deconstruction and action theorists, such as Derrida (1976) and Butler (1999), who explain the futility of working within the regulatory strictures of an imaginary Law. My methodologies are grounded in a view of identity as continually self-transforming, as a realisation of the values of growth through unfettered freedom and the practise of freedom as development (Sen 1999). My data gathering focuses on those episodes that show the development of critical thinking and critically reflective practices through the problematisation of normative cultural assumptions and organisational epistemologies. I continually subject my data and evidence to the critique of others, to ensure that I do not fall into the trap of self-deception through believing in the stable nature of my capacity for self-critique while using a form of logic that is grounded in assumptions about the inviolable nature of normative epistemologies.

Theoretical frameworks

My theoretical frameworks are to do with the politics of knowledge generation. To fulfil my values of accountability in exercising my own freedom, and encouraging others to do the same, I draw on the work of Freire (1993) and Memmi (2003), which enables me to realise that my professional narrative contains examples of how, in my knowledge creating practices, I have been both the oppressor and the oppressed. I strengthen my understanding of how to free myself from the crippling limitations of such colonialist practices through drawing on Foucault's ideas of the archaeology of knowledge-power, and I strengthen my professional identity in relation to his (1977) insights about the transformational processes involved in moving from specific to universal intellectual.

Evidence base

As evidence to test the claims above, I look to the videos of my supervisory sessions with students on practice in school. I use my values as my living standards of judgment (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). I trace the development of our reciprocal learning, as I encourage them to become independent thinkers, while their feedback on my practice encourages me to do the same. Collectively, our storied accounts show the development of dialogically-constituted communities of practice (Wenger 1998), whose aims are to engage in communicative action (Habermas 1988) for personal and social wellbeing.

Contribution to new educational knowledge

The educational significance of my research is in the demonstration of my educational influence in my students' and my own learning, and my claim to have developed a critical emancipatory epistemology of practice. By developing emancipatory intellectual and social practices, I claim that I am contributing to a new epistemology of educational knowledge through my practice of emancipatory critical pedagogy that values the inclusion of the other (Habermas 1998) as a prerequisite for social sustainability.

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How do I develop forms of representation and accountability to communicate and improve my practice?

Marie Huxtable, University of Bath, UK.

Background to the research

As schools and universities are increasingly awash with 'standards', 'targets' and demands for evidence of improving education by the government it is becoming more urgent that educators express their professional responsibility to contribute by researching to create and offer knowledge of their best practice and clarify the educational standards by which they are holding themselves to account. There has been much discussion in BERA and AERA about what constitutes improving educational practice and knowledge and appropriate forms of representation for the educational theories generated by practitioner-researchers in their educational research. The discussion during 2008 and 2009 in Research Intelligence has suggested that an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge is underway in the living educational theories being produced by practitioner-researchers.

Focus of the enquiry.

My enquiry is contextualised by the complex ecologies (Lee & Rochon, 2009) of my practice and my systemic responsibility to evolve and implement a local authority programme that contributes to improving the educational experience of each person by the development of gifts and talents as educationally influential constructs.

This self-study concerns my practice developing in living boundaries, inclusive, collaborative, creative educational relationships, spaces and opportunities that flow with ontological energy flowing values of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility (flavoured with good humour). In my living theory account of my living research I make a contribution to educational knowledge through explicating the relationally dynamic standards of judgment that can be used to validate and legitimate my embodied educational knowledge in the Academy.

The explanations of educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations include the narratives of educators and pupils developing their talents to offer as educational gifts through engaging in inclusive, collaborative, creative, knowledge-creating research. The explanations include analyses of, and generative, transformational educational responses to, government and local government policies, and the tensions in boundaries between the worlds of government expectations, schools, universities, and the educational spaces of children, young people and educators.

Research methods

The living theory methodology (Whitehead, 2008) developed in this thesis draws insights from a range of methods from phenomenological, ethnographic, case study, grounded theory and narrative approaches to educational research (Cresswell, 2007). It includes a multi-media narrative to explicate the meanings of the energy flowing values and understandings that constitute the explanatory principles of educational influences in the thesis. Rigour is enhanced using the methods advocated by Winter (1989) and social validity is enhanced using the principles advocated by Habermas (1976, 2002).

Theoretical frameworks

The paper draws on:

Whitehead's (1989, 2008) living theory and living theory methodology.

Hymer's (2007) generative-transformational framework for gift creation.

Rayner's (2005) idea of inclusionality.

Biesta's (2006) ideas on moving beyond a language of learning into a language of education through the exercise of educational responsibility.

Contribution to new educational knowledge

The significance of the paper is in the contribution it makes to an educational knowledge-base of practice, theory and systemic influence, in the development of a new, inclusional educational epistemology.

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What energy flowing and value's-laden units, logics and standards can be used to distinguish living educational theories and living theory methodologies?

Jack Whitehead, University of Bath, UK.

Background to the research

There has been much discussion in BERA and AERA about the appropriate standards of judgment for evaluating the quality and validity of the educational knowledge generated by practitioner-researchers.

The 1988 BERA Presidential Address focused on the development of a research-based approach to professionalism in education through the generation of living educational theories. By 2010 over 40 living theory doctorates have been legitimated in the Academy with new units of appraisal, living logics and standards of judgment, in explanations of educational influences in learning.

The research answers the call made by Schön (1995) for the development of a new epistemology for the scholarship of teaching and by Snow (2001) to develop methodologies for making public the professional knowledge of teachers.

Foci of the enquiries

There are three research questions addressed in this presentation:

- 1) How can energy-flowing values be represented and communicated in publically validated explanations of educational influences in learning?
- 2) How are the inclusional logics of the explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in their own learning, related to the propositional and dialectical logics of traditional scholarship?
- 3) How are self-studies of educators in higher education in the UK, Republic of Ireland, Canada, Croatia, India, China, Japan and South Africa contributing to an epistemological transformation in educational knowledge?

Research methods

Action reflection cycles are used in the generation and development of living educational theories rests to clarify the meanings of energy-flowing ontological values in educational relationships and in forming these values into living epistemological standards of judgment.

Visual narratives are used in multi-media explanations of educational influences in learning.

The methods for enhancing the robustness of the validity and rigour of the explanations include the use of Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity and Winter's (1989) six criteria for enhancing rigour.

Lather's (1991) catalytic validity is used to justify claims about the educational influence of the ideas generated in one context for individuals working and researching in different contexts in the UK, Ireland, Canada, Croatia, India, China, Japan and South Africa.

Theoretical frameworks

Answers to the research questions include the following analytic frames.

Adler-Collins' (2000) safe space; Bernstein's(2000) mythological discourse; Biesta's (2006) language of education; Bourdieu's (2000) ideas of habitus and social formation; Charles'(2007) guiltless recognition and societal reidentification; DeLong's (2002) culture of inquiry; Farren's (2005) pedagogy of the unique and web of betweenness; Habermas'(1976, 1987, 2002) notions of social validity, learning and the inclusion of the other; Hymer's (2007) idea of giftedness; Ilyenkov's(1977) dialectical logic; Jousse's anthropology of gesture and theory of oral style (Sienaert and Conolly Ed. (2000 & 2009); Lohr's (2006) love at work; McNiff's(2006) my story is my living educational theory; Merleau-Ponty's(1972) notion of embodiment; Rayner's (2006, 2009) idea of inclusionality; Vasilyuk's (1996) psychology of experiencing; Whitehead's (1989, 2008a, 2009a) ideas of living educational theories and living theory methodologies; Laidlaw's (1996) idea of living standards of judgement; Winter's (1989) criteria of rigour;

|Contribution to new educational knowledge

- 1) The generation of a relationally dynamic epistemology for educational knowledge (Whitehead, 2008 a &b).
- 2) The explication of a living theory methodology for making public the embodied knowledge of professional practitioners (Whitehead, 2009 a & b).
- 3) An understanding of educational theory as the explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in learning as distinct from education theories produced by researchers in the disciplines of education.

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