

## Proposal for AERA 2010

### Theme of the Conference

#### Understanding Complex Ecologies in a Changing World

Transforming educational knowledge through making explicit the embodied knowledge of educators in complex ecologies and different cultural contexts.

#### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on making explicit the embodied knowledge of educators within complex ecologies using a living theory methodology in different cultural contexts. Using evidence from aboriginal and non-aboriginal contexts the meanings of the energy-flowing values that educators use to explain their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of others, are made explicit. The evidence includes the living educational theories of professional educators, educational leaders and students as they study their practice in improving practice and creating cultures of inquiry. Evidence is drawn from an aboriginal context for a First Nation masters group and from living educational spaces in which creative and performance arts with visual narratives are used to bring non-indigenous and indigenous knowledges into the Academy with living standards of judgment.

#### **2. Theoretical Frameworks and Perspectives**

Theoretical frameworks used in the paper include living educational theory (1) reflective practice (8), narrative inquiry (9,) relational epistemologies (10), action research (11), methodological inventiveness (12), and self-study (13). They include ideas from Hocking, Haskells & Linds (14) on unfolding bodymind. These frameworks are offered by self-study researchers who are asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How can I improve my practice?' in the generation of their own living educational theories (1, 2) in professional contexts of education. At the heart of the theoretical frameworks is Bullough and Pinnegar's insight that:

*The consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research" (13, p. 319)*

Perspectives on colonization (15), institutionalized reproduction of power (16), inclusionality (17), and ethnostress and anomie (18) will be examined in the context of the influence of multiple ecologies and cultural settings in the knowledge-creation of self-

study researchers. *Ethnostress occurs when the cultural beliefs or joyful identity of a people are disrupted.* (18, p. 6) New forms of reflective action research (19) and new ways of representing knowledge (20) and assessing knowledge (21) are required in order to use artifacts to demonstrate aboriginal knowing (22, 23, 24) and the role of storytelling (3) in the generation of the educational knowledge of the self-study researchers.

### **3. Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry**

Living educational theories (1, 2) are the explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in their learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work.

Digital technologies are enabling educational researchers to produce visual narratives of explanations of educational influences in learning. The academic legitimation of these new forms of representation (25, 26) are increasingly being recognized in the Academy. University regulations are being changed to permit the submission of e-media and multi-media accounts of educational influences in learning and are now being legitimated in professional development learning (27) and in the Academy (28, 29, 30).

When Boyer (31) called for a new scholarship of teaching and Schon (19) called for a new epistemology for the new scholarship, digital technologies such as multi-media web-based accounts of educational practices and performance arts were in their infancy. Recent developments in video-conferencing, educational video-resources and alternative forms of representation are helping to extend the forms of representation open to educational researchers (32), including performance art.

A living theory methodology (1) is used in a process of researching the practical and epistemological implications of the question, 'How do I improve my practice?' This methodology includes contributions from: autobiography for self-study in 'I' inquiries (13); case study for the influences of individuals in their particular contexts (34); narrative inquiry for the importance of storying and re-storying lives (9); action research for systematic and systemic reflections on action (1, 2).

Drawing on the criteria of social validity from Habermas (33) in terms of comprehensibility, truth, rightness and authenticity, validation groups are used to enhance the validity of interpretations and the rigour of data collection.

### **4. Data sources or evidence**

Encouraging others to develop an inquiry habit of mind (35) signifies that one must model that value. The authors study their own practices in order to make improvements and generate knowledge. Their intent is to be responsive to the needs of the practitioner researchers and to build interdependent cultures of inquiry. The capacity to adhere to one's values and the incidents of being a 'living contradiction' (1) are examined as well as attempts to improve practice in assisting masters' and doctoral students to use multi-media and artifacts to more effectively share their embodied knowledge.

In order to bring the embodied knowledge of self-study researchers into the Academy an improved literacy is described and explained in aboriginal issues across the globe and through dialogue with First Nations people and elders (3, 15, 16, 22, 23, 37). This includes the use of artifacts to demonstrate aboriginal knowing (21) as well as the connection between alternative forms of representation for embodied knowledge, in forms other than the purely written (22) and the grading practices (36).

The presentation also includes self-studies of the authors' own practices in contributing to the evolution of cultures of inquiry within diverse cultural settings. With evidence of systemic influence in the development of such cultures of inquiry embodied in eight volumes of self studies (4, 5, 6) as well as in masters and doctoral research programs, the authors analyze their present practice in seeking to enhance educational opportunities for pupils and teachers and to contribute to a transformation in educational knowledge. The analysis includes the use of multi-media representations in visual narratives for bringing the embodied knowledge of self-study researchers into the Academy for accreditation as academic knowledge.

By emphasizing the importance of self-study research in which the individual researchers are evaluating their own educational influences in relation to both the policy implementation and student learning, there is an evidence-based analysis of systemic educational influence in professional learning of teachers and the learning of students.

From pre-school to lecturers in higher education, graduate staff have been supported to research and publish their practice by asking the question, "How Can I Improve My Practice?" The data in the published self-study work of practitioner-researchers will show how the practical principles, embodied in educational practices can be clarified in the course of their emergence in practice into living epistemological standards of judgment. These will provide evidence to show meanings of a discipline of educational inquiry that can directly relate explanations of educational influence to educational practices that are influenced by complex ecologies and diverse cultural contexts.

## **5. Conclusions**

Universities are changing the regulations that govern the submission of research degrees to permit the use of e-media and alternative means of representing knowledge, including E-media, especially the use of digital video, to communicate the nature of educational knowledge (28, 29, 30, 32).

In particular, they are enabling the weakness identified by Vasilyuk (36) to be overcome in explanations of individual activity, of including a clear conceptualization of relationships between energy with values. The importance of including flows of energy in explanations of educational influence is that individuals cannot do anything without expressing some form of energy. However, the meanings of embodied flows of energy are difficult, if not impossible to communicate through words on printed pages of text. Visual narratives which show expressions of energy in living educational relationships allow ostensive definitions to clarify the meanings of flows of energy with values in explanations of educational influence (30, 32).

This conclusion will be related to current debates about how to bring the embodied knowledges of self-study researchers around the world with complex ecologies and diverse cultural settings into the Academy as recognized and legitimate forms of knowing (21, 22, 23). As Ferguson (22) says, *To represent the aboriginal ways of knowing, creative and performing arts research, incorporated in such outputs as carving, flax weaving and composition of songs and plays need to be assessed and recognized a valid knowledge in order to address and alleviate oppressive practices of all kinds especially those associated with colonialism and post- colonialism.*

Through a better understanding of the First Nations culture and context with its oral tradition, the capacity to encourage and support the sharing of their embodied knowing through alternatives to the written word is enhanced. Montour (39) uses the symbol of the wampum belt.

*The belt symbolizes how the Haudenosaunee welcomed the Europeans to this land. It tells us how we will interact with non-Aboriginal people... We shall travel side by side but in our own boats, neither of us will try to steer the others' vessels, or make laws or interfere in the internal affairs of the other. The Onkwéhonwé have kept to this agreement.....* (North American Indian Traveling College, 1989, p.12-13)

Living theories can explain the educational influences in the learning of individuals, in others and in the social formations (40) in which the individual lives and works. These explanations include the expression of a life-affirming energy (29, 40) with values as explanatory principles for the educational influence.

## **6. Educational, scholarly or scientific importance of the study**

The significance of the presentation lies in its contribution to understanding the living standards of judgment that can be used to assess the quality of practice-based research and self-studies of teacher-education practice that take account of complex ecologies in diverse cultural settings. The importance of developing agreed-upon procedures for transforming knowledge based on personal experiences of practice into 'public' knowledge has been highlighted by Snow (41).

The originality of the analysis lies in the way in which insights from the traditional disciplines of education are included within the living educational theories generated by practitioner-researchers in their educational inquiries, 'How do I improve my practice?' that are contextualized by complex ecologies and diverse cultural contexts.

The educational significance of the study focuses on the building a critical mass of practitioner researchers publishing and presenting their embodied knowledge for scrutiny and evaluation. It also engages with the necessity of finding new ways to represent and evaluate aboriginal knowledges so that their voices can be heard and recognized. As non-

aboriginal, self-study researchers attempt to comprehend and appreciate different world views that are not well represented in the academic community, it is an essential to recognize the power relations that support the dominant views that can serve to eliminate these other world views (22).

The educational significance of the study can also be understood in relation to Snow's (40) call to systematize the personal knowledge of practitioners in the generation of educational knowledge with educational responsibility. A living theory methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge shows how the embodied knowledge of professional practitioners can be made public and legitimated as academic knowledge. The scientific significance of the study lies in the claim that academic research can embrace the knowledges of self-study researchers that are embodied in forms other than the written form to embrace creative and performance arts as well as multi-media representations. The living theory methodology, formed into epistemological standards of judgment in explanations of educational influence (40), embraces alternative forms of representation (42). Montour (39) believes *that public educational institutions ...do not consider the emotional or spiritual parts of the* (p.14-15).

Many obstacles have been overcome or circumvented to build "communities of inquiry capable of criticizing such research and fostering its development" (19 p. 34). Because of social, political, economic, and spiritual forces, the progress of implementation continues on a broken front and has varied in pace and strength. In spite of these negative forces, a belief in the democratic, non-hierarchical nature of living, learning and knowing, and commitment to transforming understandings of how individuals, groups and systems can bring about improvement in our world sustains the self-study. Spiritual resilience (43) incorporates those qualities of the human spirit that carry hope for the future of humanity.

*If we allow oppressive messages to shape beliefs about ourselves that do not support our cultural identity then we prevent our own liberation* (18, p. 26).

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