

Come and join our live conversation with an international community of practitioner action researchers.

A Town Hall Meeting at the 2015 Conference of the Action Research Network of the Americas in the University of Toronto on the 8th May 2015.

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ABSTRACT:

The intent of this Town Hall meeting was to engage practitioner-researchers across the globe as attendees and virtually through the internet in a living-culture-of-inquiry through values-based dialogue in creating living-theories (explanations of our educational influence). In preparation for the session, participants created visual representations of their research in the form of e-posters for location on the Educational Journal Of Living Theories (EJOLTs) site - see <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arna/arnaposters270415.pdf> .

Multi-screen SKYPE conversations are shown to be influencing our perceptions of the idea that 'I am because we are/we are because I am' or i~we for shorthand and enabling us to 'pool' our life-affirming and life-enhancing energies, as well as sharing and evolving our relationally dynamic Culture of Inquiry and Living Theory research.

In small groups of 6-7, we share our experience with these sorts of dialogues and invite others to participate in conversations that influence our teaching and research practice and encourage use of this interactive process as a model for joint action, learning with and from each other.

The Workshop's Connection to Conference Theme

In connecting to the conference theme, we shared our experience with these sorts of dialogues and invited others to participate in conversations that influence our teaching and research practice and perhaps use this interactive process as a model for joint action, learning with and from each other.

Preparation for Town Hall

A face-to-face team that attended the ARNA Conference, coordinated by Cathy Griffin, Liz Campbell and Jackie DeLong included Cathryn Smith, Michelle Cunningham, Kelly Hanson, Avis Dalgarno, Krystal Damm, Bradley Clarke, Melissa Juniper, Jack Whitehead. Others joined the team in the actual session. Virtual Presenters were coordinated by Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable in terms of their availability given different time zones, access to SKYPE and the internet and congregating at a location because of restrictions of the number of laptops available at the site:

The SKYPE international research support group;
Educational Action Research in Ireland including Pip Bruce-Ferguson, Bernie Sullivan;
International individual practitioner-researchers;
5X5X5 an action research based arts project in the UK;
The Editorial Board of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) and past contributors - international, including Swaroop Rawal in India;
Conversation Cafe in Bath, UK, including Sonia Hutchison, Andrew Henon,
South African Group including, Delysia Timms, Pieter du Toit, Linda Vargas, Lee Scott, Liz Wolveraat.

We have used these names in the manuscript with participant permission.

Introduction and Purpose

There were two purposes for the session. One was the evolving one where individuals are encouraged to develop their own living-theories in living-cultures-of-inquiry as we have been learning with and from each other. Two was the introductory, transformational purpose of showing others entering into the dialogue with groups and individuals across the globe. These new voices in various parts of the world are extending the living-culture-of-inquiry and contributing their own living-educational-theories to this growing knowledge base.

Rationale, Theoretical Framework

In terms of our rationale and theoretical framework, the efficacy of joint actions in learning with and from one another, how to enhance locally, regionally, nationally and globally the values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity, could be much improved, given the recent increases in inequalities across the world. We place education at the heart of the processes of enhancing this flow of values and understandings in creating living-cultures-of-inquiry for producing and sharing the living-theories of practitioner-researchers.

Approach to Inquiry

Our approach to inquiry is grounded in the methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001) of individuals as they create their own unique and appropriate approach to their questions. The research methodology is Living Theory (Whitehead, 1989) and research context is Living Culture of Inquiry (DeLong, 2002). The approach includes a method of validation that involves submitting explanations of educational influence to groups of between 3-8 peers to strengthen their comprehensibility, evidence, sociohistorical and sociocultural awareness, and authenticity. Digital, visual data of practice are used to clarify and communicate the meanings of the relationally dynamic values that constitute explanatory principles.

Data, Sources of Evidence and Analysis

The data, sources of evidence and analysis have been gathered over the 20 years of a research programme into the practice of generating, extending and sustaining living-cultures-of-inquiry for enhancing the educational experiences of young people and enhancing the professionalism of teachers. These enhancements include making contributions to the professional knowledge-base of education, with publicly-validated and accredited explanations of educational influences in learning from teacher and other practitioner-researchers. The analysis includes the use of multi-media narratives for the clarification and communication of the meanings of the embodied expressions of the values used by educational professionals to give meaning and purpose to their lives. These values constitute explanatory principles used in the explanations of educational influence. The values are influenced by the mutual relationships of 'I am because we are/we are because I am'. They flow with energies that are often omitted from traditional academic texts about education.

Development of Living Posters

The development of the notion of 'living posters' came from a number of strands of work developing at the same time and their interrelationship and influence. For, instance, we knew only a few people would be able to participate in the event through SKYPE but we wanted as many as possible to have a presence and contribute to the development of productive dialogues beyond the event. This led to speculating about a question to be researched to include, 'What might be done to encourage others to enter into educationally productive dialogue with groups and individuals across the globe?' At the same time The BRLSI (Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution) researcher programme was being developed as part of the BRLSI Youth

Activities (<http://www.brlyouthgallery.org/>) . The BRLSI Researcher programme was for young people, 13+ years of age, to inquire as 'real researchers' researching into a question of personal interest, in a disciplined manner within a time frame and with a valued outcome. The young people as researchers were supported by doctoral and post-doctoral students as research supervisors. The students were engaged in doctoral enquiries of their own at the Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering of the University of Bath, UK.

Through the project the young people and students were all encouraged to reflect on and create knowledge of their educational influence in their own learning and that of others. 'Valued outcomes' were in terms of the young researchers and their research supervisors 'making public as gifts the knowledge they had created through their research'. When planning session 4 the project team (Paul Thomas, Paul Shepherd and Marie Huxtable) were aware that the end of the project was approaching and there was a need to clarify the form of communication that would be suitable for the young researchers to make public the knowledge they had created in the course of their research. An academic poster seemed to present an appropriate vehicle that would enable the young researchers to continue to develop the skills of 'real' researchers and allow the supervisors to communicate their educational learning journey. The challenge of representing the key aspects of their research in a limited space to 'grab the attention' of a passing audience to invite them into further conversations, contributed to the evolution of the inquiries.

These and other lines of thought came together with our experience of working with people to generate their multimedia narratives of their living-theories. We thought practitioner-researchers might be more likely to enter into productive, educational, dialogue when they knew something of other people's contexts, interests, motivations and research passions, found points of resonance with their own and felt able to approach others for an exploratory conversation.

The idea matured into asking practitioner-researchers to create an attractive 'flier' rather than just a text summary, to include links to a few key publications and contact details. We also wanted a link to a video of the researcher talking about their contexts, interests, motivations and research passions, as this would contribute to the communication of their embodied values. We decided on the length of the video after a brief skim through what was available on the internet and were influenced by sites such as <http://wistia.com/blog/does-length-matter-it-does-for-video-2k12-edition> and <http://thenextweb.com/socialmedia/2014/05/02/optimal-length-video-marketing-content-short-possible/> 'Less than two-minute videos work as well, but over two minutes will make the consumer feel that this video will require some extra concentration and time.'

As we received many more posters than anticipated we had to find a way of displaying them so that each person's living poster was easily accessible. We wanted to enable people to feel and find interconnections and appreciate the extent of a supportive Living Theory research global community. The posters were brought together into one as a 'homepage' for presentation at the ARNA Town Hall, which you can access from:



We were keen that people shouldn't be put off by having to learn to use new software or IT skills so they were encouraged to use whatever they were familiar with, for instance Microsoft WORD or PowerPoint, or Mac Pages. We asked people to send their single US letter-size page with connecting links as a PDF.

It was interesting to see how people expressed their own creativity in creating their poster. They acknowledged the power of the images and videos together with the text to communicate the individual's ontological and relational life-enhancing and life-affirming values expressed in their practice. As we progressed we realized we needed a few keywords, together with the small image of the poster and the researcher's name, to enable people at a glance to decide whether to investigate further. The brief for creating a living poster evolved to:

1. Create and upload a video-clip (absolute max 3 mins) to YouTube in which you communicate the essentials of your: context; interests; ontological and relational values that motivate you; research passions.
2. Create an attractive US Letter-size page using images and text, which includes brief details of your: context; interests; ontological and relational values that motivate you; research passions; details of a few of your key publications; the url to your website if you have one; your contact details and the url to your YouTube video.
3. Four key words that communicate what you are about.

We began to realize that some people were using the creation of the living posters as a research method evolving their research through various iterations. This has come full circle as Swaroop Rawal generated her own living poster

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aran/aranposters/SwaroopRawal2704.pdf> and then developed the idea further to evaluate and communicate her teacher-training programme to

create <http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/straws-in-the-wind/straws-in-the-wind-a-poster.pdf>, which were be added to the 'meta living poster':

Her work has in turn inspired Marie Huxtable and the BRLSI Research project team working to evaluate and communicate the BRLSI Researchers programme to create the following poster of BRLSI researchers:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/documents/brlsi/brlshiprog.pdf>

Findings from the Town Hall

1. Multi-Media Narrative and Dialogue

In the following video you see first the group in Toronto, Canada and then Swaroop Rawal from India sharing her excitement in joining the group. Keep in mind that it is 3:00 am her time.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYe-8SR9eWQ&index=4&list=PLj7Kbzs74R-s7Kd3ZDeL7CeKhCCfW-dAa>

Swaroop says:

"I'm so excited to be with you. I can see you all so clear. I am working in drama in education to enhance life skills in children. Right now I am working in villages training primary school teachers how to use drama in education in the curriculum and life skills enhancement."

We heard the following comments from Bernie Sullivan and Pip Bruce-Ferguson in Ireland, Revd Dr Delysia Timm, Pieter du Toit, Linda Vargas, Lee Scott, Liz Wolveraat. in South Africa, Andrew Henon in the UK and Teri Young in the US:



http://youtu.be/_KWOf0hh4i8

When one of the members of the on-site audience asks for clarification of the nature of the Living Theory methodology and the experience of process, Sonia Hutchison in the UK shares the following definition:



<https://youtu.be/QuitKKrbKPCs>

“The part that really attracted me to Living Theory was the ability to look at your own story and really think about what was meaningful in that and where your values come from in terms of where you come from in your history. So I started off from that perspective, not particularly interested in research it has to be said, but I was working with young carers and was very passionate about what I was doing and so I began there.

And Jack started me with the idea of ‘writing myself out’ is how he puts it. And that was about writing my story of how I came to be doing what I was doing. So, about 60,00 words later I have written myself out [laughter] and then Jack says, ‘Oh, I think that might be a bit too personal.’ [laughter] He is often trying to encourage people to tell their personal stories. So for me that was a brilliant process and could have stopped there, could have just been about my autobiography but what happened in the process of telling my story was that I recognized that something had led me to be doing what I was doing. And that was my values and the fact that I was very passionate about people at that point particularly young people and children being able to have as full a life as possible.

But I loved what I did but I wanted to be, the thing about children being able to live their lives as fully as possible is about opening hope where there are difficult situations that could become hopeless And it was about thinking about what was right and just for those children, that they shouldn't be disadvantaged because of their situations So my values began to emerge and that began to lead me to want to think about my own practice and how what I was doing was influencing not just my own practice but others, what other people were doing, the people that I worked with in these situations and also, you know, I'm a bit of a 'I can save the world type person' so I wanted to think about what influence I was having on wider social formations other than just the ones that I was involved in but including those social formations as well.

And that was what really led me to thinking about actually moving into Living Theory study. I wasn't, you know, just satisfied with just having my story I wanted to think about how that has an impact. So I began doing my Masters study researching my practice and at that point I moved into leading a Carers Center and so then I started to use a more action research-based processes alongside narrative so some participatory research working alongside the carers that I support getting them to tell their stories and to really explore what's meaningful to them. And how we could improve what their situations were working together.

And also being able to bring in different types of methodologies so ethnography became more solidified in my thinking and now I'm really enjoying the process of moving into doctoral study and bringing all of those ideas together. Working with research groups to see whether what I am claiming is right and I often over claim so I have to be careful whether I have any evidence for my claims and to engage with the literature to see whether or not you know how has that influenced what I'm thinking and develops my work further So there are all these different elements and that's how I would describe living Theory really.

2. Location and Technology

For this event, the site was the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education library lecture hall. This worked well in terms of having access to the internet, in having flexible seating so that we could get the on-site audience in a semi-circle arrangement, in having technical help available and in having outlets for laptop plug in. The technology worked well for our first try. The big screen in the room had a full size image of Swaroop in India and the others were on the 3 laptops.

The location problems mostly lay in the audio for the off-site participants despite the use of external speakers with the laptops. Clearly there was a need for the audience to be closer to the laptops and/or to increase the audio with microphones.

3. Dialogue Across the Globe

This was a primary purpose. To build on the happenings across the globe where action researchers were meeting using SKYPE such as BARN International, EJOLTs, to share their

learning and support each other in their research. As you note in the comments below, participants appreciated the opportunity to connect and get a few moments to contribute despite the audio limitations. The session made it possible to see and chat with colleagues when they would not have been able to attend in person.

4 Post-event Reflections

From Bernie Sullivan in Ireland:

These are the thoughts that sprang to mind following the Town Hall Skype last week:

It was an exhilarating and life-enhancing experience to find myself in the company of a wide-ranging and diverse group of practitioner-researchers from around the globe. My three colleagues in Ireland - Caitriona McDonagh, Máirín Glenn and Mary Roche - and I have been ploughing a lonely furrow since completing our PhDs 8/9 years ago, as we tried to continue to live to our ontological and epistemological values in pursuance of our commitment to the principles and practices of living educational theory research. Like many minority groupings, we were experiencing difficulty in having our voices heard, particularly in educational settings where quantitative research and standardised testing hold sway.

Participating in the Town Hall Skype discussion enabled me to realise that there are many people throughout the world who hold values similar to mine. As participants narrated the stories of their individual research endeavours, I experienced the sense of a life-affirming and supportive environment. Even though I could not hear all contributions clearly, it was evident that participants were presenting their stories in a positive and encouraging atmosphere.

My overall impression was that we were part of a worldwide community of practice, where all voices were valued and appreciated. I experienced at first hand Jack's commitment to creating global educational networks of communication, as well as his desire to influence the education of social formations. (email to J Delong May 15, 2015)

From Rev.d Dr. Delysia Timm in South Africa:

Thanks once again to Jack for his wonderful gifts and talents that he so freely offers... to be part of a conference in Canada and it did not cost a cent... truly amazing to be part of all that knowledge generation process. I was also blessed to be in the company of Linda and Lee and have some calm moments when the video was turned off from our side intermittently..

I was a bit disappointed that I could not hear the group discussion more clearly so I would love to see/hear the recorded presentation.

Cheers. Have a blessed week all.

Jack perhaps we could consider more of such connecting events.

I love your poster idea and I am going to use the idea for another project in which I am participating.(email to J. Whitehead, May 9, 2015)

Methodology and Research Context

One important point about methodology in Living Theory research, that engages with the creation of Living Cultures of Inquiry as a social movement, is that it can draw insights from a wide range of other methodologies such as phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative research, case study and ethnography (Cresswell, 2007) as well as action research and autoethnography. A researcher does not have to choose one of these methodologies, as Cresswell advocates. A Living Theory methodology that is helping to generate a culture-of-inquiry, emerges in the course of the individual's and group's practices as part of the original contribution to knowledge and to improving practice.

The findings show that individuals around the world have found it possible to improve their practice and to generate and share their knowledge through their living-educational-theories. However, there is a global weakness in enhancing these flows of values and understandings as socially transformative influences. Hence our focus on encouraging the meetings and sharing of ideas through multi-screen SKYPE communications with action researchers from around the world in generating a living, global Culture of Inquiry - see <http://www.spanglefish.com/ActionResearchCanada/> and <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> .

Celebrating Action Research in Canada

It came as a surprise to the Ontario, Canada group that Cathy Griffin won the promising Young Researcher Award as reported in the Mentoring Moments ning website:

The 12 teachers from Bluewater and at least one other from the TLLP group who presented at the conference were warmly welcomed with a hearty round of applause at the conference dinner to celebrate practitioner researchers sharing their knowledge publicly. I was honoured for my work through the TLLP, the PKE and my school with the Promising Young Researcher Award, "Your significant contributions to the ARNA Network and beyond have only begun to impact practice."

(http://mentoringmoments.ning.com/group/bluewater-action-research-network/forum/topic/show?id=6486509%3ATopic%3A30209&xg_source=msg)



The Bluewater Group (with Cathy Smith, Jackie Delong and Jack Whitehead) at ARNA. Cathy Griffin, the award winner, is third from the left.

Conclusions and Reflections

Reflections in and on the Town Meeting continue to be integrated for those wishing to become part of this global movement, into the globalising educational dialogues of individual practices who are exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in the generation and extension of living-cultures-of-inquiry (DeLong, 2013). We are witnessing the evolving use of living posters as a research method. Swaroop has done a grand job extending this into a form of evaluation and reporting on a project:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/straws-in-the-wind/straws-in-the-wind-a-poster.pdf>

Next Steps

What we have been exploring is the possibility of bringing Living Theory researchers from around the world into a living, global Culture of Inquiry, that does not require a membership fee or affiliation with any particular organisation, but encourages the sustained and sustaining conversations of individuals and groups who are working and researching to live as fully as possible the values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. Our learning from this session has been used for a similar session in November, 2015 in Pretoria, Africa with the Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA) Conference (see Sonia Hutchison's paper and workshop plan at

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/southafrica/soniaALARA2015.pdf>).

We intend to develop the potential of the ideas described above at the June 2017 ARNA conference in Cartagena, Columbia, for generating and sharing the living-theories of action researchers in extending and deepening the influences of living-cultures-of-inquiry with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

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