

Some reflections from Jack Whitehead on:

- i) the paper, 'Engaging with theory through self-study' by Linda Abrams, Kathryn Strom, Rabab Abi-Hanna, Charity Dacey and Jacqueline Dauplaise, presented by Linda, Kathryn and Charity at the 10th Castle Conference of the AERA S-STEP SIG on the 6th August 2014.
- ii) The 10:39 minute video of the end of the presentation with Linda, Kathryn Charity and Tammy at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld-n3IdvPN0>
(You can access both the paper and the video from:
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/castle10/lindaok.pdf> .

Having read the paper in the Castle 10 Proceedings before the presentation, I was curious about the idea of theory being used by the presenters because my own research has focused on self-study researchers as knowledge-creators. I mean this in the sense that we can all generate our own unique explanations of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence our research and writings. I've called these explanations, living-educational-theories, to distinguish them from the abstract conceptualisations of traditional theories where the explanations for individuals are **derived** from the abstract conceptualisations and applied to a particular case subsumed by the general theory.

In the paper in the Proceedings you will see statements such as Rabab's '*the theory on which my practice is based*' and the group statement, '*we first wrote individual narratives exploring our practices through a particular theoretical framework*'. I am familiar with the theories referred to:

Initially, we tried to own theories about power (Foucault, 1976; 1980), non-linear thinking (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), constructivist/democratic learning (Dewey, 1916/1938; Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978), emancipatory education (Freire, 1970), participatory research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986/2009), and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), appropriating them wholesale.

At the beginning of my self-study research in 1976 I also demonstrated a tendency to appropriate such theories wholesale before I realised that no existing theory could generate a valid explanation for my educational influence in my own learning and in the learning of my students, but that I could use insights from these theories in generating my own living-educational-theory.

What excited me about the Castle presentation, as distinct from my interest in the paper in the Proceedings, was the creative response to the recognition that the paper in the Proceedings was no longer adequate to communicate the present thinking of the group (and the individuals).

In the presentation the three presenters explained that they were inviting Tammy Mills into the group for their first conversation to share their present thinking. As Tammy joined the group I suddenly thought that the group might like a video record of this conversation, I asked and they agreed so I taped the 10:39 minutes of this conversation. The presenters have all given their ethical permissions for me to share the video with you (see - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld-n3IdvPN0>)

As I watch the video I bring my own biases and assumptions into my viewing. For example, I believe that each individual is capable of generating their own unique, values-based explanation of their educational influences in learning. As I watch and listen to the relationships and conversation I find myself focusing on the embodied expressions of the meanings of the ontological and relational values of love, respect and responsibility. As these words appear on this page of text they might appear to require only lexical definitions in the sense that their meanings will be clarified just with the use of other words. My experience of the embodied expressions of the meanings of love, respect and responsibility is grounded in the 'empathetic resonance' I experience as I see Linda explaining that she feels a need to move her sense of responsibility from that of a 'mother' (see around 5:36 minutes) to that of a 'friend' and 'colleague'. I felt a very strong 'empathetic resonance' with the embodied expression(s) of love (4:58 – 'love each person') as well as respect (6:50 minutes).

I'm wondering if each individual might generate their own unique explanations of their educational influences with students and others (as well as with the social formations in which their research is located). I'm thinking of unique explanations in which the explanatory principles include the ontological and relational values that each individual uses to give meaning and purpose to their lives and which carry hope for the flourishing of humanity? The embodied expressions of these meanings are often clarified and communicated in the course of their emergence in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' These meanings of ontological and relational values can form the living standards of judgment by which we judge the validity of our explanations of educational influence as contributions to educational knowledge.

I'll pause here just to share these thoughts with the other self-study researchers at Castle 10.

There is a community space in the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) at:

<http://ejolts.org/login/index.php> that we could use as part of an ongoing conversation and I've created a thread of Castle 10 conversation if you would like to engage in this space. All you need to do is to go into <http://ejolts.org/login/index.php> and create your username and password on your first visit and then you can participate in the Castle 10 Conversation.

Marie Huxtable is chair of the Editorial Board for EJOLTS and Marie has asked me to encourage all self-study researchers who are generating their living educational theories to submit them for the open review process of EJOLTS – see the review process at <http://ejolts.net>

Love Jack.

23 August 2014

