

Our Living-Educational-Theory of Knowledge-translation: Improving Practice, Influencing Learners, and Contributing to the Professional Knowledge Base of Nursing

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Abstract

This self-study captures our joint journey to create a living educational theory of knowledge-translation in nursing. The failure to translate research knowledge into practice is identified as a significant issue in the nursing profession. Our research story takes a critical view of knowledge-translation related to the philosophical inconsistency between what is espoused in the knowledge related to the discipline of nursing and what is done in practice. The purpose of this research is to explore our own challenges and success with knowledge-translation as a way to improve our practice as well as to influence the practice of others. We employ a Living Theory Methodology to address our issue. Our data analysis reveals key elements of collaborative reflective dialogue that include multiple ways of knowing, embracing vulnerability, inspiring authenticity, and improving learning. We find it is a culture of inquiry (DeLong, 2013) that stimulates knowledge co-construction and has reframed our understanding of knowledge-translation as a holistic, active process, which reflects the essence of who we are and what we do.

**Keywords: Collaboration; Culture of Inquiry;
Authenticity; Living Theory**

Introduction

We present our account in the form of a research narrative (McNiff, 2006). It is our aim to use this narrative to make clear 'how [we] have taken action to improve [our practice] by improving our learning through action research' (McNiff, 2006, p. 308). First, the purpose of our inquiry is to situate the knowledge-translation issue in our personal and broader context and to make clear our research questions. Next, we describe the unique methodological processes we employ to answer our research questions. We highlight themes that emerge from our data analysis as evidences of our learning. We then present our understanding of our findings through the articulation of our living-educational-theory of Knowledge-translation: Improving Practice, Influencing Learners, and Contributing to the Professional Knowledge Base. We summarize what our research story reveals about our influence on self, others and the social formations in which we live. Finally, we describe our next steps in our journey of continuous improvement and offer our conclusions.

The use of "we" in our writing reflects our unified voice, as the authors in our co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001). "We" is not meant to represent the collective "we" as a human race. In response to both reviewers, Moira Laidlaw and Peter Mellett, who indicate that the use of "we" is problematic, as it does not clearly identify our individual contributions within our collaborative inquiry, we attempt to be explicit in what we are communicating. Our research process involves 'co-operative inquiry where exclusive roles are replaced by a co-operative relationship, so that all of those involved work together as co-researchers and as co-subjects. Everyone is involved in the design and management of the inquiry; everyone gets into the experience and action that is being explored; everyone is involved in making sense and drawing conclusions; thus, everyone involved can take initiative and exert influence on the process' (Heron & Reason, 2001 p. 2). "We" is purposefully used to capture the co-construction of knowledge, collaborative writing and research process that occurred within our inquiry. Within our "we" story there are also our individual stories. Our individual stories are reflected through data that reflects the experience of one author or the other. Additionally, in an attempt to make clear our joint and individual contributions we each reflect and write about our own learning as individuals in this process.

Purpose

The purpose of our research stems from an issue in practice. Our experiences while pursuing our Master of Education degree revealed a tension. We became aware that we were acting in a way that was incongruent with our values and core beliefs. Our inauthentic behaviours were linked to the concept of knowledge-translation. Knowledge-translation (KT) is a term used to describe the activities that foster the application of research findings to practice. Research in the KT field has flourished in recent years in an attempt to address the growing gap between research evidence in the literature and the limited adoption of evidence to clinical practice (Bucknall & Rycroft-Malone, 2010; Harrison, Legare, Graham & Fevers, 2010; Kitson & Bisby, 2010; Kitson & Phil, 2009; Natsch & van der Meery, 2003; Straus, Tetroe & Graham, 2009; Wallin, 2009). Prior to engaging in graduate studies,

our joint examination of knowledge-translation was limited to satisfaction and improvement surveying. Feedback and follow up from our continuous professional development (CPD) events indicated that, while our CPD sessions were engaging and stimulating, the sessions were often followed by a disappointingly slow and failing transfer of evidence to practice. Our personal success with KT within our graduate studies prompted us to recognize the narrow lens we were applying in attempting to improve KT. Professionally, we were feeling frustrated and disappointed while personally we were stimulated and engaged with KT through our graduate studies. We understood something was happening in our joint graduate journey and sought to discover, validate and describe our process.

We use Living Theory research (Whitehead, 1989) to answer:

- 1) What is our living-educational-theory of knowledge-translation?
- 2) How can we influence others?

The focus of our inquiry is driven by a desire to improve our nursing practice, starting with our own professional development. We use the next section to situate ourselves within our personal context and the broader context of nursing.

Personal Context

Together, we bring many years of experience. Our roles have included: bedside hospital nursing; community nursing; developing continuing professional development activities in hospital, primary care and public health settings; clinical nurse specialist and administrative roles. In recent years, we have both expanded our careers to the field of academia in our roles as faculty in the school of nursing. We met while working as nurses for a Public Health Unit in Ontario. Our lives had similar paths and we developed a friendly working relationship. Eventually, we shared a lead role for a large project, which required us to collaborate daily. It was through our day-to-day interactions that we grew to understand and appreciate each other.

Broader Context

To situate ourselves within the broader context of the knowledge-translation within nursing, it is important to describe the dominant hegemonic practice related to evidence. In health care, there is an emphasis on valuing knowledge that is based on rigorous quantitative studies rather than focusing on 'the social context into which the knowledge has to be implemented' or is created (Kitson & Phil, 2009, p. 126; Milton, 2007). The fundamental principle of evidence-based practice (EBP) posits a hierarchy of evidence to guide clinical decision-making. Initially, the intent was to increase the rigour of research as well as to increase the transfer of knowledge from randomized control trials in routine decision making of clinical care (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, & Haynes, 1996). Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of multiple ways of knowing to inform practice in the nursing literature and our (nursing) governing bodies, empirical knowing has 'epistemological priority over other

forms of nursing knowledge' (Paley et al., 2007, p. 692). Doane and Varcoe (2008) have highlighted that what is espoused may be different than what is practiced:

Although as a profession we have engaged in critical work to explicate the interconnections among, theory, evidence, and practice at the discursive level (e.g., within the scholarly literature), where we seem to have run into problems is translating the interconnections into action. That is at times we have difficulty walking the talk. (p. 283)

Doane and Varcoe point out that, although literature abounds in attempts to define and solve the KT conundrum, what seems to be missing is the lived experience of knowledge-translation. Although the academic literature suggests that 'now [the] focus [is] more on contextualized and situated learning' (Inman & Vernon, 1997, p. 76), our experience is that a dominant approach to the KT dilemma involves the promotion of CPD sessions that emphasize mastery of skills and direct application of knowledge. This approach perpetuates dissemination of information where learners are largely passive; thus, outside/expert "evidence" for so-called true and unbiased knowledge is promoted (Barwick, Peters, & Boydell, 2009; Kitson & Phil, 2009; Milton, 2007). Our awareness of the multiple influences of KT has created a dilemma. We began to reflect on our own practices that serve to promote the dominant KT approach that we considered ineffective. Making clear our process of KT within our personal and broader context is essential to understanding the nuances of our improvement with KT.

Methodology

To address our concern we employ Living Theory research, which adopts the concept of methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001). A Living Theory methodology draws on insights from other emergent methodologies including: action research; narrative research; phenomenological research; grounded theory research; ethnographic research; co-inquiries and case study research in the creation of one's own living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 2009). It is grounded in personal knowledge that relates to one's practice and values, rather than the theory being independent of practice. Living Theory research can be understood as a self-study involving: "I" (or "we") as a living contradiction; the use of action reflection cycles; the use of procedures of personal and social validation; and the inclusion of values as explanatory principles of educational influence (Whitehead, 2009). What is unique to Living Theory research is the use of our values as living standards of judgement to determine whether our practice is improving (Laidlaw, 1996; McNiff, 2002). In order to develop a living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989), one must be able to:

... see (one)self as a living contradiction, holding educational values whilst at the same time negating them ... by identifying the discrepancies between our espoused values and our enacted values we create tension which moves us to imagine alternative ways of improving our situation. (Whitehead, 1989, p. 4)

Unique to our application of a Living Theory Methodology is our collaborative process. We are co-inquirers in our research inquiry. We write together, and

participate fully and equally in our joint writing process. It is difficult to make clear the parallel processes of our joint and individual journeys. We intentionally use the word “we” as our research process and findings reveal the centrality of “we” in our knowledge-translation process. Within the action, reflection, revision cycles are the unique methods we employ in an attempt to gather and triangulate data to validate our claims to know. We make clear our joint and individual contributions in co-writing by using Google Docs, which allows reviewers to follow individual contributions to co-authoring a paper. However, there were also times we sat side by side and wrote and edited together. Additionally, we journaled individually and attempted to capture our co-operative process through video recording and written documentation of exchanges with critical friends and our validation group. Our video recordings offer evidence of the embodied expression of our meaning. We feel that the use of multiple mediums more clearly illustrates the sense and heart of our learning.

Data Sources/Evidences of Learning

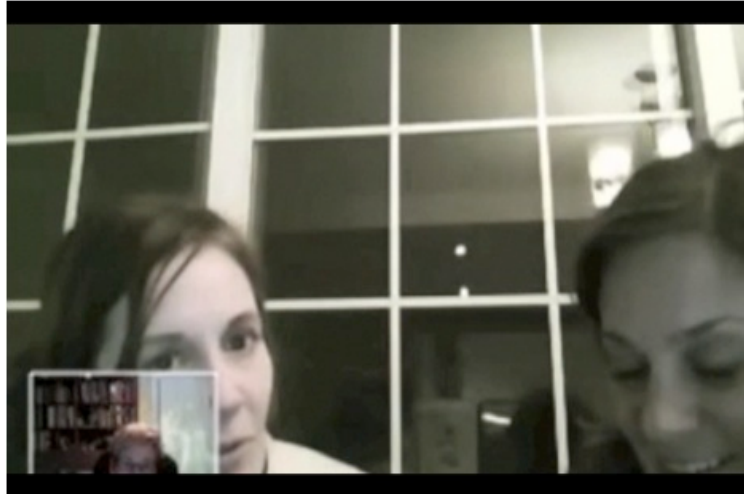
In this section, we present our themes and describe how each theme informs our research questions: What is our living-educational-theory of knowledge-translation? How can we contribute to a culture of inquiry to influence others? As a result of reviewing and coding our data sources through constant comparative analysis, eight main themes were found. By consensus, we included the best examples of data to illustrate the themes and make links to relevant literature to capture the essence of our research story. Although the selected data may represent one author’s voice, the themes were found equally throughout the data from both authors. We have attempted to share data that demonstrates the main theme; however, themes are intertwined through many data sources. Validating the data is triangulated by research, each other and other practitioners that include our work colleagues, students, graduate advisor, and fellow Living Theorists completing and guiding graduate work.

1) Critical Friends

The theme “critical friends” was identified across many data sources. The nature of our relationship is difficult to articulate; however, we recognize the centrality of our relationship in how we translate knowledge. It is best described in the literature as critical friends (MacBeath, as cited in, Katz, Earl and Jaafar, 2009; Delong, Black & Wideman, 2005, p. 16). In her academic writing (Johnston, 2011b), Jan describes the nature of learning through critical friends: ‘[I]t is through open conversations with my critical friend (Jen) that I have the greatest insights and am able to voice my dilemma, or living contradiction.’

On May 13, 2011 a journal excerpt from Jen captures the meaning of feedback from critical friends: ‘...[T]his process itself made me or motivated me to be more accountable. I find, I am inspired to move forward more purposefully and focused.’

It is through critical dialogue with others that we validate the importance of our relationship in our process. Below we include a clip from a conversation, on March 5, 2014, with another critical friend, Jackie Delong, to support our claims to know. One of her quotations from the clip captures the essence of our friendship: ‘You not only support each other but you challenge one another too.’



Video 1: [Skype conversation about the importance of critical friendships.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-P-KGnTjDU&feature=youtu.be) (Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014a) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-P-KGnTjDU&feature=youtu.be>

We believe a critical friendship is necessary to engage in honest conversations and critical dialogue to improve our process of KT. Critical friends are a necessity of action research and ‘offer both support and critique in an open, honest appraisal’ (MacBeath, as cited in Katz, Earl & Jaafar, 2009) ‘to question assumptions, validate claims’ (DeLong, Black & Wideman, 2005, p. 16), and to ‘probe for justification and evidence to support perceptions and help reformulate interpretations’ (Katz et al., 2009, pp. 90-91).

2) Safe Space

The theme of “safe space” emerged through the triangulation process. Although, “safe space” is affiliated in the definition of critical friends, culture of inquiry (Katz et al., 2009, DeLong et al., 2013) and was identified in our collaborative research process, we identify it as a main theme because of its significant contribution to the whole process of discovering our living-theory in KT. A journal excerpt from Jen’s personal journal on July 7, 2012, is data as evidence of this theme:

Jan and I met last night after a long work week. It was Friday evening and we met in my office. As always, we greeted each other warmly with words and an embrace. We review how our week has gone, always starting on the personal level.

The following clip from May 7, 2014, shows Jan discussing the importance of evocative questions and respectful dialogue that occurs in a safe space when discussing the nature of our collaborative writing process.



Video 2: [Conversation with critical friends identify safe space as an important concept](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tv5cq9OraOM&feature=youtu.be) (Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014b) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tv5cq9OraOM&feature=youtu.be>

Jan's quotation from the clip above captures the importance of safety in our reflective dialogues: 'challenging, but it was a good challenging, a good way of validating what we were saying ... about learning and pushing, the evocative piece, evoking, really important in having a critical conversation. It was a safe spot, that's the one thing that had to occur'.

We find it essential to come together in a safe space to evoke and challenge each other and enter into cycles of dialogue to debate, expand and learn from each other in order to understand and improve our KT process. Investment in critical friendships requires time and a commitment to trust one another and to be respectful, kind, and caring towards the other.

3) Reflective Dialogue

Dialogue emerged as a theme that is tied to the other concepts of reflecting collaboratively and applying multiple ways of knowing to co-construct knowledge. We use this section to discuss how reflective dialogue is an essential component to our KT process. Our dialogues involve evocation through questioning. In a personal journal entry on March 24, 2011, Jan writes:

Jen's evocative questions and respectful dialogue [during collaborative core reflection] focused solely on me, my dilemma. This helped me realize that my personal history and professional culture had influenced my identity, thus my behaviours and decision making. Perhaps, for most of my life.

Jen's personal journal on July 7, 2012 reveals her experience of collaborative reflective dialogue:

There is often a tug and pull in our discourse related to clarifying our meaning. It is this tug and pull, the clarification that I find so stimulating ... it is so much more than just contextualizing the knowledge. The discourse leads to an extension of the knowledge by bending it around specific experiences and linking it to other key literature—or identifying a need or desire to explore further.

It is through shared reflective dialogue that we are able to identify “*joie de vivre*” across all clinical settings and nursing experiences as contributing to our own professional development and the development of others. Loosely translated, *joie de vivre* means joy of life or joy of living. It is when one is loving life so much; it shows in everything they do. In the following clip from May 7th, 2014, Jen discusses contributing to the development of others as one of her greatest joys:



Video 3: [Jan and Jen around the kitchen table demonstrates embodied expressions of our values](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gL--ciXcCKM) (Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014c)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gL--ciXcCKM>

We agree with Placier, Pinnegar, Hamilton & Guilfoyle (2005) in that ‘we assert that through dialogue, we come to more clearly walk our talk ... and attempt to use dialogue to build praxis’ (p. 61), and as a process of coming to know (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Dialogue promotes interaction with others and their ideas as a method of knowledge creation. Our experience revealed that learning from reflection required more than an individualistic process. We found that when we limit ourselves to our internal dialogues we are limiting ourselves to our own insights (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). To become a dialogue, a conversation moves beyond talk to include specific characteristics such as inquiry, critique, evidence, reflection, and response (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 87). In addition, through our collaborative reflective dialogue, we expand our experience of “knowing thyself” which provides a better tool than each of our worldviews for making day to day choices to increase our authenticity (Brown, 2002). For us, translating knowledge to practice required critical, collaborative reflective dialogue to fully understand the implications in relation to our own values.

4) Embracing Vulnerability

“Embracing vulnerability” was revealed through data analysis as a key theme. Our research story to this point reveals a time in our journey where we have embraced vulnerability through identifying ourselves as “living contradictions” (Whitehead, 1989). We started by looking individually at a small area of our practice to deepen the understanding of each of ourselves, our learning, and the degree to which we embodied our values. The process involved reflecting on our own practice through a critical lens. We use one of Jen’s “stories of ruin” (MacLure, 1996) as evidence of this theme:

In the fall of 2010, I accepted a position as a part time clinical instructor at a local university. For me, this represented a significant step towards a long-term career goal. As a result of my lived experiences and career to date I was thrilled and excited in taking the position and was confident that I had something valuable to offer the students and program. I had been working as a nurse, educating peers for a number of years and had shifted to a practice that was guided by my worldview and educational philosophy. Both my worldview and educational philosophy were in alignment with the espoused philosophy of the department I would be teaching in. My disorienting dilemma occurred at midterm when I received feedback from students. The gist of the feedback was that at times I took on a behaviourist approach to teaching that was intimidating to the students. This idea was in direct opposition to my worldview, educational philosophy and core values. (Vickers-Manzin, 2011a)

The following clip and still picture is an example of the data that informed the development of this theme. In our discussion with our critical friend Jackie Delong on May 7, 2014, Jen gives voice to the initial impact of feeling vulnerable.



Video 4: [Jen describes how it feels to live outside her values](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSdHoKC6IYY&feature=youtu.be) (Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014d) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSdHoKC6IYY&feature=youtu.be>

During the clip, Jen shares that during a midterm evaluation:

...a student said to me that she felt intimidated at times, and so it was a like a splash of cold water in my face and I was like ahhhhh.....I heard in the moment because it hit a core value of mine.

An excerpt from Jan's academic writing (Johnston, 2011a) provides evidence of the theme "embracing vulnerability" through critical reflection:

Initially, I felt that the face to face education sessions revealed staff resistance and anger at the suggested clinical changes... I became entangled in the anger; I had feelings of failure and isolation in which I questioned this situation: What else is going on? What view am I teaching from? Has my educational practice been empowering and motivating my learners or have I increased their resistance to changing their clinical practice?

An excerpt from Jen's journal on July 7, 2012 captures how vulnerability provides an opportunity to deeply reflect: 'However, it is through discomfort and vulnerability that I have experienced 'aha' moments in learning and development. It is also often an incentive to pause and reflect, and plan on how to take action the next time.'

We found that embracing vulnerability is essential in the process of coming to know, to become authentic, live whole-heartedly and key to moving towards improvement (DeLong, 2013; Katz et al., 2009; Brown, 2010; Chinn & Kramer, 2008; Mezirow, 1998; Whitehead, 1989). For us, embracing vulnerability requires the practice of humility where we must accept ourselves as "fallible knowers" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Accepting the concept of being fallible, calls one to accept that there is no one certain truth: rather, only our current understanding of a truth. For us, translating knowledge to practice is intimately linked to being able to practice with application of our lessons learned, refinement through reflection and dialogue and adjustment based on experience.

5) Holistic Knowing

The theme "holistic knowing" was identified across many data sources through triangulation. Knowledge is seldom taken directly off the shelf and applied without some sort of vetting or tailoring (Graham et al., 2006, p. 20). Our experience reveals that knowledge-translation goes beyond translating empirical ways of knowing, to create a more holistic understanding which includes translating multiple ways of knowing, including aesthetic, emancipatory, ethical, and personal ways of knowing, as described by Chinn and Kramer (2008).

We include an example of our translation of knowledge from a holistic lens. During our graduate studies, we found Korthagen and Vasalos's (2005) "Core Reflection Model" helped us to enhance our self-awareness and our reflective process; however, we did not simply take the core reflection model, as is, and apply directly to practice. Rather, we adapted the model and applied it in a collaborative way that was more meaningful to both of us. This process is demonstrated in data from Jan's March 23, 2011 class seminar:

Sitting with Jen at my kitchen table that I realized my feelings of powerlessness, voicelessness, and that I conform to do what is expected of me - Was I an automaton? Have I been persuaded to accept uncritically the messages of the culture? I play the “good girl” role in many aspects of my life. In fact, I’ve been a good girl all my life, which I now realize has limited me to becoming more authentic, and mindful of my practice. (Johnston, 2011c)

Self-awareness (personal knowing) enhanced our KT as it enabled us to more readily identify knowledge aligned with who we are or not. It is a complicated process of understanding content relevant to the context and to individuals’ values. A dialogue from building our concept-map on January 14, 2012, further demonstrates this theme:

Jan: Expand more.

Jen: So, for example one of my key phrases that I quote was, “Reflexivity birthed responsiveness.” So, I was interested in how the reflexive process changed me. So, that’s again transformative learning. I mean, that’s a way of translating knowledge using multiple ways of knowing. So, that’s not translating knowledge necessarily from literature; it’s translating aesthetic ways of knowing.

Jan: Yes.

Jen: So, maybe that’s what we’re talking about, right. So, we talked about multiple ways of knowing. So, that means we’re talking about translating multiple evidences not just literature. Translating - we’ve talked about translating our beliefs into practice, right, to be more authentic. So, that’s translating knowledge; it’s just where the knowledge comes from that’s being translated. So, typically knowledge-translation has been applied to getting knowledge from the literature into practice. But what about self-knowledge, translating that into practice. Because I would argue that there is a gap even between self-knowledge and practice.

Jan: Yes, for sure...

For us, knowledge-translation requires a digesting of the new knowledge and a merging with other ways of knowing for a construction of knowledge that is personally relevant. Individual critical reflection, hearing from the voice of others through literature and personal stories and our collaborative discourse reveals the centrality of our values in our choice to translate knowing to action. When employing a “multiple ways of knowing” lens to KT it becomes apparent that enhancing authenticity is a form of KT where ethical and personal ways of knowing are translated into practice. The result is a ‘movement towards a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective and integrative of experiences’ (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

6) Choice

In our methodology we discussed importance of being aware of our living contradiction as a stimulus to improve KT. It is through the triangulation of the data that choice was revealed as theme. We present data that demonstrates choosing to

transform practice as an important concept in our process. The awareness of choice was significant for both of us. Jan's personal journal entry on March 24, 2011 demonstrates this concept:

It was (dialoguing) with Jen that I realized that I have a choice to not play the good girl, I can become the practitioner and person I want to be by focussing on my strengths in relationship building, being able to have clear, honest, respectful communication, courage, and perseverance within relationships.

We provide further data to demonstrate the importance of the concept of choice within the KT dilemma. On April 8, 2011, Jen writes:

I realize I was searching for one "right way" to facilitate learning. This last point does not align with my worldview. ... Revealing my "identity" was both disorienting and liberating. The disorienting component was linked to the revelation of a tension "that touched my very core" (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 55). The liberating piece was an acute awareness of my limiting behaviours, feelings, images, and beliefs. Liberating in the sense I became aware of a choice, the choice to allow my own limitations to create a barrier to achieving my mission or not." (Vickers-Manzin, 2011a, p. 12)

Through the process of action-reflection cycles, in developing our Living Theory research (Whitehead, 2009), we find the concept of "choice" helps us to reframe our options when faced with being vulnerable or fallible. Choice provides a sense of control and ownership in knowledge-translation rather than KT representing a dictate to follow.

7) Authenticity

Authenticity is a term we used to apply to many themes found in the data that were difficult to separate. Authenticity is 'a multifaceted concept that includes at least four parts: being genuine, showing consistency between values and actions, relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity, and living a critical life' (Cranton & Carusetta, 2003, p. 7). In this way, authenticity is the expression of the genuine self in the community and in everyday actions, which reflect the whole of knowing (Chinn & Kramer, 2008; Cranton 2002).

Our first awakening to become intentionally mindful in how we embody or contradict our values began with a process of clearly identifying our values. We were surprised at the difficulty and time invested in the process of articulating values. It involved identifying our values, finding evidence in practice of the embodiment of our values and validating our values by employing critical friends and validation groups (Johnston, 2011b; Vickers- Manzin, 2011b). We discovered that we share values of life-long learning, relationships, social justice and democracy. Our similar values of Jan's nurturing and caring and Jen's value of kindness are reflected in our desire to give people an A (Zander & Zander, 2000). Our similar values of Jan's being genuine, and Jen's values of honesty and optimism are evident in our recognition of being fallible, our desire to improve and our belief that improvement is possible.

We include three pieces of evidence that highlight the importance of the theme of authenticity to our understanding of our KT process. The first was during our graduate studies, when we often struggled with our methodological choices. The struggle was staying true to our values when the voice of others with positions of power within academia directing us to more mainstream approaches. Below we share an e-mail correspondence from January 31, 2012 with 'critical friends' who have shared a similar creative research methodology. The names used have been excluded to protect anonymity.

Hello,

Thank you for your support and questioning this past weekend on SKYPE. It has been pivotal in ensuring our research reflects our desire to be authentic in the research process. Something we have articulated in the past but seem to have floated away from. Here is to finding the joy in the struggle.

Smiles

Jen and Jan

.....

I feel for your struggle. But that struggle is so important!

:) ...

I remember well the stage you were/are at. It seemed ephemeral to me too. It was difficult to trust in the process when I wasn't quite sure what that was. It never quite fit until finally it did.

Thank you for sharing your journey. Again, [we] are happy to talk any time!

This reveals evidence of us beginning to recognize and share with others our dilemma in that we did not want to simply jump through hoops of academia, but rather it was important for us to be authentic in our research by honouring our values and our voice.

A second piece of data informing this theme is connected to our experience with broader system issues relating to our desire to be authentic. When we pursued a collaborative study within our graduate degree, we were met with resistance. The chair of our graduate studies program originally stated: 'There are two degrees, should there not be two papers?' Acquiring approval to proceed in collaborative research required seeking support of key professors and writing a proposal, which ultimately resulted in the university creating a policy. It was our desire for our research process to be authentic that moved us to action.

A third piece of data illustrating this theme is in an excerpt from Jen's academic writing on April 8, 2011 which illustrates her growing awareness of the complex issue of individual and system issues involved in KT and the challenge of "living a critical life" (Cranton & Carusetta, 2003, p. 7):

Despite this rippling inwards and outwards in perception of the KT issue, I was feeling

like I was moving with the herd towards mindless automaton conformity (Brookfield, 2002; Langer, 2000). I was overwhelmed by what Brookfield (2002) described as the burden of freedom or being different and Cole's (2009) "living in paradox" (p. 1). The paradox was now I was no longer blaming myself for the challenges with KT, but I was not sure I had the energy or desire to go against mainstream." (Vickers-Manzin, 2011, p. 7)

It was through the support of others engaging in similar research that we were able to acknowledge our living contradiction in following a research methodology that did not align with our values. In addition, choosing Living Theory as our research methodology aligns with our values and enhances our desire and motivation to exploring our research questions. We believe that embodying our values in practice is a form of knowledge-translation itself. Translating knowledge in an authentic way involves 'learning [that] is construed as a much broader activity involving the body, the emotions and the spirit as well as the mind' (Merriam, 2001, p. 95). As full partners in our research, we consistently come together to build on one another's ideas and through our collaborative reflective dialogue are able to identify our dilemmas and how to move toward a more authentic way of being. We use the term 'authentic KT' to represent the process of translating knowledge in a holistic way.

8) Culture of Inquiry

Triangulating the data has revealed creating a culture of inquiry as a key theme in our KT process. A significant piece of data illustrating this theme is our collaborative reflective approach in mapping our conceptions of the elements required in our KT process on January 14 and 15, 2012. Our concept-map is illustrated in Figure 1.

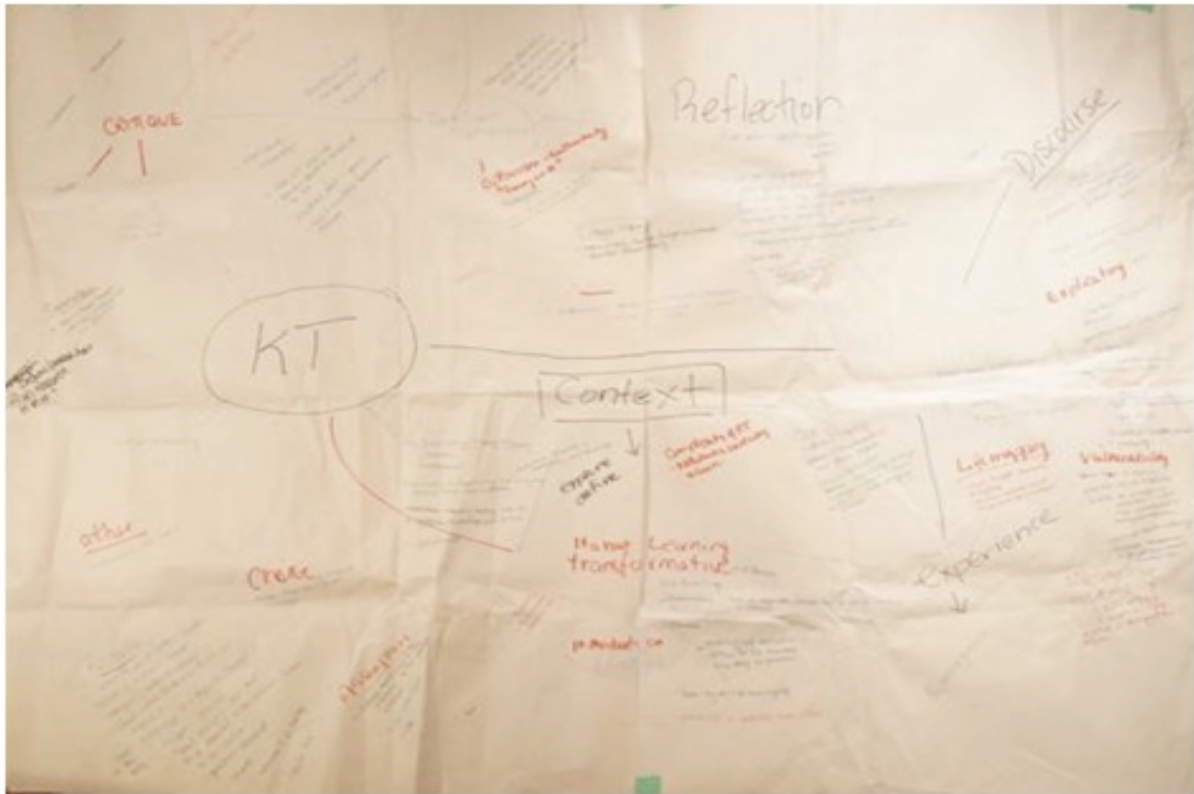


Figure 1. Concept-mapping helped build our living-theory of knowledge-translation

Essential in the theme of “Culture of Inquiry” are our mechanisms for ‘practitioner learning, done collaboratively’ (Katz et al., 2009 p. 74). Brubaker (2011) suggests that leading discussions within a culture of inquiry requires the skills of flexibility, theory/practice congruence, deliberative engagement, and good communication skills. Delong et al. (2013), further describes the philosophy we adopt in our conception of a culture of inquiry:

The development of a culture of inquiry rests upon supporting the knowledge-creating capacity in each individual in the system. Out of this perspective emerges an expression of belief that the professional development of each practitioner rests in their own knowledge-creating capacities as they examine their own practice in helping themselves, [each other and those around them] to improve their learning. Of crucial importance within the knowledge-creation process we are using is the uncovering and honouring of the practitioner's embodied knowledge and sustained support for the researcher (DeLong et al., 2013).

The following clip shows us discussing our collaborative work with our good friend and colleague, Jackie Delong.



Video 5: [Demonstrating a Culture of Inquiry](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qdo4rw0ibT0) (Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014e) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qdo4rw0ibT0>

In response to Jackie’s query about our writing process, Jan says: ‘the writing piece, it was good because we would build on each other. For instance, if I had a thought that was there or a concept that was there, you would evoke and ask and “then what”... we enjoyed it ... it enriched us.’

Transcription from a video recorded SKYPE conversation between Jackie and Jan on December 21, 2013 further describe the collaborative nature of our research:

It was a really good validation ... produce something far better than if you do own your own ... the collaborative process takes a lot more time ... not like a love affair either ... sometimes a painful process, but we have a safe environment. It’s the dialogue that really helps us.

The theme of a “Culture of Inquiry” represents many processes that we found to support our authentic KT. It is through critical reflection in a safe space with critical friends that we learn and co-create knowledge to improve our practice.

In this section we presented evidence of the eight themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. It is essential to highlight the concept of collaboration as an overarching theme evident in each of the eight themes—critical friends, safe space, reflective dialogue, embracing vulnerability, choice, authenticity, holistic knowing and creating a culture of inquiry. Collaboration is a crucial element to improving our process of knowledge-translation. We use the next section to express the living interaction of our themes as our living-educational-theory.

Findings: Our living-educational-theory

It is through Living Theory Methodology that our data sources reveal the themes of our living-educational-theory. We use this section to describe how these themes merge and interact. We express our living educational theory as a model to demonstrate how our improved learning forms the basis of our improved knowledge-translation. We have named our process “Choosing Holistic Personal and Professional Development.” (Vickers-Manzin & Johnston, 2013) shown in Figure 2.

Choosing Holistic Personal & Professional Development

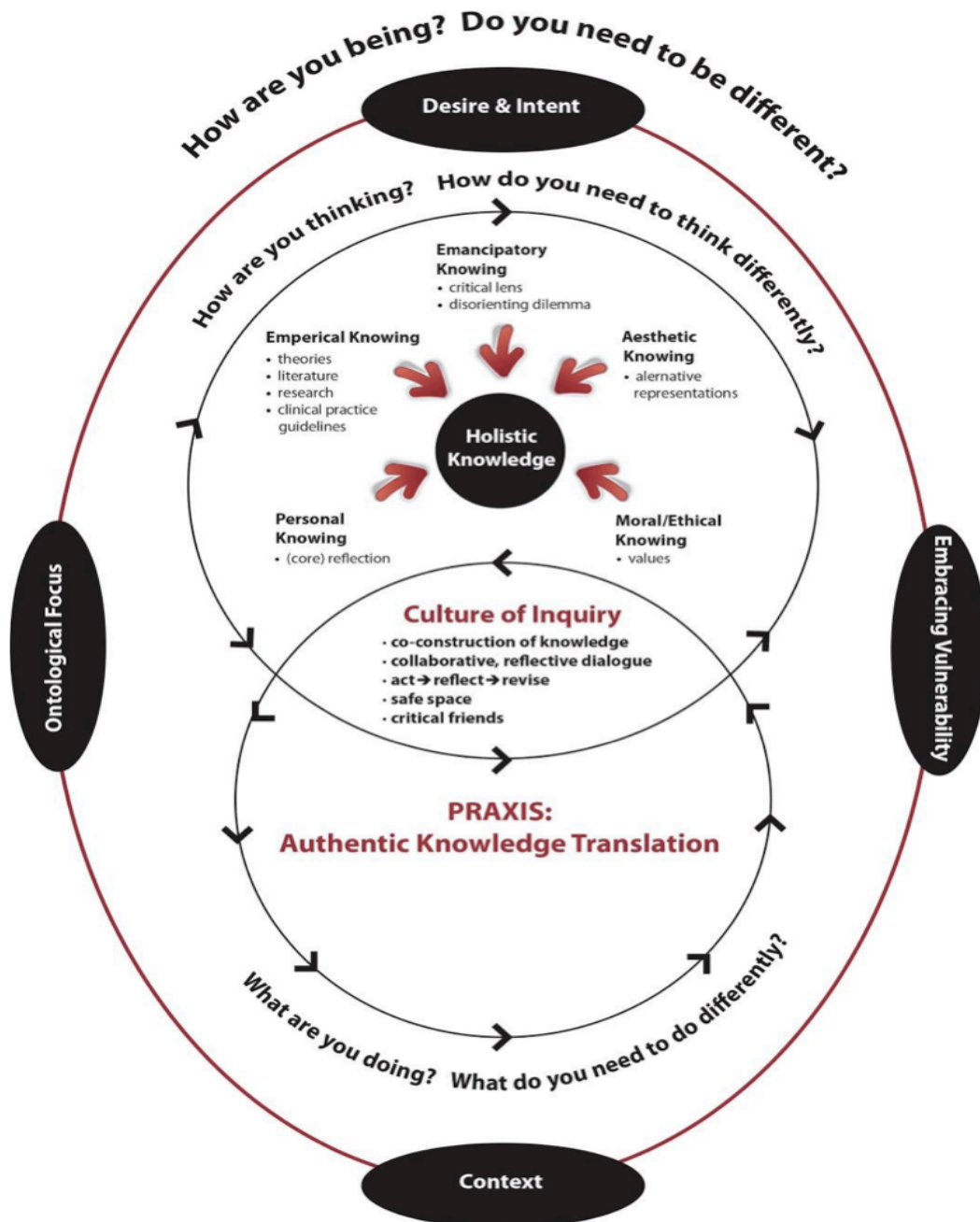


Figure 2. Our Living-Educational-Theory of Knowledge-translation: Choosing Holistic Personal and Professional Development

Our living-educational-theory involves triple-loop learning (Peschl, 2007; Romme & van Witteloostuijn, 1999). We use six prompts:

- 1) How are you thinking?
- 2) How do you need to think differently?
- 3) What are you doing?

- 4) What will you do differently?
- 5) How are you being?
- 6) How do you need to be different?

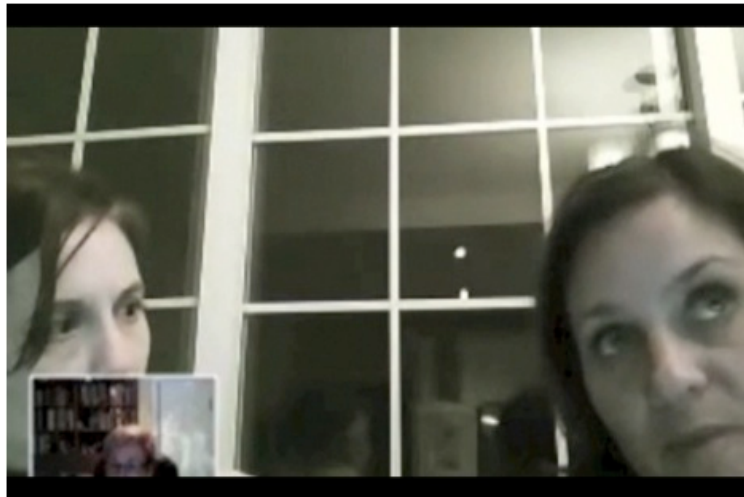
These prompt our act/reflect/revise cycles. Triple-loop learning enhances the fullness and depth of learning to an existential level and involves an ontological focus (Peschl, 2007). Our model is constantly evolving and includes multiple layers that are happening concurrently and at different paces. Just as our model is evolving and changing, so too are we. Our model mimics development in our lives and also informs the way we translate knowledge. We use three groups of questions in our model as headings to organize the articulation of our model in a comprehensible way.

1) How Are We Thinking? How Do We Need to Think Differently?

For us, employing multiple ways of knowing is critical in shifting our knowing to practice. As a result, we no longer see the knowledge-translation dilemma as empirical or research-knowledge to practice gap. Rather, the issue is a failure to promote the use of multiple ways of knowing to reveal tensions between practice and values that ultimately guide knowledge-translation. We acknowledge that at times one way of knowing may dominate other ways. Our experience is that through dialogue the domination of one way of knowing becomes tempered and converges with other ways of knowing for knowledge co-construction. We find that knowledge is derived from practice, and practice is informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process.

On March 5, 2014 we discuss how critical friends validate our influence on others to transform our practice, translate knowledge by using multiple lenses and to be more authentic in our knowing.

In the clip below Jan reflects: 'a big aha for us ... Living Theory, it's how to self-improve and how to influence others ... that's knowledge-translation for us too because it doesn't matter what kind of knowing it is.'



Video 6: [Living Theory helps us to think differently](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olLrWFv7XZk&feature=youtu.be) (Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014f) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olLrWFv7XZk&feature=youtu.be>

We find that holistic knowing is an active process essential as a basis for knowledge-translation. That is, knowledge-translation requires a bridge between the usual dichotomy of 'hard' scientific knowledge and "soft" artistry or intuition to translate to professional action (Schön, 1991). We agree with Doane and Varcoe (2008) who state: '[W]e shift the discussion from one that is solely concerned with epistemology to one that considers the significance of ontology and the way in which epistemology and ontology are intricately intertwined in every nursing action' (p. 283). Our research-story reveals our lived experience with knowledge-translation. It is our hope that this story reveals the complex, collaborative, generative and reflective process that supports knowledge-translation to be an authentic process. Our experience is that knowledge needs to be personally relevant and meaningful through a holistic lens in order to translate to action or transform practice.

Knowledge-translation is reflected in the essence of who we are and what we do from a holistic perspective. We use two prompts – 'how are you thinking?' and 'how do you need to think differently?' – to monitor our knowledge-construction and prompt our inquiry process to encourage multiple ways of knowing.

2) What Are We Doing? What Do We Need to Do Differently?

In our living-educational-theory, we refer to the embodiment of multiple ways of knowing as praxis. By praxis we refer to Aristotle's idea:

Praxis is reflective action and requires that we continuously engage in the dialectic reflection of ends and means, thought and action. By so doing we are able to change or improve on the practice of our profession for the common good. (Burayidi, 2012, p. 1)

We believe it is within a culture of inquiry that our model emerged through the action research process to foster praxis and reveal successful knowledge-translation as being intricately linked to authenticity. We agree with Chinn and Kramer (2008)

who state: ‘the process of praxis, when engaged in a collective sense, is the most important form of authentication’ (p. 101). We found our living-educational-theory was dependent on our context and situation. It is through our collaborative action research framework that we constantly monitor practice as a way of coming to know and improve.

In an action research approach to Living Theory, one chooses ‘to imagine ways in which you might begin taking action’ (McNiff, 2002, p. 17). For us, imagining a way forward involves a process that includes coming together and talking about how we behave in ways that do not align with our values and identify when we are living contradictions. We come together in a safe space to evoke and challenge each other and enter into cycles of dialogue to debate, expand and learn from each other in order to revise and improve our knowledge-translation process. Our reflective dialogues always begin with a lived experience, walking through our feelings, thoughts and actions in the past and for the future. It is a powerful way to embody our true selves while being aware of inauthentic behaviours. Each time we meet, we discuss an incident that has occurred in which we have not lived our values and discuss our actions, reflections and our experiences of learning. Each of us validates our aim to live our values as fully as we can and what we can do differently to improve each of our practices and our lives. We used the two prompts, ‘what are you doing?’ and, ‘what will you do differently?’ to ignite collaborative reflection in relation to praxis.

Our dialogue process reflects the very nature of Living Theory in that we reflect on our actions to improve and influence others and social formations by using our values as standards of judgment. It is through a collaborative relationship that we created a culture of inquiry where through dialogue and reflection we decrease our perceptual barriers and live our values more fully to enhance our authentic knowledge-translation in order to create our living-theories.

3) How Are We Being? Do We Need to Be Different?

We believe our process of knowledge-translation involves a different conceptual understanding than when we began our journey. For us, knowledge-translation is an ongoing process for personal and professional improvement. We find that translating other meaning/knowledge involved personal, individual, and collaborative processes. Our process is a way of reshaping our ways of being, knowing, relating and acting. Persisting in a reflexive process can remind us that there are multiple truths in messy uncertain problems of practice. This process starts with a willingness to peel back the layers to more fully understand how “I” can improve my practice. In our experience, this self-improvement process is difficult in that one can feel exposed, uncomfortable, and alienated for a period of time. Embodying our values as living standards of judgment represents how and why we translate knowledge. That is, when knowledge aligns with our own values it is more easily translated into practice. We use the two prompts – ‘how are you being?’ and ‘how do you need to be different?’ - to monitor our authentic personal and professional development.

Our Influence

A living-educational-theory 'is the exploration of our educational influences in our own learning and in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work' (Whitehead, 2009, p. 105). We seek not to measure but rather to understand and explain our knowledge-translation process. We provide accounts of our influence on self, others and the social formations in which we live. Our research story focuses on the locus of change as self, rather than other. The irony is the powerful ripple-effect this has on the practice of others.

1) Influence on Self: What We Have Learned

Our research story demonstrates the influence of our learning on ourselves. We have committed to the concept that it is "all about learning". That is, each of our journeys is about accepting oneself, and embracing vulnerability as a relentless aim for improvement to become a better person and professional. We have discovered that our process of coming together and validating that we live our living-educational-theory is how we improve our practice and are able to influence others. We have engaged our colleagues and our students in exploring their values and using action research as a good way to demonstrate reflective practice as a requirement of the College of Nurses of Ontario.

Although this research story is ours and shared, there are individual components uniquely experienced by each of us. I, Jen, use this section to briefly shed light on my individual journey within our collaborative process. Given my value of optimism and tendency to focus on the positive, it is no surprise that this research story is missing some components of the challenges of my individual experience that contributed to the whole. It is not my aim to share a story that was easy. My journey was fraught with more than the living contradictions we have shared in this version of our writing. For example, there were times when our collaborative process became frustrating. It was often when we were attempting to clarify our process and put our experiences into words. At these times, we were curt with each other, stepping away from my value of relationships. At these times, we would often break, take a step away from each other and work independently. These types of occurrences fit into the larger whole when we talk about our theme of vulnerability. Identifying "I" as a living contradiction led to feelings of vulnerability, which then provided a moment to make the choice to live more authentically or not. Although my value of lifelong learning and my lived experience have increased my comfort in exposing my living contradictions, it is never an easy process. At times, it is hindsight that allows me to see the value in embracing vulnerability to prompt life-long learning, choice and improvement. In the moment, this task requires me to apply the principles of mindfulness. We have shared the components in our collaborative journey that supports us to act in a way that prompts mindfulness. There are times, when doing so is not the easy thing to do. It is a tricky balance between supporting your critical friend in a loving relationship and also uncovering living contradictions.

Equally important in my journey are the times I have not chosen to be mindful. My experience of being inauthentic is disheartening and uncomfortable for me.

Challenges where I continue to struggle with fully applying our model is in my personal life and professionally when I am philosophically opposed to an action or behaviour others have taken. This is a living contradiction for me, as it flies in the face of giving others an A. In these instances, my emotional reaction dominates and I make leaps of abstraction, rather than leaps of faith. Overcoming these knee-jerk reactions is no easy battle. My internal motivation is that I find it tremendously fulfilling to use my values as standards of improvement for myself. Despite the fact that this process is not easy, the fulfilling quality is what commits me to my process. It permits me to be forgiving of myself, acknowledge my actions and provides a direction for moving forward. I recognize it is not perfection I strive for but always the opportunity to learn and improve myself. It is the stories of others' struggles and living contradictions that increase my comfort in revealing my own.

There are, of course, individual strengths and areas of improvements that we as individuals bring to our co-inquiry process. It has been my experience that through collaborative inquiry I have developed in areas where Jan has strengths.

I, Jan, use this section to share my individual learning, and discuss how our collaborative research journey and development of our living-theory has influenced me as an individual. My new understanding of knowledge-translation is that nursing and personal decisions are most influenced by the intention of living my values as standards of judgment. For me, to be a good nurse I have to be a good person. First, I set out to "know thyself". Through a long, uneasy process, I defined and articulated my values. Secondly, by committing to living my values as fully and as mindfully as I can, I feel that I am able to learn and transform my practice into meaningful actions.

My learning of self is so closely intertwined with my values of relationships, which involve being nurturing or compassionate, engaging in lifelong learning, and valuing social justice and the differences and potential (giving an A) of others. In addition, my value of developing and fostering respectful loving relationships allows me to learn through the other's lens and not limit my perception of myself. However, my greatest learning of myself is when I live in contradiction to my values. For example, in reflecting on my experiences as a nurse educator, I was hiding behind the mask of authority in my role as an "expert". In this way, I created a culture that was not democratic, equal, or engaging and which impeded the contributions to my learning and how others learned.

I am so grateful to have shared and developed our collaborative process with Jen as it has transformed the way I learn about myself and is so necessary for me to continue to live my values as fully as possible. I have learned to embrace vulnerability in order to realize my own potential or "giving an A". I find that I actively seek safe spaces to open myself up to others. I have learned that others embrace vulnerability and will collaboratively reflect and share similar stories to improve their own selves. I continue to practice and develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to create safe spaces, develop a culture of inquiry and to remain committed to living my values. I have discovered that although I intentionally situate myself in a vulnerable, safe space, it is a time where I can further my living contradiction in that I can move away from living my values while being vulnerable in this safe space.

Choosing to care for and love critical friends and at the same time evoke and challenge is a balancing act necessary for my growth. I have altered my view in that opening up, revealing and living my values with others, rather than hiding behind the expert façade in front of others has resulted in more feelings of joy, greater knowledge-translation, improved relationships and nursing practice. My authentic self requires my acceptance of the relentless journey in holding myself accountable in my values as standards of judgment, to intentionally live my (co-constructed) educational theory, as well as the acceptance that not everyone has the same path.

We feel that Living Educational Theory research is how you become and work as a professional nurse to the best of your abilities. The following clip describes the centrality of a Living Theory research methodology as part of our process of improvement:



Video 7: [Discussion on how Living Theory action research influences the profession of nursing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qz2ix0l1cg&feature=youtu.be) (Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014g) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qz2ix0l1cg&feature=youtu.be>

The gist is captured in Jen's quotation from the clip: 'professionalism is your role, it's your role as a nurse. [The process of] Living Theory action research is the how, how you work as a professional nurse to the best of your ability.'

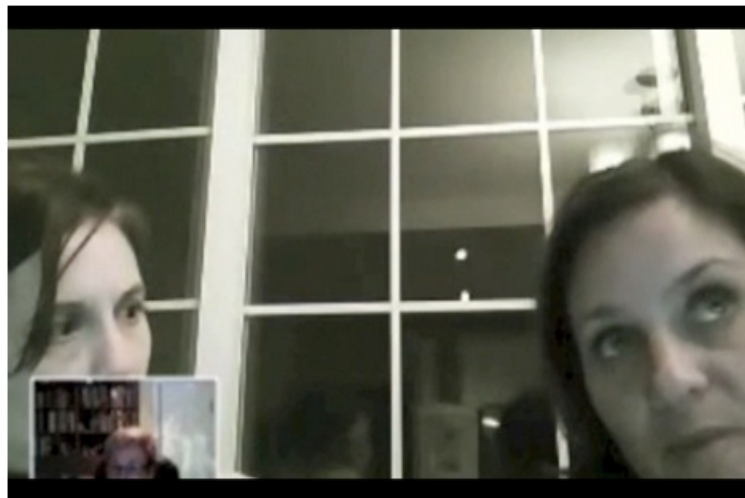
Although the dominant hegemony and hierarchy of knowledge exists within the health sciences field, we choose to live our model as our approach to knowledge-translation. At times we fall down the slippery slope of mindless actions and reactions. We are continually challenged to stay true to our emergent living-educational-theory of knowledge-translation and to contribute to a culture of inquiry to influence others.

2) Influence on Others and the Social Formations Where We Live and Work

McNiff (2002) proposes that addressing the question of “how can I improve” has a social element, suggesting that aiming to improve our own practice, for our own benefit, has the potential to benefit the practice of others. In seeking to improve our practice we suspect we are influencing the practice of those around us. We include below evidence of the influence of our improvement on others. In one particular example, Jan has modelled and created a culture of inquiry for a student who was struggling with providing therapeutic care to a difficult client. Jan captured this experience in a journal entry:

I have encouraged my student to explore her living contradiction. Her learning plan includes: “To understand conflict of values when providing patient centred care in ...clinic. ” I have encouraged and participated in collaborative reflection on her practice; dialogued about her multiple ways of knowing; encouraged her to use her values as a standard to her practice. In her final evaluation, I wrote: “[she] has identified one of her values as responsibility and discussed how this is perceived in a counselling session ...[she] is reflecting on her values and how it relates to practice with a client.

A good example of our influence is demonstrated in the following clip, in which Jen describes her experience of influencing her peers and creating a culture of inquiry:



Video 6: [Living Theory action research can influence peers and colleagues](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7G9kKXX2sM&feature=youtu.be)
(Johnston & Vickers-Manzin, 2014) -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7G9kKXX2sM&feature=youtu.be>

The following quotation from the clip above captures the importance of sharing our stories to influence others: ‘... one colleague in particular sat down with me and said talk to me about what it was like to identify your values because I really want to go through that exercise... our dialogue has changed because of that.’

Our influence is further validated by our students and staff. Jan’s anonymous McMaster School of Nursing Tutor Evaluation reveals comments from students that validate our influence on others. Students use the following words to describe Jan’s influence:

... pushes students to do their best and to think critically; very supportive of student's learning; developed a great learning environment; very thorough, kind/caring, very knowledgeable in public/community nursing, very approachable, cared about our learning, taught me a lot; empathetic, relatable.

On one occasion Jen solicited feedback from peers whom she invited to become critical friends, to inquire about the influence of her own learning on others. Her colleague validates her discovery through her response:

Yes, absolutely. Discussing this topic with you has led me to reflecting on my practice in a big way... Particularly, in the past year, I have been thinking about authenticity as something that I value but don't feel that I am doing a good job of expressing. Through this process, although I have not verbalized it, I have viewed you as a mentor in terms of becoming more authentic. (Thank you :))

Recently, our mentor and fellow Living Theorist, Jackie, has validated that our influence has helped her to further understand and develop her theory on a culture of inquiry (personal communication, Jackie DeLong, 2013). When we come together to reflect on our influence, we see our imprint when DeLong et al. (2013) describe the crucial importance within the knowledge-creation process. We continue to mindfully create those environments where learners engage in a community of inquiry to create democratic spaces in which people are safe to share their narratives and express their values as standards of judgment rather than knee-jerk responses in feeling unsafe. We aim to be authentic, to articulate our values and to "walk the talk" in order to model the way. Jen's office contains a board to keep her mindfully aware of her values on a daily basis. She often uses it as a reflection for discussion with staff and colleagues.



Figure 3. Jen's office white board

3) Influencing the Social Formations in Which We Live and Work

Our experience has been that influencing the social formations in which we live and work stems from determination, perseverance, our collaborative approach and our desire to be authentic. An example of this influence is our advocacy for our research process to be meaningful to us. Acquiring approval to proceed in collaborative research required seeking support of key professors of our research proposal, which ultimately resulted in the university creating a policy that allowed for co-inquiries.

Furthermore, we believe we are significantly contributing to the knowledge base of teaching and learning in our articulation of our lived experience of successful knowledge-translation through writing and dialoguing. Our collaborative process in researching, writing, learning and in our critical friendships provides insight into the types of relationships that were necessary for our improvement and for influencing others.

We find that with a desire to translate knowledge authentically comes an increased awareness of the system and social barriers that may constrain us. In addition to the increased awareness is a keen desire to advocate for the freedom and support to do what we want to do. We continue to aim to influence the social formations in which we live and work and discuss these in our next steps.

Next Steps

We hope that, by contributing to the professional knowledge base through our writing and our influence on our social formations, we encourage others to take a similar journey of discovery. There are two avenues in which we want to share our embodied knowledge of our co-inquiry. First, similar to Jackie's journal "Passion in Professional Practice: Action Research in Grand Erie" (<http://schools.gedsb.net/ar/passion/index.html>) in which teachers contributed to the knowledge base of teaching and learning, we have shared a dream that we can influence our public health colleagues to embrace Living Theory research as a way to improve practice. Our next steps would be to share with our own teams, the Chief of Nursing and the Nursing Professional Advisory Committee our embodied knowledge of collaborative research and how a creating a culture of inquiry can lead to learning, improvement and enhanced practice for our clients.

Second, we both currently teach a community nursing professional practice course at a local university in which our living-educational-theory resonates with the objectives of the course. Our living-educational-theory also aligns with the program's "Nursing Educational Model" in its conception of how nurses learn. Both models support the concept of a culture of inquiry. The School of Nursing philosophy believes 'effective collaboration implies mutual respect and trust, shared accountability and responsibility, and the recognition and utilization of the strengths of each partner within the collaborative relationship' (McMaster University, School of Nursing, 2010, p. 4). The major difference between our living-educational-theory and the McMaster Model of Nursing Education relates to the conceptions of values as they guide practice. Our next steps are to influence the nursing students in their course assignments by introducing Living Theory Action Research methodology, concepts of our living-theory in Knowledge-translation and to encourage them to

develop their living-theory of practice using values as standards of practice as a way to improve their practice. In addition, we will take the opportunity to discuss our embodied knowledge and lived experience, related to our living-theory of knowledge-translation, at faculty (tutor) meetings. Lastly, it is our aim to continually document our influences and learning related to this process. We view it as a never-ending journey of improving oneself and influencing others to improve the world in which we live.

Conclusion

The purpose of our research was to explore our own challenges and success with KT as a way to improve our practice as well as to influence the practice of others. We shared our account of our research story by situating our experience within the broader personal and social context in which we live and work. We make clear how our chosen Living Theory research methodology aligns with our desire to be authentic in our practice of translating knowledge. Our data analysis revealed key elements of collaborative reflective dialogue that include multiple ways of knowing, embracing vulnerability, inspiring authenticity, and improving learning. We find it is a culture of inquiry that stimulates knowledge co-construction and has reframed our understanding of KT as a holistic, active process, which reflects the essence of who we are and what we do. We believe we contribute to the knowledge base in an epistemologically significant way through the discovery of our lived experience of translating knowledge in a collaborative and holistic way that is rooted in our values. We endeavour to continue in our day-to-day journey of improvement through our collaborative relationship within Living Educational Theory research.

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