

Review of Robyn Pound's PhD thesis *How can I improve my health visiting support of parenting? The creation of an alongside epistemology through action enquiry*

Moira Laidlaw

Moira Laidlaw

Open University, Milton Keynes, U.K.

Copyright: © 2014 Laidlaw. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

I first met Robyn in the 1990s in Bath when I

lived there and taught - first at the University as a Teacher Educator and then later in a secondary school in the city as an English teacher. I remember many happy conversations in her back garden with a glass (or two) of wine, as we put the world to rights. Our talks generally focused on human rights issues, about respect for others, about how we might live our values of democracy, responsible freedoms, and ethical considerations more fully.

Over the years I saw how Robyn evolved her sense of alongsideness, which she characterises as, "sustaining connections that enhance collaborative enquiry...to support the generation of personal theory for application in practice" (Abstract, 2003). Her thesis is the exploration and explanation of her health visiting practice as she democratises relationships with her clients and their children in order to improve their access to fairness, equity and self-determination.

In order to facilitate the reader's comprehension, Robyn uses icons in the margins of particular sections to denote the stance she is taking on the ideas. A compass represents a general view – from above, so to speak. In addition, "features of the landscape are peered at through binoculars. Closer looks, as if through a magnifying glass, provide not only interpretation but explain dialectical processes in myself and with others as my theories of alongsideness in parenting, health visiting and researching relationships emerge" (p. 54).

This genuinely supports both the logic and the illumination of dialectical relationships in her emerging Living Theory.

In each chapter Robyn reveals, sometimes through case-study, how she has enabled greater clarity in her actions with clients and their children, and how these actions relate to her creation of her own alongside epistemology. She finally offers a reflective account of how the living standards of alongsideness become ways of understanding practice and transforming the facilitation of the human rights she is concerned with bringing more fully into her practice and into the wider world.

The reason I chose to present this short paper on Robyn's thesis was twofold: thrashing out ideas with her was always incredibly stimulating and hugely enjoyable and have come to represent some of the happiest times I spent in Bath. Secondly I learned a lot. As a concept alongsideness helped me to understand better what I was doing with the children in the classroom in Bath. The more alongside I was, the more likely I was to be forging relationships with the children that would be genuinely educational. Later as a VSO¹ volunteer it was helpful for me to bear this sense of alongsideness in mind as I sought to find the most harmonious ways to work with the teachers and students in rural Chinese university as an educational development worker.

Robyn's thesis is one of my favourite theses at the www.actionresearch.net site because of its readability, relatability (Bassey, 2000) and because of its emphasis – which also happens to be mine – on human relationships. Her thesis portrays a quest to find increasingly appropriate ways to help others that neither diminish nor misrepresent anyone in the network of relationships: all people are equal.

It seems to me that Robyn's development of 'alongsideness' creates a Living Theory thesis that demonstrates this brilliantly.

¹ V.S.O. stands for Voluntary Services Overseas.



Video 1: Video of Robyn Pound introducing her thesis
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zdBF3ZO5sg>)

References:

- Bassey, M. (2000). *Fuzzy Generalisations and Best Estimates of Trustworthiness: a step towards transforming research knowledge about learning into effective teaching practice*. Paper presented at the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme First Annual Conference – University of Leicester, Friday 10th November, 2000. Retrieved from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00003143.htm>.
- Pound, R. (2003). *How can I improve my health visiting support of parenting? The creation of an alongside epistemology through action enquiry*. Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Bath, 2003. Retrieved 17th December 2014 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/livingpound.shtml>