

How can I create and contribute knowledge that is of social, cultural, academic, professional and personal value through scholarly research?

A discussion paper for the Colloquium at Liverpool Hope University

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Overview

A major objective of the colloquium is “to investigate what differentiates scholarly research from personal development when generating new knowledge through researching own practice”. In relation to this objective I address three issues:

- The creation of educational knowledge of social, cultural, academic, professional and personal value through scholarly research into own practice;
- Communicating valid accounts of educational influence in learning, to have an educational influence in the learning of others
- Talking truth to power and contributing to an educational knowledge-base to have an educational influence in the learning of the social formations within which we live and work.

To communicate I have to address them separately and sequentially, but please keep in mind that in reality there is a dynamic, multidimensional, relationship between the processes of creating and offering knowledge.

Creating educational knowledge

Whitehead (1989) distinguishes between education research and educational research with respect to the disciplines like Pring (2000), but goes further to distinguish what is *educational* research by reference to the nature of values and the theory generated.

As an educational psychologist I am familiar with approaches built on notions of ‘cause and effect’. Yet life is much more complicated and subtle than that, and I cannot ascribe to myself the power that such approaches require. I find Whitehead’s notion of ‘educational influence’ far more nuanced. Like Whitehead, for me to feel I have had an educational influence in the learning of another I need evidence that what I have offered has been transmuted by them to contribute to their progress in giving expression to their best intent. By ‘best intent’ I mean the values-based hope that is the fuel of living a loving, satisfying, productive, worthwhile life, which makes this a world where humanity can flourish.

Why research our educational influence?

'We do research to understand. We try to understand in order to make our schools better places for both the children and the adults who share their lives there.' (Eisner, 1993, p.10)

I go further than Eisner and say I do research to try to understand in order to make this *world*, and not just our schools, a better place to be for *all*. We each can have an educational influence irrespective of the field or country of our practices and enquiries as demonstrated by Pound (2003) Health Visiting in England, Timm (2012) Biochemistry in South Africa, Crotty (2012) Higher Education in Ireland, Tattersall (2011) Community Activity in Australia, to give but a few examples.

How can educational influence be researched? My contention is that Living-Theory offers a credible academic and scholarly form of research that enables researchers to generate and contribute new educational knowledge through researching their own practice, wherever it is located. Living-Theory research is: academic, providing well reasoned explanations; scholarly, drawing on and critically engaging with the theories of others; and is of social, cultural, professional and personal use.

Living-Theory is a form of self-study practitioner-research whereby the researcher researches questions that are important to them and in the process generates values-based explanations for their educational influence in learning, their own, other people's and of social formations (Whitehead, 1993). They do this by clarifying their values, as they emerge and evolve in the process of enquiry, which form their explanatory principles and living standards of judgement in valid accounts of their practice. The values are living (Laidlaw, 1996) ontological, energy-flowing, life-affirming and life-enhancing, and as Crompton (2010) describes, are a 'better source of motivation for engaging in bigger-than-self problems than other values' (p.9).

I use capitals to distinguish *Living-Educational-Theory research* from *an individual's living-educational-theory*. I understand Living-Theory research as a distinct methodology (Whitehead, 2008) whereby the researcher evolves their understanding and offers values-based explanations of their educational influence as they research to improve their values-based practice. I understand my living-theory as my values-based explanation of why I have sought to bring about change and the nature of the change I am trying to make. My living-theory account includes multimedia narratives and explanations of what I have done to enhance the educational influence I have in my learning, the learning of others and social formations, in the process of living my values as fully as I can through my practice.

I understand Living-Theory research to hold theory and practice together with a moral imperative. It also has many features in common with some approaches to action research. However, in action research the emphasis is most often on practice and reflection, and not on the researcher as an influential person with embodied, ontological values generating theory.

In the process of researching to create knowledge of improving educational practice, the Living-Theory researcher also creates knowledge of self and self in and of the world. The researcher comes to know them self, the person they are and want to be, making a contribution to a world where humanity can flourish. The self is studied not as an egotistical exercise or a form of therapy. It is a study of embodied expressions of ontological values that enable the researcher to understand how they are in and of the world in the act of trying to improve it. In the process the researcher brings imagined possibilities of a better future into being in the present. The educational influence of Living-Theory research is not just in learning but also in life, as knowledge is created of self and self in and of the world in the process of creating knowledge of professional practice. Personal development is integral to academic and scholarly research in Living-Theory research.

Communicating accounts of educational influence

To contribute knowledge so that it might have an educational influence requires a channel of communication. The interface may be through text or a multimedia narrative on a library shelf, or on the web. Whichever the medium, communication is a living creative process that exists in a relationship between human beings. No matter how transitory or mediated, communication occurs in a living-boundary, in this case between you, this paper and me.

Taleb (2010) expresses succinctly the form that knowledge needs to be communicated in for it to be influential:

‘You need a story to displace a story. Metaphors and stories are far more potent (alas) than ideas; they are also easier to remember and more fun to read. If I have to go after what I call the narrative disciplines, my best tool is a narrative.

Ideas come and go, stories stay.’ (p. xxi)

However, I am not concerned with an abstract ‘story’ divorced from reality but rather an educational narrative that talks to ‘head, heart and body’ and not only communicates a narrative but also stimulates the imagination and invites the ‘reader’ into a creative dialogue concerning their own research. I do not believe I have had an educational influence if what I offer is unthinkingly replicated.

Carter (1993) describes the difficulty of:

‘... capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal and, thus, redressed the deficiencies of the traditional atomistic and positivistic approaches in which teaching was decomposed into discrete variables and indicators of effectiveness.’ (pp. 5-6)

I find ‘an academic voice’, which is traditionally impersonal, and simple text based narratives do not communicate adequately the warm inter- and intra-personal, energy-flowing, qualities of love, humanity and humour that are the core of educational knowledge. I am therefore developing multimedia narratives

to ostensibly and iteratively clarify and communicate the meanings of my ontological and social values in the living-boundaries between others and me.

While I develop my skills as communicator I am also aware of the need to raise awareness of the skills of 'reading' such accounts. As Buber (1970) said:

'We must learn to feel addressed by a book, by the human being behind it, as if a person spoke directly to us. A good book or essay or poem is not primarily an object to be put to use, or an object of experience: it is the voice of You speaking to me, requiring a response' (p.39)

All parties need to develop new skills and learn to trust in the other for knowledge to be offered, accepted, valued and worked with creatively as life-enhancing and educational gifts to bring more into being a world where humanity can flourish.

Talking truth to power

To extend the educational influence of knowledge it needs to be offered in places that others from your world of professional practice visit, such as journals, conferences, and websites. So, for instance, if you are a health visitor you will want to publish in journals health visitors read, if you are an academic you will need to present papers at conferences academics go to.

There is also space that transcends specific fields of interest or professional practice and it is that which I bring into focus here.

Kagan (1998) says:

'Our inner connection to an infinity which reaches beyond our individuality is not an incidental attribute or an icon of a particular culture. This connection defines our humanity: it is the only characteristic which distinguishes us... To lose this inner connection is to lose our humanity. It is no accident that as we forget that which makes us human, we come to view ourselves as intelligent animals or machines. ...

This transcendent connection is an objective expression of our humanity. Viewing ourselves like animals or machines is not an alternative vision of man; it is his destruction...If we cannot be what we think we are, our existence is devoid of true substance, for we have no basis in reality and no place in the order of being" (pp.19-20)

Kagan describes the sense I have of connection with other people, who do not necessarily live in my own time and place, and feeling myself as meaningful in the boundary between my self and other people who share a desire to contribute to a flourishing humanity. The conundrum of how to hold 'i' and 'we' together in an 'i~we' relationship (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2006) is expressed for me in the words of Hillel:

'If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?' (Ethics of the Fathers, *Pirkei Avot*, 1:14)

I am using 'i' and 'we' to point to self and collective that is neither subordinate nor superordinate, but exist in an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian relationship. It is a similar sense I make of Ubuntu that Nelson Mandela expresses in this brief (1.37) video clip. 'Respect, helpfulness, sharing, community, caring, trust, unselfishness', come up on the screen followed by, 'One word can mean so much.' At 0.19 Tim Modise introduces the interview with, 'Many people consider you as a personification of Ubuntu. What do you understand Ubuntu to be?' It is not just reading the few words that Mandela speaks that I understand Ubuntu but it is through the intonation of his voice, his body and his way of being that communicates Ubuntu personified in these few seconds of video.



Nelson Mandela on Ubuntu <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODQ4WiDsEBO>

Mandela offers his knowledge educationally here through the use of a multimedia narrative made available through the web. Following his example I urge others to make educational knowledge freely available as gifts globally through creating and offering multimedia narratives that communicate their living-theories on the web. Many such accounts, legitimated by universities around the world can already be found on <http://www.actionresearch.net>.

In conclusion I ask, have I communicated a well reasoned and reasonable account of how a practitioner-researcher can create and contribute knowledge that is of social, cultural, academic, professional and personal value through scholarly research? And, have I provided a response to the major objective of the colloquium by showing that Living-Theory research integrates personal development into a research process that is scholarly and academic to create and

contribute valid educational knowledge legitimated by universities around the world?

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